

MIRACULOUS SPIRITUAL GIFTS



Are Miraculous Spiritual Gifts Given Today?

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Introducing Spiritual Gifts

Our text for this study is 1 Corinthians 12-14 where Paul writes to the Corinthian church about miraculous spiritual gifts. There has been a resurgence in charismatic teachings and increasingly people seem to be drawn to seeking the gifts of the Holy Spirit. But there is so much misunderstanding and confusion about this topic. Should Christians be speaking in tongues today? Should Christians have the gift of healing or the gift of prophecy? Are the healings and the speaking in tongues as seen on television legitimate? How were these gifts received? Should we be praying for these gifts? Is there something lacking in you or me if we do not have these gifts? There are so many questions about miraculous spiritual gifts. Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 12-14 so that the Christians in Corinth would not be uninformed about these spiritual things (1 Corinthians 12:1). I want to use the scriptures to equip you so that your faith is not tossed about by confusing arguments or misunderstanding. I have many friends and preachers who I believe have been caught by false arguments and misunderstand the Holy Spirit today. I want you to know that I did my best to approach this study without bias and with fresh eyes. I purchased resources and books and listened to preachers who are for and against miraculous spiritual gifts from the Holy Spirit today. I beg you to make every effort to do the same. Set aside your preconceived notions and biases and simply listen to what the word of God says as we study these scriptures.

How Did Christians Receive Spiritual Gifts?

Before we can move into 1 Corinthians for our study, we must recognize that these Corinthian Christians already had received miraculous spiritual gifts. Paul is not going to tell them about how they received the Holy Spirit's gifts because they have them. We need to look at the book of Acts, the book that reveals much about Christianity in the first century, and see how Christians received miraculous spiritual gifts. Once we learn this, we can go forward in our study about spiritual gifts.

We do not have the time to move through the book of Acts from start to finish looking at the role of the Holy Spirit. I have a book online and on the table in the foyer that is free for you to read. In it I write more extensively about the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts. I encourage everyone to grab one of those booklets and read it for more information. But let us jump to Acts 8 where we see the clearest description of how Christians received miraculous spiritual gifts. Acts 8:5 tells us that there was a preacher named Philip who proclaimed Christ to the Samaritans, performing miraculous signs, casting out demons, and healing the paralyzed and lame (Acts 8:6-7). Philip is not an apostle but was one of the seven who the apostles laid their hands on so they would take care of the neglected Grecian widows in Acts 6 (cf. Acts 6:5-7). Philip preaches and many of the Samaritans believed and were baptized, including a man named Simon (Acts 8:12-13). Now something strange happens in verses 14-16. When the Samaritans were baptized, they did not receive the Holy Spirit. The apostles send Peter and John (two of the apostles) from Jerusalem to Samaria (37 miles). Why? Notice verse 17. The apostles laid their hands on the Samaritan Christians and they received the Holy Spirit. Now, in case we think we might have misunderstood the point, the point is made clearer in verse 18. "Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on the apostles' hands." This is a critically important point that I have not seen dealt with by anyone who believes in miraculous spiritual gifts today. Christians received spiritual gifts by the apostles coming to that Christian and laying his hands on them. This explains why Peter and John had to come to Samaria. Philip could not give them the spiritual gifts of the Holy Spirit because he was not an apostle. Even though Philip had miraculous gifts of healing, casting out demons, and miraculous signs, he could not give any gift to another Christian.

Consider that this is exactly what the scriptures teach in other places that are often omitted when discussing miraculous spiritual gifts.

For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you 10 always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you. 11 For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you— (Romans 1:9–11 ESV)

Notice that Paul earnestly desired to go and see the Roman Christians. The reason was that he desired to impart to them a spiritual gift. They were Christians already. But it is evident that none of the apostles had made it to Rome yet to be able to impart the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Paul desired to travel there to those Christians could receive a gift. Only the apostles could impart miraculous spiritual gifts.

For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, 7 for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control. (2 Timothy 1:6–7 ESV)

Notice that Paul makes the same point to Timothy. Paul encourages Timothy to use the spiritual gift he had received through Paul laying his hands on him. Why didn't Timothy pray for a gift? Why didn't Paul tell the Romans to pray for miraculous spiritual gifts? Why didn't Philip tell the Samaritan Christians to pray for the gifts of the Holy Spirit to come on them? The answer is given very clearly in the scriptures. Only the apostles imparted spiritual gifts and did so only by laying their hands on Christians.

A Necessary Conclusion

Now these scriptures have a necessary conclusion. When the apostles died, what happened to the miraculous spiritual gifts? Since only the apostles could impart spiritual gifts, then when the apostles died the gifts could no longer be given. By necessity these miraculous gifts stopped. We will eventually get to this text in our series, but quickly notice that Paul observes this truth in 1 Corinthians 13:8. "Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away."

Some will say that there are still apostles today. But those who do so do not understand the scriptures' definition of an apostle. Notice the three standards to be an apostle of Jesus according to the scriptures:

1. An apostle must be a physical eyewitness to the resurrection of Christ (Acts 1:22; 1 Cor 9:1).
Paul said he was the last person to see the risen Lord Jesus (1 Cor 15:8).
2. An apostle was appointed by the Lord (Gal 1:1; Acts 1:2; Acts 1:24-26).
3. An apostle was able to authenticate his apostolic appointment with miraculous signs (2 Cor 12:12).

Things Not Denied

Now I want to make something extremely clear so that I am not misunderstood. Just because the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit were no longer given to Christians once the apostles died does not mean I do not believe in the Holy Spirit and his work. After teaching this, I do not want anyone to walk away thinking that I do not believe in the Holy Spirit and his working. Let me declare some of the things I am not denying.

1. I am not denying that Christians receive the gift of the Holy Spirit today (Acts 2:38).
2. I am not denying that Christians are filled with the Holy Spirit today (Ephesians 5:18).
3. I am not denying that Christians are baptized in the Holy Spirit today (Matthew 3:11).
4. I am not denying that the Holy Spirit is alive and active today.
5. I am not denying that God still speaks and works in this world today.
6. I am not denying the supernatural or that God works miracles.

These six things are not the issues. I deny none of the above things. Rather, we need to use the scriptures to examine how we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, are filled with the Holy Spirit, and are baptized in the Holy Spirit. We must examine how the Holy Spirit is active and how God speaks and works in this world. Our upcoming study will answer how these things about the Holy Spirit are true today. All we have observed in our study today is that Christians do not receive miraculous spiritual gifts today because those gifts were given through the laying on of the apostles' hands and the apostles have died.

Conclusion

John MacArthur makes an important observation: "But the Bible records only three periods of history in which human beings were given the gift of performing miracles. The first period was during the ministries of Moses and Joshua, the second during the ministries of Elijah and Elisha, and the third during the ministries of Jesus and the apostles. Each period lasted only about 70 years and then abruptly ended."

My friends, as Paul said to the Corinthians, so I also say to you. I do not want you to be uninformed. This does not mean that we are missing out on something or that we should be disappointed concerning the Holy Spirit. We are going to learn so much about spiritual gifts and build our faith over the time of this series because we are going study through 1 Corinthians 12-14. We are going to look at what Paul taught about spiritual gifts and how this affects our lives today. Even if you thought that these gifts were still being transferred to Christians today, I am going to show you in this series that what we see today is nothing like what we see in the scriptures concerning miraculous spiritual gifts.

