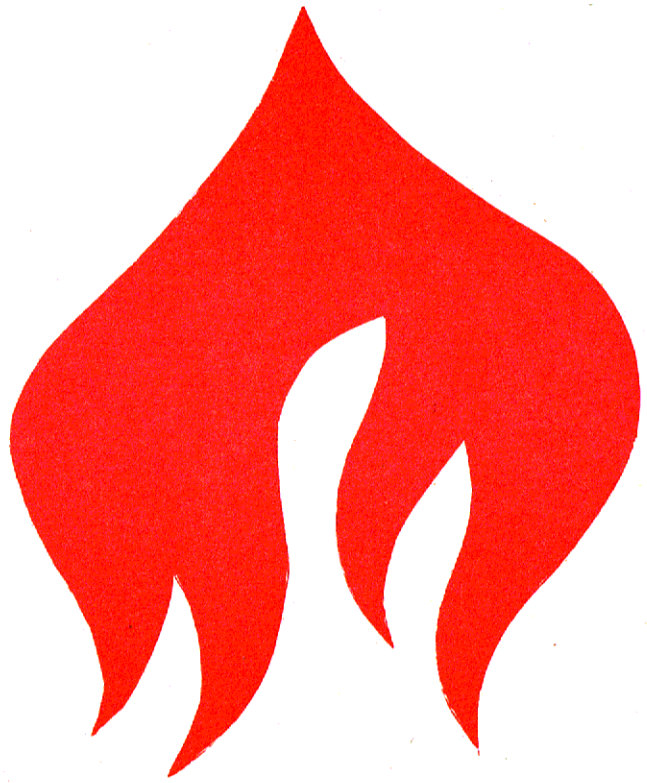


SPEAKING in TONGUES

VERSE BY VERSE THROUGH THE BIBLE



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“SPEAKING IN TONGUES” VERSE BY VERSE THROUGH THE BIBLE

Is it possible to write with complete objectivity? Can such be accomplished concerning so controversial a subject as this one? So many opinions have been voiced and heard that such a task, while perhaps not impossible, is certainly difficult. I suppose most of us have already, in some measure, “taken sides.”

Nevertheless, I propose to try for as complete and objective a look at the subject of “speaking in tongues” as I can realize. If my opinions intrude despite this attempt, please be tolerant, excuse them, and be kind enough to tell ME, before others, where Scripture corrects or modifies what I have written.

THE FIRST BASIC PROBLEM

The first question that we face is this: Is there actually a genuine gift of the Holy Spirit operating today, whereby people, under the power and direction of that Spirit of God, speak in other tongues not natural to them? Or has this gift disappeared, and ceased to operate with the completion of the Canon of Scripture? If the latter is the case, then further research or discussion would be a waste of time and effort.

There are many today, including prominent and respected Bible teachers, who completely deny the present existence of such a gift of tongues, thus indicating that the present “charismatic” movement is either Satanic in nature, or simply an emotional outburst, a thing of the flesh. Such teachers claim that the “charisma” (gifts) of the Holy Spirit are no longer operating in the Church, and that only the graces and fruit of the Spirit remain, or that the “demonstrative” gifts such as healing, miracles, tongues etc., are no longer given to Christian men and women.

It is not the purpose of this study to examine these claims in detail, but rather to examine the Scriptures themselves. However, a summary of the various arguments used in support of this position will be necessary. Let me refer to four of these:

1. The claim is made that, when the teachings of Paul are arranged chronologically, references to the more “spectacular” or “demonstrative” gifts gradually diminish, until healings and miracles and tongues are no longer mentioned. Thus the conclusion is drawn that these gifts gradually ceased, and that the work of the Holy Spirit finally was centered in the two offices of pastors and deacons.

Based on this idea, I Cor. 12:28 is taken to mean that the gifts appeared in *chronological* order, first apostles, secondarily prophets etc., each gift giving place to the following one, and finally all disappearing as they fulfilled their need for that particular time. Strangely enough, this argument would then make tongues and the interpretation of tongues last in church history longer than all the others, and totally refutes the argument based on the chronology of Paul’s writings, whereby speaking in tongues is made to disappear first. This

argument is, of course, speculative, and is not supported by the following verses, where there is strong indication that all these gifts operated at the same time. This is borne out by many other references, where these gifts are shown as operating in co-existent fashion. It is also extremely awkward that Paul's last list of gifts, in Ephes. 4:8-16 still lists apostles and prophets! And finally, who fully knows the true dates of all of Paul's epistles? The most erudite scholars disagree, or rather agree that nobody really knows.

2. Some attack the idea of "tongues" in our Christian era by eliminating the last portion of the Gospel of Mark, flatly declaring this to be an "interpolation," an addition by some scribe. This portion contains a prophecy about "tongues," and we shall discuss this later. The idea of eliminating this portion is supported by the "liberal" leaders, but cannot be established as fact. It is far more likely that some scribe, either through carelessness, or through interruption by persecution or death itself, left a copy of Mark unfinished. Ivan Panin, the great expert in Bible Numerics, declares in unqualified fashion that this portion bears all the marks of Divine inspiration. Let us not stoop to tearing out a portion of the Bible in order to support a preconceived theory.
3. It is also said that I Cor. 13:8 indicates the ceasing of prophecy, tongues and knowledge from their operation in the church. One wonders if we can get along without the last one! Again the context disputes this, as this chapter is dealing with very PERSONAL matters, and speaks in the latter part of the INDIVIDUAL going on to greater experiences after this life, when indeed he will no longer need these gifts. We shall deal with this Scripture also at a later time.
4. A fourth argument is that the Authorized Version ought to be changed so as to eliminate the word "unknown" in I Cor. 14, simply leaving the general word "tongues" to mean any exercise of human language. Some even claim that the "unknown tongue" here mentioned has nothing to do with the Christian church, but that the believers at Corinth were being rebuked for imitating the meaningless jabber of the frenzied pagans who practiced this in their religious orgies. This idea is far from a sober reading of this chapter. To give this any credence, the reference to these people speaking in an unknown tongue to God, is changed to "speaking to god," the capital letter removed to make it mean a pagan god! This is not honest exegesis.

