

A square image with a blue, starburst-like background. The background consists of numerous thin, white lines radiating from a central point, creating a sense of depth and motion. The text "Order in the Court of the King!" is centered in white, sans-serif font.

Order
in the
Court of the King!

Volume IV

By

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Welcome to Volume IV of our special series, Order in the Court of the King! If this is the first time you've read this series, please read the first three volumes to acquaint yourself with our views on God's Eternal Kingdom.

[Volume I](#)

[Volume II](#)

[Volume III](#)

Why Begin With Tongues?

There are so many divisions and problems in the Church today, why begin with ‘tongues’? Good question.

Here’s how I started this series almost two years ago –

I believe the answer to the Christian Church’s vast differences about beliefs and practice may be fairly easy to solve. Here’s why I say that.

Let all things be done decently and in order. 1 Corinthians 14:40

Paul’s apostolic command to the Corinthian Christians to resolve its differences “decently and in order” is as needed today as it was almost two-thousand years ago. The modern Church is definitely ‘out of order’ and needs help to get back in line to doing God’s will.

Jesus Christ prayed a simple prayer the night before He died. Jesus told His Heavenly Father that He accomplished what He was sent to do.

I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. John 17:4

That's a bold and true statement. Jesus did glorify God on the earth and He did finish the work God had given Him to do. That's the pattern we should follow as well. Why? Because it's what God ordered.

How's the modern Church doing with that? Not so well. How do I know that? Simple. First, read the Bible through carefully and intently. Take notes as you read. Second, take a close look at the modern Church across the world. What do you see? God-glorification or self-glorification? Finished work or incomplete work? Decency or indecency? Order or disorder?

Decently and In Order

The Apostle Paul's declaration that all things should 'be done decently and in order' was in the context of spiritual gifts – specifically about 'tongues' and 'prophecy.'

Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues. Let all things be done decently and in order. 1 Corinthians 14:39-40

When you read those verses in a partial context, you have to go back to 1 Corinthians 14 –

Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy. For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries. But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men. He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church. I wish you all spoke with tongues, but even more

that you prophesied; for he who prophesies is greater than he who speaks with tongues, unless indeed he interprets, that the church may receive edification ... I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all; yet in the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that I may teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue. 1 Corinthians 14:1-5, 18-19

If you want to understand the full context of 1 Corinthians 14, you have to go back to the first verse of chapter 12 –

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant.

To understand the context of the ignorance about spiritual gifts in the Corinthian church, you have to go back to Chapter 1 –

Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the

same judgment. For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you. 1 Corinthians 1:10-11

The Corinthian church had 'a lot of divisions.' In fact, that's a primary purpose for Paul's letter to the church he had planted. The issue of 'tongues' was just one of the 'divisions' that he learned about from some of the church leaders he trusted. However, it's the one that Paul tied to the idea of 'all things be done decently and in order,' which is the theme of this series.

Our God is a God of 'order,' even in a world filled with 'dis-order.' God expects **order** in Christian churches. Jesus Christ made that abundantly clear when He dictated letters to the 'seven churches which are in Asia' (Revelation 1). Jesus made it clear when He told His disciples that He expected 'order' in the Church in Matthew 18. The Lord was quite specific about how to deal with 'dis-order' and bring about 'order' in a church. The apostles made it clear in their preaching, teaching, and epistles that God expected 'decency and order' among Christians and within the Church.

Order is the Church is not a ‘discussion’ we can have with God. It’s His ‘command.’ We can either obey God or disobey God – that’s our choice as His children. However, there are serious consequences to disobeying God’s direction. Church leaders and members have experienced some of those consequences for many centuries.

Is Speaking In Tongues A Sign Of Salvation?

Another reason I want to begin this next volume with the issue of ‘tongues’ is because it was one of the first ‘challenges’ I had as a new Christian. As an atheist I knew nothing about ‘tongues,’ only what I remember coming across while investigating the truth claims of Christianity. One of the first of many challenges I faced as a new Christian was the issue of ‘speaking in tongues.’

Some Christians I met asked me if I spoke in tongues. I didn’t understand what they meant at the time, so I asked them to explain. They told me about Mark 16, Acts 2, 10 and 19, and 1 Corinthians 12 – 14. I asked them to demonstrate speaking in ‘tongues’ for me. As best as I can remember none of them did. However, they did say that ‘tongues’ was a spiritual gift that would prove whether I was saved. They said God gave the gift of ‘tongues’ to every saved person. If I didn’t speak in tongues, I wasn’t saved. That caught my attention. If ‘tongues’ was a ‘sign’ of my salvation, I thought I’d better learn about

‘tongues’ right away and see if I couldn’t ‘get the gift of tongues.’