Many Gifts, One Spirit
1 Corinthians 12:2-11

Paul did not want the Corinthians to be led astray. This concern is seen in 1 Corinthians 12:2-3. Paul wants Christians to know that their former experience as pagans may have poorly informed them to understand the realities concerning spiritual gifts. What God does through the Spirit is not the same as the idol worship these people had experienced before coming to Christ. Particularly, Paul reminds Christians that so-called inspired utterances are not necessarily inspired by the Holy Spirit. There may be people claiming to be speaking from the Holy Spirit, but that does not mean that they really are. Paul uses an extreme illustration to make his point. Obviously, a person who is speaking from the Holy Spirit is not going to say, "Jesus is accursed." A person who is speaking with the Holy Spirit will only speak the truth. No one who is speaking in the Holy Spirit will speak false things.

Describing Spiritual Gifts

In verse 4 Paul states that there are many different spiritual gifts. A listing of some of the gifts are given by Paul in verses 8-10. Some were given the gift of speaking wisdom. Some were given the spiritual gift of healing. Some were given the gift of working miracles. Some were given the spiritual gift of prophecy. Some were given the gift of speaking in tongues. Some were given the gift of interpreting tongues. The point is that there are all kinds of spiritual gifts. These gifts are given "for the common good" (12:7). These gifts are not given for boasting or a person to use for himself. I hope you will consider that this is different than what we see in the religious world today. Many try to claim to have spiritual gifts to draw attention to themselves. They claim to have gifts so that they will seem to have some kind of spirituality. But I want us to notice Paul's instruction that these spiritual gifts were not used for self but for the common good. These things were given so that other Christians would be benefited. These gifts are not for self-indulgence but for the community of Christ. These gifts were used to serve others, not serve self. These gifts were not to be a badge of spirituality, but an outflow of God's grace.

I want us to notice something else about the listing of these spiritual gifts. Spiritual gifts are not talents. Natural talents, skills, and abilities are certainly granted by God but these are not spiritual gifts that we see in the scriptures nor are not the gifts that Paul speaks about in 1 Corinthians 12-14. Unbelievers can have gifts of generosity or kindness or compassion. Spiritual gifts are supernaturally given by God to believers by the apostles laying their hands on a Christian. So when we speak about spiritual gifts, do not think that you have the "gift of gab" or something like that. All the gifts listed in verses 8-10 are gifts given by the Holy Spirit when an apostle laid his hands on an individual.

But notice something even more important. Notice that Paul does not merely say that God gives the gift. Look at verse 6. God empowers the gift. Other translations read that God "works" (NASB, NKJV, NIV, NLT) or "activates" (HCSB, NRSV) the gift. God is the one who makes the gift work. The gift was activated or started by God. These people did not activate their own gifts. A person did not exercise the gift on their own power. Now consider how different this is from what we see in the religious world that tries to exercise "spiritual gifts." They will activate their gift themselves. They will "heal" on their own power. They will "prophesy" from their own will. I have never seen or heard of a person who claimed to have a gift of tongues or prophecy or healing say, "God is not working in me right now." They all activate the gift themselves. Paul says that this is not possible. The true spiritual gifts given by the Holy Spirit through an apostle laying his hands on a Christian were only activated and exercised by God. We

can see all kinds of examples of this truth in the New Testament. But notice one instance that really shows this:

And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, so that they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them. (Acts 5:14–15 ESV)

Did Peter activate his gift of healing so that his shadow healed people? Did Peter will this to happen? Not at all! Of course not! God empowered this healing so that wherever Peter walked, people were healed even when his shadow passed over them. Here is the point we learn by the apostle Paul: **If you are causing your "gift," then you do not have a spiritual gift.**

Understanding the Gift of Prophecy

With the remainder of our time we are going to consider one gift in particular: the spiritual gift of prophecy. We see that this is one of the gifts listed by Paul in verse 10. Many claim today to possess the gift of prophecy. The scriptures are very clear as to what the gift of prophecy is. Listen to how the apostle Peter describes prophecy.

For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1:21 ESV)

In short, Peter says that prophecy is the speaking the very words of God. The person does not decide what to say. The Holy Spirit caused the person to speak God's word. The person with the gift of prophecy, when the gift was exercised, did not speak his own words.

Now listen to how different the gift of prophecy is defined today. Sam Storms is a noted Bible author and preacher in Oklahoma City. He is one of the leading evangelical teachers who also considered himself a charismatic and believes miraculous spiritual gifts are still being exercised today. He exercises the gift as well as many in his church. He defined prophecy in one of his sermons as, "The speaking forth in merely human words what God has brought to mind." Because of this, Sam Storms goes on to say that Christians must test what comes to mind with the scriptures. He continued, "My guess, in fact I'm absolutely certain of it, that everyone who has ever been blessed to exercise this gift [of prophecy] has in some measure here or there gotten something wrong. That doesn't make them a false prophet." If this was not enough, listen to how Sam Storms further describes the gift of prophecy. Prophecy is "a mixture of the infallible divine word of God and the fallible, oftentimes errant interpretation and application of men and women like you and me." Please consider how different this is from how Peter described prophecy. The true gift of prophecy was to speak the very words of God. This is why God could give this powerful declaration:

20 But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die.' 21 And if you say in your heart, 'How may we know the word that the LORD has not spoken?'— 22 when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him. (Deuteronomy 18:20–22 ESV)

God commanded that people who claimed to speak in God's name but did not truly speak the words of God were to be killed. The people would want to know how they would be able to discern if a person truly had the gift of prophecy (18:21). The test is if his words came true or not. If a person claimed to speak as a prophet but his words are not true or do not come to pass, that person was to be killed. Consider that this is different from how Sam Storms describes prophecy. He says that every person who ever had the gift of prophecy got something wrong. But God says that whoever truly has the gift of prophecy never said anything wrong because they spoke the very words of God. Prophecy was not left to the interpretation or application of the prophet. They were activated and empowered by God, not themselves, and said the words that the Holy Spirit carried them along to say.

Just as a note, as I listened to these online sermons by Sam Storms, they had people who claimed to have the gift of prophecy get on the microphone and exercise their gift. Every "prophecy" was non-specific and useless. For example, one person prophesied, "God wants to build you up." Please read through the scriptures and try to find that kind of broad, non-specific prophecy. That is not a prophecy at all. Prophecy is always presented as the infallible, authoritative declaration of God's inerrant revelation. It was not an impression of the mind, whether clear or vague. Prophecy is a verbal declaration, using words the prophecy vocalized audibly or wrote legibly in the presence of others who could hear or read them. We cannot define prophecy more broadly than the scriptures give.

Conclusion

All spiritual gifts are given by God through an apostle laying hands on a Christian. Therefore there are no spiritual gifts given today because all the apostles died. All spiritual gifts were activated and empowered by God. No person exercised their gift by their own will or power. The gift of prophecy was speaking the very words of God, which are without error and fully trustworthy. Anyone who claimed to prophesy but was wrong was declared a false prophet that no one was to listen to or follow. We must employ these same tests today. Here is the great thing that God has given us. We do not need prophets today because the apostles and prophets wrote down the very words of God for us which we hold in our hands today. When we read, we are reading the very words of God so that we can come to Christ and be saved (cf. Ephesians 3:3-5; Revelation 1:3).

The Gift of Tongues 1 Corinthians 12:7-11

The apostle Paul is writing to the Corinthian church about spiritual gifts so that they would not be uninformed and would have their faith confirmed concerning these gifts. We have noticed in our studies thus far that spiritual gifts were given through the Holy Spirit when an apostle laid his hands on another Christian (Acts 8:15-18; Romans 1:9-11; 2 Timothy 1:6-7). We also learned that spiritual gifts were not activated by the individual but were empowered by God (1 Corinthians 12:6). Finally, we noticed that the gift of prophecy was a gift of speaking the very words of God that were always without error (2 Peter 1:21). The person did not speak his own words from the thoughts given to him. The person was carried along by the Holy Spirit and spoke as God moved these people to speak.

