

Spiritual Gifts

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Text: I Corinthians 12 – 14

Introduction:

- I. The charismatic movement of today has come a long way from the “**classic Pentecostalism**” of the early twentieth century.
- II. Preferring the name “**charismatic renewal**” this movement has affected Roman Catholicism, the Greek Orthodox Church, nearly every major protestant denomination and many non-denominational groups as well.
- III. The appeal of modern day miraculous spiritual gifts varies, but J. R. Williams offers some general reasons:
 - A. Spiritual gifts make for **a dynamic, vital community life**
 - B. Spiritual gifts are “**power tools**” for the up-building of the community
 - C. Spiritual gifts exercised by everyone makes for **a total ministry**, instead of a clergy/laity scheme where the leaders are the only ones involved
 - D. The exercise of spiritual gifts encourages **spontaneity in worship, dynamism in ministry, and greater fellowship** with one another
 - E. The exercise of spiritual gifts awakens the church to “**high voltage**” **Christianity** and an **exaltation of the Lord’s presence** among his people (208)
- IV. Of the many passages which discuss spiritual gifts, Charismatics focus their attention particularly on **1 Cor. 12-14**.
- V. Due to limited time and space, it will not be possible to cover all of the issues in these three chapters. However, we will attempt to look at **the setting** for these chapters, understand **the meaning** to the saints at Corinth, consider a few of **the problematic issues** and then make **application** of these things to ourselves today.

Body:

- I. **Cultural Context and Backdrop to 1 Corinthians, especially chapters 12 – 14**
 - A. **Socio-economic Differences**
 1. “Because it was a seaport and emporium of commerce, many classes and nationalities mingled in Corinth. As in every large city, great wealth and extreme poverty existed side by side” (Hiebert 105).
 2. “Because there was no landed aristocracy in the new Corinth, there arose an aristocracy of wealth. Inevitably, the poor were correspondingly despised or ignored” (Carson, Moo, Morris 263).
 - a. Such a societal mix would produce selfish, image-conscious social climbers.
 - b. It probably also created class-envy between the “have-nots” and the “haves.”
 - B. **Attitudes of Arrogance and Elitism**
 1. Importance placed on wisdom and knowledge

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- a. “The Corinthians prided themselves on their interest in ‘knowledge’ and philosophical pursuits, yet with the majority this interest was quite shallow and superficial” (Hiebert 105).
 - b. “From the beginning there was a close connection between eloquence (*logos*), power (*dunamis*), and wisdom (*sophia*). The well crafted speech is extremely powerful, and this fact did not escape the notice of the ancients” (Hutto 77).
2. Importance of eloquence and persuasive speech
 - a. Bob Hutto quotes Duane Litfin in identifying four themes of rhetoric in the Greco-Roman world (77-78):
 - 1) **Persuasion** as the goal of rhetoric.
 - 2) The intimate association between **eloquence** and **power**.
 - 3) **Adaptation** as the genius of rhetoric.
 - 4) **Eloquence** as an avenue of honor, wealth, position and influence.
 - b. “Volumes could be written about the oratorical conceit of the Greeks. Their speakers assumed an emphatic distance, constructed their speeches with all kinds of decorative phraseology, gloried in balanced phrases and clauses, sought stunning effects by the use of alliteration, used words which sounded good, no matter what their meaning, modulated their voices in undulating cycles of dynamic contrast, adopted an ‘oratorical tone’ much like the ‘holy voice’ affected by some preachers, skillfully employed a hundred different gestures, each having its hidden significance and known only to the profession, timed their gesticulations so that the ictus always occurred exactly with the intonation of the proper syllable, strutted like peacocks before their audiences, exposing their good Grecian profiles in moments of dramatic pause..., arranged their speeches in classical outlines, cut, altered or perverted material to suit the outline, paused at predetermined intervals to receive the applause of their hearers, and produced by such devices what they called an oration! This ornate artificial and worthless kind of speaking...in Paul’s day...was still very stylish and popular among the self-imagined intelligentsia of a place like Corinth” (Coffman 456).