Thus most of I Cor. 14 is ignored, except those verses which indicate the restraints that must be put on speaking in tongues. If "tongues" here simply means ordinary human language, the whole chapter becomes nonsense, and "tongues" could not then be distinguished from prophecy. The word "unknown" MUST be there to make sense of the context.

I have read these claims carefully, and I am convinced that the arguments are futile and inadequate. It appears that such teachers begin with a proposition, and then seek to prove it. This is NOT Bible Exegesis. The fact that so much Scripture is given to the subject of gifts, and especially to careful instruction and control concerning the gift of tongues must surely mean that these are intended

for more than a few local people. God has preserved these Scriptures until this day. Must we say they are no longer relevant, and that this part of Church Scripture is not now to be read, but rather ignored, and relegated to a bygone time? Moreover, the fact that the "charismatic movement" has broken out in such totally unemotional areas as the Anglican and Presbyterian churches is strong evidence that this is NOT merely some emotional excitement or outburst. These churches are surely the very last places we would look for such strong emotions! Is it not still true what Paul said, through the Holy Ghost: "Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant"?

May I close this introductory portion by quoting from the book "Keys to the Deeper Life," written by the late Dr. A.W. Tozer, one of the Spirit-filled men of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, mightily used of God. He says: "For a generation certain evangelical teachers have told us that the gifts of the Spirit ceased at the death of the apostles or at the completion of the New Testament. This is, of course, a doctrine without a syllable of biblical authority back of it . . . We desperately need leaders with the gift of discernment . . . This frightening hour calls for men with the gift of prophetic insight . . . We need men with the gift of knowledge . . . The truth of the matter is that the Scriptures plainly imply the imperative of possessing the gifts of the Spirit. Paul urges that we both 'covet' and 'desire' spiritual gifts." We do well to heed the words of this man of God!

THE BESETTING DANGERS

While the Scriptures clearly indicate, in my opinion, the continuation of the various gifts of the Spirit throughout this Age of Grace, there remains the ever-present possibility of the existence and manifestation of the counterfeit. Satan has always sought to imitate the works of God, in order to confuse and sidetrack the believers and the unbelievers. A striking example of this is recorded in Exodus 7:11, 22, 8:7. The magicians of Egypt duplicated the miracles of Moses, but this power apparently had certain limitations, as shown in Exodus 8:18, and led to the admission by the magicians that this particular miracle was indeed "the finger of God." And this is most significant. This miracle involved the bringing forth of lice from the dead dust, and was therefore the actual creation of NEW LIFE! And the agents of Satan could NOT duplicate this! May I suggest that here we have an important criterion to use in checking the supernatural, as to whether it is of God or Satan? We can well ask the question about any supernatural manifestation, "Does this bring forth NEW LIFE?" Does this so-called "gift of the Spirit" produce the *new fruit of the Spirit* in the life?

Let us thoroughly understand that, because something appears to be supernatural, it does not follow that this is necessarily of God. It may be:

1. Of the flesh; an emotional frenzy in which a person is carried away and apparently does something beyond normal powers. I think this sort of frenzy is exemplified most clearly in the excesses of the priests of Baal on Mount Carmel. (I Kings 18). An insane person often exhibits powers far beyond normal. Beware of emotional excesses. They are not sanctioned by Scripture. Beware of the babble of word repetition, even such Bible words as "Jesus,"

“Glory” etc. Word repetition is often used to produce a hypnotic state, and can be self-induced. God wants none of this.

2. An expression of Satanic energy, producing the counterfeit. Against this we are carefully and seriously *warned by our Lord*. Notice this important fact in Matthew 7:20-22, that the preface is this: “BY THEIR FRUITS YE SHALL KNOW THEM.” The exercise of supernatural powers is to be checked, as we have already suggested, by the “fruit” produced. With this introductory word, our Lord then goes on to warn that some will claim three evidences of God’s power in their lives: — *Prophecy, casting out devils, and many wonderful works*. And all these can be done in “the name” of our Lord, which is an amazing thing! But Jesus called these people “ye that work iniquity.” God forbid that any of us should ever earn such a dreadful title! The Sermon on the Mount then concludes with an exhortation to hear the “sayings,” the Word of the Lord Jesus, and to do it. This is the supreme check.

Let us remember how clearly Paul warned us, in such writings as II Thess. 2:8-10, of “that Wicked . . . whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all POWER and SIGNS and LYING WONDERS, and with ALL DECEIVABLENESS OF UNRIGHTEOUSNESS . . . and STRONG DELUSION.” Add to this the dire warning of Rev. 13:13-15, that the coming False Prophet will do “great wonders” making fire come down from heaven, imitating God’s great prophet Elijah, and doing “miracles,” even making the image speak and commanding the execution of those who refuse the mark of the beast. How very careful we should be in our day. Manifestations of power, the casting out of demons, prophesying, wonders and signs, may all be the counterfeit of Satan.

Let me then suggest three criteria that we can apply to any supernatural movement.

First: — Does this produce new, genuine Christian living, the true fruit of the Holy Spirit? Is this new life truly “holy” in every way?

Second: — Is this in absolute agreement with the WHOLE teaching of the Word of God, or does it violate any part? Our study is designed to furnish the information for such a check.