Another gift of the Holy Spirit that we see in this list that causes much attention today is speaking in tongues. Interestingly, just as speaking in tongues has popularity today, it also had popularity in the Corinthian church. This is one of the reasons why Paul must write to the Corinthians about spiritual gifts. The Corinthian Christians had elevated the gift of tongues as superior to all other spiritual gifts. Using our text today we must consider what is the gift of tongues and how these tongues were used.

What Are Tongues?

To begin, I want to quote Wayne Grudem from his book, *Systematic Theology*. The reason I want to do so is because Grudem is a continuationist, that is, he believes that spiritual gifts are still in use today. So even though he believes speaking in tongues and other gifts are still today, his definition of the gift of tongues is helpful.

"It should be said at the outset that the Greek word *glossa*, translated "tongue," is not used only to mean the physical tongue in a person's mouth, but also to mean "language." In the New Testament passages where speaking in tongues is discussed, the meaning "languages" is certainly in view. It is unfortunate, therefore, that English translations have continued to use the phrase "speaking in tongues," which is an expression not otherwise used in ordinary English and which gives the impression of a strange experience, something completely foreign to ordinary human life. But if English translations were to use the expression "speaking in languages," it would not seem nearly as strange, and would give the reader a sense much closer to what first century Greek speaking readers would have heard in the phrase when they read it in Acts or 1 Corinthians" (*Systematic Theology*, 1069).

Grudem is exactly right. Speaking in tongues in the scriptures simply means speaking in another language. You will notice that a couple translations are willing to translate this Greek word as such.

"...to another, different kinds of languages, to another, interpretation of languages." (1 Corinthians 12:10 HCSB)

"Still another person is given the ability to speak in unknown languages, while another is given the ability to interpret what is being said." (1 Corinthians 12:10 NLT)

To call this "the gift of tongues" seems to give the gift an air of mystery and intrigue. But when we call this gift, "the gift of languages" we lose all the mystery. The gift was the ability for a person to speak in another language in which they previously had not been trained. We see an example of this in Acts 2. In

Acts 2:4 we read concerning the apostles: **"And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:4 ESV)**. Notice what this meant two verses later.

"And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language." (Acts 2:6 ESV)

Notice that there was nothing ecstatic in what they were doing. Notice that we are not told anything about feeling something or having an emotion come over them. Speaking in tongues was nothing more than speaking in another language, a foreign language that was previously unknown. David Garland, a biblical scholar, writes in his commentary, "'Language' is the most natural meaning of the Greek word and best explains how tongues can be differentiated into various kinds" (Garland, 584). This point comes from 1 Corinthians 12:10. Carefully read and notice that Paul says that there are "various kinds of tongues." How can there be various kinds of tongues? Paul is saying that there are various kinds of languages and different Christians possessed the gift of different languages of the world.

I would like to take a moment to quote some words from D.A. Carson. Carson is also a continuationist, that is, he believes these spiritual gifts are still in practice. He wrote a commentary on 1 Corinthians 12-14 called "Showing The Spirit." Even though he is a continuationist, he makes these observations concerning speaking in tongues.

"I shall discuss Acts 2 in the last chapter, but for the moment I must merely register my conviction that what Luke describes at Pentecost are real, known, human languages. More careful word studies have shown that in none of the texts adduced by Behm or the standard lexical does *glossa* ever denote noncognitive utterance" (Carson, 80).

"On balance, then, the evidence favors the view that Paul thought the gift of tongues was a gift of real languages, that is, languages that were cognitive, whether of men or of angels" (Carson, 83).

"To my knowledge there is universal agreement among linguists who have taped and analyzed thousands of examples of modern tongue-speaking that the contemporary phenomenon is not any human language" (Carson, 83).

"What about the contemporary gift of interpretation? A few years ago a friend of mine attended a charismatic service and rather cheekily recited some of John 1:1-18 in Greek as his contribution to speaking in tongues. Immediately there was an "interpretation" that bore no relation whatsoever to the Johannine prologue. Two people with the gift of interpretation have on occasion been asked to interpret the same recorded tongues message and the resulting different and conflicting interpretations have been justified on the grounds that God gives different interpretations to different people. That is preposterous, if the interpretations are wildly dissimilar, because it would force us to conclude that there is no univocal, cognitive content to the tongues themselves" (Carson, 87).

"More commonly, at least in my experience, triteness triumphs: 'Interpretations prove to be as stereotyped, vague, and uninformative as they are spontaneous, fluent, and confident.'" (Carson, 87).

Somehow, Carson goes on to say that this does not negate that there is the gift of tongues today even though all the evidence he has seen and presented proves otherwise. Even honest continuationists recognize that what is passed off as tongue speaking today is not what we see in the scriptures. If we consider the history of the church, we find that the gift of languages was universally considered to be the supernatural ability to speak authentic foreign languages that the speaker had not learned.

Gifts Given

Turn your attention back to 1 Corinthians 12:8-11. Paul gives a long list of the various gifts of the Spirit, including the gifts of knowledge, wisdom, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, distinguishing spirits, various languages, and the interpretation of languages. Who gave these gifts? Notice in verse 11 that it is the Spirit who apportions to each one as he wills. Notice in verses 8-10 that Paul says that one person would receive one gift and one person would receive another gift. No one had all the gifts. Christians had different gifts. Who decided who received what gift? Paul says that the Spirit decided. The individual could not decide or will himself into having a gift. In 1 Corinthians 12:18-19 Paul says again that God chose the arrangement of who received what gift because there would no value if all had the same gift. Notice that Paul said the same thing to the Romans.

For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you— (Romans 1:11 ESV)

Paul did not decide what gift a person received. God decided. Today people will talk about how you can have the gift of tongues if you pray for it or seek after it. They will say if you are spiritual enough then you also can have this gift. Some churches will go so far to say that it is the truly spiritual ones who have the gift of tongues and less spiritual ones do not. Therefore the reason you do not have the gift of tongues is because of a lack of faith. I want us to see from this text that this is entirely false. God decided who receive a particular gift. This gives us more information. Spiritual gifts were given when an apostle laid his hands on a Christian. But the Spirit determined, not the apostle nor the Christian, what gift that Christian would receive. The amount of faith had nothing to do with this. God decided what gift was given. Paul says this explicitly in 1 Corinthians 12:11.

Now, this leads to an important consideration and my challenge to those who claim miraculous spiritual gifts today. If speaking in tongues is still today, where are the rest of the spiritual gifts? Look at the long list Paul gives. God gives the gifts and God distributes these gifts because there is no value in a church having only one or two gifts (1 Corinthians 12:18-20,30). Notice 1 Corinthians 12:30. All do not speak in tongues. If God is still distributing spiritual gifts, then where are the gifts of miracles? Where are the gifts of wisdom? Where are the gifts of knowledge? Where are the gifts of distinguishing spirits?

Further, if true spiritual gifts exist today, then we would expect to see these gifts use to show the false claims of the Spirit to be counterfeit. Just as Philip used the true gifts of the Spirit to show that Simon the sorcerer was false in Acts 8, we should see the same today so that we would follow the true works of the Spirit rather than these false works.

Conclusion

Speaking in tongues was the speaking of actual foreign languages, not gibberish. It was miraculous because the person was not trained in that language but now spoke the language fluently. This gift could

only be given by an apostle placing his hands on a Christian. Since all the apostles have died, these gifts cannot be transferred to anyone today.