As I usually did as a journalist, I started researching. I studied all the references to ‘tongues’ in the Bible. That research led me to some interesting conclusions. You may or may not agree with my conclusions, but I hope you’ll stay with me to the end of this article to see if we can find some agreement.

‘Tongues’ and Jews

The first time the word ‘tongues’ is used in the New Testament is Mark 16 –

And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover. Mark 16:17-18

I found that verse interesting. The ‘signs’ that would follow people who believed in Jesus included casting out ‘demons,’ speaking with ‘new tongues,’ taking up ‘serpents, not being hurt if they drank ‘anything deadly,’ and sick people would ‘recover’ when believer laid their ‘hands on the sick.’ I later learned that some scholars questioned the authenticity of that part of Mark 16, but I didn’t know that as a young Christian. I wondered why Christians said I had to speak in ‘tongues,’ but didn’t say anything about also having to cast out demons,

take up serpents, and heal sick people as signs of my salvation. Tongues seemed to be the ‘acid test.’

I also noted the term ‘new’ attached to ‘tongues.’ I was fortunate to have some Christian friends who read Greek, so I asked them about the words – *glōssais lalēsousin kainais*. The word ‘*glōssais*’ means ‘language,’ often based off a nationality. That reminded me of what happened in Genesis 11 when God confused their ‘language’ (Hebrew – *saphah*, ‘lip’). God took the one language that Noah’s family spoke and confused (*balal* – confound, mix, mingle) it so people couldn’t understand each other’s ‘speech’ (*saphah*, lip).

Back to Mark 16, the word ‘new’ (*kainais*) meant ‘fresh, novel, unused.’ I found that interesting that Jesus was promising that people who ‘believed’ in Him would speak in ‘fresh, novel, unused’ languages.

The next verse I found about ‘tongues’ was Acts 2 –

And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. Acts 2:2-4

That, I was told, was more proof that every real believer would speak in ‘tongues.’ Since Pentecost would have been only days after Jesus spoke in Mark 16, I wondered if the ‘divided tongues’ that sat upon each believer might be the ‘fresh, novel, unused’ tongues Jesus promised. I also noticed that when the Holy Spirit ‘filled’ them they ‘began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.’ What were ‘other tongues?’

The words *heterais glōssais* simply meant languages of ‘different kinds.’ The believers spoke with ‘other tongues’ as the ‘Spirit gave them utterance.’ Utterance is *apophtheggomai* and simply means ‘declaring, speaking out.’ An important observation is that the Holy Spirit ‘gave them’ utterance. My sense at the time was that the ‘utterance’ of ‘different kinds’ of languages was probably the promise of ‘new tongues’ that Jesus had made to the disciples.

I kept reading in Acts 2 –

And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven. And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language. Then they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, “Look, are not all these who speak Galileans? And how is it that we here, each in our own language in which we were born? Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining

Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God.” So they were all amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “Whatever could this mean? Acts 2:5-12

I noticed the audience – Jews ‘from every nation under heaven.’ It happened during a Jewish festival (Pentecost). The people attending the festival heard the ‘sound’ of the ‘tongues’ being spoken by followers of Christ and were confused by what they heard. They were ‘all amazed and marveled.’ Why were they amazed? Because even though the majority of Christ’s followers were ‘Galileans,’ everyone heard what the disciples declared in their ‘own tongues,’ meaning ‘each in our own language.’ What the people heard were words, in their own language, of ‘the wonderful works of God.’ That was truly a miraculous event – promised by Jesus and caused by the Holy Spirit. No surprise there. When Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit speak, they glorify God. Giving followers of Christ the supernatural ability to declare the wonderful works of God so that everyone heard the same

thing in their own language makes sense as we look at the totality of Scripture.

Some of the Jews at the festival thought the disciples of Christ were drunk –

So they were all amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, ‘Whatever could this mean?’ Others mocking said, ‘They are full of new wine.’

Remember that God brings ‘order’ out of ‘disorder.’ The Apostle Peter set everyone straight –

But Peter, standing up with the eleven, raised his voice and said to them, ‘Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and heed my words. For these are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: ‘And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your young men shall see visions, Your old

men shall dream dreams. And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; And they shall prophesy. I will show wonders in heaven above And signs in the earth beneath: Blood and fire and vapor of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, And the moon into blood, Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord. And it shall come to pass That whoever calls on the name of the Lord Shall be saved.’ Acts 2:14-21

Peter set the record straight quickly and decisively. What the Jews witnessed on the Day of Pentecost was fulfillment of prophecy. God was bringing order out of disorder through ‘tongues’ declaring the ‘wonderful works of God.’ Peter went on to preach about the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and about three-thousand people repented and were saved that day. In fact, people continued to repent and be saved for many days following.

