

Avondale College of Higher Education

TONGUES IN CORINTH - THE CASE FOR HUMAN LANGUAGES:
A STUDY OF 1 CORINTHIANS 12-14.

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by

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ABSTRACT

This treatise supports the historical view that the tongues phenomenon in 1 Cor 14 is identical to that in Acts 2. Hence, it argues that the tongues referred to in 1 Corinthians are known human languages and not angel speech, riddles, ecstatic irrational utterances or groans. In addition, it contends that this gift was meant to be used for an evangelism that would build up the church. Nevertheless, the local tongues-speakers were abusing this gift by employing it to exalt self, even using it in public worship services where no one present knew the language. It is this abuse that Paul addresses throughout 1 Corinthians, not the phenomenon itself. When seen in this light, the difficult texts in this biblical passage become clear.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	<i>The Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>
AGJU	Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums
ANF	Ante-Nicean Fathers
ATSM	Adventist Theological Society Monographs
AYB	The Anchor Yale Bible
BEB	<i>Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible</i>
BDAG	W. Bauer, F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich, <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> (3d ed.; Chicago: University of Chicago press, 2000).
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
<i>BibSac</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentary
BST	Bible Speaks Today
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>CC</i>	<i>Christian Century</i>
CRO	Chi Rho commentary
<i>CT</i>	<i>Christianity Today</i>
<i>CTR</i>	<i>Criswell Theology Review</i>
<i>EB</i>	<i>The Expositor's Bible</i>
<i>EBC</i>	<i>The Expositor's Bible Commentary</i>
EC	Epworth Commentaries
ECS	Exegetical Commentary Series
<i>EDNT</i>	<i>Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
<i>EQ</i>	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>

<i>ET</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
<i>HBD</i>	<i>Holman Bible Dictionary</i>
<i>IB</i>	<i>Interpreter's Bible</i>
ICC	The International Critical Commentary
INT	Interpretation
<i>ISBE</i>	<i>The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</i>
<i>JAAR</i>	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JPT</i>	<i>Journal of Pentecostal Theology</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
<i>JTSA</i>	<i>Journal of Theology for Southern Africa</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
LW	Luther's Works
LXX	Septuagint
MNTC	The Moffatt New Testament Commentary
MTL	Marshall's Theological Library
<i>NBD</i>	<i>New Bible Dictionary</i>
NCB	New Century Bible
NIBC	New International Bible Commentary
NIC	New International Commentary
NICNT	The New International Commentary of the New Testament
NIV	New International Version
NKJV	New King James Version
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NT	New Testament

NTC	New Testament Commentary
NTM	New Testament Message
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
OT	Old Testament
<i>PC</i>	<i>The Pulpit Commentary</i>
PNTC	The Pillar New Testament Commentary
<i>RE</i>	<i>Review and Expositor</i>
RRL	Regency Reference Library
<i>RTR</i>	<i>The Reformed Theological Review</i>
<i>SJT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies: Monograph Series
SPS	Sacra Pagina Series
<i>TDNT</i>	G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, eds., <i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> (10 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-1976).
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentary
WBC	Wesleyan Bible Commentary
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
<i>ZNW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

INTRODUCTION

On page 1 of his 1976 paper, “Speaking in Tongues: a Lexicographical Study,” R. A. Harrisville states that the NT contains “35 references to what is commonly called ‘speaking in tongues.’” One of these is found in Mark, six are found in Acts, and the other 28 are found in 1 Corinthians. Of the 28 instances found in 1 Corinthians, four appear in chap. 12, two in chap. 13, and 22 appear in chap. 14.

Speaking in tongues is usually referred to by the noun γλῶσσα (tongue) and the verb λαλεῖν (to speak), and consequently is generally referred to as glossolalia. Clearly, the majority of these references are by Paul. However, Mark and Luke also use the same combination. Variant expressions used by Paul are γλῶσσαις (to speak in tongues) and λαλεῖν (ἐν) γλῶσση (to speak in a tongue), with γλῶσσαις being the most common. Luke uses λαλεῖν ἑτέραις γλώσσαις (to speak in other tongues - Acts 2:4), λαλούντων γλώσσαις (speaking in tongues - 10:46) and ἐλάλουν τε γλώσσαις (they spoke in tongues - 19:6).

As the same terminology is used in Acts and 1 Corinthians to describe their respective tongues phenomena, the post-apostolic, medieval, Reformation and post-Reformation churches all held that the Corinthian phenomenon was exactly the same as the Acts 2 phenomenon. That is, they believed that speaking in tongues constituted the miraculous ability to speak in other human languages without having to learn them first, and that it was intended for evangelism.

On the other hand, all but a handful of exegetes in the modern and postmodern era have rejected this view and maintain that the two phenomena are essentially different. In the main, they acknowledge that the Acts 2 phenomenon refers to human languages but the Corinthian phenomenon is said to refer to some sort of non-human speech, possibly ecstatic and, therefore, that it constitutes a private rather than a

public gift.

This view is based on the assumption that the references to speaking in tongues in 1 Cor 14:2-4 are describing the innate qualities of the gift itself. In particular, the declaration that “no one but God can understand the glossolalist’s speech” (v. 2) is taken to mean that, without the supernatural gift of interpretation, no one can comprehend the words spoken. Therefore, it is likely to be a heavenly language, possibly the language of the angels. In addition, the statement that “the one who speaks in tongues edifies himself” (v. 4) is understood to mean that this gift has an entirely different purpose to that of the other gifts of the Spirit, of which the primary purpose is to edify the church.

This treatise will argue that this assumption is flawed, in that 1 Cor 14 is not referring to the tongues phenomenon *per se*, but rather it is describing the abuse of this gift in the Corinthian assembly by the resident glossolalists. Its basic premise is that this passage is not an objective, systematic, abstract, theological treatise on the gift of tongues, but that it is corrective in nature and therefore constitutes an impassioned pastoral exhortation to holier living.

Moreover, it will argue that the glossolalists in Corinth had been claiming that their gift was the sign that they had reached spiritual maturity. They had been using their gift in church services to show-off their assumed spiritual superiority, rather than to communicate something meaningful and helpful to the congregation.

It will also argue that in spite of how these tongues-speakers were thus abusing their gift, Paul does not prohibit its use in church services (1 Cor 14:39). Instead, he seeks to correct this abuse by admonishing the offending parties to either interpret their speech for the benefit of all present (vv. 14:5, 13), or to get someone else with the gift of interpretation to do it for them. Otherwise, they were to remain silent and

to speak to self and/or God (vv. 27-28).

Furthermore, it will be argued that the purpose of the gift of tongues is identical to that of the other gifts of the Spirit, namely, the edification of the church. This translates to using it to prophesy in the sense of the clear proclamation of the word of God (1 Cor 14:5b). This would make the Corinthians' use of tongues comparable with other NT expressions of this gift (Acts 2, 10, 19), where it was consistently used to prophesy. On each of the previous occasions where tongues had been used in this way, they constituted foreign human languages.

The theory that the Corinthian tongues phenomenon was actually human languages concentrates on the interpretation of certain verses and proposes some alternate readings. For instance, 1 Cor 12:1 ("Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant") does not speak exclusively of "spiritual gifts" but of "spiritual things" in general. On the other hand, 12:31a ("But earnestly desire the best gifts") is read as an indicative statement, rather than as an imperative. More importantly, the clause *μᾶλλον δὲ ἵνα προφητεύητε* (14:1, 5) is treated as a purpose clause, rather than a sub-final or object clause.

With reference to 1 Cor 14:12, it will be proposed that Paul speaks here of the Corinthians' zeal to be seen as "spiritual people" and not of charismatic gifts. In regards to 14:13, it will be argued that Paul insists that he who prays in tongues in church should also interpret his speech for the benefit of the entire congregation, rather than pray for the additional gift of interpretation. On the other hand, the expression "my *νοῦς* is unfruitful" (14:14-15) refers to Paul's knowledge of the plan of salvation and not to the cognitive function of the human mind.

Chapter 1 will review the history of tongues-speaking from the days of the apostles until the present time. It will reveal that from the second to the mid-

nineteenth century A.D. the prevailing idea in Christendom was that tongues constituted foreign languages and that they were intended for evangelism. Nevertheless, the use of tongues ceased when the early church had become firmly established. It will also show that this belief is based on the Acts 2 tongues phenomenon, which has been rejected by the vast majority of biblical scholars since the mid-to-late 1800's. They believe that speaking in tongues constitutes some sort of unintelligible speech.

Chapter 2 will look into the cultural and social milieu of the Greco-Roman world of the first-century A.D. and will show that the standards and practices of society were mirrored in the attitudes and behaviour of the Corinthian church. For example, the Corinthians, like their secular counterparts, held wisdom and eloquence in high esteem and, consequently, revered those who possessed these attributes in the local assembly. This caused the more spectacularly gifted members of the church, especially those with the gifts of utterance (tongues and prophecy included) and knowledge, to see themselves as spiritually superior to the other pneumatics in the church. The equating of giftedness with spirituality eventually led to all sorts of behavioural problems in the Corinthian church.

Chapter 3 will examine the meaning of the term τῶν πνευματικῶν in 1 Cor 12:1. Most commentators translate this expression as “spiritual gifts,” but this chapter will show that it literally means “spiritual things,” which include the gifts of the Spirit but are not limited to them. This treatise maintains that the subsequent reference to τὰ πνευματικά in 1 Cor 14:1 has this same meaning. Therefore, the contrast between the gift of prophecy and the other charismata in this verse, and the contrast between the gift of prophecy and the gift of tongues in v. 5 is in fact unwarranted.

Chapter 4 will show that Paul's discourse on the source and the role of the various charismata in the body of Christ (1 Cor 12) was meant to draw attention away from the gifts themselves and towards the provider of the gifts, the Holy Spirit. It will also argue that, with the spiritual arrogance of the more spectacularly gifted members of the church in mind, especially that of the local glossolalists, Paul stresses that the purpose of the charismata, including the gift of tongues, is to edify the church, not self. This implies that the reference to the self-edification of the tongues-speaker in 14:4 constitutes an abuse of this gift rather than one of its inherent qualities.

Chapter 5 will discuss the need for a diversity of gifts within the body of Christ. All believers, regardless of the nature of their particular gift or gifts, are to be content with the gifts that the Holy Spirit has apportioned to them. Therefore, they are not to hanker after those gifts which they do not already possess. In this context it will be argued that the verb ζηλοῦτε in 12:31a is more likely to be in the indicative rather than the imperative mood. Consequently, Paul is not encouraging the Corinthians to eagerly desire the "greater" gifts, but rather is simply recording the fact that in an attempt to raise their profile within the church, the Corinthians were coveting these gifts.

Chapter 6 will argue that Paul's treatise on love in 1 Cor 13 is not a parenthesis, but rather that it is an integral part of his argument against the Corinthians' preoccupation with the gifts of the Spirit. It will contend that his reference to the loveless exercise of certain charismata, including the gifts of tongues, prophecy and knowledge, as well as other Christian attributes as being spiritually worthless. This reinforces the notion that chaps. 12-14 are corrective rather than informative. Moreover, his list of what love is not (vv. 4-7), including self-seeking (v. 5), is presented as further evidence that the self-edification of the tongues-speaker

(14:4) is a violation of this particular gift.

Chapter 7 will contend that the term τὰ πνευματικά in 1 Cor 14:1 refers to spiritual things in general and not to the charismata in particular. Therefore the contrast in this verse (μᾶλλον δὲ) is not between the gift of prophecy and the other gifts of the Spirit, but between the Corinthians' inordinate desire for the greater gifts (12:31a) and using the things of the Spirit to prophesy. This is based on the interpretation of the ἵνα clause in this verse (μᾶλλον δὲ ἵνα προφητεύητε) as a final rather than a sub-final clause and, therefore, that the aim or goal of all Christians is to prophesy.

Chapter 8 will focus on the principal reasons for the modern and postmodern rejection of the historical view that speaking in tongues refers to the God-given ability to speak in other human languages without having to learn them first, and that they were given for the express purpose of evangelism. Counter-arguments by the handful of remaining human language advocates will also feature in this chapter.

Chapter 9 will show that Paul's statement about tongues in 14:2 is referring to the Corinthian glossolalists' abuse of this gift and not to the intrinsic nature of the phenomenon itself. It will be argued that the πνεύματι referred to in this verse applies to the human spirit and not to the Holy Spirit. Moreover, because the human spirit has a cognitive as well as an emotive function, it implies that glossolalists are fully aware of what they are saying when speaking in tongues. Further, it will be argued that self-edification means selfishness and therefore that it is contrary not only to the spirit of love, but also to the original purpose of the charismata, including the gift of tongues; that is, the edification of the church. Moreover, the latter implies that the gift of tongues is a public rather than a private gift.

Chapter 10 will argue that the clause μᾶλλον δὲ ἵνα προφητεύητε in 1 Cor

14:5a should also be read as a final rather than a sub-final clause, and that the verb προφητεύω in this clause refers to prophesying in the sense of proclamation or witnessing and not to the gift of prophecy itself. This would make prophesying the goal or aim of speaking in tongues, which implies that glossolalia must refer to speaking in other human languages.

Moreover, it indicates that the contrast in this verse is between the Corinthians' use of this gift to edify self, and using it properly to prophesy. Furthermore, it will show that the interpreter in 1 Cor 14:5c is more likely to refer to the one speaking with tongues than to someone else present who has the supernatural gift of interpretation. This strongly suggests that glossolalists were able to understand their own speech without the additional gift of interpretation.

Chapter 11 will argue that the analogies drawn from musical instruments played haphazardly, the uncertain call of the trumpet on the field of battle, and the incomprehensible speech of a foreigner (1 Cor 14:7-11) do not apply to the tongues phenomenon *per se*. Instead, they relate to the Corinthians' use of this gift in church when no one present knew the language.

On the other hand, it will show that the verb προσευχέσθω in 1 Cor 14:13 does not mean "to ask" and, therefore, it does not imply that glossolalists were to pray for the additional gift of interpretation. Rather, its subsequent use in vv. 14-15 indicates that when tongues-speakers prayed in public they were to do so with the intention of interpreting their speech afterwards for the benefit of the whole church. This, too, implies that tongues-speakers could understand their own speech.

This chapter will also argue that when Paul says that his νοῦς is "unfruitful" (1 Cor 14:14) it does not mean that his mind would be rendered inactive by the Holy Spirit and/or that he was unaware of what he was saying when using tongues to pray

in church. On the contrary, it means that his personal knowledge of what he was saying when speaking in tongues would be of no use to the church because no one else could understand a word that he said. Should this be the case, it undermines the non-human language view that no one but God could understand the glossolalist's speech.

Chapter 12 will examine other passages in 1 Cor 14 that have been used to support the non-human languages point of view; in particular the reference to "madness" in v. 23 and the use of an interpreter in church services (v. 28). In regards to the term "mad" in v. 23, it will be argued that it refers to the irrational use of this gift in church services where no one could understand a word that was spoken, and not to religious frenzy or the like. As for the rules and regulations set down by Paul to curtail the disorderly use of this gift in public worship services, he is making it clear that speaking to self and to God is to take place in the church proper and only when an interpreter is unavailable. Consequently, it is not a private or a mystical gift. Moreover, these rules and regulations indicate that glossolalists could refrain from using their gift at will. This infers that glossolalists were in complete control of their gift and therefore that it is unlikely to be ecstatic.

Chapter 13 concludes that the weight of evidence supports the traditional/historic view of the early church fathers, the medieval, the Reformation, and the post-Reformation churches is likely to be correct. It deduces that the Corinthian tongues phenomenon was no different from the Acts 2 phenomenon. They both constituted the God-given ability to speak in other human languages without having to learn them first, for the express purpose of evangelism.

CHAPTER 1 - A BRIEF HISTORICAL REVIEW OF THE GLOSSOLALIA DEBATE

Does Church history shed any light on the current tongues debate? What do the early church fathers, the medieval church, the Reformers and the post-Reformation church say about speaking in tongues? Do their writings concur with the teaching of the modern and post-modern church? Has tongues-speaking been an integral part of church life from apostolic times until the present? And, if so, what form did it take? These and other related questions will be answered in this chapter.

The Early Church Fathers

There are few references to glossolalia in the writings of the early church fathers. Of those surveyed, a majority view emerged among post-apostolic commentators that the early church viewed the gift of tongues as a prophetic gift to be used for the express purpose of evangelism.

For example, Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons in the late second century, categorised glossolalia “into a single category with prophecy.”¹ In a passage referring to both the Spirit and the water baptism of Cornelius and his household, Irenaeus writes, “neither for a like reason, would he [Peter] have given them baptism so readily, had he not heard them *prophesying* when the Holy Ghost rested upon them”² (emphasis ours). Here, “Irenaeus substitutes the word ‘prophecy’ when the Biblical text (Acts 10:46) to which he refers specifies tongues.”³ This view, observes Hunter, was repeated in the

¹ Morton T Kelsey, *Speaking with Tongues: An Experiment in Spiritual Experience* (London: Epworth Press, 1965), 34-35.

² Irenaeus, cited in Kelsey, *Speaking with Tongues*, 34-35.

³ H. Hunter, “Tongues-Speech: A Patristic Analysis,” *JETS* 23 (1980): 130.

fourth century by Gregory Nazianzus, and others.⁴

Elsewhere, Irenaeus claims “that he has heard many brethren in the churches possessing prophetic gifts and speaking in tongues of all sorts by the Spirit . . . bringing to the light the hidden things of men, and expounding the mysteries of God.”⁵ Although Irenaeus does not clarify what he means by the expression ‘tongues of all sorts,’ “he does equate them with prophecy, praising God and declaring the mysteries of God,”⁶ according to Powers. Further, the immediate context identifies these tongues with Pauline glossolalia. This would suggest that Irenaeus saw no intrinsic difference between the Pauline and Lukan tongues phenomena.

These contemporary speakers in tongues to whom Irenaeus refers have been mistaken, at times, for the Montanists - the followers of Montanus (126-180 A.D.). Hinson describes Montanus as “a converted priest of a Phrygian mystery cult”⁷ with, in Rogers’ terminology, a “perverted pneumatology.”⁸ Gromacki remarked that these cult members claimed to be the sole mouthpiece of the Holy Spirit.⁹ The following report on Montanists is afforded by Hinson who cites Apollinaris, Bishop of

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Cited by F. Godet, *St. Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 2 vols. (E. T. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1898), 1:200. This statement is considered to be the clearest indication that speaking in tongues survived into the second century A.D., although it would appear that Irenaeus himself was not a speaker in tongues and that personally he had not witnessed the phenomenon. He had only “heard” of its manifestation in the churches.