Please think about this for a moment. What would be the point of the Holy Spirit revealing in an unknown, unintelligible language only to need another person with the gift of interpretation reveal the meaning so all could understand? I hope that we see that this does not make sense. Why would God reveal himself to particular person in gibberish to all people so that another person could interpret? Why not cut out the middle man and just reveal in a language that is understood by all? A picture that makes much more sense is that the Holy Spirit revealed his will in a language that some in the church understood. A Christian with the gift of interpretation revealed this to the rest who did not speak the language. This fits what we see later in 1 Corinthians 14 when Paul gives further directions about using the gift of languages.

The message for us today is that we have the complete revealed will of the Lord written down by the apostles and prophets so that we can know God (Ephesians 3:3-5). God blessed the churches in the first century with these gifts until the apostles and prophets could record God's word which would be preserved for all time to bring people to himself.

One Body

1 Corinthians 12:12-31

How are Christians to function together? There is a great challenge that must be considered when we think about the local church. Think about all of us. We are different ages. We are from different cultures. We are different races. We come from different states and even different countries. Many countries are represented in this room. We come from different upbringings. Some come from a Christian background and some do not. Some know the Bible well, perhaps from their youth while others are just starting to use a Bible. How are Christians to come together and function together? This is part of the idea that Paul is addressing in 1 Corinthians 12:12-31. Paul has a bunch of Christians in Corinth who come from all of these different backgrounds, nationalities, and upbringings. Not only these, they had one more thing that added to their distinctions. Some had spiritual gifts and some did not. Those who had spiritual gifts had differing ones. Some could speak in tongues. Some had prophecy. Some had gifts of healing. Some had knowledge. There are all of these different gifts and they are to come together with their different backgrounds into this one place and represent Christ as his people. How are Christians to function together? Let's notice what Paul says Christians are to do to be the people of God in a particular city.

Unity In The Body (12:12-13)

The first point Paul makes is that we are to be one. The thesis statement is found in verse 12. There are many parts to the human body but it is still one human body. We have all kinds of different parts on our body. But that does not change the fact that with all of those parts you still have one body. It is the same with Christ. Verse 13 is the explanation of how we are one body, as witnessed that the first word of verse 13 is the word "for." Paul says we are united because we are all baptized in one Spirit and all drink of one Spirit. Paul says that as Christians we have experienced the same thing in the Spirit. We are baptized in the Spirit and drink of the one Spirit.

What is Paul referring to? Paul is referring to the whole conversion experience that every person experiences. Notice in our text that Paul says that, "All were baptized in one Spirit" and "all drink of the one Spirit" (12:13). It is not that only "some" are baptized in one Spirit. All are baptized in one Spirit and all drink of the one Spirit. This is what the other scriptures in the New Testament teach as well. Notice what Peter said occurs when we come to Jesus.

And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." (Acts 2:38-39 ESV)

Notice the two things that are received when we repent and are baptized. Peter says that our sins are forgiven and we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit which was promised by the prophets (cf. Ezekiel 36:22-27; Isaiah 32:14-20; 44:3-5), by John the Baptizer (cf. Matthew 3:7-12), and by Jesus (cf. Acts 1:4-5). Some have argued for "Spirit baptism" as referring to a separate experience from conversion. But Paul does not speak this way, nor does the New Testament. The emphasis Paul makes is on their Christian conversion as the common reception of the Spirit. Paul does not speak of something that is limited. Any concept of the baptism of the Holy Spirit is the same and simultaneous as water baptism as seen in Acts 2.

The same drink in the Spirit also refers to this conversion experience. This imagery also comes from the teachings of Jesus.

On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. 38 Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" 39 Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. (John 7:37-39 ESV)

The point Paul is making is that we are one because we share a common conversion experience. We have been given true, eternal life through Jesus. We have come to Jesus who has forgiven our sins, restored us to a relationship with the Father, poured out his blessings on us, and joined us into his eternal kingdom. These aspects were the hope of the promise of the Holy Spirit that would be poured out on all flesh. Paul tells the Corinthians that you are one because you have joined together in the same conversion experience. Let us consider that the means of entering a relationship with Jesus is important. This is something that we are to have in common. There cannot be that one person is not ever baptized, one person was baptized as a child, and one was baptized with faith in Jesus. This conversion experience is a common bond that joins us together. Therefore we must experience the same activity.

Diversity In The Body (12:14-20)

Though we are joined as various parts in one body of Christ does not mean that we are not different. It does not mean that there is not diversity within the body. Paul explores this truth in verses 14-20. Verse 14 is the thesis statement here. The body consists of many parts, not one body part. Therefore, there is no one who should say that he or she does not belong to this body. We have shared the same conversion experience but we are different. Here is the great truth: different parts of the body do different things. Paul is calling for us to recognize our diversity and to be content with what we are able to do as a part in the body of Christ. But here is the danger: too often people look at what others are doing and do nothing because they cannot do that. Do not take yourself out of the body. Don't look at what others can do and be discouraged. Look at what you can do and do it with all your might. You will do many things that I am not as good at doing. The local church is intended to have a wide diversity of people doing a variety of works for the Lord. Find your part in this work here. Find your role. We need more people doing more things. Find your work. Lift your eyes and be part of the work here. There are no barriers. Talk to us about what you see you can do and we will assist you in doing that work. There is nothing that is holding you back from doing God's work here.

Dependency In The Body (12:21-26)

This means that we are dependent on each other. Paul states in verse 21 that no one can say that they have no need of another. There is no person here that is useless in their work before the Lord, unless they are doing no work at all. Whatever you are doing for the Lord is useful and we are to depend on each other to do those things. No one person does it all. This is such a problem in the religious landscape today. Preachers are looked at as the ones to do it all. I think preachers like this because the whole church depends on them and it gives them power and security. But it is not right and it is not what God has instructed. We depend on each other for the variety of works that must be done.

What Paul describes, therefore, is the need for the local church. We live in a time where people do not see the need for the local church. To sharpen their point, if all we do as a church is come together and sit

for an hour and leave, then I completely agree that there is no need for a local church. But we are supposed to be like a human body. Each part is supposed to work together in the kingdom of God for teaching, for encouragement, for correction, and for help. When one part of the body hurts, the whole body hurts. I had a horrible headache the other day. I caused my whole body to go lie down and tend to the pain. We are to be so connected together that we will rejoice together and hurt together. When one part receives honor, the whole part receives honor and joy. There is no room for jealousy or denigration. A pitcher's arm does not receive the honor for pitching a perfect game. The whole body, the whole person, receives the honor. In the same way, what we do as parts of this body in Christ bring honor and joy to everyone here and to Christ. When I go teach another person, it represents all of us teaching. When you go to the hospital to visit someone or give to the needy or teach or do some work for the Lord, you are doing it for the whole body. The hand does not get the glory. The work of the hand is for the benefit of the whole body. We must see our work in this light and see our relationship together in this light.

Part By Part (12:27-31)

We must look at ourselves as the body of Christ, part by part. When a part is missing, it hurts us. If a part is missing, then we are going to say something and try to do something to bring you back. Further, each part has a role and a work. Do not worry about what other parts are doing. Do your part in the body of Christ. Notice the result that is to occur in verse 25. What is to happen is "that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another."

We must be warned against two false ways of thinking. First, to think that we do not need anyone else. This pride results in neglecting the local church. We do not participate, we do not worship together, and we do not work together. We fail to see the design that God has given for us as parts of the body. The second way we engage in false thinking is assuming we have nothing to offer. It does not matter how new you are in the faith, you have much to give to the body here. We need you. We have many people here who are newer Christians but are excelling, teaching, and working in this body. It is a wonderful thing to see and it is building up the body here. Consider that both forms of false thinking come from comparing ourselves to other Christians. Instead of comparing ourselves, let us be different parts of the body that work together for the glory of Christ. Though we come from different backgrounds and may find ourselves to be so different from others in this room, we are joined by our conversion experience. "For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body and all were made to drink of one Spirit."