Third: — Does this go BEYOND the clear pattern of Scriptural procedure and ordinance in any way? Even to Moses, concerning earthly matters, God said: “See that thou make all things according to the PATTERN showed to thee in the mount.” (Heb. 8:5). Today this exhortation is ours. We are to follow Bible PATTERNS, for these are set out for our safety and benefit. Some may think this is mere ritual, but if they will read the Book, they will find how carefully God has set these out, and how He insists on such patterns being followed. See just one such example, concerning the matter of women praying or prophesying, set before us in I Cor. 11:4-10. Women are to be especially careful when they enter into a deeper relationship with the Holy Spirit. The woman is to be in subjection. Beware of movements headed up by a woman who assumes the prominent or authoritative place. The matter of laying on of hands is NOT the privilege

of every Christian, and is not to be performed casually, or without the full authority of the church. Drastic results have accrued from people “tinkering” with the occult. Remember that grievous incident recorded in Acts 19:13-16.

In closing, may I again quote Dr. Tozer. He gives this word of warning: “The various spiritual gifts are not equally valuable, as Paul so carefully explained. Certain brethren have magnified one gift out of 17 out of all proportion . . . The general moral results of this teaching have not been good . . . In practice it has resulted in much shameless exhibitionism, a tendency to depend upon experiences instead of upon Christ, and often a lack of ability to distinguish the works of the flesh from the operations of the Spirit. Those who deny that the gifts are for us today and those who insist upon making a hobby of one gift are both wrong, and we are all suffering from the consequence of their error. Today there is no reason for our remaining longer in doubt. We have every right to expect our Lord to grant to His Church the spiritual gifts which he has never in fact taken away from us, but which we are failing to receive only because of our error or unbelief. It is more than possible that God is even now imparting the gifts of the Spirit to whomsoever He can, and in whatever measure He can as His conditions are met even imperfectly. Otherwise the torch of truth would flicker and die.”

Now with these preliminary thoughts seriously before us, let us examine all the Scriptures that deal with the matter, examining them verse by verse.

IN ORDER TO AVOID MAKING LENGTHY QUOTATION, LET ME SUGGEST THAT THE READER FOLLOW EACH PASSAGE IN HIS BIBLE, AS WE REFER TO IT.

TONGUES IN PROPHECY

To my knowledge there are very few prophecies in the Bible concerning this phenomenon of “speaking in tongues.”

In I Cor. 14:21 we find a reference made to an Old Testament book, interpreted as referring to “tongues.” The reference is to Isaiah 28:11-12. You will notice in verses 9-10 of this chapter that we are given God’s method of dealing with mature people, “weaned from milk, drawn from the breast.” These are able to feed on the “meat of the Word,” precept upon precept. This thought is returned to in verse 13. The speaking with another tongue is interpreted to mean that God would give them “rest” and “refreshing,” but that the hearts of these people would not hear. This is taken, in I Cor. 14, to mean that this “tongue” speaking is for the immature children in understanding (vs. 20) and even then they will not hear. So the “sign” is for the unbelievers, the “not hearers.”

Another prophecy is that found in the New Testament, in the words of our Lord, recorded in Mark 16:17. Here the speaking with “new tongues” is foretold as a sign that will “follow” those who believe.

Three matters in this passage require our careful examination:

1. The speaking in new tongues is ONE of FIVE such signs listed here. The others are named as casting out devils, taking up serpents, drinking any deadly

thing without hurt, and laying on of hands for the CERTAIN healing of the sick. At once we ask this: if we claim any one of these signs as pertinent in our ministry, should we not be thus compelled to accept and expect all of them?

2. These signs are said to follow ALL those who BELIEVE, not just those believers who have had a certain experience.

3. The word "follow" is important, and I believe gives us the key to the whole matter. It is the Greek two-word phrase, "Parakaloutheo." "Para" means "near," and "akaloutheo" means "to follow on the same road." Put together the phrase means "to follow near; to attend," so these signs are not an essential possession of all Christians at all times, but they are "on the same road," and thus may be seen to attend the way of the Christian from time to time.

The TIME application of these two prophecies is undeclared and undetermined. Some believe that they applied to the days of the early church at Jerusalem, because of the reference to baptism in Mark 16:16 in connection with salvation. Others believe these things apply to our Age of Grace. Still others feel they will be fully operative in the Millennium. We are not told in Scripture.

TONGUES IN HISTORY

The historical record of people speaking in a tongue unknown to themselves is chiefly and almost entirely contained in the Book of Acts. And it is not recorded as an essential element that always accompanies spiritual endowment. There is no example of speaking in an unknown or unlearned tongue in the whole of the Old Testament. And at the greatest baptism of them all, the baptism of the Lord Jesus, when the Holy Ghost descended in visible, bodily form, as a dove, there is neither record nor the slightest indication that there was any speaking in "tongues." At this point let me ask a question. Did the Lord Jesus ever speak in "tongues"? In Him "all fulness" dwelt. In John 3:34 we read, "God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto Him." And it can certainly be clearly shown that He manifested all the other gifts of the Spirit, such as prophecy, teaching, helps, miracles etc. It is interesting to see that our Lord spoke, on occasion, strange words that needed an immediate interpretation, because they were not understood by the hearers, or by those who later read these words. They are as follows: "Ephphatha," meaning "be opened," "Talitha cumi," meaning "Damsel, I say unto thee, arise," and "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" meaning "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" These words are of unusual origin. Strong's Concordance suggests they may be from a Persian tongue, but it is evident that those who heard them did not understand the meaning, without an interpretation, and even misinterpreted that last one. I leave the matter at this point, for the consideration of the reader. If it is true that this was a "speaking in tongues" by our Lord, remember well that He used just SEVEN WORDS in this way, compared with the uncounted words He spoke in His natural language, clear to the understanding of His listeners. Let us use a similar emphasis.