⁶ Janet Evert Powers, “Missionary Tongues?” *JPT* 17 (2000): 40.

⁷ Frank Stagg, E. Glenn Hinson and Wayne E. Oates, *Glossolalia: Tongue Speaking in Biblical, Historical, and Psychological Perspective* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1967), 47.

⁸ Cleon L. Rogers, Jr., “The Gift of Tongues in the Post Apostolic Church (A.D. 100-400),” *BibSac* 122 (1965): 139.

⁹ Robert G. Gromacki, *The Modern Tongues Movement* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1967), 13-14.

Hierapolis, writing around 170 A.D. The description is as follows:

(Montanus) became beside himself, and being suddenly in a sort of frenzy and ecstasy, he raved, and began to babble and utter strange things, prophesying in a manner contrary to the constant custom of the Church.¹⁰

Later, the narrative reads, two of his female devotees (Priscilla and Maximilla) were imbued with the same spirit as Montanus. As a result, they too prophesied wild, irrational and strange things.¹¹ Tertullian (160-220 A.D.), the celebrated North African theologian and a former Montanist, refers to this phenomenon in his treatise *Against Marcion*. He cites the evidence of spiritual gifts, including this ecstatic and rapturous phenomenon, “as a proof of God’s oneness and as a refutation of Marcion’s” teaching that the God of the OT and the God of the NT are two different gods.¹² However, it is highly unlikely that Irenaeus had the Montanists in mind when he recorded that he had heard reports of speaking in tongues in Christendom. The early church fathers, including Irenaeus, viewed glossolalia as an integral part of the prophetic mission of the church, not something that was contrary to it (see below). Not only that, they rejected the Montanist phenomenon on the grounds that it fell “far short of the gifts as exercised by the apostles.”¹³

During the third century Clement of Alexandria refers to tongues, “apparently as a contemporary reality.” It is suggested that he also envisioned the future cessation

¹⁰ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 5.16.7-10, 11, quoted in Stagg, Hinson and Oates, *Glossolalia*, 47; cf. Christopher Forbes, *Prophecy and Inspired Speech in Early Christianity and its Hellenistic Environment* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 152.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Stagg, Hinson and Oates, *Glossolalia*, 50.

¹³ Rogers, “The Gift of Tongues,” 141.

of this gift.¹⁴ However, Clement makes no comment on the nature of such. Origen (185-254), also of Alexandria, is credited with having “a somewhat hazy acquaintance” with tongues in his day and, like Clement, is attributed with pressing the future cessation of the gift. However, it is debatable whether Origen was in fact acquainted with contemporary tongues-speech. Nevertheless, he was the first post-apostolic writer to link glossolalia to evangelism.

Commenting on Paul’s admission that he spoke with tongues more than all of the Corinthians put together (1 Cor 14:18), Origen writes: “I suppose that he was made debtor to different nations, because, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, he had received the gift of speaking in the languages of all nations.”¹⁵ Two things are immediately apparent: (1) Origen agreed with Irenaeus that the Pentecostal and Corinthian tongues were identical; and (2) that the gift is meant to be used in furthering the gospel. Origen is also attributed with referring at times to ecstatic speech, and understood the gift of tongues to express itself in a variety of ways, not just in human languages. In Section 7.9 of his treatise entitled, *Against Celsus*, Origen cites Celsus’ charge “that some Christian prophets uttered all sorts of [Messianic] nonsense” about themselves before “threatening to call down fire from heaven.” After which, Celsus continues,

. . . they added ‘strange, fanatical, and quite unintelligible words, of which no rational person can find the meaning: for so dark are they, as to have no meaning at all; but they give occasion to every fool or imposter to apply them to suit his own purposes.’¹⁶

¹⁴ Hunter, “Tongues-Speech,” 131.

¹⁵ George B. Cutten, quoted in Stagg, Hinson and Oates, *Glossolalia*, 50-51.

¹⁶ Origen, *Against Celsus*, VII. 9: *ANF*, IV, 614, quoted in Stagg, Hinson and Oates, *Glossolalia*, 51.

As far as Thiselton is concerned, this passage is at best enigmatic.¹⁷ However, Gromacki proposes the explanation of the phrase is in the textual account. Later in the same work (Section 7.11) Origen solves the riddle. He claims that contemporary commentaries of Isaiah, Ezekiel, and some of the Minor Prophets have already “explained literally and in detail what he [Celsus] calls ‘those fanatical and utterly unintelligible passages.’”¹⁸ This shows that the “unintelligible words,” of which Celsus speaks, refer to the difficult prophecies found in the above OT books. They do not refer to glossolalia. We must assume, therefore, that Origen’s earlier statement linking glossolalia to evangelism represents his true position on speaking in tongues.

The Marcan reference to tongues, “they will speak with new tongues” (Mk 16:17),¹⁹ has been dated as early as A.D. 200 and as late as 382, with the most likely date also being the early third century, possibly 225. It is a well known fact that this reference forms part of the longer ending (vv. 9-16) to the Book of Mark – a later addition to the original text by some well meaning, albeit uninspired, copyist.²⁰ Nevertheless, in some circles its inclusion into the main body of the text is considered to be an indication of the widespread contemporary use of tongues. If this supposition is correct, then speaking in tongues was far more common in the third century than the extant literature indicates.

¹⁷ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 974.

¹⁸ Gromacki, *The Modern Tongues Movement*, 15.

¹⁹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture references are taken from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

Further reference to tongues in the post-apostolic Church is limited to the fourth and fifth centuries. Pachomius (292-348), the founder of coenobitic monasticism in the south of Egypt, “was reported to have prophesied and to have exercised xenolalia.”²¹ According to Jerome, the monk Hilarion (291-371) used “xenolalia in a battle with a demon-possessed man.”²² In his treatise, *On the Holy Spirit*, Ambrose (315-397) “refers to the gifts listed in 1 Cor 12 and Mk 16:17, explicitly mentioning tongues-speech as an ongoing phenomenon.”²³

On the other hand Chrysostom, Patriarch of Constantinople (397-407), and Augustine, Bishop of Hippo (391-430), make it clear that they had no firsthand experience with speaking in tongues and dismissed the phenomenon as a thing of the past. They also make it clear that:

1. They understood the gift of tongues to be the ability to speak in foreign languages without having to first learn them.
2. This gift was given for the express purpose of evangelizing the world.
3. Tongues ceased when this purpose had been realized.

To show that the “Holy Spirit is completely indivisible and inseparable from the Father and the Son,”²⁴ Basil of Caesarea, a fourth-century Eastern Church scholar and ardent Trinitarian, wrote a treatise called *On the Holy Spirit*. In the course of his argument Basil referred his readers to Paul’s statement concerning the evangelistic nature of prophecy in 1 Cor 14: 24-25, in particular its power to convict and convert

²¹ Hunter, “Tongues-Speech,” 132.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Basil of Caesarea quoted by Judith Kovacs (trans. & ed.), *The Church's Bible: 1 Corinthians Interpreted by Early Church Commentators* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 234.

the ignorant and unbelieving. He commented:

Prophecy, then, which operates by the gifts the Spirit distributes (1 Cor 14:1), makes it known that God is present in the prophets. Therefore, let those who contend against the Spirit decide what position they will assign to the Holy Spirit, whether it is more correct to rank him with God or to banish him to the created realm.²⁵

Basil's acceptance of prophecy as the outcome of the exercise of gifts is apparent, while he alludes to the fact that speakers in tongues could understand their own speech in a discussion on 1 Cor 14:14 where he wrote:

‘How does a man’s spirit pray while his mind is unfruitful?’ This was said about those who utter their prayer in a tongue unknown to the hearers. For he says: ‘If I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful’ [1 Cor 14:14]. For when the words of the prayer are unknown to those who are present, the understanding of him who prays is unfruitful since no one is benefited. But when those who are present understand the prayer, which is able to benefit the hearers, then he who prays has the improvement of those who are benefited as a fruit.²⁶

For Basil, the term “unfruitful” is used to show that the listener, not understanding, fails to derive any benefit (or fruit) from the gift. On the other hand, as Haykins claims, Basil gives no indication that the speaker is incapable of understanding his or her own prayer.²⁷

John Chrysostom (347-407), the Eastern Church’s greatest expositor and Basil’s contemporary, is even more explicit in his writings that speakers in tongues could understand their own speech. In a sermon on 1 Cor 14 he makes the point that it is impossible for speakers in tongues to be edified by what they say (cf. v. 4) if they

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Basil of Caesarea, quoted by Michael A. G. Haykin, *The Spirit of God: The Exegesis of 1 and 2 Corinthians in the Pneumatomachian Controversy of the Fourth Century* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994), 147, fn. 230.

²⁷ Cf. Ibid.

do not know what they are saying.²⁸ Hence, the self-edifying glossolalists of whom Paul speaks must have understood their own utterances.²⁹ Chrysostom is just as clear that glossolalia constituted human languages. Referring specifically to the Corinthian believer's conversion experience, he writes:

Whoever was baptized he straightway spake with tongues and not with tongues only, but many also prophesied, and some also performed many other wonderful works. For since on their coming over from idols, without any clear knowledge or training in the ancient Scriptures, they at once on their baptism received the Spirit, yet the Spirit they saw not, for It is invisible; therefore God's grace bestowed some sensible proof of that energy. And one straightway spake in the Persian, another in the Roman, another in the Indian, another in some other such tongue: and this made manifest to them that were without that it is the Spirit in the very person speaking.³⁰

In regards to the Corinthians' obsession with the gift of tongues, Chrysostom claims that they held it in such high esteem "because it was the one which the apostles received first, and with a great display."³¹ However, their admiration for this gift was condemned by Chrysostom as completely unwarranted. "The reason the apostles got it first," he explains, "was because it was a sign that they were to go everywhere, preaching the gospel."³² Despite these assumed evangelical properties, Hunter notes that Chrysostom, having no firsthand knowledge of the gift, dismissed it as a thing of the past, claiming that "tongues were no longer necessary after the faith had been

²⁸ John Chrysostom, Homily 35, <http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/NPNF1-12/npnf1-12-40.htm>.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Chrysostom, Homily on 1 Corinthians, 29:1, <http://www.piney.com/FathChrysHomXXIX.html>.

³¹ Chrysostom, cited in Gerald Bray, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament VII: 1-2 Corinthians* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 138; cf. Kovacs, *The Church's Bible*, 236.

³² Bray, *1-2 Corinthians*, 138.

established.”³³

Another of the early church fathers to comment on the tongues phenomenon was Theodoret (393-457), a writer who focused on the rivalry aspect of claims to the tongues gift in Corinth and on Paul's attempt in 1 Cor 12-14 to correct this problem. According to Theodoret, tongues were given as a gift to overcome the language barriers that would otherwise prove a hindrance to the preaching of the gospel throughout the Greco-Roman world of the first century A.D. Therefore tongues were not to be used in church. Consequently, to speak in church in any other language than the local dialect was “pointless,” he says. This explains why Paul says that the glossolalist speaks to God and not to men; that is, because no one but God would be able to understand the speaker (1 Cor 14:2).³⁴

On the other hand, Ambrosiaster, a fourth-century commentator whose true identity is unknown, simply says that “to speak in other tongues and with other lips is to preach the New Testament,”³⁵ that is, to preach the NT gospel message. Since “to preach” means to sermonize, proclaim or teach, this is a clear reference to the evangelistic use of the gift and to its human language properties.

Augustine (354-430), Chrysostom's counterpart in the Western Church, is quoted as saying that:

In the earlier times, “the Holy Ghost fell upon them that believed and they spake with tongues,” which they had not learned, “as the Spirit gave them utterance.” These signs were adapted to the times, for there behooved to be that betokening of the Holy Spirit in all tongues, to show that the Gospel of God was to run through all tongues over the

³³ Hunter, “Tongues-Speech,” 134.

³⁴ Kovacs, *The Church's Bible*, 230.

³⁵ Bray, *1-2 Corinthians*, 142.

whole earth.³⁶

Accordingly, Augustine, like Chrysostom, limited tongues to the apostolic era.

Other patristic writers on the tongues phenomenon include Theodore of Mopsuestia, Cyril of Alexandria, and Severian of Gabala. Theodore makes a few comments on 1 Corinthians but not on the issue of tongues.³⁷ Cyril limits his comments on tongues to their sign character, and to the fact that the speaker in tongues could not understand his or her own speech.³⁸ Severian, on the other hand, implies that glossolalists are fully conversant with their speech and that they are in total control of their gift. This is what he says:

When Paul says **let him** [the speaker in tongues] **keep silent** [1 Cor 14: 28], he teaches that a person who is speaking in the Holy Spirit speaks when he wishes and is silent when he wishes. This is the practice of the prophets, but not of those possessed by an unclean spirit. The latter speak when they do not wish and utter things they do not understand.³⁹

Hunter points out that there is a complete absence among the early church fathers of any reference to unintelligible ecstatic utterance in their writings. Excluding the Montanist phenomenon, the fathers specifically clarified the nature of the tongues being spoken as xenolalia.⁴⁰ As mentioned previously, the early Church dismissed the Montanist phenomenon as falling short of a genuine gift of the Spirit and linked to demon possession.

It is also clear that in the majority of cases they link glossolalia with prophesying, evangelism, or preaching the gospel. Some even give the impression

³⁶ Augustine. Homilies on 1 John, 6:10, NPNF, 1:7:497, cited by Hunter, "Tongues-Speech," 134.

³⁷ Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 974.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Kovacs, *The Church's Bible*, 237.

⁴⁰ Hunter, "Tongues-Speech," 135.

that glossolalists could understand their own speech. And, one or two suggest that there were problems associated with this gift in Corinth.

The relative silence of the early church fathers regarding tongues-speech has generally been understood to signify “that the miraculous gifts of the first century had died out and were no longer needed to establish Christianity.” Or, if still active, the phenomenon was neither commonplace nor widespread.

On the other hand, it has been argued that the almost complete silence on this subject in post-apostolic times can just as effectively argue the case for the normative use of tongues. It is claimed that, as a rule, these early writings only referred to a matter when there was a particular need to do so or an extraordinary academic interest warranted “a commitment on the subject.”⁴¹ Further, it is stressed that the early church fathers never “set out to write an unabridged systematic theology or elaborate commentaries on the books of the NT. Had this been the case the demand for explicit data would be more reasonable.”⁴²

The Middle Ages

During the Middle Ages (590-1517), there are even fewer references to tongues than in post-apostolic times. Any references that do occur similarly specify this gift to be human languages. Kelsey contends that the earliest known mention of tongues in this period concerns the Eastern Church’s codification of its ‘One Hundred and Two Canons’ of the sixth council, in 691. In the Canon which mentions 1 Cor 12:29, it is inferred “that tongues is actually only a special teaching ability,”⁴³ thus

⁴¹ Hunter, “Tongues-Speech,” 136.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Kelsey, *Tongue Speaking: The History and Meaning of Charismatic Experience* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 42-43.

making tongues a communicative language. Six hundred years later Thomas Aquinas concluded that, although tongues no longer occurred, reason could only confirm the preceding eight hundred years of belief; that tongues are the miraculous gift of foreign languages given for the purpose of evangelism.⁴⁴

As for actual cases of tongues-speaking in this era, Vincent Ferrer (1350-1419), a Dominican Monk, is attributed with having the ability to speak in a foreign language/s that he had not previously learned. This occurrence of the gift is “supported by Nicholas Clemangis, a doctor of the University of Paris, who heard him preach.”⁴⁵ Tongues-speaking has also been attributed to Hildegard (1098-1179), the so-called seeress and prophetess of the Rhine. The oft cited evidence for such is “a list of nine hundred words of an unknown language . . . together with an unknown alphabet of twenty-three letters” found in her writing “*Lingua Ignota*”.⁴⁶ However, it is more likely that this list is “a sort of early ‘esperanto,’ being a mixture of German and Latin with an idiosyncratic alphabet.”⁴⁷

The Reformation

This trend continued during the Reformation (1517-1648). Although very little is said about tongues, what is recorded indicates there was no apparent change in the Church’s position that tongues meant foreign languages. Martin Luther, the great German reformer and the era’s most prolific writer, did not write a commentary on 1

⁴⁴ Ibid., 48-49.

⁴⁵ Gromacki, *The Modern Tongues Movement*, 18.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Canon Desmond V. Treanor, *St Hildegard, 17th September*, in “Saints Advice, Christians of the Month,” part 3, updated 11 January, 2004. <http://www.stwilfs.freeseve.co.uk/saints3.htm>

Cor 12 or 14. Nevertheless, in a discourse *Concerning the Order of Public Worship*, he associated the public reading of the Scriptures in Latin and its interpretation into the vernacular with the gift of tongues, and its interpretation as set down by Paul in 14:26-27.⁴⁸ Further, in a side-note to 1 Cor 14:14-15, Luther gives the impression that the speaker in tongues could understand his or her own speech when he writes, “. . . to ‘speak in the spirit’ [like a glossolalist], is to understand the sense itself and not interpret it.”⁴⁹

John Calvin, the Swiss reformer, is even more specific. In his commentary on 1 Cor 14:2, he writes:

It is likely that the Corinthians were giving undue attention to the gift of tongues, because it was more showy, for it is the case that, when people hear somebody speaking in a foreign language, they are usually moved to wonderment. . . . There is no pleonasm in the use of the word ‘tongue’ . . . it means a foreign language.⁵⁰

Calvin, like Chrysostom and Theodoret, perceived there was an attitudinal problem concerning the gift of tongues in Corinth. It would appear from what he says that its high public profile had caused the Corinthians to over inflate this gift’s importance. Also, Calvin is in no doubt whatsoever as to the nature of the tongues gift. As far as he is concerned, speaking with tongues means speaking in foreign languages.

There are no recorded instances of speaking in tongues during the Reformation, although Luther and various Catholic saints, including Francis Xavier

⁴⁸ Martin Luther, *Liturgy and Hymns*, Luther’s Works, vol. 53, ed. Ulrich S. Leupold, gen. ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965), 11, fn. 2; 38.