Interestingly, Acts 2 doesn't say that any of those new believers 'spoke in tongues.' It says they 'continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.' The new disciples 'were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.' The disciples continued daily 'with one accord in the temple.' They broke bread 'from house to house.' They ate their food 'with gladness and simplicity of heart.' They praised God and had favor 'with all the people.' However, not a word about 'speaking in tongues.' Why not? If that was a 'sign of salvation,' why was tongues not mentioned once? Just making an observation. That comes before making any interpretations.

‘Tongues’ and God-Fearing Gentiles

The next time I found the word ‘tongues’ in the New Testament was Acts 10. That’s where God sent the Apostle Peter to preach to a ‘God fearing’ Roman centurion who had ‘a good reputation among all the nation of the Jews.’ Peter didn’t want to go at first because it was ‘unlawful’ for a Jewish man ‘to keep company with or go to one of another nation.’ However, Peter obeyed God and went to speak to Cornelius and his family. That’s when something unexpected happened

—

While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Acts 10:44-46

This was similar to what happened at Pentecost, except the Holy Spirit ‘fell upon’ God-fearing Gentiles, rather than Jews. Peter and the Jews who were with him heard the Gentiles ‘speak with tongues and magnify God.’ Notice that Acts refers to it as ‘the gift of the Holy Spirit’ being poured out on the Gentiles. The word ‘gift’ is *dōrea*, which means ‘a free gift, a gift freely given.’

Peter asked his fellow Jews, “Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we *have*?” Obviously not, so Peter commanded that the Gentiles be baptized in the name of the Lord. Peter also stayed with Cornelius for a few more days after that.

‘Tongues’ and John’s Baptism

The next time we see ‘tongues’ mentioned is in Acts 19. That’s when Paul came to Ephesus and found some disciples who were not aware of the Holy Spirit. They had experienced the baptism of John the Baptist, but not that of the Holy Spirit. Paul laid hands on them and the Holy Spirit came ‘upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied.’ We don’t know what ‘languages’ they spoke, though it was probably languages they didn’t know and Paul did (maybe Hebrew or Aramaic?). The disciples also ‘prophesied,’ which is interesting to note. Another thing to note is that this event would have been many years after the original ‘tongues’ at Pentecost.

If Jesus died and rose about 30 AD, and Paul met John the Baptist’s disciples in Ephesus about 53 AD, that’s more than 20 years. Why didn’t they know about the Holy Spirit? They were ‘disciples’ living in Ephesus, so why didn’t they know more than they did? They may have received John’s baptism in Judea and returned home before Jesus’ earthly ministry

fully developed. John the Baptist clearly presented the fact that He was the 'preparing the way' for Messiah, but these 'disciples' may not have known that Jesus was the Messiah.

Keep in mind that Acts 18 tells us that Apollos had been in Ephesus and 'spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord.' Apollos had also known 'only the baptism of John.' Whether Apollos and these twelve disciples is not revealed, but it may have been that many people living in Ephesus had experienced John's baptism.

You might remember that Aquila and Priscilla had to take Apollos aside and explain to him 'the way of God more accurately.' They may have baptized Apollos in the name of Jesus, though we're not told. We're also not told that Apollos ever spoke in tongues.

Paul did something similar with the twelve disciples he met in Ephesus, but did baptize them in the name of Jesus, the Holy Spirit did come upon them, and they did speak in tongues and prophesied. Some similarities? Yes, but some differences as well.

Decency and Order

Our focus in this series is on ‘decency and order’ in the Church. As I read news stories and social media posts about people’s perception of the modern ‘Church,’ it would seem that everything is ‘out of order.’ That’s not entirely true, though I do agree in general that the ‘Church’ has lost its way in many areas of bringing glory to God and finishing the work He has given us to do.

So, how do we find our way back to the ‘path’ our Lord has set for His Church? He’s the Builder and we, interestingly enough, are what He’s building –

For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, you are God’s building. 1 Corinthians 3:9

Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. Ephesians 2:19-22

Those verses, among many others, have astounded and amazed me from the first day I read them. We learn in Scripture that God has a very special purpose for His ‘Church.’ As we understand His purpose, we should be able to understand how important ‘order’ is in the Church –

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the

exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. Ephesians 2:4-7

... to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord ... Ephesians 3:10-11

For though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ. Colossians 2:5

Tongues in Corinth

I chose the divisive issue of ‘tongues’ to start Volume IV of our series. The primary reason is because of this verse – “Let all things be done decently and in order (1 Corinthians 14:40). Another reason, as I explained in the last part of this series, is that ‘speaking in tongues’ was one of the first challenges I faced as a new Christian. I was glad to have the opportunity to share my testimony of God’s grace to me as a former atheist, but I was a bit surprised by the reception from some Christians. Among other things, they told me that I needed to speak in tongues as ‘proof’ of my salvation. They said it was in the Bible, so I should believe it and do it.