Now we turn to the Book of Acts. The first reference to "tongues" is in Acts 2. The last is in Acts 19. This is very evidently a phenomenon of the Church

Age, and is evidently closely allied to the coming into the world of the Holy Ghost at Pentecost. The Lord Jesus is the Person who baptizes with the Holy Ghost (John 1:33), and then the Holy Ghost distributes the various gifts to men (I Cor. 12:11). Thus all the gifts purchased for us by the Lord Jesus (Ephes. 4:7, 8, 11) are given to men through the agency of the Holy Ghost as the baptism of the Spirit is received, or accompanying some later "infilling."

ACTS 2:2, 3, 8, 11

As the Holy Spirit came into the world, with manifestations of sound and sight, never again repeated, the disciples were "filled with the Holy Ghost," and spoke with "other tongues" as the Spirit gave them utterance. He gave the tongues, each one that of a different language. These were KNOWN TONGUES, uttered in public, without any miraculous interpretation.

These people spoke "the wonderful works of God," not something mystic or bordering on the fortune telling idea.

This speaking produced amazement, doubt and mockery.

This tongues demonstration was evidently given to get the attention of the people and to indicate to the UNSAVED the supernatural working of God. Even concerning this, the people divided into those who believed, and those who doubted and mocked. Speaking in tongues did NOT bring the great multitude to salvation. *It was the following preaching*, in the Hebrew tongue (verses 14-36) that produced the cry of repentance (verse 37). There is no evidence of an "unknown tongue" that needed supernatural interpretation. This was, in a sense, a reversal of Babel, and had the very definite purpose in mind that the Gospel should be immediately spread through all the areas where these various languages were spoken by the people of the many nationalities who were then present at the Feast of Pentecost (Acts 2:8-11). God always has a PURPOSE in what He does.

ACTS 8:12-18

This Scripture should be examined, even though, as in the case of the baptism of the Lord Jesus, there is no specific mention of speaking in tongues. There are many facts to be remembered.

In Samaria many had believed, and had been baptized in water by Philip the evangelist. There can be no doubt, therefore, that these people were truly saved. BUT they had not yet received the "falling upon" of the Holy Ghost. We read that He had "fallen upon" none of them.

Philip, though ordained by the Apostles (Acts 6:5-6) as a minister or evangelist, *did not lay hands* on his converts. Note this carefully. And act carefully! A man may be ordained, and yet not be authorized for the laying on of hands. The Apostles came from Jerusalem, and they DID lay on hands. This physical contact is seemingly the prerogative of apostleship.

Upon the laying on of the Apostles' hands, the Holy Ghost was received by these people of Samaria. And Simon saw "that" through the laying on of the Apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given. This was clearly a mental perception. He did not "see the Holy Ghost given." But what produced the mental perception? We are simply not told, so we had better not go by our imagination. It could have been some manifestation of any one of the gifts of the Spirit. It could have been the joyful fruit of the Spirit that changed the lives of these people. No gift is mentioned. If there was some manifestation, its importance is negated by this lack of mention. It certainly cannot be listed as essential, or something to be emphasized or sought after.

ACTS 10:46

One verse in this story records that people were heard to "speak with tongues and magnify God."

No matter when we may think that Cornelius was actually converted, it was certainly before this moment. The Holy Ghost does not fall on unconverted men.

The Jewish believers were "amazed," a word which literally means "stunned." This event was very evidently similar to what happened on the day of Pentecost. See verse 47 and 11:15, 17. (Note: — The words "like gift" in 11:17 probably refer to the Holy Ghost Himself as the Gift, as in Acts 2:38, for no gift of tongues is mentioned in this context.)

Being similar to Pentecost, and with a public speaking in tongues requiring no interpretation, we can assume that these were KNOWN tongues of men. Why was this manifestation given? This was certainly a sign to Peter that the Gentiles were accepted by God, and that the Holy Ghost had been poured out upon them. Note the word "because" in verse 45, and the word "for" at the beginning of verse 46. The Holy Ghost "fell" on these people (vs. 44, 11:15), indicating a sudden act. They "received" the Holy Ghost, a Person. The emphasis again is on the Person, and not on the receiving of gifts.

A strong purpose is indicated in the words "magnify God." This is always the work of the Holy Spirit (John 16:14). Beware of anything less, some insignificant thing, especially that which tends to glorify the speaker.

ACTS 19:6

Again we find one verse mentioning the fact that some "spoke with tongues." It is also added that they "prophesied."

Such casual, almost "tacked on" mention may mean one of two things: either that it is insignificant and unimportant, or that it was the normal, expected thing, and so needing no further comment.

In either case it is lacking in emphasis.

Follow this story carefully, point by point.

1. There was enquiry and instruction by the man of God.

2. This was followed by a re-baptism. It is thus evident that these were now saved.
3. Paul then laid his hands on them. (Note: — He was the first of the Apostles of the Christian church. See Acts 14:14. He was so ordained by the Church at Antioch. Acts 13:1-3.)
4. Immediately upon the laying on of hands, the Holy Ghost "came on them."
5. This was FOLLOWED (note the semi-colon) by a speaking with tongues (plural) and prophesying. We are not told exactly when this took place, nor whether this was public or private.
6. There is no record of any interpretation, as in all this Book of Acts.
7. No reason for this speaking in tongues is given. This would tend to support the thought that this is a very matter-of-fact record, as though the manifestation of these TWO gifts was a natural sequence.
8. It seems that it was not a sign to anyone, as far as this record goes.
9. What purpose was involved in this manifestation? Could this involve the unsaved people of Ephesus, who worshipped Diana, and were always seeking for mystic manifestations (and sometimes finding them)? cf. vs. 13-17, 35.