⁴⁹ Martin Luther, *Biblia* (Wittenberg: Hans Lufft, 1551), 327, margin note to verse 15b “with the mind,” trans. by Maurice Schild in private correspondence, 1994.

⁵⁰ John Calvin, *The First Epistle of Paul The Apostle to the Corinthians*, Calvin’s Commentaries (E. T. London: Oliver and Boyd, 1960), 286.

(1506-1552) and Louis Bertrand (1526-1581), have been credited with this practice. None of the aforementioned Christians claimed to have possessed this gift, rather it was their disciples or later writers who claimed it for them.⁵¹ Luther could read and speak German, Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, but this is not sufficient reason to attribute this gift to him. The same can be said of the bilingual or multilingual abilities of the various contemporary saints likewise attributed with tongues.

The Seventeenth-Century

The Ranters, a prominent radical group in mid-seventeenth century England, are alleged “to have been fond of glossolalia and other types of extravagant speech.” However, their pneumatology, like that of the Montanists, was suspect, and led to all sorts of heresies and deviant behaviour, with few checks put on their spiritual enthusiasm.

The early Quakers were often considered by their contemporaries to have been cut from the “same bolt of cloth” as that of the Ranters, although they were thought to be of a slightly better quality.⁵² They, too, had a suspect pneumatology and are touted to have “witnessed tongue speaking as one of many expressions of the Spirit’s power in their lives.”⁵³ George Fox (1624-1691), the founding father of the Quakers, and his followers often reported physical phenomena such as “visions, groaning, quaking or trembling, weeping, outbursts of prophecy, foaming at the mouth, faintings, and the

⁵¹ Gromacki, *The Modern Tongues Movement*, 19; Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), 240-241.

⁵² *English Dissenters: Ranters*,
<http://www.exlibris.org/nonconform/engdis/ranters.html>

⁵³ Stagg, Hinson, Oates, *Glossolalia*, 63.

like.”⁵⁴

In the wake of the revocation of the Edict of Nantes by Louis XIV in 1685 and the ensuing persecution of the French Huguenots, ecstatic experiences including prophesying and speaking in tongues are also reported to have broken out among the Cévenol peasants of southeastern France. The first to experience this phenomenon was Isabeau Vincent, a ten-year old wool-carder’s daughter. “Though familiar only with the native patois . . . the young girl was reported to have prophesied for hours in perfectly cultivated French.”⁵⁵ Soon others, of all ages and both sexes, including infants as young as three years old, experienced this phenomenon with some alternatively speaking in Hebrew, others in Latin.⁵⁶ As the fires of persecution grew so did the reports of spiritual inspiration. However, these subsequent experiences of the Cévenols were accompanied by various physical phenomena such as falling over backwards, convulsions, foaming at the mouth, sobbing, and glossolalia.⁵⁷

For 1600 years, the prevalent idea in the Christian church was that speaking in tongues was the God given ability to speak in a foreign language that one had not previously learned. Moreover, the Church believed that this gift was given in order to evangelize the world and had ceased when this task had been accomplished. Historically, both positions regarding tongues were confirmed, as speaking in tongues had occurred only spasmodically, if at all since apostolic times, and it was xenolalic in nature. Despite this, the Cévenols’ experiences in the late seventeenth-century would prove to be a watershed in the Church’s tongues-speaking history. Subsequent groups

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 60.

⁵⁶ Kelsey, *Speaking with Tongues*, 52-55.

⁵⁷ Stagg, Hinson, Oates, *Glossolalia*, 60

and movements experienced the same sort of physical phenomena as they did, but without the xenolalia. Falling over backwards, convulsions, foaming at the mouth, sobbing, and the like, would henceforth accompany glossolalia.

The Eighteenth-Century

Still, it would be another hundred years or more before the scholarly tide would turn against the traditional view that speaking in tongues refers to the supernatural ability to speak in other human languages without having to learn them first. For instance, Christopher Poole who published his work, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, in 1685, claims that the gift of tongues referred to in 1 Cor 12:10 is no different to the tongues phenomenon in Acts 2. It is the “power,” he says, “to discourse with men in their several languages, as we read in Acts ii. 8.”⁵⁸ Bengel (1687-1752) also interprets glossolalia as foreign languages. The only clue he gives for adopting this position is Paul’s reference to the Assyrian tongue in 1 Cor 14:21. “Since God is said to speak in the tongues of enemies,” he says, “the parity of reasoning holds good from them to the gift of tongues.”⁵⁹

In 1731, the Jansenists, “a reform element within the Catholic Church”, had similar experiences to those of the Cévenols. At the tomb of Francois de Paris in Saint-Médard, a crowd of Jansenists had gathered in the hope of miraculous healing. It would appear that no one was healed that day, but some of the sick “fell into violent transports and inveighed against the pope and the bishops, as the convulsionaries of Cévennes had denounced the papacy and the Mass. In the excited crowd, women

⁵⁸ Matthew Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 3 vols. (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1685, reprinted 1963), 3:583.

⁵⁹ John Albert Bengel, *Gnomon of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1759), 311.

were especially noticeable, screaming, yelling, throwing themselves about, sometimes assuming the most astounding and unseemly postures.”⁶⁰ On the other hand, their utterances were “an absolutely meaningless torrent of syllables . . .”⁶¹

Unusual spiritual phenomena also attended the early Methodist revival meetings, especially in Northern England and Wales. Critics of the phenomena took the historical stance, claiming that miracles were a thing of the past. When Dr. Conyers Middleton appealed to the fact “that the gift of tongues had not occurred since apostolic times” as proof of this claim, Wesley countered by reminding him of its recent occurrence among the Cévenols. This highlighted just how significant the Cévenols’ experiences were to some post-Reformation Christians.

Reports of these extraordinary phenomena increased as the Methodist revivals gained momentum, especially under a lay ministry. Adults and children “shrieked, swooned, fell to the floor as if dead, babbled senselessly, cried out in praise of God, and so on.”⁶² If Wesley was concerned by these manifestations he did not show it. If anything, he was more concerned about the dangers of rejecting them, than of approving them. Besides the obvious Cévenol connection, this positive attitude towards spiritual manifestations/gifts on the part of Wesley and his followers was no doubt also due, in part, to their belief in a “second blessing” sanctification experience. Who could say with certainty that extraordinary spiritual phenomena were not a part of this experience?

The Pentecostal premise “that one may receive later effusions of the Spirit

⁶⁰ *Catholic Encyclopedia: Jansenius and Jansenism*
<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08285a.htm> - cached.

⁶¹ Kelsey, *Speaking with Tongues*, 54-55.

⁶² Stagg, Hinson, Oates, *Glossolalia*, 64.

after initiation/conversion”⁶³ can be traced back through the eighteenth and nineteenth-century holiness and revivalist movements in America to this Wesleyan doctrine of the second blessing. These later revivalist movements with their holiness-cum-perfectionist emphasis likewise produced some very unusual by-products, which no doubt included tongues-speaking. Religious enthusiasm and the demand for a tangible expression of the Spirit’s power worked together to produce some astounding physical effects. “Barking, violent jerking, shrieking and shouting, wild dancing, fainting, and the like were common.”⁶⁴

The Nineteenth-Century

The most notable outburst of glossolalia in the post-Reformation period took place in 1831. Edward Irving (1792-1834), a Scottish Presbyterian minister, sought to duplicate in his London congregation the experiences of Mary Campbell, a young Scottish farm girl, and her acquaintances who, only the year before, had experienced tongues and gifts of healing. Strangely enough, Irving never spoke in tongues but according to his wish, tongues broke out among his parishioners. As a result, Irving was later defrocked and excommunicated by the Church of Scotland. More importantly, the Irvingites distinguished between the Pentecost phenomenon and the Corinthian gift, claiming that the former was foreign languages and the latter, ecstatic, unknown languages.⁶⁵

This departure from the Church’s historic stance on tongues-speaking was not confined to the Irvingites alone. By the mid-to-late nineteenth-century, scholarly

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 65.

⁶⁵ Gromacki, *The Modern Tongues Movement*, 22.

perception had changed dramatically as to what constituted speaking in tongues.

According to Godet, hardly anyone in the late 1800s believed that tongues meant foreign languages.⁶⁶ Various contemporary commentators, especially the German exegetes, had in fact modified the older exposition. The following examples will give us some idea as to the wide variety of interpretations prevalent at the time.

Wieseler suggests that the glossolalist internalized the gift and spoke so softly that no one could understand him. And if anything moved, then it would have been the lips. Under the circumstances the speaker would need to be his own interpreter.⁶⁷ Conversely, Schulz had the idea that glossolalia exhibited itself in “loud cries of joy.”⁶⁸ Fritzsche, on the other hand, did not believe that the Corinthian gift was a gift at all, but rather acquired language/s passed off as a gift.⁶⁹ Billroth held that the Spirit had inspired and equipped the Corinthians to speak in a mixed language comprised of the elements or rudiments of vastly different historical languages, which thus represented the universal character of Christianity.⁷⁰ Rossteucher and Thiersch maintained that glossolalia was a mysterious prayer language akin to the language used by the angels to commune with God;⁷¹ whereas Bleek and Baur expressed the opinion that glossolalia was made up of “highly poetic words and forms that are

⁶⁶ Godet, *1 Corinthians*, 1:221

⁶⁷ H. Olshausen, *Biblical Commentary on St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians* (Edinburgh: T & T. Clark, 1855), 216.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 217.

⁶⁹ Christian F. Kling, “Corinthians” in J. P. Lange, *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Critical, Doctrinal and Homiletic* (E. T. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1960), 252.

⁷⁰ H. A. W. Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistles to the Corinthians* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1870), 367.

⁷¹ *Ibid*.

obsolete and provincial.”⁷² Ernesti and Herder similarly suggested that tongues mean “unusual, antiquated, figurative and poetical expressions,”⁷³ while Bardili and Eichhorn referred to glossolalia as “a lisping of inarticulate tones.”⁷⁴

Still others, including Eichhorn and Meyer,⁷⁵ interpreted γλῶσσα in 1 Corinthians to mean “the organ of speech,” implying the Spirit’s control of the tongue, which may manifest in one of four ways. Firstly, it may manifest “as the babbling of inarticulate tones,” without moving the lips. Secondly, it may manifest as ecstatic speech expressed “in low, scarcely audible, inarticulate words, tones, [and] sounds” as the Spirit gives vent to itself. Thirdly, it may manifest “as an act of worship by means of ecstatic exclamations” and various other Spirit inspired outbursts of prayer and praise that are involuntary and operate independently of the intellect. Finally, it may manifest as inspired utterance independent of the intellect, which is unintelligible to those hearers “not possessed of the same inspiration”.⁷⁶

The Shift Away from Foreign Language

This profound shift away from the foreign language viewpoint by the commentators, as previously outlined, was mainly due to the notion that the Corinthians’ circumstances and the expressions used in 1 Cor 12-14 did not warrant interpreting “tongues” as such. Therefore, they abandoned the old interpretation on one of two accounts. Either they assumed that the Pentecost phenomenon was

⁷² Kling, “Corinthians,” 252; cf. Meyer, *Epistles to the Corinthians*, 368.

⁷³ T. C. Edwards, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1885), 320.

⁷⁴ Meyer, *Epistles to the Corinthians*, 369.

⁷⁵ Edwards, *1 Corinthians*, 321.

⁷⁶ Kling, “Corinthians,” 252-253.

different from that of the Corinthian phenomenon, or alternatively that the account in Acts was an untrustworthy perversion of the original facts.⁷⁷

Even though the arguments presented on all sides of the tongues debate will be spelled out later in this treatise, a brief summary of the main objections to the human languages view is nevertheless appropriate at this juncture. Meyer's list of objections to the historical point of view is representative of the times. He states that:

Even putting out of account the *singular* expression γλώσση λαλεῖν, which is supposed to refer to a *foreign* language, and the psychological impossibility of speaking languages *which had not been learned*, the following considerations tell decidedly against the view of foreign languages: (1) It would make xiv. 2 untrue in all cases in which persons were found among the audience who understood the languages spoken. (2) In xiv. 10, 11 we have the γένη φωνῶν (*languages*) expressly distinguished from the γένη γλωσσῶν . . . , and the former adduced as an *analogue* of the latter. (3) What is contrasted with the *glossolalia* is not speaking in one's native tongue, but speaking with employment of the understanding (xiv. 15); and the *glossolalia* itself is characterized as λαλεῖν πνεύματι. (4) In xiv. 6 there is contrasted with γλώσσα λαλεῖν the speaking ἐν ἀποκαλύψει, ἐν γνώσει κ.τ.λ., which could all, of course, be done in *any* language; hence the unintelligibleness of the *glossolalia* is not sought in the *idiom*, but in the fact that what was spoken *contained* neither ἀποκάλυψις nor γνῶσις, etc. (5) Upon this theory, the case supposed in xiv. 28 could not have occurred at all, since every speaker would have been able also to interpret. (6) In xiv. 18 Paul states that he himself possessed the *glossolalia* in a high degree, but adds that he did not exercise it in the church,—from which it would follow that Paul was in the habit of praying in private, before God, in foreign languages! (7) In xiv. 9, διὰ τῆς γλώσσης plainly means *by the tongue*, which, however, would be quite a superfluous addition if the point were not one concerning speaking with *tongues* (not with *languages*). (8) Paul would have discussed the whole subject of the χάρισμα in question from quite another point of view, namely, according to the presence or non-presence of those who understood foreign languages.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Kling, "Corinthians," 252; cf. Meyer, *Epistles to the Corinthians*, 364-372.

⁷⁸ Meyer, *Epistles to the Corinthians*, 1:366-367; cf. W. J. Conybeare and J. S. Howson, *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1855), 460-461; T. Teignmouth Shore, *St. Paul's Epistles to the Corinthians*, ed. Charles John Ellicott (London: Cassell, Petter, Galpin & Co, n.d.), 340; Edwards, *1 Corinthians*, 319-320; Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament* (London: Deighton Bell & Co, 1877), 315; Godet, *1 Corinthians*, 1:221; F. W. Farrar, "The

The Twentieth-Century

Very little has changed since Meyer's day. Most twentieth and twenty-first century scholars also reject the idea that the biblical gift of tongues is the God-given ability to speak in foreign languages without having to first learn them, and that it ceased to function when the apostolic church had become firmly established. Again, the main reason for this stance is Paul's statement in 1 Cor 14:2, which says that no one but God can understand the glossolalist's speech, including the speaker. At Pentecost the crowd that witnessed the phenomenon heard the 120 disciples speaking in their own native tongues and dialects and, therefore, could understand what they were saying without the need for an interpreter. In contrast, the Corinthian phenomenon, if the words spoken were to be understood at all, clearly called for interpretation (1 Cor 14:5, 13, 28).⁷⁹

Another major factor in the swing away from the traditional human languages view is that there is no evidence in Paul's writings that the Corinthians used this gift for evangelism or that he ever encouraged them to use it for this purpose. Moreover, Greek and Latin were universal languages at the time and could have been used as

First Epistle to the Corinthians," in *PC*, new ed., ed. H. D. M. Spence and J. S. Exell (London and New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1909), 398; Joseph Agar Beet, *A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistles to the Corinthians*, 4th ed. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1889), 241; F. W. Robertson, *Expository Lectures on St. Paul's Epistles to the Corinthians*, 4th ed., ed. Stopford A. Brooke (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1870), 225-227.

⁷⁹ Gordon D. Fee, "Toward a Pauline Theology of Glossolalia," *Crux* 31/1 (1995): 26, 28; David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 584; Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 976-977; Everts Powers, "Missionary Tongues?," *JPT* 17 (2000): 48; cf. Anthony C. Thiselton, "The 'Interpretation' of Tongues: A New Suggestion in the Light of Greek Usage in Philo and Josephus," *JTS* 30/1 (1979): 16; Jean Héring, *The First Epistle of Saint Paul to the Corinthians* (E. T. London: Epworth, 1962/1966), 146.

effectively as tongues to preach the word of God in foreign fields.⁸⁰

It is also argued that Paul makes a number of statements indicating that glossolalia is a private rather than a public gift. Firstly, he said that tongues-speakers edified themselves rather than the church (1 Cor 14:4). Secondly, he wrote that he would rather speak five words in church that could be understood by all present than ten thousand words in a tongue that no one could understand (v. 19). Thirdly, he declared that glossolalists were not to speak in church unless an interpreter was present, but were to remain silent and to speak to God and self (vv. 27-28). These statements also indicate that glossolalia was different in kind from the Acts 2 phenomenon.⁸¹

In addition, it is argued that there are several other indicators in 1 Cor 14 that would suggest that tongues-speaking is unintelligible and therefore different from the tongues spoken on the day of Pentecost. Firstly, Paul makes an analogy between speaking with tongues in worship services and the cacophony of musical instruments played aimlessly (v. 7). Paul makes a second analogy between speaking with tongues in worship services and the uncertain signals given by trumpeters in times of war (v. 8). Paul makes a third analogy between speaking with tongues in worship services and the gibberish spoken by low status barbarians (vv. 9-11).⁸² Next Paul

⁸⁰ Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 976-977.

⁸¹ Cf. John F. Walvoord, "The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts," *BibSac* 143 (1986): 117; cf. Jacobus J. Muller, "Neo-Pentecostalism: A Theological Evaluation of Glossolalia, with Special Reference to the Reformed Churches," *JTSA* 7 (1974): 45; Craig S. Keener, *1-2 Corinthians* (Cambridge: CUP, 2005), 113; Cartledge, "The Nature and Function of New Testament Glossolalia," *EQ* 72:2 (2000): 148; Thiselton, "The 'Interpretation' of Tongues," 16.