So, I began a study in the Bible about speaking in tongues. What I found in the early verses about tongues (e.g. Mark, Acts) didn’t convince me that I had to speak in tongues as proof of salvation. However, I did notice that most of the verses about tongues were in 1 Corinthians. I would wait to make a decision about until I finished the investigation.

I was fortunate to learn from Christian mentors about the importance of studying the Bible ‘in context.’ That simple phrase has helped me greatly in the years that followed. The first mention of ‘tongues’ (*glōssais*, a language) in 1 Corinthians is in chapter 12, but I thought it would be best to understand the context of Paul’s letter before diving into ‘tongues.’

Paul began his letter by addressing the fact that the Corinthian church had many ‘divisions’ and ‘contentions.’

Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe’s household, that there are contentions among you. 1 Corinthians 1:10-11

Paul added this several paragraphs later –

And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? 1 Corinthians 3:1-3

The context of that statement was about divisions among church members concerning Paul and Apollos, which we've already looked at in this series. Paul later wrote this in the same letter –

For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it. For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you. 1 Corinthians 11:18-19

Paul wrote that in the context of Christians sharing the ‘Lord’s Supper’ together. While other apostolic letters dealt with ‘divisions’ in churches from the aspect of ‘heretical’ teachings, Paul’s letter to the Corinthians seemed to deal with ‘non-heretical’ issues. Church leaders and members have had to deal with both for centuries, even as you will or already have in your church. The question is how to deal with them ‘decently and in order.’

Spiritual

Now that we have our bearings on Paul's general context for writing 1 Corinthians, let's dive into what he taught about 'speaking in tongues.'

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant. 1 Corinthians 12:1

Paul's opening to the subject began with the importance that Christians not be 'ignorant' (*agnoein*, not to know, to be ignorant about something) about 'spiritual gifts' (*pneumatikōn*, spiritual, realm of the spirit). The word 'gifts' is not in the original, so Paul was addressing the idea of those things in the spiritual realm. He continued –

You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols, however you were led. Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that

*Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit. 1 Corinthians
12:2-3*

Most of the Christians in the Corinthian church were Gentiles who had worshiped ‘dumb idols’ (*eidōla ta aphōna*, false image, false god, without voice, speechless) before responding to the Gospel of Christ. Paul wanted to make it clear at this point that ‘no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed,’ and that ‘no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.’ The idea of ‘speaking’ here is the word *lalōn*, which means ‘talk, speak.’ The word ‘say’ is *legei* and means ‘speech in progress.’ Neither word connects specifically to speaking in ‘tongues,’ but it’s important to note that Paul addressed speaking and speech in progress before addressing ‘tongues.’

It’s also important to notice how the Holy Spirit functions in ‘speech.’ No one speaking by God’s Spirit calls Jesus ‘accursed’ (*anathema*). No one can say that Jesus is Lord ‘except by the Holy Spirit.’ Remember what Jesus said the Holy Spirit would do in the life of Christians when He came?

However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. John 16:13-14

This connects directly to what Paul wrote the Corinthians. The Holy Spirit speaks what He 'hears.' The Holy Spirit glorifies Christ. He takes of what is Christ's and declares it to His people. That's why Paul wrote that no one speaking by the Holy Spirit can call Jesus 'accursed.' If you hear anyone say that, it is not from the Holy Spirit. Also, no one can truly call Jesus 'Lord' except by the Holy Spirit.

Spiritual Gifts

Paul does use the word ‘gifts’ in the next verse of his letter to the Corinthians –

There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. 1 Corinthians 12:4

The Greek reads *diareseis de charismatōn* (varieties, differences, of, gifts of grace). Spiritual gifts, *charismatōn*, are what many Christians wanted to emphasize to me as a young Christian – especially speaking in tongues. However, I noticed that there were two other important aspects of God’s working that I should note –

There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. 1 Corinthians 12:5-6

So, what we have so far are three areas of how God works in the 'spiritual realm' for and through His children –

1. There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.
2. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord.
3. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all.

We see the working of the Spirit in the area of different gifts of grace (*charismatōn*). We see the work of the Lord Jesus in different ministries (*diakonia*, service). And we see the work of God the Father in the area of different activities (*energéma*, operation, energetic working). God is involved in every aspect of what we do as Christians in His Church – from the spiritual gifts, to the various ministries, to the operation and energetic working. Spiritual gifts come from the Holy Spirit, not us. Ministries come from the Lord, not us. Energetic working and operation come from God, not us. Everything is from Him, for Him, and to Him. All credit goes to God – as it should.