These Scriptures form the TOTAL historical record of speaking in tongues in the Bible. These are what the Holy Spirit has seen fit to record, as to the story of the Church. Paul added his own personal record in I Cor. 14:18. He spoke with tongues. The rest of the Biblical information is contained in the Epistles of Paul, tongues being mentioned in only one of them, the first Epistle to the Corinthians. It is significant that this Epistle is written to a church torn with various factions, caused by various evils. The purpose of its writing was corrective in nature, seeking to draw the Corinthian Christians back into real and lasting unity.

TONGUES IN DOCTRINAL TEACHING

The area in which doctrinal teaching about the gift of tongues is, as we have already indicated, remarkably limited. In all the wide extent of the Epistles this subject is mentioned in only one of them, the first letter to the "carnal" church at Corinth. Three chapters in that Epistle refer to this gift. In two of these chapters it is merely named or listed. In one chapter alone this gift is dealt with in some detail and therein are the rules for its CONTROL.

In all his writings to the other churches, Paul did not see fit to mention this gift. Nowhere are people urged to seek it. It is not even hinted at as being an essential in the churches. Other more important gifts are listed as being "set" in the churches, and people are urged to give attention to their use. See Ephes. 4:11-13, Romans 12:6-8.

I CORINTHIANS 12:4-31

Examine this chapter with me in five sections, or groups of verses, with suggested headings.

Verses 4-6. The Body has many differing members.

As each of these performs a different function in a body, so the gifts of the Spirit are diverse in nature, yet ALL are of the same *Spirit*. There are different administrations, or purposes and uses. The expression means "to run on errands." The same *Lord* administers all the gifts. He is "Boss." There are diversities of operations. This word is "energema," the root of our word "energy," and means "activities, workings." It is the same *God* working in each person. Thus the *whole Trinity* is occupied in giving, directing and the active working of the gifts. How very important these gifts must be!

Verses 7-11. The Manifestations of the Spirit.

These are many, and diverse.

They are given to all for *profit*, not merely personal profit, but for communal profit also. They are not all alike, yet they are all given by the same Spirit. ONE of those gifts is called "divers kinds of tongues." These are not only the "tongues" of men, but some of a different kind, the "tongues of angels" (I Cor. 13:1). All the gifts are operated by the Holy Spirit in diverse ways. He DIVIDES SEVERALLY as He will. This word "severally" has been grossly misunderstood, being taken to mean that the Spirit gives several (or even all) gifts to each person. This is not true at all. The word means "to sever from others." The Greek word is "idios," which means "one's own, private, separate." A concordance will immediately show the meaning of this word. See II Kings 15:5, Matt. 25:15, Rev. 21:21. The Holy Spirit "severs" out certain gifts for each person. He does NOT give all gifts to one person. He gives *separate* gifts. This is borne out in the whole context of this passage.

Verses 12-26. The diverse parts of the Body.

This is a most important illustration. It follows the theme of verse 1, still discussing spiritual gifts.

As there are many parts to the body, so there are many differing gifts. Read carefully verses 12, 14 and 20. The gifts are interdependent. See verses 15-16 and 21. The diverse parts are all essential to the Body. Verses 17-19. There is the possibility of false claims being made. Verses 15-16 and 21. There is the possibility of false evaluations being made. Verses 22-24. This can be especially true when a "spectacular" gift is involved, and such a manifestation evaluated above a gift used more quietly and obscurely. A SYMPATHETIC ORDER should prevail. Verses 25-26.

Verses 27-30. God sets in the Church people with differing gifts.

Again this is likened to the differing members of our bodies. Verses 18, 27-28, Note God's evaluations listed in verse 28. This cannot be a chronological listing, for the gifts were certainly co-existent in the early church. It must then be an order of importance or essentiality. "Diversities of tongues" is placed last.

Then come the rhetoric questions. (Verses 29-30). The rhetoric question has a self-evident answer, and is used to counter a false position. Apparently a very false idea was in the church at Corinth, the idea that everybody had the *same gift or gifts*. The obvious answer to all these questions listed here is a decided "NO," not even "potentially" as some claim.

Verse 31. The Double Goal.

First: – To covet earnestly the BEST GIFTS (as just evaluated, first, second etc.)

Second: – To follow the more excellent way of charity.

Is it not amazing that some have read this second exhortation, and decided that the gifts, even the best gifts, can be thrown away because they are no longer operative? BE SURE to accept BOTH parts of this exhortation. We are to COVET EARNESTLY certain gifts, and ALSO walk the charity road. Charity is simply to be the pervading characteristic as we serve with the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Surely this exhortation is greatly needed, that there be no jealousies or strife in the Body of Christ.

I CORINTHIANS 13:1-13

Only two verses in this chapter mention "tongues," but we need to examine them, and note their setting.

The two kinds of tongues are mentioned in verse 1, and charity set forth as the absolute essential atmosphere in which each one must operate.

There is a question here. Does the plural (tongues) also apply to the tongues of angels? Are there diversities of angelic languages in heaven? In the "experience" of those claiming to speak in this tongue of angels, the "unknown tongue," there appears to be real diversity, one "unknown" tongue seemingly different in sound than another one. This is a bit inconceivable. We think of heaven as totally harmonious, not a consequence of some heavenly "Babel."

Charity is said to be THE permanent quality that will count for eternity. Verses 8-13. Tongues, together with prophecies and knowledge are impermanent, and will "vanish away." Thus they are less important than this supreme quality of charity. "Vanish" is the Greek "katargeo" which means "to idle down until entirely idle or useless."