⁸² Powers, "Missionary Tongues?" 48; James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1975), 244; Fee, "Toward a Pauline," 28; Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 977.

distinguishes between the νοῦς and the πνεῦμα, and refers to the “unfruitfulness” of the former when speaking in tongues occurs (vv. 14-15).⁸³ Finally, Paul comments that unbelievers would react badly to an all-tongues worship service (v.23).⁸⁴

By comparison, few modern scholars have retained the traditional view that the gift of tongues constituted the God-given ability to preach the gospel to other nationalities in their native tongues and dialects without having to learn them first.⁸⁵ Prominent nineteenth-century figures who maintained a traditional view of the gift of tongues include A. R. Fausset, Albert Barnes and Charles Hodge. The foremost twentieth-century protagonists are J. G. Davies,⁸⁶ R. H. Gundry,⁸⁷ and Christopher Forbes.⁸⁸

Even though the vast majority of modern and post-modern exegetes agree that glossolalia does not refer to speaking in unlearned human languages, they are unable to agree on the exact nature of this phenomenon. Including the human languages

⁸³ Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 113; F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, NCB (London: Oliphants, 1971), 131; Hans Conzelmann, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Hermeneia (E. T. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 237-238; F. W. Grosheide, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1953), 326; David E. Lanier, “With Stammering Lips and Another Tongue: 1 Cor 14:20-22 and Isa 28:11-12,” *CTR* 5 (1991): 266; Richard A. Horsley, *1 Corinthians* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 180-181; Ernest Best, “The Interpretation of Tongues,” *SJT* 28/1 (1975): 47; Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 112; cf. Charles L. Mitton, “Notes of Recent Exposition,” *ET* 77/8 (1966): 226-227.

⁸⁴ Cf. Grosheide, *1 Corinthians*, 332; William E. Richardson, *Speaking in Tongues: Is It Still the Gift of the Spirit?* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1994), 88-89; L. T. Johnson, “Tongues, Gift of,” in *ABD*, 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 6:597.

⁸⁵ Godet, *1 Corinthians*, 2: 200.

⁸⁶ John G. Davies, “Pentecost and Glossolalia,” *JTS* 3/2 (1952): 228-229

⁸⁷ Robert H. Gundry, “‘Ecstatic Utterance’ (N. E. B.)?” *JTS* 17 (1966): 299-307.

⁸⁸ Christopher Forbes, *Prophecy and Inspired Speech in Early Christianity and its Hellenistic Environment* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1986).

view, M. J. Cartledge points out that at least a dozen different theories regarding the linguistic nature of glossolalia have been put forward in the modern era. These theories include:

1. The God-given ability to speak in foreign languages without having to learn them first
2. The miraculous ability to speak in the language of heaven
3. A hybrid language made up of both human and angelic languages
4. An inferior, early form of speech, possibly coded, resembling human language but not identical to it, yet capable of conveying meaning
5. An idiosyncratic prayer language dominated by archaic and foreign terms
6. Unintelligible speech
7. Unintelligible ecstatic utterance
8. “Enigmatic ‘dark sayings’”
9. “Cadences of vocalization which did not constitute discourse”
10. The miracle of Pentecost was one of hearing and not of speaking.⁸⁹

We can also add the “inarticulate groanings” of the Spirit-inspired believer in Rom 8:26 and Gerd Thiessen’s theory that glossolalia makes known to us thoughts and feelings which were formerly inaccessible.⁹⁰ Most of these theories will be addressed in the body of this treatise, especially the more dominant ones such as the “unintelligible ecstatic utterance” and “heavenly languages” hypotheses, and so they will not be enlarged upon at this juncture.

⁸⁹ M. J. Cartledge, “Nature and Function,” 136-138.

⁹⁰ Gerd Thiessen, *Psychological Aspect of Pauline Theology* (E. T. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 307.

The Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal Phenomenon

Around the mid-to-late nineteenth-century there was also a marked change in the extent of the incidence of glossolalia. Previously, tongues-speaking had been predominantly a European or British phenomenon, albeit limited. It now became a North American phenomenon that would become the cornerstone of Pentecostalism, a movement that would eventually rival the Reformation for its impact on Christendom. To a large degree this change can be attributed to the Holiness movement which, using the Methodist style camp meetings of the early 1900s and the techniques of emotional revivalism, swept across North America in the latter half of the nineteenth-century.

Among other things, the Holiness movement insisted on the literal inspiration of the Bible and taught that there was a third blessing to be had by Christians. The first was conversion. The second was sanctification. The third was “the final experience, the ‘baptism of burning love,’ the baptism of fire, of the Holy Spirit . . .” It was this unique teaching of a third blessing that opened the door for Pentecostalism with its characteristic second blessing theology of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit and its attendant tongues-speaking.⁹¹

In 1900, Charles F. Parham (1873-1929), a former Methodist minister and Holiness Christian, established the Bethel Bible College in Topeka, Kansas. This college was not a Holiness school. Nevertheless, Parham espoused the standard teachings of the Holiness movement that were current in his day, including the doctrine of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Having arrived at the conclusion that there was a definite connection between the baptism of the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues, a concerted effort to receive this baptism with its evidence of tongues-

⁹¹ Kelsey, *Tongue Speaking*, 70-74.

speaking followed. Subsequently, on January 1, 1901, Agnes Ozman, one of Parham's students, spoke in tongues. Two days later, on January 3, other Bethel Bible College students, along with Parham, also spoke in tongues. Thus was born the modern tongues movement as we know it today.⁹²

Henceforth, Parham taught that speaking in tongues was the biblical evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. He also "taught that when believers spoke in tongues they were speaking actual languages and that those who received this gift became instant missionaries." It soon became clear, however, that these so-called "missionary tongues" were glossolalic in nature, not xenolalic.⁹³

Within a few short years numerous independent Pentecostal organizations were formed, especially in the United States. Among these were the Church of God in Christ, the Church of God, the Assemblies of God, the United Pentecostal Church, the Pentecostal Holiness Church, the Apostolic Faith, the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World, The Pentecostal Free Will Baptists, the Unitarian Pentecostal Movement and the Pentecostal Church of God, to name a few.

However, the initial success of the tongues movement did not receive the endorsement of the mainline churches. In some respects speaking in tongues had become an alternative to the emotional revivalism that had helped to spawn it and, thus was mainly embraced by those organizations associated with revivalism, especially in the Holiness movement. The mainline churches, on the other hand, were wary of it, even though their scholars generally agreed that the Corinthian gift of tongues constituted some form of unintelligible ecstatic utterance. Pentecostalism had

⁹² Gromacki, *The Modern Tongues Movement*, 25; Kelsey, *Tongue Speaking*, 73-74.

⁹³ Powers, "Missionary Tongues?" 40-41.

many failings and excesses that repelled people who might otherwise have been interested in it. Fanaticism, bedlam, ignorance, lack of professionalism including an untrained ministry, proselytizing, sectarianism, and serious moral problems, brought it into disrepute.⁹⁴

Despite these difficulties, in 1960 tongues-speaking finally made its way into the mainline churches. The movement's profile was raised by the calibre of the men associated with it. "Dennis Bennett (an Episcopalian minister), Harold Bredezen (a Reformed minister), Larry Christenson (an American Lutheran pastor) and Chandler W. Sterling (bishop of the Episcopal diocese of Montana)"⁹⁵ were highly respected, well educated, articulate and intelligent.

The movement's success on college and university campuses also gave it status. It gained a following at Ivy League institutions such as Yale, Stanford and Princeton. According to the March 29, 1963, edition of *Time* magazine, twenty Yale students had experienced speaking in tongues. These were not "Holy Rollers", as the more extreme Pentecostals have been called, but members of the "sobersided Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship – Episcopalians, Lutherans, Presbyterians, and Methodists. Five have Phi Beta Kappa keys."⁹⁶ One was a Catholic. This positive coverage of the fledgling movement by *Time* and similar exposure in the secular press also gave the movement respectability. Pentecostal publications such as *Voice*, *Vision* and *View*, and *Trinity* magazine, an independent publication whose editor was a tongues convert, also had a hand in raising the movement's profile and breaking down

⁹⁴ Kelsey, *Tongue Speaking*, 82-83.

⁹⁵ Watson E. Mills, "Reassessing Glossolalia," *CC* 87/41 (1970): 1217. Copyright 2001, ATLAS Serials.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

the denominational barriers against tongues-speaking.

A major factor in this turnaround was the rising dissatisfaction with the impact that Protestantism had been making on people's lives in the 1950s. Many in the mainline denominations had become disillusioned with the liberal tradition of the modern Church and were looking for a more satisfying spiritual experience. Consequently, some showed an open interest in the experience of their tongues-speaking Pentecostal brethren. They had no desire to change denominations however, preferring "to bring the vitality of the tongues experience back into their own churches."⁹⁷

In 1966 this new movement, which became known as neo-Pentecostalism, infiltrated the Roman Catholic Church. This was largely due to the Papacy's emerging ecumenical spirit during Vatican Council II (1962-1965) and to the work of David Du Plessis, a Pentecostal at the forefront of the ecumenical movement, who "became a bridge between Rome and the world of Pentecostalism."⁹⁸

As a result of these various movements over the past 150 years, and the contemporaneous scholarly perception that glossolalia constitutes non-human utterances, this phenomenon currently boasts a following of around 600 million adherents. Followers include representatives from nearly every Protestant denomination on the face of the earth, as well as Roman Catholicism and Pentecostalism. This translates to an increase of around 60,000 percent since 1959; when there were only 1 million tongues-speakers worldwide. There is no sign of its popularity abating.

⁹⁷ Kelsey, *Tongue Speaking*, 95.

⁹⁸ Ed Tarkowski, *Part One: Foundations For Apostasy: 1950-1985*, <http://users.stargate.net/~ejt/founda1.htm>

Conclusion

In the past 200 years, modern biblical scholarship has almost universally rejected the historic view that the biblical gift of tongues constitutes xenolalia, and that it ceased to function when the apostolic church had become firmly established. The prevailing idea today is that it refers to glossolalia and that it is currently active in the church.

The first post-apostolic occurrence of glossolalia was among the second century Montanists. However, the early church rejected this phenomenon on the grounds that it did not measure up to the gifts as exercised by the apostles, and because the doctrine and behaviour of the Montanists was unorthodox. Glossolalia did not surface again until the post-reformation period (1648-1900), when it manifested itself among those groups and movements who were either unorthodox in doctrine or life, or both. Unusual physical phenomena such as falling over backwards, convulsions, foaming at the mouth, sobbing, and the like, also accompanied these manifestations.

This pattern continued into the twentieth-century. Modern Pentecostalism with its emphasis on tongue speaking grew out of the erroneous belief that this gift is the one, indispensable, sign of the baptism of the Holy Ghost. It has also exhibited bizarre behaviour. Hence the mainline churches, like the post-apostolic church, initially rejected the phenomenon, claiming that it was demonic.

So what are we to believe? Are we to believe the historical, cessationist, view of those who are closest to the biblical event in time, and who deemed the glossolalia phenomenon of the second century to be unscriptural? Or are we to believe the current view which claims that tongues means glossolalia? This view has prevailed although its proponents are removed by two millennia from the original event; it has

made its way into the modern church via groups and movements who are unorthodox in doctrine or in life, or both; and it is based somewhat on extraneous material.

History does not answer this question for us. It is simply a record of past events. What history may do in this instance, however, is to keep the tongues debate in perspective as we analyse its various sides in the context of 1 Cor 12-14. We begin this analysis with a review of the situation in Corinth that prompted Paul to write to the Corinthian church.

CHAPTER 2 - THE CHURCH IN CORINTH

Correctly interpreting the original meaning of a document requires, among other things, an understanding of its entire context. This includes both the literary context of the document itself and the broader social and historical context, or setting, in which the author wrote. These broader contexts are studied in this chapter. It is often to be regretted that what happens in society at large often influences the Christian church. Therefore an understanding of what was happening in Corinthian society in the first century A.D. will give us a clearer picture of the influences affecting the behaviours of the Corinthian Christians, causing Paul to write a letter of admonition and rebuke.

Status Gained through Wealth, Wisdom, Eloquence, Beneficence and an Entourage

Commenting on Greek society in the days of ancient Corinth, Andrew Clarke writes:

From Homeric days, Greek society had been founded on the praise and honouring of those described as *ἀγαθοί* [good] or possessing *ἀρετή* [virtue]. No higher commendation could be given to a person, and the highest goal of many in society was to strengthen their claim to these terms.⁹⁹

However, to the ancient Greeks, “good” and “goodness” did not necessarily mean moral purity, righteousness, justice or fairness, as we understand them. On the contrary, to be considered “good,” a Greek in those days had to do something beneficial for society. In times of war this meant protecting one’s family, friends and city from their enemies. In times of peace it meant using one’s talents and

⁹⁹Andrew D. Clarke, *Secular and Christian Leadership in Corinth: A Socio-Historical and Exegetical Study of 1 Corinthians 1-6*, AGJU, vol. 18 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1993), 23.

possessions to increase the political security and standing of one's own city, always providing the necessities of life for one's dependants. All this, however, cost money. Hence, only the wealthy could earn the label "good."

Initially such wealth was possessed only by the landed aristocrats. Over time some from the "lower classes" also became wealthy, thanks to increasing social mobility across the Greco-Roman world. This class of "new rich" as they were called, could then in turn flaunt their prosperity, and so also earn the label "good."

Since wealth, therefore, was the way to gain social status, esteem and honour in ancient Greece it was of supreme value. Accordingly, the rich were regarded as being far more important than the poor. In fact, "society as a whole was strongly biased in favour of those who were already privileged."¹⁰⁰ For instance, in a court of law the judge was expected to speak in favour of the man of higher rank. "This bias could even be as severe as to prevent a man of low rank even being able to bring a case against his social superiors."¹⁰¹ Since high social standing brought so many benefits "social progression was inevitably the goal of most, especially in the urban culture."¹⁰²

All Greeks, regardless of their social status, craved honour and they made no secret of it. Because high status and honour were so highly valued, the wealthy displayed their superior status ostentatiously. This led some "to enter the competitive round of ostentatious expenditure in benefactions for friends and the city. Some such people would get into serious debt through having tried to maintain appearances of

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 25.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 27.

¹⁰² Ibid., 25.

generosity.”¹⁰³ However, debt thus incurred was considered to be worthwhile if, as a result, one was honoured for one’s beneficence. “To have one’s name inscribed above the door of some important new public building, or to erect a statue to oneself with a fulsome inscription was a powerful status symbol.”¹⁰⁴

Another powerful status symbol “was to have a large following of adherents with you through the day as you pursued business, in the agora or in the courts, and a large clientele who attended your house at the outset of the day waiting to receive the daily dole of money (*sportulæ*).”¹⁰⁵ The more “tagalongs” a benefactor had in tow, the greater the public honour and recognition he would gain, as a large entourage was evidence of large beneficence. Indeed, recipients of a *beneficium*, who were commonly called clients, were expected to publicize the generosity of their patron. A client would be so loyal to his patron that even in the patron’s absence the client would go to great lengths to uphold his patron’s name. All clients were thus expected to keep praising their benefactor in public, whether the benefits they received were monetary or something else, such as political support.

Even so, bought friendships with many poor dependants were by themselves not enough to gain the esteem that was so highly prized. To boost one’s status one also needed peers for friends. According to Clarke:

It was often that the whole of a man’s career depended on the number and type of friends that he might have. A great number of friends suggested both popularity and honour, and well-chosen friends could be of particular value in an unforeseen situation of crisis, whether financial, legal or political.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Ibid., 31.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 34.

Clearly, the poor could not provide this type of strategic friendship. Well-placed friends could also be bought with gifts but, unlike poor friends, the well-off recipient was obliged to respond in kind to the gift giver. In fact well-off recipients were expected to return the favour with an even greater show of generosity. Failure to return favours thus was considered an injustice and a reason to regard the ingrate with enmity. “In this way the relationship could turn from one of friendship to one of hostility; and to incur hostility was often more costly in terms of loss of status than the trouble of maintaining the friendship.”¹⁰⁷ Hostility in relationships was not passive in nature but called for open attack, so that the eloquence of the speaker could be used to further the status of the attacker by recourse to invective. Clarke states:

With regard to hostile relationships, it should be pointed out that invective was a widely-used form of attack; its purpose was twofold. First, ‘to show by contrast how much more favoured in every way the ridiculer is than his enemy (such self-commendation may be direct or, as is more often the case, implied by the unfavourable comparison made with the enemy),’ and secondly, ‘to ensure the public humiliation and disgrace of the enemy.’¹⁰⁸

Even though trying to buy the friendship of a peer could thus backfire and make an enemy instead, the benefits to be gained outweighed the risks. To avoid making enemies, everyone engaged in gaining status had to make sure that they always reciprocated favours in full and beyond.

Another move in the game of status-seeking was to attach oneself to someone who had already achieved considerable influence in the city. The support of an influential friend or patron could be invaluable in boosting a man’s political career, especially if the friend or patron were an eloquent speaker. Oratory, so long as it was tempered with “wisdom,” was the most powerful political tool of all in the Greco-

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 33.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 36.

Roman world. Clarke, commenting on the importance of eloquence, asserts:

The spoken word was paramount: without oratory a Greek could not enter civic life, where he had to persuade his colleagues in the council or his inferiors in the assembly, to plead courts of law, and to represent his city before governors and emperors.¹⁰⁹

Wealth alone was therefore not enough for reaching the pinnacles of success, even though it could buy praise and honour in a society where “regard was given to those things which society was most dependent on.”¹¹⁰

Since only those who had the power to persuade could reach the heights of leadership, oratory became a powerful status symbol and thus a most highly prized ability. In fact, as stated by Litfin, orators were lionised in the Greco-Roman world.¹¹¹ By means of public speaking prowess, many inadequate men, ill equipped to lead, sought recognition and power. Clarke comments on the situation with reference to the historical commentators of the day. “Foolish men,” Plutach called them, who, regardless of their rank, “do not act as statesmen, but court the mob, deliver harangues, arouse factions, or under compulsion perform public services.”¹¹² Dio Chrysostom called them “deceitful people who accept praise for themselves which is rightly due to another.”¹¹³

Typical of such were the sophists, who were partly responsible for the decline in genuine eloquence in the Greco-Roman world of the first-century. Glen indicates that sophists were capable, theatrical public speakers “who could improvise on a

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 36-37.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 23.

¹¹¹ Duane Litfin, *St. Paul’s Theology of Proclamation: 1 Corinthians 1-4 and Greco-Roman Rhetoric*, SNTSMS (Cambridge: University Press, 1994), 124.

¹¹² Clarke, *Secular and Christian Leadership*, 38.