With that introduction, Paul explains the various spiritual gifts the Spirit gives Christians –

But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills. 1 Corinthians 12:7-11

A ‘manifestation’ (*phanerōsis*) means ‘a disclosure, coming to light.’ Notice that the purpose of the Spirit’s ‘manifestation’ that is given to ‘each one’ is for the ‘profit of all.’ **That’s vital to understand.** Whatever spiritual gift (*charismatōn*) the Spirit gives you is for the purpose of the ‘profit of all’ (*sumpheron*, bringing together for mutual profit, common profiting, combining in a way that brings a gain to all). Spiritual gifts are not for our individual profit. They are for edifying, building up,

profiting all Christians in a church. Please take hold of that idea before proceeding into the world of spiritual gifts.

Here's the list of spiritual gifts the Holy Spirit distributes for the profit of all –

- for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit
- to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit
- to another faith by the same Spirit
- to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit
- to another the working of miracles
- to another prophecy
- to another discerning of spirits
- to another *different* kinds of tongues
- to another the interpretation of tongues

Paul mentioned nine specific spiritual gifts here, and notice these words that follow –

But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.

The Holy Spirit ‘works’ (*energeó*, accomplishes) all these things (all the ‘gifts’ mentioned), ‘distributing’ (*diaireó*, assigns) as He ‘wills’ (*boulomai*, desires, intends, wishes).

Notice how carefully Paul is explaining each aspect of how the Holy Spirit works in distributing spiritual gifts. Why? Because he was dealing with a ‘division’ in the Corinthian church. Some people thought they were better than other people because of the *charismatōn* they believed they had. How do I know that? Because of the theme of the letter (dealing with divisions and contentions in the church), and what Paul wrote after naming the spiritual gifts –

For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one member but many. If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body,” is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body,” is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. And if they were all one member, where would the body be? But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you”; nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. And those members of the body which we think to be less

honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable parts have greater modesty, but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. 1 Corinthians 12:12-26

Look at how Paul addressed the problem. Some Christians were telling other Christians 'I have no need of you.' Wrong. Paul pointed out that every member of the local body is important in God's eyes and needed for the mutual profit of the entire church.

The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you.' The head cannot say to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' Every member of the church is needed. To say otherwise is to hurt people and cause divisions in a church. God does not want any 'schisms' (*schisma*, divisions) in a local body of believers. Members should 'have the same care for one another.' That's why He designed spiritual gifts the way He did.

Tongues ‘and’ Interpretation

Though I would love to dive into all of the *charismatōn* Paul mentioned, I’m going to stay on course for this particular part of our story. Keep in mind that I’m referring back to statements Christians made to me soon after I left atheism for Christian theism. They said I needed to ‘speak in tongues’ as proof of my salvation.

So, when I came to 1 Corinthians 12 I was struck by Paul’s statement –

to another *different* kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues

The first phrase reads this way in the Greek – *heterō genē glōssōn* (to one's neighbor, to another, various kinds, various family of, a language). The first thing that stuck out to me was the idea of 'to another, to one's neighbor.' This spiritual gift of tongues was not for everyone! That's not what I had been told by some Christians. They said I had to speak in tongues as proof that I was saved. If that was true, how could Paul's words also be true – 'to another *different* kinds of tongues'? The statement Paul made contradicted the statements of some Christians telling me I had to speak in tongues. That kind of contradiction is logically impossible, so who would I believe? No contest – I believed the Bible.

Paul restated the same point later in chapter 12 when he wrote –

Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all

teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?

1 Corinthians 12:27-30

The answer is obviously 'no.' Everyone in the church did not have all those spiritual gifts. Not everyone was an apostle. Not everyone was a prophet. Not everyone was a teacher. Not everyone had the gift of miracles. Not everyone had the gift of healings. Not everyone spoke in tongues. And, not everyone interpreted tongues.

That last part was interesting – the spiritual gift of 'the interpretation of tongues.' Did 'interpretation' mean what I thought it meant? The Greek, *hermēneia*, means 'interpretation, translation.' I looked back at Acts 2 to see if anyone there was translating or interpreting the 'tongues' spoken by Christ's disciples.

And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language. Then they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, "Look, are not all these who speak Galileans? And how is it that we here, each in our own language in which we were born? Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God." So they were all amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "Whatever could this mean? Acts 2:6-12

No mention of anyone 'translating' or 'interpreting' tongues. Everyone from every nation in Jerusalem on Pentecost heard the 'tongues' spoken by the Galilean followers of Jesus Christ in their 'own language' in which they were born.