Those who feel that these gifts have ceased place great stress on this verse 8. When will this vanishing away take place? Some say, "When the canon of Scripture was completed." But where is the authority for this statement? Is not this mere human speculation? Certainly this verse does NOT say that. Then when do spiritual gifts become "idle"? When does their use cease? May I suggest from a reading of verses 9, 10 and especially verse 12, that this is a very *personal matter*? Paul speaks of "we" knowing in part, and "we" prophesying in part. In verse 11 he takes a very personal illustration, comparing childhood with maturity in the *individual*. And that maturity, according to verse 10, involves *perfection*. When will that be acquired? Verse 12 describes it as the time when we see "face

to face," and our knowledge will be complete, and when we shall know as we are known of God. I submit that this will only come AT OUR GLORIFICATION, either through death, or at our Lord's appearing for the Church. THEN the spiritual gifts we have will become "idle" and out of use, and not until then. I need them NOW. But in that day, the grace of CHARITY ought to be found as moulded into the character I shall carry throughout eternity.

I CORINTHIANS 14

As we look at this chapter it will be well to notice that "tongues" are spoken of in both the singular and plural. This could well mean that both "kinds" of tongue-speaking, in known and in unknown languages, are referred to. Or it could possibly indicate a diversity in the unknown tongue of angels, which, as we have said before, seems to be a strange thing.

The term "unknown" has been challenged, and changed in the revised versions, to "a tongue," by those who claim that this term is not in the Greek. I suggest that the SENSE of this term is there, and that the context wholly requires it. Known tongues do not require a spiritual gift for their interpretation. Then where will such a gift of interpretation be used? There IS a tongue of angels, evidently not known to men, and this requires spiritual interpretation. Known tongues were used publicly without interpretation as we have seen in the examples recorded in the Book of Acts. Careful restraints are imposed on this "tongue" of I Cor. 14. It would seem that this "tongue" is then something different, and "unknown" by human means. The term is needed to describe it properly. Again let us examine this chapter in sections and with suitable headings.

Verses 1-5. Prophecy is to be desired above tongues.

We do well to note that "tongues" and "prophecy" are here completely separated. Some have felt that they are almost synonymous, and that a person prophesies through tongues. This distinction discredits such an idea.

Verse 1 uses the word "rather" in an emphatic sense, as a word of strong comparison. Prophecy is the gift to be desired FIRST and above all the gifts that are made available to all Christians. This is CRYSTAL CLEAR.

The unknown tongue named in verse 2 does not edify our fellow-men. By this gift a person addresses God as a form of prayer.

Verse 3 begins with the word "but," indicating a contrary idea. Prophecy helps men by bringing them edification, exhortation and comfort. Thus prophecy is the BASIC gift that makes the other gifts effective, and indeed makes the gifts of teaching, exhortation, helps etc. possible.

Verse 4 tells us that the unknown tongue edifies the person exercising the gift, but that prophecy edifies the CHURCH, which includes every believer. It has been said that "tongues" is the only gift that edifies the user. THIS IS NOT TRUE AT ALL. ALL the gifts edify the user, as anyone involved well knows. They all edify the CHURCH, and we Christians are all part of that Church.

Verse 5 states that "tongues" is a good gift for anyone, "BUT RATHER" the gift of prophecy. This is repeated from verse 1, making the matter doubly emphatic. So we read, following this, that "Greater is he" that prophesies than he that speaks in an unknown tongue, unless that "tongue" is interpreted to the edification of the whole church.

BY THIS TIME WE SEE THE VITAL APPLICATION OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS. THEY ARE NOT GIVEN FOR MERE PERSONAL GRATIFICATION. THEY ARE ESPECIALLY GIVEN FOR USE IN THE CHURCH, AND FOR THE EDIFICATION OF THE CHURCH. The idea of a person or sect using these for a private following is out of order.

Verses 6-12. Tongues alone do not profit the Church.

This section begins in verse 6 by telling us that other gifts must operate in the Church, and not only the gift of tongues. The Church needs a "gifts" movement, not merely a "tongues" movement.

Verses 7-8 give us a striking illustration. All sounds must be *understood, distinguishable, distinct* and *unmistakeable*, or there is no profit to the hearer.

In verse 9 we find the application of the illustration. Words should be "easy to be understood," so that the hearers may receive profit therefrom. Otherwise the words will be lost and useless, and there will be no profit to the hearer.

Verses 10-11 bring us another illustration. There are many voices (the Greek is "phone," meaning "a tone or language") in the world. All of them are significant and meaningful. But if the language used is unknown to the hearer, it will sound barbarous, as though coming from a foreigner. This word "barbarian" was coined to imitate the sound of a foreign tongue in Roman or Greek ears. It sounded like Ba-Ba-Ba-, a babble, and so it was called "barbarous."

Verse 12 gives us the application of this illustration. People who are zealous (meaning "on fire") need an exhortation to ever choose that which excels, that which edifies the Church, not a *lesser* gift that only edifies *self*.

Verses 13-19. The proper balance that MUST emphasize the understanding and edification of OTHERS.

Verse 13 tells us that the person with a "tongue" is to pray for power to interpret so that OTHERS may benefit.

Verse 14 says that he is to pray for interpretation that his own *mind* may also benefit.

Verse 15-17 says that both spirit uplift and mental appreciation should come from speaking in an unknown tongue, and that this should be in *meaningful* prayer, song, praise and thanksgiving, so that OTHERS may also join in the blessing with an intelligent "Amen," and so be edified.

In verses 18-19 the proper balance is clearly set forth. Paul spoke in tongues (plural) more than all the Corinthians, and thanked God for this. But he esteemed preaching and teaching in an understandable language far above the use of an unknown tongue, in the ratio of 10,000 to 5, in order that he might use the gift of teaching to edify OTHERS.