¹¹³ Ibid.

subject at a moment's notice and whose eloquence impressed the gullible mind not only as clever but as inspired (1 Cor 2:4-5)."¹¹⁴ These men craved applause, riches, and fame, and laid claim to being wise, well-born and influential and, thus, to being of the social elite. A Sophist on his first visit to a city would give a public lecture simply to display his skill and win acclaim, which, in the main, it seems, he succeeded in doing. Sophists were extremely vain. Nevertheless, they were very popular and boasted a large following.

The Sophists, by their shallowness and vanity, contributed to a decline in the quality of oratory, but in spite of this it grew even more popular. Litfin states:

. . . oratory became more prevalent than ever. In both the Roman and the Greek setting the frequency with which speakers rose to address audiences, for whatever reasons, seemed to be on the rise during the first century. The quality of oratory may have declined but the quantity had not.¹¹⁵

Those Greeks who lacked eloquence attached themselves to those who were eloquent in the hope that some of the orators' glory might rub off onto themselves and thus increase their own standing in society. The pupils of oratory were as loyal to their sophist teachers as a client was to his patron in the patron-client relationship, even in their mentor's absence.

The Greeks revered not only oratory but also "wisdom." Fee states that "all Greeks were zealous for every kind of learning,"¹¹⁶ and prided themselves on their wisdom – their ability to solve intellectual difficulties philosophically. On the same topic, Morris points out that, "no names were more honoured among them than the

¹¹⁴ J. S. Glen, *Pastoral Problems in First Corinthians* (London: Epworth, 1965), 24.

¹¹⁵ Litfin, *St Paul's Theology*, 132.

¹¹⁶ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 74-75.

names of their outstanding thinkers.”¹¹⁷ Association with the “wise,” as with the eloquent and the reputable, likewise bestowed a status on the intellectually mediocre, giving them cause to boast.

Status Gained through Boasting of Self and One's Patrons

Boasting and flattery were other widely accepted practices in the Greco-Roman world. Even though self-praise was considered to be rather odious, it was commonly practised as a means of achieving ambitions. Notorious for their self-praise were the sophists. In fact, boasting was a significant part of their display. However, the sophists were not the only ones who practised self-display. Self-display was an important and accepted aspect of leadership throughout the Greco-Roman world. Leaders would promote and glorify themselves, and their followers or friends would also praise and glorify them, gaining glory for themselves by the association.

All of this wallowing in egotistical self-praise and sycophantic flattery, the superficial glorying in oratory and human wisdom, the bias against those of lower status, and the use of wealth to buy status and followers, so prevalent in Greco-Roman society was also rampant in contemporary Corinth.

Regarding Corinth's populace, Litfin writes:

[It] was made up of an alloy of peoples drawn from across the Mediterranean. Though no doubt dominated by Greeks and Romans, with its various travellers and minority residents, Corinth must have represented as much of a cross section of the empire as one was likely to find in any single location. More Greek than Rome, more Roman than Athens, if any city of the first century deserved the hyphenated designation “Greco-Roman” it was Corinth.¹¹⁸

Therefore, it can be confidently assumed “that Corinth generally mirrored the

¹¹⁷ Leon Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, rev. ed. (Leicester: IVP, 1985, reprinted 1990), 45.

¹¹⁸ Litfin, *St Paul's Theology*, 142.

broad values of the Greco-Roman culture of which it was a part.”¹¹⁹

The corrupt values and practices so widespread in the Greco-Roman world of the first century A.D. had, it seems, also infected the Christian church in Corinth. For instance, 1 Cor 1:11-13 and 3:4-5¹²⁰ refer to four highly contentious factions in the local assembly: some Corinthian Christians claimed to be followers of Paul, others of Apollos, others of Peter, and others of Christ himself. However, as Paul, Apollos, Peter and Christ all taught the same gospel these schisms must have been based on personalities rather than on teachings. In other words, the Corinthian Christians were getting into the same sort of personality cultism that typified the patron/client or teacher/pupil relationships prevalent in the contemporary Greco-Roman world. One church member was saying, ‘I am of Paul,’ and another, ‘I *am* of Apollos’ (1 Cor 3:4). To Clarke, this verse indicates that the Corinthian Christians had adopted the worldly practice of aligning themselves with those who had considerable influence in their community to gain some glory and thus to enhance their reputation and status.¹²¹

Paul asks them: “What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul?” (1 Cor 3:5, NIV).¹²² This demonstrates that the schisms were based on personalities and not on doctrines. The Corinthian Christians were “boasting in men” (3:21), which was the reason for the Corinthian divisions (4:6), and not theological differences. “In 1 Cor 3.21, he [Paul] urges the Corinthians to stop boasting in men and immediately links it

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 143.

¹²⁰ This and subsequent references are to the *Holy Bible, New King James Version* (NKJV). Copyright © 1990 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. unless otherwise noted.

¹²¹ Cf. Clarke, *Secular and Christian Leadership*, 93.

¹²² This and subsequent references to the NIV are from the *Holy Bible, New International Version*. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, International Bible Society.

[this boasting] with further discussion of the party slogans.”¹²³

It is clear from Paul’s defence of his own apostolate in 1 Cor 9:1 ff. that there were at least some members of the local Christian community that resented his apostolic authority. The fact that he was not an eloquent speaker probably compounded the situation as well (see 2:4). Moreover, his message of a crucified saviour appeared foolish to the Greeks (2:4; 1:17-23). Both were a distinct disadvantage in a world where eloquence was revered and sages prided themselves on their ability to solve the world’s problems philosophically. They were also a distinct disadvantage in a church that had adopted the conventions of secular society and had changed their priorities in Paul’s absence.

Nevertheless, because of their fascination with learning, the Corinthian still saw merit in having a mere intellectual knowledge of the message of the cross. It would appear that they thought that the possession of this knowledge and/or being associated with certain distinguished patrons who carried the Christian gospel, demonstrated high spiritual status and therefore spiritual maturity. Their behaviour, however, only demonstrated that the message of the cross had not touched their hearts, and so proved their spiritual immaturity.

J. S. Glen comments on the position in Corinth at the time as follows:

The situation which therefore confronted Paul was one in which the Corinthians regarded ‘the Christian message as wisdom like that of the Greeks, the Christian leaders as teachers of wisdom, themselves as wise, and all this to boast about.’ In this respect their conception of the servant of God was only an extension of their own egotism and a protection against the evangelical offense of the cross. . . . The problem thus constituted by worldly wisdom within the Corinthian church was, however, only a special instance of the same problem within the world. The idolatrous exaltation of religious leaders was only a special instance of the idolatrous exaltation of men. It was consistent with the dictum of the sophists that man is the measure of all things, and with

¹²³ Clarke, *Secular and Christian Leadership*, 92.

the dogma of modern atheists that man's only hope is in himself.¹²⁴

Social Elite in the Church at Corinth Introduce Spiritual Boasting

Exacerbating these problems in the Corinthian church was the behaviour of a small number of members from the social elite. According to Clarke, it is now known that some from the upper echelons of Greco-Roman society had joined the church in Corinth.¹²⁵ He argues that Paul's statement that not many of the Corinthian Christians were of noble birth, not many were wise, not many were influential or powerful (see 1 Cor 1:26), implies there were some, albeit a small minority that fitted the categories stated.¹²⁶ Paul also admonished the elitists among his readers (1 Cor 3:18-22), by exhorting that those who considered themselves wise should become fools. This indicates that there were indeed such elitists in the Corinthian church and that they must have been as proud of their carnal wisdom as were the worldly wise.¹²⁷

So, the vanity and pride so endemic in Greek society in NT times, had, it appears, infected the Corinthian church. Christians were glorying in men, and boasting about self and their favourite teachers (1 Cor 3:18-23). Paul first mentions such boasting in 1 Cor 1:29 and 31, where he paraphrases Jer 9:23-24. In these verses Jeremiah condemns glorying in one's own wisdom, might and riches, reflecting the glorying similarly indulged in by the Greek society and the church members of Corinth at that time.¹²⁸

The boasters in the secular world, however, were even out-boasted by the

¹²⁴ Glen, *Pastoral Problems*, 24-25; cf. F. Godet, *Studies on the Epistles of St. Paul*, The Expositor's Library (E. T. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1889), 77.

¹²⁵ Clarke, *Secular and Christian Leadership*, 92.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 96.

braggarts in the Corinthian church. In addition to their carnal attainments, they also boasted about their spiritual giftedness; their “abundance of spiritual gifts which distinguished this Church above all others, and which Paul himself had recognized in the outset (i. 5, 7).”¹²⁹ Fee, on the subject of spiritual boasting, points out that, “instead of offering humble thanksgiving for gifts received (see on 1:4), the Corinthians have allowed the gifts to become a sign of status and a source of dissension.”¹³⁰ They “*possessed* their gifts—saw them as their own—and looked down on the apostle who seemed to lack so much.”¹³¹

The members of the Corinthian church not only took the credit for their own giftedness, they also regarded the possession of spiritual gifts as tokens of God’s acceptance. Fee points out that the Corinthians understood the possession of these gifts to mean that they had spiritually arrived – that they were “‘above’ the earthly, and especially ‘fleshly,’ existence of others”¹³² (cf. 1 Cor 4:6-8) and, therefore, they had all the spiritual food they needed. Barrett comments that the Corinthians were “behaving as if the age to come were already consummated, as if the saints had already taken over the kingdom (Dan. vii. 18).”¹³³ Conzelmann asserts that they acted as though the second coming of Christ and the judgment were already behind them.¹³⁴ Godet, addressing the topic, stated: “They are people who have nothing more to ask,

¹²⁹ Godet, *1 Corinthians*, 1:221.

¹³⁰ Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 170.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 171.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 172; cf. Glen, *Pastoral Problems*, 157; J. P. M. Sweet, “A Sign For Unbelievers: Paul’s Attitude To Glossolalia,” *NTS*, 13 (1966/1967): 253.

¹³³ C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, BNTC (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1968), 109.

¹³⁴ Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 88.

all whose spiritual wants are satisfied; they have reached the perfect life!”¹³⁵ Those who possessed the gifts of utterance (tongues and prophecy included) and knowledge felt especially superior, because in the secular world eloquence and knowledge bestowed high status, as discussed earlier.

So low had the Corinthian Christians fallen that they were even condoning an incestuous relationship between a young church member and his pagan stepmother (1 Cor 5:1-8). Even the contemporary pagan world condemned such incest, but the Corinthian Christians saw nothing wrong with it and so did nothing to correct it (v. 2), so puffed up (vv. 2, 6) were they with their own power and wisdom (1 Cor 1:26-31), knowledge (1 Cor 8:1-2), giftedness (1 Cor 4:6-8), and eloquence of their favourite teachers (1 Cor 3:4, 18-23; 4:6-7).

Clarke has suggested that another reason why the Corinthian church did not take a stand against this immorality was that the incestuous couple may have belonged to the social elite. As such the church members may have felt “bound by conventions as clients to a patron, and either through loyalty to him or dependence on him did not charge the man.”¹³⁶ This reconstruction is only a conjecture on Clarke’s part, but in view of Paul’s argument throughout 1 Cor 1-6, it seems feasible.¹³⁷

Social Elite in the Church at Corinth Appeal to Secular Courts to Settle In-House Disputes, Disrespect for the Poor

Another wrongdoing committed by some Corinthian Christians was the practice of appealing to the secular courts to arbitrate in their own in-house disputes. Those accused of doing this may well have belonged to the social elite, as secular

¹³⁵ Godet, *1 Corinthians*, 1:221.

¹³⁶ Clarke, *Secular and Christian Leadership*, 88.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

courts were notoriously biased in favour of those of higher social standing. The social elite in the church could therefore be confident that in a secular court they could easily defeat those of lower social standing. For those of higher status who wanted to establish their own reputation and standing over others of lower status, the secular courts would have ensured a more favourable outcome. Clarke states:

It has been shown that this practice was widespread within the secular courts, and Paul's comments in 1 Corinthians 6.7 and 8 suggest that similar animosity existed between these two brothers. . . . Such enmity would increase one's advantage in the divisions over personalities discussed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 1.12 and 3.21.¹³⁸

This un-Christian use of the secular courts by professed Christians upset Paul to the extent that he adopted a tone of irony in addressing the church members. He posited that if they were so “wise” and “spiritually mature,” how was it they could not find at least one from amongst themselves who could adjudicate their disputes for them? (1 Cor 6:1-8).

Yet another wrongdoing for which Paul had to rebuke the Corinthian Christians was their misuse of Christian liberty. He taught them that liberty does indeed result from the knowledge of the truth (Jn 8:32), but that using liberty in a way that could hurt the faith of a weaker believer is sinful (1 Cor 8:9-12). He allowed that, under certain circumstances, Christians were free to eat food that had been offered to idols without themselves being guilty of idolatry. He emphasised, however, that if eating such food gave the wrong impression to weaker believers, then stronger believers should abstain, since weaker believers may mistakenly infer that it must be acceptable to pay homage to idols as well as to Christ. It seems the “free” Christians were heedlessly eating this food oblivious to the great damage they were doing to the church, while under the delusion that they were spiritually wise and knowledgeable.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 68-69.

A further wrongdoing in this depressing catalogue of sins was the un-Christian way that the members at Corinth celebrated the Lord's Supper. This one ordinance, more than any other, should have reminded the Corinthians of their common need of Christ, of the equality of all believers, of the futility of glorying in man, and most importantly, of how we should treat each other as exemplified by Christ. But it clearly did not so remind them. According to A. R. Fausset, in their hands the very symbols that were meant to unite believers together in a common bond of love for God and for each other were unwittingly used by some to further divide the church.¹³⁹ This time the divisions were based on the status of wealth rather than on loyalty to this or to that favourite teacher, or on wisdom in the form of knowledge.

As noted earlier, the local church community included a few rich among the many poor: the "haves" and the "have-nots." There will always be the rich and the poor, even in the church – Jesus said so himself (Matt 26:11). However, the rich were not to neglect the poor, especially in the church. And yet such neglect is exactly what happened when the Corinthians met together to celebrate the Lord's Supper.

Morris reveals that the Holy Communion was accompanied by a pot-luck lunch "of the type called a 'love feast' (Jude 12; some MSS of 2 Pet 2:13)."¹⁴⁰ All were to contribute what they could, with the wealthier believers bringing extra portions for the poor who had no food of their own and were nearly always hungry. Potentially this was a marvelous opportunity for the rich to express their love for the poor, but as it turned out this event was anything but a love feast. The poor, who needed the food the most, were often late and so the rich – who always had plenty to

¹³⁹ Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset and David Brown, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1871, reprinted 1961), 1212.

¹⁴⁰ Morris, *1 Corinthians*, rev. ed., 156.

eat – went ahead and started the meal without them. By the time the poor arrived the food was gone, the rich having consumed it all.¹⁴¹ Needless to say the poor went hungry again.

This, of course, made a complete mockery of the Lord's Supper that followed, and Paul bluntly lets the Corinthians know how disgusted he is with their behaviour. In no uncertain terms he declares: "Your meetings do more harm than good" (1 Cor 11:17, NIV). Home, he says, is the place to satisfy one's hunger, not the church. In effect, they were "crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace" (Heb 6:6, NIV; cf. Matt 25:40, 45) in the person of the poor, but they could not see it. On the contrary, they considered themselves to be above reproach.

The situation was so bad in the Corinthian church that Paul did not have one decent word to say about the Corinthian Christians in the introduction to his epistle. This omission, on his part, was unusual in that Paul generally had something positive to say about those to whom he was writing in his greetings and salutations at the beginning of his letters. The one exception that Paul could find to be thankful about in regards to the Corinthians was that, in spite of their un-Christian attitude and behaviour, God had enriched them with all of his gifts, including the gifts of utterance and of knowledge (1 Cor 1:4-7). Even so, Paul was not congratulating the Corinthians on their giftedness – not even in regards to the gifts of utterance and knowledge. Rather, he was pointing the Corinthians away from self to God as the source of these gifts. In doing so he was making an immediate approach against the spiritual arrogance that had grown out of their possession of the same.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 156-157.

Paul Condemns Spiritual Arrogance and Complacency

Not so subtle, however, is Paul's statement in 1 Cor 3:1-4 that he could not speak to the Corinthians as spiritual people but rather as "babes in Christ," a term he coined that means carnal or worldly, spiritually immature. What is more, he claims that as long as the Corinthians continued to be divisive, troublesome and partial they were no more spiritual than they had been in their former, pagan days.

Paul warns this pseudo-piety has had such a detrimental effect on every aspect of the fledgling Corinthian church that he attempts to check it at every stroke of his pen. In 1 Cor 1:30, for instance, he emphasizes that it is Christ, not people, who is the Christian's wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption. In 1 Cor 4:1-2, 7 he makes the point that human beings are merely the recipients of God's grace, not its source. And in 1 Cor 5:6-8 he admonishes the Corinthians to glory in the Lord Jesus Christ, and with the building blocks of sincerity and truth to build their lives on Him alone (cf. 1 Cor 1:31; 3:11) instead of edifying self and/or their favourite teachers.

In 1 Cor 10:31-11:1 Paul appeals to the Corinthians to glorify God in everything they do, even in regards to their eating and drinking, and not to be a stumbling block to others, including their brethren and sisters in the church. He urges them to follow his example in the same way that he follows Christ's example. This example includes seeking the good of others rather than seeking one's own good, so that others too might be saved.

As early as 1 Cor 4:6, Paul holds himself up as an example of what it means to be spiritually-minded, in the hope that the Corinthians might learn not to think of man/self more highly than they ought, and that, as a result, they would cease their foolish, although culturally accepted, egotistical games of playing off one favourite teacher against another. He warned that if they did not put a stop to these potentially

church-destroying games they were in danger of losing their own souls. Hence, Paul tells them plainly to stop glorifying “men” (1 Cor 3:16-23). In the final analysis no one will be able to stand in the presence of God and boast about self, not even their favourite teachers will be able to do this. The only boasting that will be done on that day, Paul says, will be one’s boasting in Christ (1 Cor 1:26-31).

Moreover, Paul warns the Corinthians against spiritual complacency. The giftedness, of which they boasted, for example, is of itself of no moral worth at all, as demonstrated by the wilderness experiences of the Israelites under Moses (1 Cor 10:1-12). Even though the children of Israel were the apple of God’s eye and the recipients of abundant supernatural tokens of God’s love for them, the Hebrews of the Exodus were not immune from sin or its penalty. On the contrary, they were guilty of the sins of idolatry, fornication, murmuring, and of lusting after the fleshpots of Egypt, etc. – sins for which they eventually paid the ultimate price.