Nothing Without Love
1 Corinthians 13:1-7

The thirteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians is a chapter that is widely known, yet routinely taken out of its context. This is another situation where the arbitrary chapter breaks interfere with the author's message. Before this chapter Paul wrote to the Corinthians to teach them that though they have different spiritual gifts, they were dependent on each other. No one was greater than another. They were all parts in the body of Christ and there was not to be any division. But the Corinthians were seeking the "better" gifts or the "greater" gifts. Paul uses this desire to move them in a godly direction. Paul is going to show them what the "better" or "greater" gifts are (12:31).

The Necessity of Love (13:1-3)

As we read the first three verses of 1 Corinthians 13, we can see that Paul uses hyperbole to teach the Corinthians Christians how a lack of love nullifies any ability or gift one has. Paul begins by supposing he can speak in the languages of men (which is what the Corinthians are desiring as the greatest gift), or even if he can speak the language of angels, if he does not have love, then all of these languages are nothing more than a clanging cymbal or noisy gong. All of those efforts are nothing but noise without love. Further, suppose that Paul had all the powers from these spiritual gifts.

Paul continues to speak in this hyperbolic language where he would have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries, and have all knowledge, and have all faith so that he could remove mountains. But if he does not have love, he is nothing. "Removing mountains" is an idiom for doing the impossible. Even if Paul could accomplish the impossible, without love then he is nothing. We must recognize what Paul means when he says, "He is nothing." It is a powerful statement. Paul is an apostle, selected by the Lord Jesus to go with the gospel message to the Gentiles. However, if Paul does not exercise and practice love, Paul is nothing. Paul is emphasizing for our ears the necessity of love. This is a critical message that all Christians must hear. It does not matter how much good we think we are doing for the Lord and for his kingdom, if we lack love then we are nothing. Our motivation is critical toward our efforts for the Lord. The Lord cares about what is in our hearts. God cares about our motives. The Christians in Corinth are motivated with selfish pursuits. They want the gifts for themselves. They want to elevate themselves. They want to be seen by others as spiritual. Paul is telling them it does not matter what they do for the kingdom of Christ, they have it all wrong.

Paul continues in verse 3. Even if he does great, selfless acts, there is nothing gained. Paul could give away all that he has. Paul can even sacrifice his body to be burned. Paul speaks of the most extreme self-denial. But if love is not the motivation, he has gained nothing from his sacrifice. All that we can possibly do is absolutely nothing before God without love. I submit to you that the love that Paul means is a love for God that leads us to love others. People today do all kinds of selfless acts. But without the motivation being a love for the Lord, the act is nothing for God and there is no gain because all that matters in life is our spiritual standing before God.

The tongue of angels. Before we can move forward we need to deal with a false teaching that comes from 1 Corinthians 13:1. This verse is frequently used to suggest that there is a gift of speaking in the tongue of angels. Therefore, the gibberish that people claim to represent the gift of speaking in tongues is angelic language. There are many problems with this interpretation that I would like to take a moment to reveal.

First, we pointed out in the last lesson that the “gift of tongues” is simply the gift of languages. Therefore Paul is simply saying that if he possessed the languages of men and of angels. When we remember that “tongues” are actual languages, the mystery and intrigue behind the idea of tongue speaking is removed.

Second, we have already noticed that this paragraph is using hyperbolic language. To suggest that there are angelic languages would mean that it was possible for a person to understand all mysteries and have all knowledge and have all faith and be able to remove mountains from the earth. We recognize from the language used that Paul is using extreme illustrations to make his point more dramatic that it does not matter what you have or what you do, without love it is nothing.

Third, if there is such a thing as an angelic language, what would be the purpose for people on earth? Why would God reveal to a person with the gift of languages words that are from an angelic language? What is the purpose? Who is that helping? God is causing confusion. Why not speak to humans in a language that someone would understand? The reason is that they do not possess any miraculous spiritual gift.

Fourth, if there is a gift of angelic languages, why is it that every person who claims to possess this gift only speak in angelic languages? Remember that the Spirit gave the gift to the Christian (12:11,18-19). The Christian did not decide which gift he or she would receive. If the gift of speaking languages (tongues) is still continuing, why are there not people speaking earthly languages like we see in the scriptures? The reason is that they do not possess any miraculous spiritual gift.

Finally, we learned in our first lesson from Acts 8 that these spiritual gifts were only given when the apostles laid their hands on a Christian (Acts 8:17-18). Therefore, when the apostles died, the miraculous spiritual gifts were no longer able to be transferred. So even if there were a language of angels, that gift passed away with the apostles.

People key in on this one phrase, “The tongues of men and of angels” and miss the way Paul is reasoning and the point Paul is making. Paul is using the art of exaggeration to make a point that every gift and every act must be motivated by a love for the Lord.

The Character of Love (13:4-7)

Paul continues by teaching the Corinthians what true, godly love looks like. Paul reveals the character of love. This is a description of what love does and what love does not do. Interestingly, the things Paul says that love does not do are the very things the Corinthians are doing toward other Christians. So Paul is trying to get them to exercise love by stopping their actions that show a lack of love and starting the actions that show true love. As we consider the characteristics of love we must see that Paul is describing how Christians are to behave toward each other. This text is certainly useful for describing how to love in dating and in marriage. But this is not the context. The context is that this is how we are to behave as Christians toward other Christians in the body of Christ, the church.

Love is patient. The word picture is that of suffering long toward another. Love means that we will exercise patience in attitude and actions toward each other.

Love is kind. We understand what this means. Love exhibits a gentleness and tenderness toward another.

Love does not envy. The Corinthians were envious of the gifts that other Christians possessed. We will not be envious of what other Christians are able to do in the kingdom. This is not a competition. There is no best preacher award or greater glory because one is able to serve as an elder or deacon in the body of Christ. We are all looking for our part to serve. Envy is unnecessary.

Love does not boast nor is arrogant. Love does not display pride. If we love each other because of our love for Jesus, then we will not be concerned about receiving recognition. We will not care that other people pay attention to us or see what we are doing. We will want to deflect that recognition to God and his word.

Love does not behave rudely. Love does not dishonor other people. We will not tear other people down with our words because we want them hurt. We are not trying to hurt others by our actions.

Love does not insist on its own way. This is an important key to harmony among Christians. We will not be self-seeking. We will remember that our lives and our worship and our service is not about ourselves. Love is not selfish and love does not seek its own benefits. Love is not demanding.

Love is not irritable. Love is not easily angered or provoked. We are not going to be set off quickly because someone makes a mistake.

Love does not keep a record of wrongs. We do not store up in our minds all the wrongs committed against us. Christians are not to be resentful or bitter, which comes from keeping a record of wrongs.

Love finds no joy in wrongdoing. We will not be happy to see others sin. We will not want to see others stumble but will want to help others spiritual grow.

Love rejoices in the truth. Love is glad to see others excel in righteousness and godliness.

The summary is simple and memorable. Love bears all things. Love believes all things. Love hopes all things. Love endures all things. We do not give up on each other. We will bear with each other, even though we make many mistakes and commit sins. We will continue to trust each other and believe in each other. We will think the best of others and possess hope for others. Love endures even when we are harmed and hurt.