C. Familiarity and Fascination with Ecstatic Tongues

1. Melvin Curry identifies three Greek religions which employed ecstatic tongues-speaking (196-199):
 - a. **The Cybele-Attis cult** which arose around 200 BC
 - 1) Emperor Claudius (AD 41-54) established a Cybele-Attis festival.
 - b. Worship of **Dionysus**
 - 1) Among his many powers was that of prophecy, which involved *ekstasis* and mantic powers.
 - c. Worship of **Apollo** and its ecstatic priestesses
 - 1) Several temples of Apollo have been known to exist in Corinth.
 - 2) Most famous shrine of Apollo was at Delphi
 - a) An inspired priestess at Delphi was called a Pithia.

- b) Consider Acts 16:16 and the maid with the spirit of divination (a python).

II. Scriptural Context and Backdrop to Chapters 12 – 14

- A. Paul is **answering questions** raised by the brethren at Corinth (7:1; 7:25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1) and **addressing problems** reported to him by the household of Chloe (1:11).
- B. Many of these problems stemmed from the **cultural influences** previously discussed.
1. **Socio-economic differences**
 - a. Some of the saints were leaders and probably wealthy.
 - 1) Erastus, the treasurer of the city (Rom. 16:23)
 - 2) Gaius, who hosted the whole church (Rom. 16:23)
 - 3) Stephanas (1 Cor. 16:15-18)
 - b. Some of the saints were slaves (7:21).
 2. **Image-conscious social climbers**
 - a. Circumcision / Uncircumcision (7:18)
 - b. Freedom / Slavery (7:21)
 3. **Selfishness: A “me first” attitude**
 - a. Use of courts (6:1-6)
 - b. Eating of meats (8:8-12)
 - c. Abuse of the Lord’s Supper (11:21, 33)
 4. **Arrogance and elitism** (4:6, 18, 19; 5:2; 8:1; 13:4)
 - a. The importance of eloquence and persuasive speech
 - 1) 1 Cor. 1:17; 2:1-4; 2 Cor. 10:10; 11:6
 - b. Note the importance the saints placed on wisdom and, possibly, the attitude that their wisdom was “superior, new, or divine.”
 - 1) “Don’t you know?” used ten times (3:16; 5:6; 6:2, 3, 9, 15, 16, 19; 9:13, 24)
 - 2) “If any one thinks he...” used three times (3:18; 8:2; 14:37)
- C. Paul seems to be addressing the question (whether asked of him or not), **“What does it mean to be spiritual? What constitutes true spirituality?”**
1. “In vss. 29-30 it is clear that Paul denies the contention of the enthusiasts that everyone truly spiritual should speak in tongues” (Osborne 1101).
 2. Some (perhaps many) at Corinth believed having spiritual gifts meant that they had already arrived – **their spirituality was complete.**
 - a. 1 Cor. 4:8, 10
 - b. “...the possession of the Spirit, the heavenly essence, was the all-important matter: the crowning achievement of Christ was the impartation of the Spirit. ... now that they enjoyed the heavenly gift...the kingdom was theirs already” (Bruce 20).

- c. “If, as suggested in 13:1, ‘speaking the tongues of angels’ reflects their own understanding of this gift [tongues], then one can begin to appreciate how they made it the basic criterion for their understanding of spirituality. Glossolalia was for them the evidence that they had already assumed the spiritual existence of angels” (Fee 11).
 3. They felt they possessed a kind of **“ultimate spirituality”** in which they lived above the present age.
 - a. “All things are lawful” (6:12; 10:23)
 - b. “Meats for the belly and the belly for meats” (6:13)
 - c. “Every sin is outside the body” (6:18)
 - d. “We know an idol is nothing”(8:4)
 4. Their position on this **threatened the unity of the body** and the very message of the gospel itself.
- D. Some of the problems addressed centered around their **regular assembling together** for worship.
1. “Come together; assemble together, coming together” (11:17, 18, 20, 33, 34)
 2. “First of all” (11:18); Could chapters 12 – 14 be the “second of all”?
 3. Consider also “in the church” (14:19); “the whole church assembled together” (14:23); “when you come together” (14:26); “in the church” (14:35).
 4. What Paul discusses in chapters 12 – 14 is to be understood within the context of the regular assembling together of the saints (Acts 20:7; Heb. 10:25) and not as a special charismatic gathering where spiritual gifts were exercised.