I looked at other mentions of 'tongues' in Acts and found the same thing. No mention of anyone translating or interpreting 'tongues.' So, what was Paul talking about in 1 Corinthians 12? What was going on in the Corinthian church that people who spoke in tongues would need a translator/interpreter? It seemed like something had changed, but what? and why?

‘Order’ in the Church

We are looking at one of the ‘divisions’ in the Corinthian church. The reason we’re looking at it in this series is to see how God is ‘orderly’ in all He does and how He expects members of His Church to also do all things ‘decently and in order.’

As I mentioned in the last part of our series, I didn’t find any mention of anyone interpreting or translating the supernatural gift of ‘tongues’ (languages) in the Book of Acts. Everyone in Jerusalem heard ‘tongues’ in their native (national) language without anyone interpreting. However, I did find ‘interpretation of tongues’ in 1 Corinthians. Why did Paul mention it there? Was it because they were Gentiles and the other mentions in Acts affected only Jews? No, because the ‘tongues’ mentioned in Acts 10 concerned Gentiles as well –

While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Acts 10:44-46

That event in Peter's life happened years before Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, so the addition of 'interpretation' of tongues was apparently new – even for Gentiles. What was going on in the Corinthian church that people who spoke in tongues would need a translator/interpreter? It seemed like something had changed, but what? and why?

Love and Spiritual Gifts

Paul wrote about 'tongues' twice in 1 Corinthians 13 –

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. vs 1

Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away. vss 8-10

I found verse 1 interesting from the aspect of the importance of ‘love’ among Christians. Chapter 12 is a demonstration of how ‘unloving’ and ‘prideful’ some members were in the Corinthian church. Paul asked if everyone had all of the spiritual gifts (which they don’t), then wrote this –

But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way. 1 Corinthians 12:31

He had already told us the ‘best gifts’ when he wrote – ‘And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues.’ So, what was this ‘more excellent way’ Paul wanted to show the Corinthians? Next sentence –

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all

my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing. 1 Corinthians 13:1-3

I think you'll agree with me that any Christian who could speak with the tongues of men and of angels, have the gift of prophecy, understand all mysteries and all knowledge, have all faith so they could remove mountains, bestow all their goods to feed the poor, and give their body to be burned, would be looked by other Christians as a 'super Christian.' They'd probably flock by the thousands at some arena to hear 'super Christian' give a talk about being a 'super Christian.' He'd be a Christian celebrity to top all celebrities.

However, the Apostle Paul wrote that even this 'super Christian' would be no more than senseless noise, be nothing, and profit nothing if he didn't have 'love.' That's how important love is, and it's the point Paul was making to the Corinthians about their 'division' over spiritual gifts. Gifts are important in the Church because the Holy Spirit gives them for His purposes, but love is even more important. Remember that 'love' is the 'fruit of the Spirit' that Paul wrote about to the

Galatian churches (Galatians 5:22). Loving each other, caring for each other, building up each other – that’s what set Christians apart from the rest of the dog-eat-dog world they lived in than, and it’s still the same today. Love for God and others gives Christians the proper ‘decency and order’ that God expects from His people.

Stop or Go?

1 Corinthians 13:8-10 caught my attention because of Paul's statement that 'tongues' would 'cease.' What did that mean? I know this is controversial, but stay with me. It's part of learning how to address 'divisions' among Christians. It's not always easy and often takes time, but if Christians want to solve problems in the Church they're going to need to put in the effort and time. It will be worth it.

The word 'tongues' was the same – *glōssai*, language. The Greek word translated "they will cease" is – *pausontai*. It means 'to make or cause to cease, to hinder, to stop.' This gets a little complicated, but I learned as a young Christian that grammar played an important part in the translation and understanding of many Greek words. Grammatically, the word *pausontai* is a verb in the future tense, indicative mood, passive voice, and third person plural.

The reason I mention that is because of something I heard early in my Christian life – that Paul had predicted ‘tongues’ would come to an end by some event or force acting upon it (passive voice). The Greek grammar seemed to support that idea, but the question was when it would happen. Paul wrote – ‘But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.’ He continued to write – ‘When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.’ vss 11-12

So, what was the ‘perfect’ that was to come? What was the ‘in part’ that would be done away? And why did Paul write about putting away childish things when he became a man? Also, what’s up with the mirror – For ‘now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face.’? It all seemed to fall within the same context, so I wanted to get a better understanding about it.