Paul tells us that if we are going to desire the higher, greater gifts, look to love. Love is the more excellent way that we must practice. The love of God must be the motivation for our actions. This love will lead us to love each other, not in words alone, but in our actions. Without love for God and for each other, we are nothing before God and we have gained nothing before God. Let us examine ourselves and make changes in our thinking and behavior where necessary.

When The Perfect Comes 1 Corinthians 13:8-13

Paul is in the midst of describing to the Corinthian Christians the way followers of Jesus are to behave. Paul has taught the necessity of love in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3. Without love we are nothing before God and have gained nothing before God. The spiritual gifts these Corinthians possessed were nothing without love. Further, Paul described the character of love in verses 4-7. How we behave toward one another in the body of Christ matters to the Lord. The practice of love is necessary in the body of Christ. Paul continues his teaching on love in the rest of this chapter by describing the permanence of love.

The Permanence of Love (13:8-13)

Paul declares that love never ends. This is what makes love so important also. Love is necessary because spiritual gifts would pass away. In verse 8 Paul makes this point clear. Prophecies would pass away. The speaking in various languages (tongues) would stop. The gifts of knowledge would cease. Love is critical because love is permanent. The various spiritual gifts that they are arguing over and dividing over would eventually disappear. Prophecies, healings, wisdom, knowledge, tongues, and all the rest of these miraculous spiritual gifts given by God would stop. However, love would not disappear.

Verses 9-10 are Paul's explanation of this truth. Notice that the first word of verse 9 is "for." These two verses explain why these spiritual gifts will pass away. The reason Paul gives is that, "We know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away." The question people have is, "What is the perfect?" To answer this question we must consider that this is an answer to the explanation for why spiritual gifts are going to cease. Verse 12 must also be kept in mind because Paul continues to speak of the partial there. "Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known."

Verse 9 teaches us that "the part" is a reference to spiritual gifts. Paul illustrates that at present there is only partial knowledge of the will of God. The reason is that they were presently still receiving the revelation of God through the miraculous spiritual gifts. Some had the spiritual gift of knowledge. Some had the gift of prophecy. Some had the gift of languages. God is revealing his will to the first century Christians through these miraculous gifts. The Christians are receiving pieces or parts of the will of God. Piece by piece they are receiving God's knowledge. Verse 10 continues that when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. Whatever the "perfect" is, that will be the time when the partial, that is, these miraculous spiritual gifts, will end.

Misunderstanding the Perfect

A popular understanding of the "perfect" is that this is a reference to return of Jesus. This explanation makes sense. Jesus is perfect and we are waiting for his return. So many teach that Paul is saying that miraculous spiritual gifts will continue until Jesus returns. But there are many problems with this understanding of Paul's teaching. First, what is the point of saying that the miraculous spiritual gifts will end at the second coming of Christ? Of course those gifts would end! Everything is going to end at the second coming of Christ, according to 1 Corinthians 15:23-24. Second, what is the point of saying that right now we cannot know all of God's will but when Christ returns we will know fully? Again, this is not helpful, especially to these first century Christians who are arguing over spiritual gifts. Third, Paul says that three things will remain: faith, hope and love. But faith and hope cannot remain after the second coming of Christ. The scriptures are very clear that hope that is seen is not hope (Romans 8:24). No one

hopes for what he sees. Hope is necessary until we are joined with Christ. Hope will not remain after the second coming. Further, faith will not remain either. The writer of Hebrews teaches that faith is the evidence of things not seen (Hebrews 11:1). There is no need for faith in Christ when we are gathered home with him. Paul is describing a time after the ending of spiritual gifts when faith, hope, and love will remain. Finally, many jump to verse 12 and state that we have not seen God face to face. Therefore, Paul is talking about the second coming when we will see God face to face. But this is not what Paul says if we carefully read it. The text does not say we will see God face to face. Paul simply says that we will see clearly like being face to face, rather than dimly. I will explain what this means in a moment. But I just want to point out that Paul does not say we will see God. That is not the time frame. These are just a few reasons why "the perfect" is not referring to when Jesus' second coming. So what does Paul mean?

Understanding the Perfect

Since the partial is referring to the limited knowledge and information the Christians had in the first century through the spiritual gifts, the most natural understanding of "the perfect" is a time when that knowledge would be complete and no longer limited. Reread verses 8-13 and consider how this interpretation fits best and makes the most sense of what Paul is teaching. In verse 8 Paul declares that these spiritual gifts that the Corinthians are fighting over will stop. Paul continues in verse 9 that at that time when Paul writes they only had partial knowledge and partial revelation from God, coming to them piece by piece, part by part, through the gifts. But when the full knowledge and revelation of God is given, then these spiritual gifts (the partial) will end (13:10). In verse 11 Paul describes these spiritual gifts as "elementary ways" or "childish ways." Paul is not being derogatory toward spiritual gifts but is making a point that a more mature way is coming. Paul and the Corinthian Christians were living in a time of limited knowledge and understanding. But the perfect and mature was coming so that these things would be set aside and no longer necessary.

Verse 12 is beautiful. Paul describes their current condition of knowledge as seeing in a mirror dimly. Mirrors in the first century were not like mirrors today. Their mirrors were not made from glass. They could see their reflection clearly like we can today. They saw dimly in the metal they were looking at. But when the perfect arrives, Christians will be able to see so clearly that it will be like seeing face to face. Listen to the rest of verse 12. "Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known." This is a staggering declaration. Knowledge could only be received partially. God's new covenant was being revealed a piece at a time. Paul was moved by the Holy Spirit to write Ephesians. Peter was moved by the Spirit to write his two letters. James was moved by the Spirit to write his letter. John would write his three letters as the Spirit moved him. Living in the first century was a time when God's will was being revealed a little bit at a time. But Paul pictures a time when that will no longer happen. When the full revelation of God came, Paul says he will know fully.

We are able to see God clearly with the word of God. We are not looking at God dimly. God has revealed all we need to see clearly. The clarity to which we are able to know God now through his word is unparalleled to any time in human history before the revelation of the scriptures. Once God revealed his word and will to his apostles and prophets, these spiritual gifts that Paul is writing about would no longer be necessary. Those gifts were revealing the knowledge of God. But once the apostles and prophets wrote God's words down, continued revelation would be unnecessary. So only three things would remain once the full revelation of God came: faith, hope, and love. These are the great Christian characteristics that we must cling to. The greatest of these is love.

Consider how this fits exactly what we learned in Acts 8:18 and Romans 1:9-11. Only the apostles could give a Christian a spiritual gift. When the apostles died, the gifts could no longer be given. The apostle Paul confirms this truth in 1 Corinthians 13. Not only does Paul say that the spiritual gifts would end but they would end when God's revelation were written down as scriptures for all to read and know. It is widely accepted that the scriptures were completed before the end of the first century. The scriptures were completed, the apostles pass away, and the miraculous gifts stopped, all around the end of the first century, just as God said in the scriptures.

Conclusion

Did you know that you can fully know God? God has revealed all that we need to know about him. We do not have to know God vaguely or dimly. With the word of God we can know him as if we are seeing him face to face. This is exactly what John taught in the first chapter. We have seen God when we see Jesus which was recorded for us by the Holy Spirit. Will you dedicate yourself to knowing God fully? Will you spend time his word so that you do not need to be fuzzy in your knowledge of the Lord? Give yourself to the reading of the scriptures. It is so glorious that we can know God. It is amazing. It is a staggering thought. Know God. Read his words. See your God clearly.

Strive To Excel In Building Up The Church 1 Corinthians 14:1-25

The fourteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians now deals with specific problems concerning spiritual gifts in the assembly of the Christians in Corinth. The apostle Paul has taught these Christians that we are nothing without love and everything we do must be motivated by love. Love is the greatest gift and only faith, hope, and love will endure until the return of Christ. Therefore, the goal is to pursue love.