III. Meaning of Chapters 12 – 14 to the Saints at Corinth

A. Use of, and Attitude Toward, Spiritual Gifts

1. From the context it seems clear that the Corinthian brethren held **the gift of tongues speaking in higher esteem** than the other gifts (14:5, 23, etc.).
 - a. Paul says all the gifts are of equal importance.
 - 1) Different *charismata* (gifts) – same Spirit; Different *diakonai* (service) – same Lord; Different *energemata* (working) – same God
 - a) All the personalities within the Godhead are equal in power and importance yet their functions are different.
 - 2) Example of the human body
 - a) All the members in our physical body have different functions and abilities, yet all are necessary and no one member can deny the usefulness of another.
 - 3) “What Paul here means is Christ as the Head of the Church has a body composed of the members who have varied gifts and functions like the different members of the human body. They are all vitally connected with the Head of the body and with each other” (Robertson 170-171).
2. **Proper understanding** of these points leads to **unity and working together**.

- a. “The stress in the 12th on *oneness* and *sameness* (4,5,6,9,11,12,13,14) and the expressed will of God that ‘there should be no schism in the body’ should make it clear that *it is a call to unity and cooperation*” (McGuiggan 253).

B. “I Show You a More Excellent Way” (12:31)

1. More excellent way **to what?**
 - a. To get spiritual gifts? To exercise spiritual gifts? To be spiritual? To work together and achieve unity?
 - b. Perhaps it is a combination of the last two or three above suggestions.
 - c. Clearly, though, love is more excellent because:
 - 1) It is something everyone can possess.
 - 2) It is something that will never go away.
 - 3) It is something that distinguishes us from pretenders (John 13:34-35).
2. The **importance** of love (13:1-3)
 - a. Without love, nothing of value is produced, nothing of value is received, and the loveless person is, himself, of no value.
3. The **characteristics** of love (13:4-7)
 - a. In the Greek text, all fifteen characteristics / properties of love are in verb form.
 - b. Love is not conceptual; it is not a motivating factor for behavior – love is behavior! It is action!
4. The **permanence** of love (13:8-13)
 - a. Prophecy, tongues, knowledge will be done away
 - b. The incomplete gives way to that which is complete
5. **Paul’s conclusion?** The greatest of what abides is love (13:13) so, follow after love (14:1).

C. Contrast Between Prophecy and Tongues Speaking

1. In the assembly, tongues were **spoken to God** (provided there was no interpreter); prophecy was for the **edification, exhortation, and consolation of all men** (14:2-3).
2. In the assembly, tongues were for the **edification of the tongues speaker** (provided there was no interpreter), while prophecy **edified the whole church** (14:4).
3. Tongues were for a **sign to the unbeliever**, while prophecy was for a **sign to the believer** (14:22).
 - a. I believe the “unbeliever” here is the pagan traveler, sailor, merchant, etc. which filled the city streets of Corinth. Under these conditions, with so many foreigners and so many foreign languages, the gift of tongues speaking would seem an absolute necessity for the teaching of the gospel.
4. If all spoke in tongues the “visitor” would **think the whole assembly was mad**, but if all were to prophesy, the “visitor’s” **heart would be touched** and he would fall on his face worshipping God (14:23-25).

5. Since understanding and edification were of primary importance, the prophet (who could be understood by the assembly) was of **greater importance** than the tongues speaker (who could not be understood by the assembly).

D. Regulation of Use

1. When used properly the result was **edification** and **unity**.
 - a. 14:3, 4, 5, 12, 17, 26
 - b. 14:33
 - 1) Confusion – instability, tumult, discord
 - 2) Peace – harmony, to set at one
2. Those who were truly spiritual would obey these things as commandments of the Lord (14:37), and they would observe God’s proper arrangement (14:40).