The inference is clear. The Corinthians, although blessed with all of the gifts of the Spirit (see 1 Cor 1:5, 7), were as guilty as their Hebrew forebears were of the sins of idolatry and fornication, and so on. This was demonstrated in their adulation of their favourite teachers, their toleration of immorality in the church, their attempts to overthrow Paul’s apostolic authority, and in their hankering after the worldly wisdom that they were supposed to have left behind at the time of their conversion.

Some of the Corinthians may have liked to think that they were ‘above’ the earthly and especially ‘fleshly’ existence of others but in reality they were no different from anybody else. They were subject to the same weaknesses as all the sons and daughters of Adam (cf. 1 Cor 10:13). Paul warned them if they did not take stock of themselves they were in grave danger of suffering a similar fate to that which befell the Israelites who perished in the wilderness under Moses (cf. 1 Cor 16:22).

Our subsequent study of 1 Cor 12-14 will show that the above misconceptions and practices of the Corinthian believers:

1. Had led to spiritual elitism within the church, especially among its more spectacularly gifted members (cf. 12:21-25; 13:1-3; 14:5).
2. Had caused the Corinthians' to develop a fetish for the "greater" gifts (see comments on 12:31 in chap. 5).
3. Were responsible for all sorts of behavioural problems within the assembly itself.

Not only that, it will show that the local glossolalists were at the forefront of this activity and that these chapters are specifically targetting these misconceptions and practices.

Paul's opening remarks in 1 Cor 12:1 concerning τῶν πνευματικῶν imply that the Corinthians were in fact ignorant of genuine spirituality, and that he is about to inform them of its inherent qualities. In the process he will put the gifts into perspective, correct the misconception that giftedness equates to spirituality, and endeavour to curb the excesses of the pneumatics in the assembly, especially those with the gift of tongues (cf. 13:1, 8; 14:2-40).

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that all first-century Greeks craved honour and that if they were to receive it they had to be wealthy, eloquent and wise. Failing that, individuals would attach themselves to leading public figures in the hope that they would gain kudos through association. In return, they would praise the latter who also praised themselves.

It has also been shown that in Paul's absence the Corinthian church had adopted these conventions of secular society, by forming several personality cults

within the community that were based on their favourite teachers, in whom they boasted. Members even boasted about their own giftedness, which they confused with spirituality. Paul, in the context of addressing a raft of other transgressions caused by this reliance on human wisdom, rather than on God, attacks this status-seeking behaviour as indicative of spiritual immaturity and admonishes the Corinthians to seek spiritual maturity instead.

CHAPTER 3 – SPIRITUAL THINGS

Most commentators translate the term $\tau\hat{\omega}\nu$ πνευματικῶν in 1 Cor 12:1 as neuter and therefore interpret it as “spiritual things,”¹⁴² which they tend to understand as “gifts.”¹⁴³ This perception that “things” equals “gifts” has had a direct bearing on the subsequent translation of τὰ πνευματικά (14:1) and πνευμάτων (14:12) also as “spiritual gifts,” which, in turn, has generally affected the way that both verses have usually been interpreted. For instance, the translation of τὰ πνευματικά as “spiritual gifts” in 14:1 gives the impression that the contrast in this verse is between the gift of prophecy and the rest of the charismata and, therefore, that this particular gift is to be desired above the other gifts of the Spirit.

In keeping with this distinction the subsequent contrast in v. 5 is understood to be between the gift of tongues and the gift of prophecy, with prophecy being the preferred choice of the two gifts (see chap. 10). To some commentators, the translation of πνευμάτων as “spiritual gifts” in 14:12 follows this theme and, therefore, indicates that the Corinthians were to seek only those gifts that would build up the church. On the other hand, the general feeling is that it simply means that they were to use their gifts to build up the church (see chap. 11).

Since the translation of $\tau\hat{\omega}\nu$ πνευματικῶν as “spiritual gifts” in 1 Cor 12:1 has played such an important part in the interpretation of 1 Cor 14, and because the latter is an integral part of Paul’s corrective regarding the misconceptions and practices of the Corinthian church, the main focus of this chapter will be on whether or not this translation is a valid one.

¹⁴² Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 575.

¹⁴³ Cf. Leon Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, TNTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1958), 166.

Paul's opening remarks concerning genuine spirituality in 1 Cor 12:1 read as follows: Περὶ δὲ τῶν πνευματικῶν, ἀδελφοί, οὐ θέλω ὑμᾶς ἀγνοεῖν. The words περὶ δὲ τῶν or a similar expression περὶ δὲ ὧν have been used elsewhere in 1 Corinthians (see 7:25; 8:1 and 7:1 respectively) to refer to issues that the Corinthians had raised in a letter to him. We can gather that their letter expressed concern over the scandalous behaviour of some of their members, including what was taking place in their worship services.

According to Morris, the recurrence of the phrase περὶ δὲ τῶν in 1 Cor 12:1 indicates that here Paul is most likely responding to another of those concerns, “though exactly what they had asked is not clear.”¹⁴⁴ It is unclear, he adds, because it is not certain whether “*gifts* should be added after *spiritual* (as NIV, AV, etc.).”¹⁴⁵ It is uncertain because the word χάρισμα (see vv. 4, 9, etc.), not πνευματικός, is the usual word for “spiritual gift.”¹⁴⁶ Πνευματικός in the plural can mean “spiritual people” or “spiritual things,” depending on whether it is in the masculine or neuter gender, respectively.¹⁴⁷

Spiritual Persons

Hurd takes the view that τῶν πνευματικῶν in 1 Cor 12:1 is masculine in gender and therefore should be interpreted as “spiritual people.” The main focus of his argument is on the Corinthians’ fixation with the gift of tongues. He states that the Corinthians were so obsessed with this charisma they thought it was “the main (or

¹⁴⁴ Morris, *1 Corinthians*, rev. ed., 163.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. Ibid; BDAG, 837.

only) evidence of possession by the Spirit.”¹⁴⁸ As a result, they held that only those who could speak in tongues were spiritual. This is evident from what Paul says about unity in diversity in chap. 12 and the pre-eminence of love in chap. 13. These chapters clearly show that “Paul was disturbed over the narrowness and uniformity of the Corinthians’ view of the operation of the Spirit.”¹⁴⁹

According to Hurd, Paul initially responds to this situation by establishing that the Spirit is known primarily by the effect he has on people, in particular by their confession of Christ. Not only that, genuinely spiritual people, he says, are gifted by the Spirit in a variety of ways, not just one.¹⁵⁰ Similarly, they may hold one or more of several Spirit-ordained church offices or ministries (vv. 4-10), all of which are necessary if the church is to function effectively.

Hurd adds that it would appear, from the way Paul has structured each of his three lists of spiritual gifts in 1 Cor 12 (vv. 8-10; 28; and 29-30), with ‘the utterance of wisdom’ appearing at the top of the first list and ‘apostles’ heading the other two, that they are given in order of importance. Since speaking in tongues and the interpretation of tongues consistently appear at the bottom of these lists, it is apparent that Paul considered glossolalia to be “the lowest of God’s spiritual blessings” and that the Corinthians’ zeal for it was misplaced.¹⁵¹ Hurd also claims it is evident from Paul’s many arguments against the practice of speaking in tongues in church (1 Cor 14), including the proposition that “love” curtails the use of this gift in public

¹⁴⁸ J. C. Hurd, Jr., *The Origin of 1 Corinthians* (London: SPCK, 1965), 193.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 191.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 194.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 192.

worship,¹⁵² that he not only “‘damned’ glossolalia ‘with faint praise,’”¹⁵³ but also was dealing with a church which was actively promoting this gift in the local assembly.

Hurd concludes that this sustained “attack upon the notion that speaking in tongues was the single or best manifestation of the Spirit at work in the Church”¹⁵⁴ indicates the Corinthians were not asking “for information or clarification” but were, in fact, defending their position on glossolalia.¹⁵⁵ Hence, Paul was not answering a polite question put to him by them, but rather was attempting to persuade them that they needed to “broaden their viewpoint” as far as the Spirit’s activity was concerned. Thus, the Corinthians’ original “question” may have been: “Concerning spiritual men: How is it possible to test for the Spirit? How can we (or anyone else) distinguish between spiritual men? When you were with us and spoke with tongues you gave us no instruction on this point.”¹⁵⁶

F. F. Bruce similarly interprets τῶν πνευματικῶν as “spiritual persons” in 1 Cor 12:1 claiming, without elaboration, that this interpretation is more likely than the alternative: “spiritual gifts.” Further, he limits such persons to those “endowed with **spiritual** gifts (as in 2.15; 3.1),”¹⁵⁷ even though he later writes that every “true Christian” is in fact a “spiritual person.”¹⁵⁸

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 189.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 192.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 194.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 195.

¹⁵⁷ Bruce, *1 & 2 Corinthians*, 116-117.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 118.

Speaking with Tongues

House and Robinson narrow the scope of τῶν πνευματικῶν in 1 Cor 12:1 even further. Completely independent of each other, both writers claim that it is a Corinthian term that refers to “speaking with/in tongues”¹⁵⁹ or, as House suggests, “tongues-speakers” themselves.¹⁶⁰ They acknowledge that this is not the usual meaning given to οἱ πνεύματικοι in 12:1, nevertheless they insist that here Paul adopts the special meaning that the Corinthians had given it.¹⁶¹ Proof of this, Robinson contends, is that Paul’s initial response to the Corinthians’ question regarding οἱ πνεύματικοι in 12:2-3 fails to mention the χαρίσματα. This omission virtually rules out “spiritual gifts” as a possible interpretation of the term.

On the other hand, Paul’s specific reference to the type of utterance one can expect from a genuine pneumatic (v. 3) would suggest that the Corinthians were seeking to discover the exact nature of certain types of ecstatic utterances.¹⁶² House similarly writes that “evidence of this specific meaning for πνευματικὸς is that 1 Corinthians 12:2-3 concern ‘speaking by the Spirit of God.’”¹⁶³ Appeal is made also to 14:1, where, it is alleged, the μᾶλλον δέ in this verse (μᾶλλον δέ ἵνα προφητεύητε) is most likely adversative and therefore distinguishes prophesying from τὰ πνευματικά.¹⁶⁴ House assumes from the ensuing contrast

¹⁵⁹ D. W. B. Robinson, “Charismata versus Pneumatika: Paul’s Method of Discussion,” *RTR*, 31 (1972): 50; Wayne House, “Tongues and the Mystery Religions of Corinth,” *BibSac*, 140 (1983): 144.

¹⁶⁰ House, “Tongues,” 144.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² Robinson, “Charismata,” 50-51.

¹⁶³ House, “Tongues,” 144.

¹⁶⁴ Robinson, “Charismata,” 51-52.

between prophesying and speaking in tongues (vv. 2-5) that τὰ πνευματικά refers to the latter.¹⁶⁵

Both commentators urge that Paul makes the same distinction between prophesying and τὰ πνευματικά in 14:37, where he challenges anyone who thinks he is a prophet or πνευματικός to acknowledge that what he is writing comes from God. According to Robinson, this verse proves that Paul's use of the term "pneumatic" in 1 Cor 12-14 excludes prophesying and therefore the gifts in general.¹⁶⁶ Other than for tongues there is no evidence, Robinson claims, to suggest that the Corinthian believers "were thinking of any other activity as 'pneumatic'."¹⁶⁷

House, on the other hand, appeals again to the contrast between prophesying and speaking in tongues throughout chap. 14 as proof that here πνευματικός equates with one who speaks in tongues.¹⁶⁸ What Paul wanted to show the Corinthians, he suggests, is that their pneumatics needed to bring their utterances into line with God's purposes for the χαρίσματα. Tongues, House asserts, is a genuine χάρισμα with a specific purpose (14:21-22), but, contrary to the Corinthian mind-set, it was never meant to be used "for personal edification or to show possession by the god."¹⁶⁹

The Abuse of Tongues in Corinth

Most, if not all, commentators would agree with Hurd, Robinson and House

¹⁶⁵House, "Tongues," 144.

¹⁶⁶Robinson, "Charismata," 51-52.

¹⁶⁷Ibid., 51.

¹⁶⁸House, "Tongues," 144.

¹⁶⁹Ibid.

that the Corinthians had grossly exaggerated the importance of speaking in tongues¹⁷⁰ and that their enthusiasm for this gift had caused serious problems in the local assembly.¹⁷¹ It is widely held that the Corinthians considered glossolalia to be the highest status symbol of all¹⁷² and, commensurate with its exalted station, the ultimate evidence of spiritual maturity. As a result, the local glossolalists, in the fashion of the sophists, ostentatiously paraded their gift in public,¹⁷³ using the regular church services as a forum for self-display.

Further, it is understood that this misconception and abuse of the gift of tongues not only contributed to the pride, jealousy, rivalry, boasting and elitism endemic in the Corinthian assembly, but was also behind the question regarding τῶν πνευματικῶν in 1 Cor 12:1. Therefore it was at the very heart of Paul's discourse on tongues in 1 Cor 12-14, the primary purpose of which was to correct this abuse¹⁷⁴ and to restore equilibrium in the local church.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁰ Mitton, "Notes on Recent Exposition," 226; Olshausen, *1 & 2 Corinthians*, 214; Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 6 vols. (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, reprint 1953), 6:577.

¹⁷¹ A. Robertson and A. Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of Saint Paul to the Corinthians*, 2nd ed., ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1911, reprinted 1958), 267; cf. Victor Paul Furnish, *The Theology of the First Letter to the Corinthians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 97.

¹⁷² Cf. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 586; Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 259; Murphy-O'Connor, *1 Corinthians*, NTM (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1979), 128; Furnish, *Theology of 1 Corinthians*, 89.

¹⁷³ Mitton, "Notes on Recent Exposition," 227; Alford, *Greek Testament*, 317.

¹⁷⁴ Fee, "Toward a Pauline," 26. Cf. Albert Barnes, *Notes, Explanatory and Practical on the First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (London: George Routledge & Co., 1853), 274; Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 276; Furnish, *Theology of 1 Corinthians*, 87-88.

¹⁷⁵ Olshausen, *1 & 2 Corinthians*, 215-216. Cf. Craig Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan,

Fee follows a similar line of argument when he states, “even the most casual reading of 1 Cor 12-14 makes it abundantly clear that the problem has to do with the gift of tongues.” Firstly, this is evidenced by the fact that “‘speaking in tongues’ is mentioned or referred to at least 19 times” in 1 Cor 12-14. Secondly, “it is the only gift that makes all seven ‘gift lists’ where in the course of the argument Paul lists or refers consecutively to three or more gifts.” Thirdly, Paul’s long argument against the Corinthians’ abuse of tongues in chap. 14 follows the same pattern as his other arguments in chaps. 1-4 and 8-10. That is, he addresses the larger theological issues arising out of the Corinthians’ position before responding specifically to the problem at hand, with “chs. 12-13 in a more general and theological way” setting the tone for his correctives in chap. 14.¹⁷⁶

The Corinthians’ preoccupation with glossolalia, Fee insists, had “not only destroyed the church as a worshipping community, but it had also given them a very myopic view of the Spirit.”¹⁷⁷ This in turn had led them to think that they were genuinely spiritual people and that they were in fact “already realizing the future in its fullness,” which accounts for their denial of the resurrection from the dead (see 1 Cor 15).

Not only does Paul seek to correct the Corinthians’ erroneous view of tongues, Fee urges, but he also tries to replace their pseudo-piety with genuine spirituality: “A true work of the Spirit, Paul says, will be judged by its content, not simply its mode (12:1-3), and it will have love as its aim (- the edification of the whole community),

1995), 268-269; Barnes, *Notes on First Corinthians*, 274; Furnish, *Theology of 1 Corinthians*, 87-88.

¹⁷⁶ Gordon D. Fee, “Tongues – Least of the Gifts? Some Exegetical Observations on 1 Corinthians 12-14,” *Pneuma* 2/2 (1980): 6.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

not ‘spirituality’ as such (13:1-3).”¹⁷⁸ The point is also made that Paul is not informing the Corinthians in matters of which they are ignorant,¹⁷⁹ but rather that he is arguing aggressively against the way the Corinthians differed with him on issue after issue, including the gift of tongues.¹⁸⁰

Spiritual Gifts

As mentioned at the outset of this chapter, most commentators translate the term τῶν πνευματικῶν in 1 Cor 12:1 as neuter and therefore interpret it as “spiritual things,”¹⁸¹ which they usually equate with spiritual gifts.¹⁸² The reason most commonly given for this viewpoint is that in the subsequent discourse (chaps. 12-14) Paul has a great deal to say on the topic of gifts.¹⁸³ In particular, the reference to τὰ πνευματικά in 1 Cor 14:1 is deemed to be a more comprehensive treatment of the term τῶν πνευματικῶν in 12:1 and “can only relate to gifts, not persons.”¹⁸⁴ It is also argued that πνευματικός (12:1) and χαρίσματα (12:4) “cover the same

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 8.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 4.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 5.

¹⁸¹ Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 575.

¹⁸² Cf. Morris, *1 Corinthians*, 166.

¹⁸³ Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 575. This may also explain why Lexicons allow πνευματικῶν (12:1) and πνευματικά (14:1) when used as a substantive with the definite article to also mean “spiritual gifts.” Cf. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature. A translation and adaptation of the fourth revised and augmented edition of WALTER BAUER'S Griechisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der übrigen urchristlichen Literatur*, 2nd edition, revised and augmented by F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker from Walter Bauer's fifth edition, 1958 (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1957, 1979).

¹⁸⁴ Ralph P. Martin, *The Spirit and the Congregation: Studies in 1 Corinthians 12-15* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 8; cf. Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 575; Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 204.

ground”¹⁸⁵ and therefore have the same meaning.¹⁸⁶ In addition, the context appears to be more concerned with the way the Corinthians conduct their worship than with the types of individuals who make up the congregation.¹⁸⁷

Problems with the Spiritual Gifts Viewpoint

However, restricting the meaning of τῶν πνευματικῶν in 1 Cor 12:1 to “spiritual gifts” alone is also problematic. It would appear from the immediate context and from how Paul uses πνευματικός elsewhere in this epistle that in this passage τῶν πνευματικῶν entails a great deal more than simply spiritual gifts.