Cessationism

I talked to people on both sides of the division (disagreement) about whether tongues had ceased or were continuing. They called the disagreement ‘cessation vs continuation.’ I was told that a ‘cessationist’ believed spiritual gifts like ‘tongues, healing, and miracles’ had ‘ceased’ with the death of the last apostle (John). The reason, they explained, was that the ‘perfect Word of God’ was complete and there was no more Scripture that would be written. They believed some special supernatural gifts (e.g. tongues, healing, miracles) would end when God’s Word was complete. They said those gifts were no longer needed as ‘sign gifts’ after the Apostle John finished writing. They said that, ‘But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away’ fit their interpretation well. They also believed their view (cessationism) fit well with the idea of a man putting away ‘childish’ things – because the Word of God was matured and completed. Cessationists pointed to Paul’s words, ‘Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known,’ as evidence that he was addressing the fact that God’s Word

was still being written when he addressed the Corinthians. When Paul and the others finished writing the New Testament, tongues would 'cease.'

Continuism

On the other hand, ‘continuists’ explained that they believed all of the spiritual gifts, including tongues, healings, and miracles, ‘continue’ to this day – just as they did in the 1st century AD. They viewed that the ‘perfect’ that was to come was when Christians would see Jesus ‘face to face’ in the future. The Greek word for ‘perfect’ is *teleion*, which is an adjective meaning ‘having reached its end, complete, mature, full grown, of full age.’ The grammar for *teleion* is ‘nominative neuter singular.’ It is preceded by the definite article *to* (the). Continuists pointed to that as evidence of the ‘perfect’ being something or someone specific. They also said that Paul’s, ‘Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known,’ was evidence of how Christians would know Christ fully when they saw Him face to face.

Tongues vs Prophecy

I continued reading and found that Paul's focus on 'tongues' did not end with Chapter 13. In fact, Paul's presentation reached a high point in Chapter 14. He blended his 'love' theme into spiritual gifts graciously and powerfully –

Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy. vs 1

Paul said that Christians should 'pursue' (*diókó*, chase aggressively, earnestly pursue) love, and 'desire' (*zéloó*, jealously desire, burn with zeal, completely intent upon) 'spiritual gifts' (*pneumatikos*, spiritual, relating to the invisible realm of the spirit). Then Paul used the comparative adverb 'especially' (*mallon*, more than, what is better) to refer to the spiritual gift of prophecy where a Christian would 'prophesy.' The grammar of the verb *prophéteuó* is 'present tense, subjunctive mood, active voice, second person plural.' The word means 'to tell forth, speak forth, forth telling.' A person with this spiritual gift might declare a truth, or foretell

something that would happen at a future time. Most of the uses of the word in the New Testament concerned the ‘telling forth’ of a truth God had revealed to them.

As you read 1 Corinthians 14 you’ll see that Paul valued ‘prophecy’ way above ‘tongues.’ Why?

- For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands *him* – vs 2
- But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men – vs. 3
- He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself – vs 4
- but he who prophesies edifies the church – vs 4
- I wish you all spoke with tongues, but even more that you prophesied – vs 5
- for he who prophesies *is* greater than he who speaks with tongues, unless indeed he interprets, that the church may receive edification – vs 5

Paul made it abundantly clear that tongues needed interpretation to be helpful to the ministry of the church –

Therefore let him who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret. For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful. What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding. Otherwise, if you bless with the spirit, how will he who occupies the place of the uninformed say “Amen” at your giving of thanks, since he does not understand what you say? For you indeed give thanks well, but the other is not edified. I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all; yet in the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that I may teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue. vss 13-19

I noted that what Paul described as ‘tongues’ in 1 Corinthians was quite different than what I had seen in Acts. Was it a matter of how much time had gone by since Acts 2? Well, what about Acts 19 when the Paul laid hands on Jews who had only experienced the baptism of John the Baptist? ‘The Holy Spirit came upon them and ‘they spoke with tongues and prophesied’ (Acts 19:6). That event was very similar to Acts 2, though it happened more than 20 years after Pentecost. No mention of needing anyone to ‘interpret’ the tongues of those Jewish disciples. However, Paul probably wrote this letter to the Corinthians a couple of years after encountering those men in Acts 19. The timeline doesn’t support the idea that ‘tongues’ changed because of a lengthy passage of time. Something else introduced the idea of tongues needing an interpreter.

Paul also wrote –

Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophesying is not for unbelievers but for those who believe. Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those who are uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say that you are out of your mind? But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all. And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you. vss 22-25

Now we get some insight into the purpose of tongues and prophecy. Paul wrote that tongues were a 'sign' to 'unbelievers.' Prophecy was a sign for 'those who believe.' It's important to note how the gifts of 'tongues' and 'prophecy' would impact people. If 'uninformed or unbelievers' came into a church gathering and heard 'all speak with tongues,' they would say that the people in the church were 'out of their mind.' However, if 'an unbeliever or an uninformed person' came into the church and 'all prophecy,' the unbeliever or uninformed person would be 'convinced by all, he is convicted by all.' Paul said that the gift of 'prophecy' would reveal 'the secrets of his heart' and so, 'falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God truly among you.'