THIS IS AN AMAZING COMPARISON! HOW HIGHLY IT EXALTS THE PREACHING OF THE WORD IN UNDERSTANDABLE FASHION! No wonder Paul gave Timothy his closing exhortation in this command: "PREACH THE WORD." He did not say "speak in tongues," good though that might have been in its place. We MUST put preaching in top priority.

Verses 20-25. The maturity of the understanding mind.

Verse 20 tells us to grow up in *understanding*, but not in malice.

Verse 21 gives us the Old Testament illustration to which we have already referred, telling us that "tongue" speaking does not make men "hear" God.

Verse 22 adds the information that "tongues" are merely a "sign" to the unbelievers, convincing them of something supernatural. Remember what Acts 2:12-13 teaches. It was the preaching that followed the speaking in tongues, that won the 3,000 to the Lord.

TONGUES ARE NOT A SIGN TO BELIEVERS. If a person BELIEVES, he accepts by faith that which God has said. He therefore needs no signs. Our Lord emphasized this when He was asked for a sign. Read Matthew 16:4 and Luke 16:27-31 in this regard. Prophecy *serves* believers, not the unbelievers, except to convict of sin (verse 24).

In verse 23 we read that if there is a church gathering where *all* speak in tongues, the unsaved or unlearned will judge that such people are *insane*. And that is NOT godly suffering or persecution in which a Christian can take smug satisfaction. This is DISORDER, and must be controlled. Compare this with verses 27-28. See also verses 26b, 32-33 and 40. There must be *control* and *edification*.

Verses 24-25 show us that prophecy produces the opposite effect to disorder, and thus very greatly excels "tongues." By this means the unsaved are *searched, judged, convicted* and *convinced*, by the unanimous and un mistakeable exposition and declaration of the Word of God.

Verses 26-40. The necessity of right order and the danger of confusion.

Verse 26 teaches us that when everyone is wanting to "have their say," wanting to present something "new," confusion is produced rather than edification.

Verse 27 lays down a definite and important rule. When there is a "speaking in tongues" in the church, there must be no more than two or three in one gathering, speaking in sequence, and with one interpreting.

Verse 28 continues this control by saying that if there is no interpreter, the person involved in "tongue" speaking must keep silence, and speak privately to God. Note also that this indicates complete personal control over the exercise of the gift. Emotions must never take control or get out of control.

Verses 29-31 set out rules about the gift of prophecy. When this gift is used in the church it is also limited in its exercise. No more than two or three may speak in any session, and others are to listen and judge what is said. This judgment will evidently be in the light of Scripture, for the listener will clearly understand what is being said. Compare this with Isaiah 8:20, an important verse. The prophet is to give preference to another if that person receives a message from the Lord. All may exercise this gift, from time to time, and in sequence. The purpose of prophecy is clear and desirable in every respect, that *all* may learn, and *all* be comforted.

Then we read in verses 32-33 that control of a gift is always possible, and is commanded. This does away with confusion, and produces peace.

There are NO EXCEPTIONS to these orders. They are to be observed in "all the churches."

Verses 34-35 talk about the position of women. This is simply stated as "silence," but it is given in this "tongues" and prophecy setting. This must mean that they are not permitted to speak in churches WITH AUTHORITY, but are to be in subjection and "under obedience." Otherwise it is a "shame." Christian women ought to be most careful that they do not usurp the position that the man is called upon to take.

Verses 36-38 deal with the matter of the source of authority. It is not self-generated. It will be recognized by the spiritual man.

Paul's writings are stated to be "the commandments of the Lord," and thus must be carefully and completely obeyed. *The stress on this is important.* It indicates how great a need there was at Corinth, and what need there is today. People need to be strongly exhorted to follow the Word of God, not something extraneous, no matter how thrilling or exciting. People must NOT be "carried away."

The ignorant man, the "not knowing" one (which means "ignoring, disinclined to know") might as well remain that way unless he has a change of heart. A man can become utterly hardened to the truth in these matters.

Verses 39-40. Summary.

This is a dual exhortation of great significance. We are told two things: First, that we are to covet the gift of prophecy. Second, that we are to allow people to speak in tongues, providing it is done in scriptural manner. Here the positive is affirmed, and the negative implied in the words "forbid not." Paul infers that, with all this confusion around, a leader might well, and with some justice, say "We will not allow tongues in our church. It is too divisive and too confusing." So a person like this has to be exhorted to be charitable, and yet control the situation.

But again prophecy is lifted far above tongues. LET US NOT REVERSE THIS ORDER!

The FINAL EXHORTATION is again needed:—

Do things DECENTLY, meaning “decorously, well-formed.”

Do things IN ORDER, meaning that we must avoid excesses.

DOCTRINAL TEACHING ABOUT THE GIFTS, OTHER THAN TONGUES

This will not be a detailed dissertation on each of the gifts, but an examination of two other important portions of Scripture that tell us much about the gifts of the Spirit, mentioning several by name. The significant point is that in these two passages the gift of tongues is omitted. I do not think that this omission can be stretched to mean that tongues had later disappeared from the early church. It is sometimes conveniently overlooked that apostleship and prophecy are still mentioned in these “later” Scriptures. But it is nevertheless important to notice that “tongues” could not have held any *supreme* or *highly important* place in the life of these churches. Such omission would be incredible, if this were the important “sign” or “seal” of the enduement of the Holy Ghost. Where the Bible minimizes, we must be careful not to maximize. And remember that these churches, at Rome and Ephesus, had no access to the Epistle to the Corinthians when Paul wrote to them.

ROMANS 12:3-8

This scripture instructs believers regarding their individual ministry and responsibility. Verse 3 tells us that we must have a proper sense of self-estimation, accompanied by a fitting humility. Our personal *measure* of faith is God-given and differs from that of another believer. We must not judge each other in this matter.