When Paul refers to the gifts of the Spirit his own preferred term is χαρίσματα (the plural form of χάρισμα),¹⁸⁸ not πνευματικός. In 1 Cor 12:4, 9, 28-31 he uses χαρίσματα to refer specifically to one or all of the gifts of the Spirit for ministry.¹⁸⁹ However, in the same chapter he also lists some other manifestations of the Spirit, apart from these gifts, which also come under the umbrella of the term τῶν πνευματικῶν in v. 1. These other manifestations of the Spirit include confessing that Jesus is Lord (v. 3), and different kinds of ministries (Gk. διακονιῶν) and activities (Gk. ἐνεργημάτων) (vv. 5-6). In chap. 13 Paul speaks of still other spiritual things; namely, faith, hope and love.

In one sense all these “manifestations” of the Spirit are gifts of God, as is life itself. However, this broad use of the term “gift” is not what is generally understood

¹⁸⁵ Martin, *Spirit and Congregation*, 8; cf. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 204.

¹⁸⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, 35.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ Cf. W. G. Putman, “Spiritual Gifts,” in *NBD*, 2nd ed., org. ed. J. D. Douglas (London: The Intersociety Fellowship, 1962), 1141.

¹⁸⁹ Cf. BDAG, 1081.

by the term “spiritual gifts,” but is more accurately designated “grace-gift.” The term “spiritual gifts” is generally understood to refer to the gifts for ministry. Therefore, to list all these manifestations of the Spirit under the one heading of “spiritual gifts,” as the common translation of τῶν πνευματικῶν in 1 Cor 12:1 tends to do, is potentially misleading. Moreover, if the broader “grace-gifts” (which include the gifts for ministry) were Paul’s intended theme in this passage, then χάρισμα would be a more appropriate term, and a less confusing word than πνευματικός to express this concept.

Notes on spiritual gifts in the *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* define

χάρισμα as follows:

Χάρισμα denotes God’s saving action in Christ (Rom 5:15-16) and the gift of eternal life (6:23). More generally, in Romans 11:29 *χάρισμα* probably refers to the series of gracious acts on behalf of Israel whereby God made Israel’s calling and election sure. In 2 Corinthians 1:11 it probably refers to a particular action of God that brought Paul deliverance from deadly peril. Otherwise *χάρισμα* refers to divine grace as mediated through individuals, with Paul presumably thinking of the sort of utterances and deeds that he illustrates in Romans 12:6-8 and 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 (so in Rom 1:11; 1 Cor 1:7; 7:7; 12:4,9,28,29,30; similarly 1 Pt 4:10).¹⁹⁰

It is significant that χάρισμα is sometimes used interchangeably with δόμα.

Therefore δόμα may be another more appropriate and less confusing word than πνευματικός or πνευματικῶν to convey the broader concept of “grace-gift.”

Another reason for claiming that τῶν πνευματικῶν in 12:1 must mean more than just spiritual gifts, is the meaning Paul gives to πνευματικός elsewhere in this epistle. In 1 Cor 2:9-13 Paul clearly uses πνευματικοῖς to refer to more than just spiritual gifts:

But as it is written: Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered

¹⁹⁰ “Spiritual Gifts,” in *BEB*, 2 vols., gen. ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 2:1993.

into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him. But God has revealed *them* to us through his Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God; that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things [πνευματικά] with spiritual [πνευματικοῖς].

It is claimed by Lenski that there are many who take these “spiritual things” or “the things which God has prepared for those who love Him” to be referring to heaven and the joys awaiting the saved in the hereafter (“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for those who love Him”). However, he proposes that Paul is here referring to more than just the joys awaiting us in the hereafter. He is also clearly referring to the things of God in general, which we cannot begin to grasp or appreciate with our mere physical senses or conceive of in our unaided minds. “All that God offers us in the gospel, all that he has prepared for us, and all he does for us in Christ Jesus, not only the glory of the joy in heaven [is intended] . . . If we wish to specify what things God thus made ready we shall not go amiss if we mention pardon, sonship, peace, etc., and finally everlasting glory in Christ Jesus.”¹⁹¹

In short, “the spiritual things” referred to here are “the things of God” which are spiritually discerned; namely, the revealed will of God (including the gifts of the Spirit and their purpose), “His divine nature, attributes, and counsels.”¹⁹² Also included are the things that God has prepared for those who love Him, which are so dim to the eye of faith now (cf. 1 Cor 13:12), but nevertheless are revealed to us by

¹⁹¹ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1937), 104-105.

¹⁹² Jamieson, Fausset and Brown, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 1191.

His Spirit in the new birth. The point is made that Paul clearly uses πνευματικοῖς in 1 Cor 2:13 to mean more than simply the gifts of the Spirit.

The Things of the Spirit

Thiselton points out a wide range of writers conclude there is not enough objective evidence and very little difference in sense between spiritual persons and spiritual gifts to warrant an either/or interpretation of τῶν πνευματικῶν in 1 Cor 12:1. These writers all contend the phrase refers to both possibilities. However, their emphasis is not on the people or the gifts themselves but rather on what makes both people and gifts spiritual.

According to Thiselton, the key issue is: “What criteria are we to apply for specific people or specific gifts to be considered genuinely ‘of the Holy Spirit’?”¹⁹³ Fee, similarly writes that the “primary focus of πνευματικά is on the Spirit” rather than on the gifts themselves or on those who are the beneficiaries of the Spirit’s activity.¹⁹⁴ Χαρίσματα, he reminds us, is the word Paul uses to refer to the specific manifestations of the Spirit, in particular the gifts of the Spirit, whereas πνευματικά is used “when the emphasis is on the Spirit” himself.¹⁹⁵ Therefore the better translation of πνευματικά, he suggests, “might be ‘the things of the Spirit,’ which would refer primarily to spiritual manifestations, from the perspective of the Spirit’s endowment; at the same time it would point toward those who are so endowed.”¹⁹⁶

¹⁹³ Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 910.

¹⁹⁴ Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 576.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

To paraphrase Thiselton, it is all about what comes from the Spirit of God.¹⁹⁷

We can gather from the preceding arguments that limiting τῶν πνευματικῶν in 12:1 to either “spiritual persons” or “spiritual gifts” or to the gift of tongues or tongues-speakers in particular is far too rigid. The subsequent references to the gifts of the Spirit and other Spirit-ordained ministries and services, along with faith, hope and love in chaps. 12-14 militates against the view that it refers exclusively to people, albeit gifted people and, therefore, that it is virtually impossible to sustain.

Conversely, the same references to faith, hope and love and other Spirit-ordained ministries and services strongly indicate that the meaning cannot be limited to spiritual gifts alone. Even though it is clear that the term τῶν πνευματικῶν (12:1) includes the gifts of the Spirit, it would appear that it entails “spiritual things” more generally. If this is the case, the usual translation of τὰ πνευματικά (14:1) and πνεύματων (14:12) as “spiritual gifts” may be misleading, and will affect the meaning of both verses (see chap. 7).

In spite of the different views regarding the meaning of τῶν πνευματικῶν in 1 Cor 12:1, commentators, as noted previously, are generally in agreement that the Corinthians’ preoccupation with the gift of tongues had caused serious problems in the local assembly. Not only that, the consensus is that this fetish for tongues was behind their query regarding τῶν πνευματικῶν, and that it is the main reason for Paul’s discourse on tongues in 1 Cor 14. With this background in mind we are now ready to analyse in detail what Paul says in 1 Cor 12-14 about “spiritual things,” including what constitutes genuine spirituality and the proper use of the gifts of the Spirit, especially the gift of tongues.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.; cf. Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 910.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have found that the term τῶν πνευματικῶν in 1 Cor 12:1 can be taken as either masculine or neuter plural and, therefore, that it can be translated as either “spiritual persons” or “spiritual things.” We found also that most exegetes opt for the neuter gender and therefore translate this phrase as spiritual things, which they usually equate with “spiritual gifts.” On the other hand, some translate it as “spiritual persons,” whereas House and Robinson contend that it refers to “speaking in tongues” or to “tongues-speakers” themselves. Still others propose that τῶν πνευματικῶν encompasses both persons and gifts, but the emphasis, they suggest, is not so much on the people or the gifts themselves as it is on what makes both people and gifts spiritual. However, it cannot be both masculine and neuter at the same time.

From the various arguments presented, it would appear that τῶν πνευματικῶν in 1 Cor 12:1 does not refer to any of the above views. Rather, it refers to “spiritual things” in general, which includes the gifts of the Spirit and other Spirit-ordained ministries and services, as well as God’s plans and purposes for the human race. Faith, hope and love also come under its umbrella. On the other hand, this chapter has shown that commentators on all sides of the tongues debate generally agree that the Corinthians’ inordinate obsession with the gift of tongues and their resulting abuse of the same was behind their query concerning τῶν πνευματικῶν in 1 Cor 12:1. They also concur that the same is at the heart of Paul’s discourse in chaps. 12-14.

CHAPTER 4 – THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT

Reference has already been made to the fact that some of the Corinthian believers had assumed that certain gifts of the Spirit conferred upon their possessors a higher spiritual status or indicated a fuller acceptance with God. In 1 Cor 12 Paul goes to extreme lengths to show that this assumption was wrong by explaining that all spiritual manifestations, including the charismata, have the same divine source and therefore are not open to rivalry, jealousy, or elitism. A diversity of gifts, he emphasizes, is ordained by God.

Moreover, the gifts of the Spirit all have the same common purpose of edifying the entire church. Although most commentators pay lip-service to this principle, there are many who insist there are in fact two types of gifts, those which edify the church and those which do not. It is the intention of this chapter and the next to analyse in detail what Paul says in regards to these matters and to confirm that there is only one type of spiritual gift – those that edify the church. This includes the gift of tongues.

God as the Source of Spirituality and Spiritual Things

The failure of the Corinthians to give God the credit for their giftedness and hence their spirituality was, it seems, in part a carry-over from their own idolatrous past. Pagan idol worshippers tried hard to induce favours from their gods by offering worship and sacrifices as an exchange, but with little success. Those dumb pagan deities were incapable of doing anything for, or making anything known to, their worshippers¹⁹⁸ (1 Cor 12:2). Because of this background, perhaps the Corinthians saw God as just another impersonal and unresponsive deity. On the other hand, the

¹⁹⁸ Cf. Morris, *1 Corinthians*, 167.

Christian message as taught by Paul and others showed the converts to Christianity that the ways of the living God are not the ways of the pagan gods. The Holy Spirit not only communicates with man, says Paul, but he is also exclusively responsible for man's attainments of genuine spirituality (v. 3).

Glen points out that a chief characteristic of this genuine spirituality is honouring Jesus in speech (1 Cor 12:3).¹⁹⁹ This was in stark contrast to the speech of the Corinthians, which, apparently, failed to honour Jesus – including when they spoke in tongues. It seems that they even went so far as to dishonour Christ by their words (see 1 Cor 1:10-13; 3:1-4; 14:23-25). This failure to honour God in speech was just one way the members at Corinth indicated they were not spiritually superior (as they aspired and claimed to be) in spite of their giftedness.

The Pagan Connection

Paul's remarks about the Corinthians being "led astray to dumb idols" in their pre-Christian days (12:2) have caused the majority of NT scholars²⁰⁰ to see in them "an analogy between pagan and Christian ecstasy, or between the ways in which people are led by the spiritual forces behind pagan and Christian religion."²⁰¹ More specifically, as pointed out by Cartledge²⁰² and by Turner,²⁰³ they have appealed to phenomenological similarities between early Christian glossolalia and inspired speech in Hellenistic religion as proof of the ecstatic nature of this gift. The most commonly

¹⁹⁹ Glen, *Pastoral Problems*, 183

²⁰⁰ Cartledge, "Nature and Function," 141.

²⁰¹ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 274. Cf. Hurd, *The Origin of 1 Corinthians*, 227; House, "Tongues," 141.

²⁰² Cartledge, "Nature and Function," 141.

²⁰³ Max Turner, *The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts: Then and Now* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1996), 227.

cited parallel, notes Cartledge, is the ecstatic speech of the oracle and its subsequent interpretation by the priest at Delphi.²⁰⁴ The wild, erotic, self-emasculating and ecstatic frenzy associated with the worship of Dionysius and Cybele²⁰⁵ also features regularly with writers.²⁰⁶

In addition to his comments concerning the Corinthians' pre-conversion religious experiences in the Mystery Religions in v. 2, Paul uses the verb μαίνομαι ("mad") to describe the response pagan observers would give to a hypothetical all-tongues worship service (14:23). This is the same word the Greeks used to describe the religious frenzy associated with the pagan mystery religions, where the worshippers were swept away into uncontrolled ecstasy by demonic powers.²⁰⁷ This association, Johnson argues, suggests that, as far as appearances go, Paul could see no difference between glossolalia and the mantic prophesying of the pagan cults.²⁰⁸

House sees further evidence of the influence of the mystery religions on the Corinthians' style of worship in the wording of 14:12. The term πνευμάτων (lit., "spirits"), he asserts, "implies their present 'devotion was to spiritual matters *per se*, independent of Christ-centered worship and congregational-oriented edification.'"²⁰⁹

Against these "appeals to supposedly parallel phenomena in the Graeco-Roman world," Forbes' 1995 study, *Prophecy and Inspired Speech*, has shown conclusively that a substantial parallel with early Christian glossolalia does not

²⁰⁴ Cartledge, "Nature and Function," 141-142.

²⁰⁵ E.g., House, "Tongues," 137-138.

²⁰⁶ Cartledge, "Nature and Function," 141-142.

²⁰⁷ Cf. Victor C. Pfitzner, *First Corinthians*, CRC (Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1982), 224-225.

²⁰⁸ Johnson, "Tongues," 598.

²⁰⁹ House, "Tongues," 145.

exist.²¹⁰ Forbes found that the oracle's speech at Delphi, for instance, "was neither 'ecstatic' nor unintelligible, and . . . was commonly characterised by oracular obscurity."²¹¹ Forbes also found the frenzied worship of Dionysius and Cybele to be substantially different from glossolalia in that it was more ritualistic and invocatory than oracular,²¹² whereas glossolalia "is seen as revelation and praise."²¹³ These findings, insists Thiselton, do not rule out "ecstasy" as a possible option for glossolalia but they do show that justification for this understanding of tongues must, of necessity, come from elsewhere.²¹⁴

Different Gifts but the Same Source

As mentioned in the previous chapters, the Corinthians not only took the credit for and were proud of their giftedness (1 Cor 4:6-8), they also competed against each other for spiritual status based on whose gift was supposedly the greater one.²¹⁵ This is evident from, or, at least, is very strongly implied by, what Paul says about the gifts of the Spirit in 1 Cor 12:4-31, especially vv. 14-26.²¹⁶ This passage is usually divided into two sections by commentators, with the second section supporting and expanding

²¹⁰ See Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 980; cf. Cartledge, "Nature and Function," 142.

²¹¹ Forbes, *Prophecy*, 168.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Ibid., 169.

²¹⁴ Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 980.

²¹⁵ See D. Moody Smith, "Glossolalia and Other Spiritual Gifts in a New Testament Perspective," *Int* 28 (1974): 309; Glen, *Pastoral Problems*, 157; Morris, *1 Corinthians*, 169.

²¹⁶ See Smith, "Glossolalia," 309.

on the first.²¹⁷ The first section is made up of vv. 4-11, which stress that there are multiple gifts, ministries and activities in the Christian church, but the same divine source for them all (God), and that the Holy Spirit distributes the gifts among the church members as he sees fit. The purpose of the gifts is likewise emphasized and an *ad hoc* list of gifts given, with tongues and their interpretation placed at the bottom of this list.

The second section (vv. 12-31) of this passage is primarily concerned with unity in diversity in the church and is based on a modification of Menenius Agrippa's popular Greco-Roman analogy of the human body, which, in the main, the ancients compared to the state. In order to quell the plebeian revolt against the social injustices suffered by the working class in Rome, Menenius explained that, in the same way that the stomach was necessary for the health of all the other body parts, a social hierarchy, was just as necessary for the smooth running of society. Paul, on the other hand, compares the human body to the church and uses it to the opposite effect. In order to arrest an alarming trend in the Corinthian assembly to make more of one gift than another, he emphasizes the equality of all body parts and therefore of all Christians, regardless of what gifts they might have and what functions they may perform in the church.²¹⁸

Thus, when Paul speaks of a diversity of gifts in the church which have the same Divine source (vv. 4, 11), he is making the point that since it is the same Spirit who gives all of the gifts, and he is not at odds with himself, the Corinthians, likewise,

²¹⁷ Furnish, *Theology of 1 Corinthians*, 89.

²¹⁸ Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 102-103.; cf. Barrett, *1 Corinthians*, 287; Héring, *1 Corinthians*, 129-130; Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 258-259.

should not be at odds with each other over their giftedness.²¹⁹ Kistemaker echoes the sentiments of others when he writes, “because the Holy Spirit stands behind every gift distributed to the people, there ought not to be any pride or division among the Corinthians. The Spirit does not initiate separation. Rather, he promotes unity.”²²⁰ Barrett remarks that “gifts are shared out among Christians: all do not receive the same gift, but all the gifts come from the Spirit, so that there is no room for rivalry, discontent, or a feeling of superiority.”²²¹ Hering notes that Paul specifically mentions there is a *wide* variety of gifts (v. 4) and they are distributed among *many* individuals so that no one can boast that they possess all the charismatic gifts.²²²

In addition, this emphasis on the diversity of the gifts and their giver, rather than on the recipients as such, shows that it is not necessary for all Christians, including the Corinthians, to have exactly the same gifts in order to be genuinely spiritual people. In a similar vein, Paul insists there are a variety of divinely inspired ways in which believers can serve God and there are different ways that God himself works within both the Christian community and the individual (12:5-6). This also makes it clear that the Corinthians did not have to perform exactly the same functions in order to have God in their lives.

Moreover, Paul’s choice of *χαρίσματα*, the term he uses for “gifts” in 12:4 and elsewhere in this chapter (vv. 9, 28, 30, 31), indicates that the Corinthian

²¹⁹ Cf. Morris, *1 Corinthians*, rev. ed., 165-166.

²²⁰ Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993), 418.

²²¹ Barrett, *1 Corinthians*, 283-284.