Don't miss this because it's very important to the conclusion I'm going to share with you at the end of this study. Unbelievers would hear everyone in the church speaking in tongues and think they had lost their minds. However, unbelievers would hear everyone in the church prophesying and fall down on their face, worship God, and report that God was among them. Why? Because 'prophecy' (telling forth)

reveals the secrets of a person's heart. Tongues does not do that, according to what the Apostle Paul taught.

Paul then addressed the importance of 'order in the church' as pertained to tongues and prophecy. His point is powerful because we learn something very important about how God views Christians gathering together to worship Him and learn of Him –

How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be two or at the most three, each in turn, and let one interpret. But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God. Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge. But if anything is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged. And the spirits of the prophets are subject to

the prophets. For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints. vss 26-33

God is 'not *the author* of confusion but of peace.' When people gather to worship and study the Bible, they need to remember that. Everything done in a church gathering should be 'for edification.' If someone speaks in a tongue, two or three people at most should speak, 'each in turn, and let one interpret.' However, if there is no interpreter present, 'let him keep silent in the church.' Nobody should 'speak in tongues' without an interpreter present, and then only two or three members of the church should speak in tongues. Two or three prophets may speak, and others can judge what they say. Prophets should speak one at a time, 'that all may learn and all may be encouraged.' Also, if the Holy Spirit reveals something to another person with the gift of prophecy, the first person should keep silent. The prophets were to speak one at a time so there would be clarity and no confusion. That's 'order in the church.'

Remember what Paul wrote earlier? He would rather speak five words 'that would rather speak five words 'with my understanding, that I may teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue.' Think about the comparison the apostle just gave us. Five vs. ten thousand. That's huge, and it's huge for a purpose. Paul was making an important point about how much more important 'forth telling' was compared to 'tongues' that could only be understood if someone with the gift of 'interpretation' was available to explain what the 'speaker in tongues' was saying.

Unfortunately, I have witnessed many church meetings where hundreds of people were speaking in tongues with no one interpreting. Even as a believer, it sounded to me like those people had lost their minds. Plus, it's absolutely unbiblical. Paul made it very clear that only two or three people in a church gathering should speak in tongues and only if someone with the 'interpretation' gift was there to 'interpret.' Paul said, 'But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God.' That's pretty clear. No interpreter available, no tongues – 'keep silent in the church.'

Conclusion

I think it's clear from what Paul wrote the Corinthians that he was addressing a serious 'division' in the church about the use of spiritual gifts. Some of the church members were being unloving, unkind, and downright rude to other members of the church. Paul was not going to have that in a church because it is an affront to Jesus Christ, the Builder of His Church. No matter how prideful these Christians were about their spiritual gifts, none of it mattered if they didn't have 'love' for each other.

If you are a 'cessationist,' meaning you believe 'sign gifts' like tongues, healing, and miracles 'ceased, stopped' at the end of the apostolic period (when the Apostle John died), then 1 Corinthians 14 may not be something that you'll use to convince anyone about what you believe.

However, if you are a ‘continuist,’ meaning you believe ‘sign gifts’ like tongues, healing, and miracles ‘continued’ past the apostolic period and are still active to this day, I highly recommend you wrap your heart, soul, and mind around 1 Corinthians 14. If you will not allow Paul’s clear direction about how tongues and interpretation are to be under the ‘control of the Holy Spirit’ in church settings, then you have stepped outside God’s clear direction. You are disobeying God even as you think you are worshiping and serving Him.

The Apostle Paul concluded this section about spiritual gifts by writing –

Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues. Let all things be done decently and in order. 1 Corinthians 14:39-40

I agree with Paul's conclusion. Prophecy is the more needed spiritual gift for what God is doing in the world to reach the lost with the Gospel of Christ, so 'desire earnestly to prophecy.' At the same time, 'do not forbid to speak with tongues,' but make sure you follow Paul's direction about speaking and interpreting tongues to the letter.

'Let all things be done decently and in order.' The context is spiritual gifts, but I believe that's a good thing for us to consider for 'all things.' Everything we do as Christians should be done 'decently and in order.' God is decent and orderly in everything He does. That's His Nature. Why would Christians want to do anything that is against God's Nature?

Think about it.

Next Volume

We'll take a look at what Paul told Timothy and Titus about challenges facing church leaders in the next volume of our series, *Order in the Court of the King!*

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