IV. Problem Passages in Chapters 12 – 14

A. What is the Nature of the Gifts?

1. Are the gifts **miraculous** or **non-miraculous**?
 - a. *Charisma* – not exclusively miraculous gifts, emphasizes **the grace** by which it is given.
 - 1) Rom. 12:6-8 – prophecy, ministry, teaching, exhorting, giving, leading, showing mercy
 - 2) 1 Pet. 4:7-11 – praying, loving, showing hospitality, speaking, ministering
 - b. The argument is made that the “**grace gifts**” of 1 Cor. 12-14 are still active because the “**grace gifts**” of Rom. 12, 1 Pet. 4, etc. are still active.
 - c. However, in no other passage other than 1 Cor. 12-14 are these “grace gifts” referred to as “**the manifestation of the Spirit**” (12:7).
 - 1) We must confine ourselves to the context. The actions and activities that Paul was discussing were clearly performed with / by miraculous power.
 - 2) Leon Morris calls them “the extraordinary endowments the Spirit confers on chosen people” (165).
 - 3) I can pray, give, love, show mercy, show hospitality, etc. without possessing any miraculous powers.
 - d. Other passages using *charisma* or *charismata* do not have any bearing on 1 Cor. 12-14 because, based on context, the nature of the gifts is different.

B. What is the Nature of the Tongues?

1. Are the tongues **unintelligible, ecstatic, verbal sounds** (Fee 598; Morris 169; Grosheide 288), or are the tongues **human languages**, unknown to the one speaking (Hodge 248)?
2. I contend it is the latter of the two based on the following arguments:
 - a. **Acts 2**
 - 1) The apostles spoke with **other tongues** (2:4).
 - 2) The multitude was amazed hearing **the Galileans speak** (2:7).

- a) For “speak” see John 18:20; Matt. 12:46-47; 10:19-20; etc.
- 3) The multitude recognized the apostles were speaking in **the hearer’s native language** (2:6, 8).
- 4) Luke uses *glossa* (2:4, 11) and *dialektos* (2:6, 8) interchangeably.
- 5) Note the comparison below from McGuiggan (244):

<u>Acts</u>	<u>1 Corinthians</u>
1. <i>Glossa</i> is used	1. <i>Glossa</i> is used
2. They were a gift	2. They were a gift
3. They were signatory	3. They were signatory
4. They were used as signs for unbelievers	4. They were used as signs for unbelievers

b. **Acts 10:46**

- 1) The words for “speak” and “tongues” are the same as in Acts 2.
- 2) Those who were with Peter heard the Gentiles “speak...magnifying God.”

c. **1 Cor. 14:21 – “men of strange tongues”**

- 1) “The Old Testament context has reference to the Assyrian language, which, when heard by the Israelites, would be a sure sign that God had brought judgment upon them for their unbelief. Thus the Corinthian tongues were intelligent human languages, not irrational fragments of speech produced by a state of ecstasy” (Curry 201).

d. **1 Cor. 12:10**

- 1) The expressions “interpretation” or “interpret” mean to translate languages
- 2) “The word interpretation (*hermeneia*) is derived from *hermeneuo* which occurs in John 1:38, 42; 9:7; Heb. 7:2. In every case, it is used to mean ‘to translate from one language to another.’ ... Hence, the normal meaning of the word *hermeneia* demands that we understand the gift of tongues to be the ability to speak in a language which one had not learned and that the gift of interpretation of tongues be understood to be the ability to translate what was spoken by one who had the gift of tongues into a language easily understood by the congregation” (Willis 348-349).

C. What is That Which is Perfect (to teleion)?

1. Three groups of theories (Carson 68-69)
- a. **Maturity of the church, or maturity of believers**
- 1) McGuiggan – maturity of love (257)
- b. **Completed canon of scripture**
- c. **Perfection is related to the parousia** (Majority interpretation according to Carson)
- 1) Life to come (Gooch 143)