We have spent the last few lessons noticing how Paul taught that these spiritual gifts were going to pass away. We also noted that the gifts that many claim to have today (like tongue speaking and prophecy) do not match what we see in the scriptures concerning what those gifts did. First Corinthians 14 is going to show us that even if these gifts still did exist today, the churches that claim to have these gifts do not obey the directions that Paul commands here. Therefore, we are going to consider two keys in our study today. First, we will notice how spiritual gifts were to be practiced among Christians. Second, we will learn about how we should worship God in our assemblies today based on the directions given by Paul. The fourteenth chapter probably gives us the most information about what an assembly of Christians looked like in the first century.

Desire To Build Up The Church (14:1-5)

Paul begins by telling these Christians that desiring spiritual gifts is good. Paul has not given these instructions about the ending of spiritual gifts so that they would reject these gifts. Paul is trying to teach them that they must not overemphasize having these gifts, particularly the gift of languages (tongues). Desire gifts and understand the great value of prophecy (14:1). Paul says that tongue speaking alone is not useful. Tongue speaking does not help other people in the local church because people do not understand the language being spoken. One can easily imagine how this would be true. Imagine in our congregation a person had the miraculous spiritual gift of speaking in German. Is that gift going to be useful to us in our assemblies? No, it will not. His words will only be spoken to and understood by God. Those words would not be spoken to or understood by the congregation. By contrast, Paul says that prophecy helps all the church (14:3). Therefore, the tongue speaker only accomplishes one thing: building himself up. The person with the gift of prophecy, however, is able to build up all the Christians. This is why prophecy is the greater gift (14:5). Unless there was a person to interpret the language, the gift of tongues was useless in the assembly.

Notice the emphasis made in verses 3-5. Three times Paul emphasizes that gifts were to be used for the building up of the body. Tongue speaking does not benefit the church unless there is an interpreter. Paul condemns the way they were using their gift of speaking in another language (tongue speaker) because the only person being built up was the speaker. This is exactly what we see in churches today that claim to practice tongue speaking. They are not helping anyone but themselves and are simply building up their pride. This is unacceptable and violation of God's law because we are to come together to build each other up. Verse 3 says that we are together for upbuilding, encouragement, and consolation. Any action in life and particularly in our assembly that is the drawing of attention to ourselves rather than the Lord and his word is sinful.

Further, this description defines our purpose when we come together. The stated goal is that the church (which is the people of God) is built up. This is why we are never going to give you a coffee when you come through the door. This is why we do not show movies on the screen. This is why we are not going

to run fundraisers. This is why we are not holding entertainment activities. None of these activities lead us to spiritual upbuilding. We are not going to back campaigns, charities, or other social activities. The church has a single purpose in our assembly to spiritually build people.

Unintelligible Sounds Help No One (14:6-12)

Paul presses the uselessness of the gift of tongues without an interpreter even further in verses 6-12. Tongue speaking is nothing more than noise without interpretation. The gospel cannot be proclaimed in tongues alone in an assembly. There is no help to the people unless a revelation is given. The result is that they are speaking in the air. This is true again today. Those who claim to be speaking in tongues are not helping anyone with their words. They are simply speaking to the air.

We noted in prior lessons that speaking in tongues was the speaking in a foreign language that is on earth. Verse 10 proves our conclusion. There are many different languages of the world and all of them have meaning. But if the meaning is not given, then there is no value in the gift. They were not speaking "angelic language." There is no such thing. First Corinthians 13:1 is Paul using hyperbole to make a point. The gift of tongues was speaking in foreign languages that the speaker was not trained in speaking.

Engaging The Mind (14:13-19)

Interpretation is critical because the mind must be engaged to have proper worship (14:13). The person with the gift of tongues may be using the gift but the mind is unfruitful (14:14). The use of spiritual gifts must be paired with the use of the mind (14:15). Paul says that the use of their spiritual gifts must be useful to knowledge. Otherwise, no one knows what you are saying (14:16) and the church is not being spiritually built up (14:17). Notice verse 17 carefully. What you are doing with your gift might be godly, but it is of no help. If others are not helped by the words spoken, then there is no point to speaking. Therefore Paul would rather speak five words that are understandable rather than 10,000 words in a tongue (14:19). This is why love is the greatest gift. Love for each other determines how we speak and act. Spiritual upbuilding is what we are supposed to give toward each other. If I am not speaking words that are for the building of your faith and knowledge of God, then you must stop supporting me. We assemble so that everyone can be edified.

Be Mature (14:20-25)

It is time to be mature in thinking. Battling, bickering, and competing with other Christians are marks of spiritual immaturity. Further, Paul uses Isaiah 28 to show that the gift of tongues was a sign for unbelievers. This is exactly how we see the gift used in Acts 2. The apostles spoke in tongues to preach the gospel and cause unbelievers to recognize that they were God's servants and messengers. Speaking in tongues is not for the assembly of Christians. By contrast, prophecy was used for believers. Think about verse 22 for a moment. Have you noticed that those who claim to have miraculous spiritual gifts? They use tongue speaking for the assembly and try to give prophecies to unbelievers (like trying to predict the end of the world). God says that this is not why he gave the gifts. Tongues (speaking in languages) was to reach unbelievers. Prophecy was for teaching the church.

Therefore, our assemblies are to be conducted in such a way so that people are convicted to worship God. Verse 23 says that tongue speaking in the assembly will cause people to think you are crazy. How true this is! Yet people who do not have the gift, claim to have the gift, and use it during the assembly and cause God's name to be blasphemed and mocked. Verse 24 tells us that we must be engaging the

mind, teaching the very words of God, so that people will come in to our assembly, hear God's word and worship him. This is the goal. Not only must we order our worship in a way so that our minds are engaged and we are spiritually built up, but we also must use our time in a way so that people who enter our assembly will hear God's word and be convicted in their heart. Again, coffee, games, entertainment, charity drives, and the like do not accomplish this goal. We must not distract from the proclamation of the word of God. The word of God is the only thing that has the power to convict hearts and change lives.

Conclusion

We learned from our previous studies that the miraculous spiritual gifts were only given when an apostle laid his hands on a person. Once the apostles passed away, these gifts could no longer be given. When those in the first century had the gift of tongues, they were speaking earthly, foreign languages (14:10). Those who claim to exercise these gifts today do so in a way that directly violates the first 25 verses of 1 Corinthians 14. Tongues were not intended for the assembled congregation but for teaching unbelievers, working as a sign to the lost. The only value tongue speaking had in the first century was if there was an interpreter present.

Paul's emphasis is that when we assemble that the goal is the spiritual building up of one another. Therefore, when we come together for our Bible studies, let us make sure that the words we choose to say are words that will build faith. When we offer prayers, we want to speak words that build up, encourage, and console (14:3). Our songs are words that build up our faith as we praise God. The Lord's Supper memorial will be words that encourage our faith as we direct our attention to the cross of Jesus. Sermons must be centered on the word of God so that we are instructed, encouraged, and faith is built. With all that is going on in the world that challenges our faith and people in the world who try to do damage to our faith, when we come together we need time to strengthen faith.

The Rules For Tongue Speaking (14:26-28)

Paul begins by reestablishing the key to the chapter. "Let all things be done for building up." Faith is supposed to be encouraged and strengthened by the word of God when we come together. Satan attacks our faith on a daily basis and we need to assemble to rebuild our faith and grow stronger in the Lord. Verse 26 also gives us another small peek into what was going on during the assembling. We note that there was singing. Implied in this was that someone led the assembly in the singing of the song. Further, there was a person giving instruction and teaching. Also, there was a person giving a revelation of the word of God, which to us would be the reading of the scriptures. All of these activities during the assembly were to meet the goal of building up the body of Christ.