Verses 4-5 inform us regarding the different “offices” that we hold in the Body of Christ, even while we are all joined to each other in that Body.

Verses 6-8 carries this thought forward, showing that we each have different gifts, given to us on the basis of given GRACE, or Christian character. Each gift is to be exercised in its *own sphere*, and in the degree of the faith provided for that gift. Note the stress on FAITH. Apparently some gifts need more faith than others. And suitable characteristics, such as simplicity, diligence and cheerfulness must accompany the exercise of each gift.

“Tongues” are not mentioned once in this great *book of doctrine*, the Book of Romans. Were “tongues” only for the Corinthians, and not for the Romans, who had never seen the letters written to Corinth? Or did “tongues” not amount to anything of very great importance? Apparently a fine church can flourish without this gift.

EPHESIANS 4:7-16

This is a very well-known Scripture, telling us about Christ and the diverse parts of His Body, the Church. Verse 7 begins by telling us that we are given *grace* as

the *measure* of the gift requires. This is similar to Romans 12. the exercise of some gifts requires more grace, or Christian character, than others, and God gives this.

In verse 8 we are told that Christ has taken complete control over both the dead and living saints, and has given gifts to the *living*. They are for this life only. (See again I Cor. 13:8).

Verses 9-10 follow on to speak of Christ as our complete Saviour and Lord, descending to save, and now ascended to rule over all and through all. HE MUST ALWAYS BE IN CONTROL.

Verse 11 tells us that Christ gave gifts to men, and then gave the gifted men to the Ephesian CHURCHES. They were different gifts and different gifted men. There were “some” of each kind, and five kinds are here named.

Again, in this Book of highest spiritual truth, “TONGUES” ARE NOT ONCE MENTIONED. So once more we ask, were not “tongues” important to the Ephesians? Did they need this gift, or not?

Verse 12 gives us the three-fold purpose of the exercise of these gifts. They were for the perfecting of the saints, and this task is not yet completed! They were also for the work of the ministry, not yet finished. And they were for the edifying of the *Body of Christ*. This means the building up of the complete Church, and certainly this has not yet happened. We would thus conclude that the gifts must still be operative, unless God has quit His job, and left it unfinished. Such a thing is, of course, unthinkable.

Then in verse 13 we are told what will be the terminal exercise of the gifts. They will be operative “till” the Body of Christ is complete, fully built, in full measure and stature, and until we are all in the unity of the faith and the knowledge of Christ, in perfect fullness. This has not happened yet. And so God must continue to give the gifts, and operate them in His children, even in these last days.

Finally, verses 14-16 set before us the final goal God has in mind, and the process that will produce this goal. We are to be no more children, but sons! Children are such as are easily tossed about by the winds of doctrine, by the sleight of men, by deceit, and by every cunning and crafty ambush of Satanic forces. So again we are WARNED against Satan’s devices, his subtle counterfeits. God make us strong, Bible believing, Bible obeying SONS! Moreover we are to speak the TRUTH, in love, as we “grow up” into Christ in all things, with complete submission to Christ our Head.

The WHOLE BODY is to be fitted together, joined compactly, interdependent, and yet with all its different joints and parts. This complements what we read in I Cor. 12. The Body of Christ is to EDIFY itself in love, by the proper exercises of ALL the gifts of the Spirit, given to the whole Church. The rest of the chapter is a most impressive exposition of the total life outcome that results from such a harmonious working together of all the gifts.

A SUMMARY

1. Spiritual gifts are a present reality, given to the Church, to be exercised in each one of us until death, and in the Church until it is wholly complete.
2. There is the ever-present danger of imitation, through emotionalism and through demonism.
3. The gift of tongues, and especially the unknown tongue, must be carefully controlled and practised.
4. The laying on of hands must be limited to those designated by the Church to conduct this important ordinance.
5. The gift of tongues is not for everybody, and is NOT the sole sign of the endowment of the Holy Ghost.
6. The atmosphere of the operation of any gift must be that of charity.
7. The gift of prophecy is a gift quite separate from the gift of tongues, and is held as far superior. It is more to be desired than tongues, because of its tremendous use in the edifying of the CHURCH. Tongues alone DO NOT PROFIT THE CHURCH. All the gifts edify the one who exercises them, and many of them, in addition to this, also edify those who hear. This is not true of "tongues" unless they are interpreted.
8. The gift of tongues must therefore remain in the subservient place where Scripture places it, beyond any question. There is danger if and when this gift becomes the prominent one. Such a condition leads to fanaticism, to schism in the Body, and to emotional excesses.
9. FAITH is the basis for the work of the Holy Spirit, not certain signs.
10. ALL GIFTS are given for the EDIFICATION OF THE CHURCH. This must always be our prime goal.

AN EXHORTATION

Let me say once more that which Paul, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, said in the last verse of I Corinthians 12. "Covet earnestly the best gifts." By this I am sure that he meant that we are to aim for the highest and best that God has for us. He certainly did not mean that we are to covet and seek for the gift of tongues. God undoubtedly gives this gift to some. But we are to aim for the BEST GIFTS, and these are set out clearly before us, listed in this same Scripture as coming before the gift of tongues. Let us be sure to seek diligently, prayerfully, earnestly, with a real burden from God, for a mighty moving of the Holy Ghost in ALL His power and blessing. Let us not be sidetracked into seeking for "tongues" above all else. I am sure such a "seeking" is NOT proper.

WE NEED A GREAT AND REAL CHARISMATIC MOVEMENT, wherein ALL the gifts are manifested. We do not need a "glossalalia" movement where we find only the gift of tongues. We need ALL the "charisma," the gifts of the Spirit, in full operation, with "tongues" kept in its lesser position.

May God burden all our hearts to seek this.