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- 2) Millennial Kingdom (Blomberg 260)
 - 3) The parousia of Christ (Bruce 128)
2. Stauffer argues that, contextually, Paul is speaking of a perfection of knowledge and therefore the study of *to teleion* is narrowed to a consideration of heavenly knowledge or scriptural knowledge (147).
 3. Definition of *teleios*
 - a. “brought to its end, finished; wanting nothing necessary to completeness; perfect” (Thayer 618)
 - b. “having reached its end, finished, complete, perfect” (Vine 466)
 4. **Two facts** – 13:8 (Stauffer 149)
 - a. Love never fails.
 - b. Prophecies, tongues, knowledge (representing the whole group of miraculous spiritual gifts) will cease and be done away.
 5. **Two reasons** – 13:9-10 (Stauffer 150)
 - a. These gifts, even when fully exercised, only give us parts, portions, sections.
 - 1) “in part” – *to ek merous*
 - b. A point of completion is coming
 - 1) “... since *teleion* is set in contrast to that which is ‘in part’ (*ek merous*), it must refer to the culmination of a process” (Gromacki 123).
 - 2) Gromacki quotes Gilbert B. Weaver on this point: “Logically, *to teleion* must refer to completeness or perfection in the same realm as that referred to by *ek merous*. Since *to ek merous* refers to the transmission of divine truth by revelation, the other term *to teleion* must refer to God’s complete revelation of truth, the entire New Testament...” (126).
 6. **Two illustrations** – 13:11-12 (Stauffer 154)
 - a. The maturation process from childhood to manhood
 - b. The partial seeing (knowing) in a dim mirror and the full seeing (knowing) of being face to face
 - 1) God’s eternal plan, as it was in the process of being revealed, was referred to as a mystery – something not obviously or easily seen.
 - a) Rom. 16:25-26
 - b) 1 Cor. 2:7
 - c) Eph. 1:9; 3:3, 4, 9; 6:19
 - d) Col. 1:26, 27; 2:2; 4:3
 - 2) Peter referred to things Paul wrote “in all his epistles” (2 Pet. 3:15-16), implying a collection of Paul’s letters as early as AD 68.
 - a) Though this point is disputed by Carson, Moo and Morris (435), I still believe it to be valid. The collection need not to have been complete by the time of Peter’s writing for Peter to have made such a reference.
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7. That which is perfect is, therefore, **the word of God** (revealed will of God) at its mature, completed state. This should be obvious based on the text alone. The message of the gospel was imparted by means of the gifts of prophecy, tongues and knowledge. This manner, or way in which the gospel was delivered, was in part – “bit by bit revelation” (Stauffer 152). Once the message was fully received, the way was no longer needed.

Conclusion:

I. Applications For Us Today

- A. Do we possess attitudes of **arrogance** and **elitism**?
 1. How do we treat those who are wealthy, well educated, more talented?
 - a. James 2:1-3
 - b. The eloquent speaker; the talented song leader, etc.
- B. Do we make **edification** our primary goal?
 1. 1 Cor. 14:3, 4, 5, 12, 17, 26
 2. Rom. 14:19; 15:2; Eph. 4:29
 3. Preachers and teachers must be understood! (1 Cor. 14:9, 16, 19)
 - a. We might enjoy wrestling with difficult subject matter in our private study, but before we take it into the pulpit we must always ask ourselves how such will benefit the congregation.
 - b. We should never take our “think so’s” into the pulpit.
 - c. A Bible class teacher is not a facilitator but is one assigned the task of teaching!
- C. Have we missed the point concerning **what makes us spiritual**?
 1. Is it – having been baptized? Being a member of the church of Christ? Partaking of the Lord’s Supper every first day of the week?
 - a. See 1 Cor. 10:1-5 – “With most of them God was not well pleased.”
 - b. Heb. 6:4-6
 2. Do I (individually) think that because I am a talented and popular preacher, class teacher, song leader, deacon, elder, etc. I am spiritual?
 3. Do we (collectively) think that changing the order of our services, or the length of our services, or the times of our services or increasing the number of times we meet, or rearranging the seats in the auditorium etc. will make us more spiritual?
 4. True spirituality is seen in our devotion to God and to one another.
 - a. John 4:24
 - b. 1 Pet. 2:5
 - c. Heb. 13:15-16
 - d. Heb. 6:9-10
- D. Do we fully appreciate the connection between **love and unity**?
 1. Eph. 4:1-4; Col. 3:12-15

2. Phil. 2:1-5
3. John 13:34-35
4. Psalm 133 – oil and dew; consider Lev. 26 and Deut. 28

II. May God **forgive us** when we fail in these matters and **strengthen us** and **bless us** as we try to do better.

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