In verse 27 the apostle Paul gives the directions to those who have the miraculous spiritual gift of speaking in tongues. The first rule of God is that there is only to be two tongue speakers, and at most three tongue speakers, who will speak at the assembly. The second rule is that each tongue speaker is to speak in turn. They are not to speak simultaneously nor interrupt each other. The final rule is that there must be interpretation. This is so important that if there is no one to interpret the language spoken, then the tongue speaker is to remain absolutely silent.

There are a few things we need to consider regarding this direction. I think it is important to observe that those who claim to have the gift of speaking in tongues today violate every part of this command. The rule of no more than three tongue speakers is broken. The rule that they do not speak simultaneously is broken. The rule that they only speak if there is interpretation is broken. Every aspect is regularly broken in many religious groups who claim to have the gift of tongues.

Another point that is very important to consider. Paul's direction reveals that the speaker had power over the spiritual gift. The gift was not uncontrollable. Christians were not "slain in the Spirit" or lacking self-control when the Spirit moved them. It is not that a person could not help himself from speaking. Paul says that the tongue speaker, though given a message from God, was to keep silent if others were speaking, if three tongue speakers had already spoken, or if there was no one to interpret the foreign language. Again, what we see today in the charismatic churches directly violates the scriptures and directly violates the way the Spirit operates.

The Rules For Prophecy (14:29-33)

Paul now turns his attention to the gift of prophecy. Notice that the same direction is given to those with the gift of prophecy as those with the gift of tongues. The first rule is that only two or three prophets should speak in any given assembly. Everyone else is supposed to listen and evaluate what is said. Therefore we see that a Christian with the gift of prophecy would declare the very words of God to the assembly and the assembly would listen to that message, evaluating what is said. The second rule is that if another person receives a prophecy, the first prophet was to stop and allow the other prophecy to be spoken. The same rules apply that each person should prophecy one by one, but no more than two or three "so that all may learn and all be encouraged" (14:31). Again, Paul declares the goal of building up the believers who are assembled. Paul also explicitly declares the conclusion in verse 32 that we drew concerning the tongue speakers. The spirit of the prophets are subject to the prophets. That is, those with the gift of prophecy are not lacking self-control but are able to wait and speak in turn. There is no

reason for noise, interruption, or chaos because God is not the author of confusion. Paul tells the Corinthian Christians that they can control the gifts given and empowered by the Holy Spirit because God does not cause confusion. In both instances, Paul is teaching that there is to be silence regarding the spiritual gifts they possess when in the assembly. There were rules for spiritual gifts when the assembly of believers is gathered.

The Rule For Women (14:33-35)

Paul continues by reminding these Christians that these directions are the practice in all the churches. Therefore, the teachings in this chapter are all the more emphasized as the pattern for us to follow today regarding the purpose and activities in our assembly. Verse 34 is a verse that is frequently quoted and separated from the context of the chapter. The women are instructed to keep silent in the churches. The same word instructing silence earlier in this section for the tongue speakers (14:28) and the prophets (14:30) is used here. As a reminder, the word for "silent" means absolute silence and to not make a sound. Is Paul teaching that women are not to make a single sound in the assembly? The answer must be "no" simply because women believers are instructed to sing in the assembly, to confess sins, and the like. The context of this command must be maintained. Paul is instructed the women to remain absolutely silent regarding the spiritual gifts they possessed. We know that women possessed spiritual gifts, like Philip's four daughters who prophesied (Acts 21:9) and the instructions given to women with gifts earlier in this very letter (1 Corinthians 11:5). Therefore, just as tongue speakers and prophets were given restrictions for using their gifts in the assembly, so also women were given restrictions for using their gifts in the assembly.

Now we must ask why this would be the case? Why would it be necessary for women not use their spiritual gifts in the assembly? Paul indicates in verse 34 that for the women to speak would mean they would be forfeiting the submission that the Law of God says. Again, we must ask an important question: how would women speaking cause a breaking of God's law concerning submission? Think about this for a moment. The scriptures teach that the wife is to be submissive to her husband (cf. Ephesians 5:22,24; 1 Corinthians 11:3; Colossians 3:18; 1 Peter 3:5). Does this mean that the wife cannot speak at all to her husband or else be out of submission? Of course not for there is no way for a marriage to operate without communication and no way for a husband to live with his wife in an understanding way without communication (cf. 1 Peter 3:7). The point to consider is that speaking does not equal a lack of submission.

So we must ask the question: why would a woman with spiritual gifts speaking in the assembly be a lack of submission? The necessary conclusion is that when any person spoke in the assembly the person was taking the lead. The person speaking was leading the assembly. We have seen this in the directions Paul has given. When the tongue speaker spoke, the rest were to be silent and listen to what was said and its interpretation. When the prophet spoke, the rest were to be silent and evaluate what was being said. The situation is similar this hour of assembly we have right now where the person speaking is in charge and in the lead. The song leader has the lead of the assembly. The prayer leader has the lead of the assembly. The Lord's Supper speaker has lead of the assembly. The teacher has lead of the assembly. Whoever is speaking is leading the assembly. This becomes the reasonable answer for why the women must remain silent in the assembly. Speaking during time would be taking the lead, which is a violation of the law of God.

Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. (1 Timothy 2:11–14 ESV)

The events of Genesis regarding creation and the sin of Adam and Eve are the reasons why women are to not teach or have authority over a man. For a woman to speak in the assembly would do that very thing — teach over the assembly. Therefore, saying amen or confessing sins or singing does not take authority away or violate a submissive attitude. This text has no application to women teaching children's classes. Women speaking in our gathered Bible studies, whether in homes or at the building, is not violating this text because a man is leading the class and teaching the class. As we just noted, a wife speaking to her husband is not to lack submission. Speaking is not the issue. The way the speaking occurs is the issue. The scriptures want a submissive attitude reflecting godly character and not taking authority away from another or seizing authority over the assembly. So this is the evaluation to be made: when the assembly is gathered, is her speaking taking authority over the assembly?

The context of spiritual gifts helps us understand verse 35. It was not the woman's place in the assembly to verbally disagree or question a prophetic teaching. To do so is to usurp authority and take the lead over the assembly. Therefore that questioning was to occur at home and not in the assembly. I hope we can see the need to keep these verses in their context and how we can properly apply the text when we do so.

All Things Should Be Orderly (14:36-40)

Paul concludes by observing that what is commanding the church is the very command of the Lord. God has given an order to these things. The church may think they can run the assembly in the way they want. But Paul says to violate this order is to reject the Lord. This is not a suggestion by Paul. Instead, the rule is given: "But all things should be done decently and in order." This does not mean that we have to do things traditionally or the way we have always done things in the assembly. The point is that spiritual upbuilding cannot happen in chaos. Paul has taught the need to take turns, to not speak over each other, and to focus on the goal of building up each other through the teaching of the scriptures.

It is my prayer that this series of lessons concerning miraculous spiritual gifts helps us understand the importance of our time together. How we worship when we come together matters to God, so much so that God will not recognize us if we reject his order (14:38). Everything we do must be for spiritual building each other up, not for fun or entertainment (14:26). The goal is spiritual strengthening in God's word. Edification cannot occur in chaos and noise. Therefore, there must be an order to what we do so that learning can occur (14:31,40). Otherwise our time together is wasted. The scriptures are all we need to learn and love the Lord.

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16–17 ESV)