²²² Hering, *1 Corinthians*, 125.

pneumatics should have been thankful for, rather than proud of, their giftedness.²²³

As noted earlier, χάρισμα (gift) has its roots in χάρις (grace). This means that the gifts of the Spirit are actually “gifts of grace” and therefore, as Keener puts it, “expressions of God’s generosity, not of human merit.”²²⁴ Consequently, the Corinthians should not have used their gifts to determine whether or not they had possessed the Spirit to a greater or lesser degree than other believers. Instead, they should have been on their knees thanking God for his beneficence in personally allocating them any form of spiritual gift when he distributed the various gifts to various people in the church.

This, reasons Thiselton, is why Paul uses χαρίσματα rather than πνευματικά (spiritual things) for the word “gifts” in v. 4. He wants to call attention “to God’s generous acts of *freely* **apportioning** different gifts to different recipients.”²²⁵ It tells the pneumatics, Conzelmann asserts, that they are what they are because of God’s grace.²²⁶ The message Paul wants the Corinthians to realize, Witherington insists, is that the gifts they possess are unmerited and therefore cannot be used as grounds for egotism or for boasting.²²⁷

The Purpose of the Gifts

In 1 Cor 12:7, Paul writes, “But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of *all*.” (The word “all” does not actually appear in the original

²²³ Cf. Spiros Zodhiates, *Anointed, Filled, and Gifted: An Exegetical Commentary on First Corinthians Twelve*, ECS (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1998), 79-80.

²²⁴ Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 100-101.

²²⁵ Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 929.

²²⁶ Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 207-208.

²²⁷ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 255.

Greek, but, as it will be argued below, it is nonetheless implied). If taken as read, this statement not only confirms that the gifts of the Spirit are acts of grace, it affirms that all believers receive at least one of these many and varied gifts. The latter reinforces the view that the gifts cannot be used as a gauge to determine the level of one's spiritual maturity²²⁸ and, thus, as Furnish observes, "invalidates any attempt to rank believers according to the kind of spiritual gift they have."²²⁹ More importantly, this verse stresses that the gifts of the Spirit are bestowed upon each individual believer for the "common good" or "profit of all." The expression Paul uses to convey this concept is πρὸς τὸ συμφέρον. This phrase literally means, "with a view to advantage"²³⁰ or "with a view to what is for the best,"²³¹ and is generally understood in the sense of building up or edifying the church.²³²

There are several related NT passages that have led commentators to both embrace and to espouse this view. First and foremost, Paul categorically states that the gifts of the Spirit and the spiritual functions they enable their recipients to perform are for the express purpose of building up the body of Christ (Eph 4:12).²³³ Secondly, Paul uses οἰκοδομή (the word he uses for "building up" in Eph 4:12) and συμφέρω interchangeably to condemn every conceivable form of self-edification and, at the same time, to admonish all believers to seek to edify others (1 Cor 10:23-24). Third,

²²⁸ Cf. Arnold Bittlinger, *Gifts and Graces: A Commentary on 1 Corinthians 12-14*, (E. T. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 25.

²²⁹ Furnish, *Theology of 1 Corinthians*, 89.

²³⁰ Robertson and Plummer, *1 Corinthians*, 264.

²³¹ Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 208.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Francis Foulkes, *The Letter of Paul to the Ephesians*, rev. ed., TNTC (Leicester: IVP, 1989), 128-129.

he advocates that whatever a person does – which, in the case of the Corinthian pneumatics, would include the exercise of their individual spiritual gift/s, – it was to be done to the glory of God (1 Cor 10:31-33). No one, including himself, he says, was to “*seek individual advantage*.”²³⁴ All were to seek to profit or advantage (συμφέρον) others in the sense of facilitating their salvation.²³⁵ In this way the church itself is edified or built up.

These passages clarify that the express purpose of the gifts of the Spirit is to equip the community of believers to bring other people into the church and thus enlarge the borders of the kingdom of heaven.²³⁶ They indicate also that the gifts were not to be used for the personal benefit or edification of the recipient. If such were the case, then Paul, as Zodhiates points out, could have used the term ὠφέλεια (the word he uses in Rom 3:1 to refer to personal profit), instead of συμφέρον, to convey this idea. Alternatively, he could have used the expression πρὸς τὸ χρηστόν, which simply means “for the good” rather than “for the *common* good” (emphasis ours).²³⁷ Of course, Paul uses neither, and with good reason, it seems.

Paul’s “intent here,” insists Kistemaker, “is to promote the common good and to prohibit anyone from using a gift for personal profit.”²³⁸ Barrett likewise urges that “no member has his gift for his own private use; all are intended for the common good.”²³⁹ The point of this verse, says Morris, is that the gifts of the Spirit “are

²³⁴ Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 936.

²³⁵ Cf. Zodhiates, *Anointed*, 81.

²³⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, 80.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 80-81.

²³⁸ Kistemaker, *1 Corinthians*, 420.

²³⁹ Barrett, *1 Corinthians*, 284.

always given to be used, and to be used in such a way as to edify the whole body of believers, not some individual possessor of a gift. A schismatic individualism contradicts the purpose of the gifts.”²⁴⁰

Most commentators concur with these sentiments. What this means, comments Furnish, is “that spiritual gifts are not to be used to enhance one’s standing in the congregation.”²⁴¹ And yet, as the course of Paul’s discussion will show, the Corinthians were using the charismata, especially the gift of tongues, for self-glorification and status-seeking, rather than for the express purpose of growing the kingdom of God on earth. That, implies Fee, is why Paul introduces the proper use of the gifts in 12:7; he has the concerns of chaps. 13-14 in mind.²⁴² Similarly, Furnish sees the proper use of the charismata as one of two premises on which the “appeals and directives of chapter 14 are founded,” although, as he says, they are not stated as such. Furnish refers the reader to 14:26c where Paul implores the Corinthians to “let all things be done for edification.”²⁴³ Although Furnish fails to mention it in his comments, the concept of edifying the church rather than self plays a dominant role in both Paul’s commendation of prophesying and his correctives regarding the Corinthians’ abuse of the gift of tongues and the gift of prophecy (see 14:2-5, 12-13, 21-26 and 29-31).

The other premise upon which the appeals and directives of 1 Cor 14 are founded, Furnish claims, is the Lordship of Christ.²⁴⁴ Thiselton also links the proper

²⁴⁰ Morris, *1 Corinthians*, rev. ed., 166-167.

²⁴¹ Furnish, *Theology of 1 Corinthians*, 89.

²⁴² Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 589.

²⁴³ Furnish, *Theology of 1 Corinthians*, 88-89.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 88.

use of the charismata with the Lordship of Christ. Both, he argues, are the “mark[s] of being authentically activated by the Spirit.” A genuine pneumatic, he says, will use the charismata to benefit others. A different spirit is at work, he fears, where the gifts are used merely for “self-affirmation, self-fulfilment, or individual status.” “The [Holy] Spirit,” he asserts, “produces visible effects for the profit of all, not for self-glorification.”²⁴⁵ This, it seems, is true of all the charismata, including the gift of tongues. In 12:7, Paul makes no distinction between the gifts in this respect. Consequently all, potentially, edify the church.

Tongues are for the Edifying of the Church

Nevertheless, some commentators distinguish between the gift of tongues and the other charismata on the grounds that the former, allegedly, is a private gift which edifies the recipient rather than the entire church. Several passages in 1 Cor 14 are usually cited as evidence of the private nature of glossolalia; namely, vv. 2, 4, 18-19, and 27-28. Firstly, the connection between v. 2 and v. 4 is obvious. The glossolalist’s speech is directed towards God and appears to edify the speaker only.²⁴⁶ Secondly, in vv. 18-19, Paul’s reluctance to exercise the gift of tongues in church suggests that it has a private function.²⁴⁷ Third, in vv. 27-28, Paul enjoins the speaker in tongues not to exercise his gift in church unless an interpreter is present to translate his speech and for him to keep silent or to speak to himself and to God, which indicates that speaking in tongues is a private matter between the glossolalist and

²⁴⁵ Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 936.

²⁴⁶ Cf. Thiselton, “The ‘Interpretation’ of Tongues,” 16.

²⁴⁷ Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 113.

God.²⁴⁸

Thiselton adds one more text (v. 13) to the above list, claiming that Paul's admonition to the speaker in tongues to "pray for the power to produce articulate speech," as he puts it, "becomes in effect Paul's most explicit statement in the chapter that ideally, speaking in tongues should not occur at all in public."²⁴⁹ In addition, Paul's admonition to "*let it* be for the edification of the church that you seek to excel" (14:12) is understood by many to mean that the Corinthians primarily were to seek those gifts which edified the church. It is reasoned that this indicates that there are in fact two different types of gifts; those, as mentioned, which edify the church and those which do not. Interestingly enough, the only gift that commentators seem to identify with the latter is tongues.

All of these passages will be discussed at length in subsequent chapters of this paper. Regardless of that, it will suffice to say, at this juncture, that in spite of the apparent reasonableness of the argument that the gift of tongues is intrinsically different in effect to that of the other gifts, Paul's *ad hoc* list of nine gifts in 12:8-11 does not appear to support this hypothesis. This list is not exhaustive (there are approximately twenty different spiritual gifts mentioned in the NT²⁵⁰), but it is representative of the gifts briefly mentioned in v. 4. According to v. 7, these gifts are included in the manifestations of the Spirit that are allocated for the express purpose

²⁴⁸Cartledge, "Nature and Function," 148; cf. Thiselton, "The 'Interpretation' of Tongues," 16.

²⁴⁹Thiselton, "The 'Interpretation' of Tongues," 16.

²⁵⁰Kistemaker, *1 Corinthians*, 418.

of building up the church.²⁵¹

Since the gift of tongues appears on this list, it follows that it, too, is meant to edify the church. If this is indeed the case, then Paul's statement in 14:4 which says, "He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself," would strongly suggest that the Corinthian glossolalists were in fact abusing their gift by turning it to selfish ends. No one would deny there are benefits to the recipient which attend every gift,²⁵² including the gift of tongues. Nevertheless, no matter what form these benefits may take, it is highly unlikely that they fall into the category of self-edification described in 14:4. As we have already discovered, Paul categorically condemns all self-edification in 10:23. Besides, it does not make sense if Paul, on the one hand, were to condemn all self-edification and, then, on the other, commend or encourage it.

The Classification of the Gifts

Numerous attempts have been made to classify the list of charismata in 12:8-10²⁵³ but whether or not this is Paul's intention is uncertain.²⁵⁴ Over the years various classifications have emerged, with some of them going back as far as Tertullian, who Thiselton points out, divides the list four ways: (1) wisdom and knowledge; (2) faith; (3) healings and miracles; and (4) prophecy, discerning of spirits, tongues and the interpretation of tongues.²⁵⁵

Thiselton notes that later theologians such as Weiss and Allo "perceive a triad

²⁵¹ Cf. Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 257; Morris, *1 Corinthians*, rev. ed., 166-167; Robertson and Plummer, *1 Corinthians*, 265; Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 590; Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 420.

²⁵² E.g., Zodhiates, *Anointed*, 81; Kistemaker, *1 Corinthians*, 420.

²⁵³ Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 937; Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 590.

²⁵⁴ Kistemaker, *1 Corinthians*, 420.

²⁵⁵ Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 937.

of triads here,”²⁵⁶ “Collins, on the other hand, argues for a 2 + 5 + 2 chiasmus.”²⁵⁷

The most popular classification, it seems, is to divide the list into three conceptual groups which, Kistemaker proposes, “make a distinction between gifts that are either temporal or permanent, verbal or nonverbal, and important or less important.”²⁵⁸ Of the three conceptual groups identified, the first group is made up of the **teaching** gifts of wisdom and knowledge (v. 8). The second group consists of the **supernatural** gifts of faith, healing and miracles (vv. 9-10a), and the third, the **communicative** gifts of prophecy, discerning of spirits, tongues and the interpretation of tongues (v. 10b).²⁵⁹

Others, like Hurd, have suggested that here the gifts are given in order of importance.²⁶⁰ This claim is unable to be substantiated, because the other lists which appear in this chapter (vv. 28-30) and elsewhere in the NT (Rom 12:6-8 and Eph 4:11) do not follow the same order as this one.²⁶¹ Nevertheless, a significant point raised by Hurd is that in all three lists of charismata in 1 Cor 12, tongues and the interpretation of tongues are mentioned last.

This is interpreted by some, including Hurd, to mean that the gift of tongues is the least of the gifts. Gillespie’s comments could not be clearer in this respect. “The positioning of the gift of tongues at the bottom of each list of spiritual gifts in chapter 12,” he says, “shows that Paul’s intention is clearly to subordinate ‘tongues’ to the

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Kistemaker, *1 Corinthians*, 420.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.; cf. Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 590-591.

²⁶⁰ Cf. Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 590.

²⁶¹ Cf. Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 257.

other charismata as the least of the gifts of the Spirit.”²⁶²

In direct contrast to this statement, others maintain that tongues appear last on these lists because it was not only the gift most highly prized in Corinth, it was also the most problematic and, therefore, Paul wanted to deemphasize it.²⁶³ Still others maintain that all nine gifts listed in 12:8-10, including the gift of tongues, had caused problems in the Corinthian church and “were often misused or misunderstood”²⁶⁴ or “overly [stressed] in divisive ways”²⁶⁵ by the congregation. This point is reflected by Glen, who claims that Paul’s incomplete list of the gifts in this passage (wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, tongues, and interpretation of tongues) indicates which ones are responsible for the rivalry over giftedness within the assembly.²⁶⁶ Be that as it may, what remains incontrovertible is the fact that wisdom and knowledge were so highly prized in the Greco-Roman world and were held in such high esteem by the Corinthian believers (see 1 Cor 1:10-4:20; 1:5; 8:1-3, 7-11; 13:2, 8), that these two gifts are likely to have caused some concern/division in the local assembly.

On the other hand, the rules set down by Paul for the proper exercise of the gift of prophecy (see 14:29-33), indicate that this gift is likely to have caused serious problems in Corinth as well. The reference to faith in the context of the futility of the

²⁶² Thomas W. Gillespie, “A Pattern of Prophetic Speech in First Corinthians,” *JBL*, 97/1 (1978): 84.

²⁶³ Cf. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 209; Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 101; Barrett, *1 Corinthians*, 286; Dale B. Martin, “Tongues of Angels and Other Status Indicators,” *JAAR*, 59/3 (1991): 580; Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 257; Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 619.

²⁶⁴ Bittlinger, *Gifts and Graces*, 27.

²⁶⁵ Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 244.

²⁶⁶ Glen, *Pastoral Problems*, 157.

loveless exercise of tongues, prophecy, wisdom, knowledge and self-sacrifice (13:1-3) suggests that this gift may also have been abused in Corinth. As for the gifts of healing, miracles, discerning of spirits, and the interpretation of tongues, there is no textual evidence to suggest that they, too, were problematic, but since there is no undeniable evidence, the likelihood cannot be completely ruled out. It may well be that all nine gifts had been misused or misunderstood by the Corinthians and, therefore, that the placing of the gift of tongues at the bottom of all three lists of spiritual gifts in 1 Cor 12 carries no real significance. Nevertheless, scholars, as we have previously noted, tend to agree with Fee that “even the most casual reading of 1 Cor 12-14 makes it abundantly clear that the problem has to do with the gift of tongues.”²⁶⁷

Evidence of the Tongues Problem in Corinth

Gundry states that “the minuteness and length of Paul’s discussion suggest that excessive glossolalia had already run wild at Corinth.”²⁶⁸ Chadwick similarly asserts that “the entire drift of the argument of 1 Cor. xii –xiv is such as to pour a douche of ice-cold water over the whole practice [of speaking in tongues].”²⁶⁹ In the same vein, Smith contends that the purpose of this passage is not to commend or promote speaking with tongues but rather to put it “in a proper theological perspective and to introduce some restraint into its practice.” He then goes on to say that “The obvious inference is that some Corinthians extolled it too highly and misused it in services of

²⁶⁷ Fee, “Tongues – Least of the Gifts?” 6.

²⁶⁸ Gundry, “‘Ecstatic Utterance’,” 307, fn. 1.

²⁶⁹ Chadwick, quoted by House, “Tongues,” 143.

public worship, even as they misused the Lord's supper (1 Cor. 11:17ff.).²⁷⁰ Mitton simply states that "one has the impression re-reading these chapters (1 Cor 12-14), that Paul's objection was not so much to tongues in themselves, but to tongues paraded in public."²⁷¹ Walvoord adds that these "chapters were written to correct and regulate speaking in tongues rather than to exhort the Corinthian believers to exercise this gift."²⁷²

Chapter 13 begins with tongues appearing at the top rather than at the bottom of a select list of gifts and Christian attributes deemed by Paul to be spiritually bankrupt if used in a loveless manner. This gives the impression that:

1. The Corinthians were using the gift of tongues in just such a manner.
2. This practice may have been more pronounced in Corinth than the loveless exercise of the other gifts and attributes mentioned.
3. The Corinthians thought that speaking with tongues equated with genuine spirituality.

In v. 8, Paul contrasts the transitory nature of prophecy, tongues, and knowledge to the enduring character of faith, hope and love, especially love. This would suggest that the Corinthians had in fact placed an unwarranted premium on all three gifts, including tongues, to the exclusion of faith, hope and love, and that Paul wanted to put all three charismata into perspective.

In addition, Smith notes that there may be an allusion to tongues "in Paul's statement that when he was a child he spoke as a child."²⁷³ This appears likely from

²⁷⁰ Smith, "Glossolalia," 319.

²⁷¹ Mitton, "Notes on Recent Exposition," 227.

²⁷² Walvoord, "The Holy Spirit," 116.

²⁷³ Smith, "Glossolalia," 310.

his later appeal to the Corinthians to put their childish attitude towards tongues behind them and to spiritually grow up (14:20). An immaturity, no doubt, that was reflected in the way they used this gift.

Tongues are even more prominent in chap. 14. In fact the whole chapter is devoted to this topic save for a handful of verses that highlight the problems caused by the local prophets (vv. 26, 29-33) and the wives/women in the congregation (vv. 34-35). Firstly, if all self-edification is condemned by Paul (10:23), it follows that the statement that glossolalists were using tongues to edify self (14:4) implies that they were misusing their gift in their worship services for selfish purposes. Secondly, Paul's statement that "the one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless the latter interprets his speech for the edification of the whole church" (v. 5b), infers that the local glossolalists believed that they were spiritually superior to the non-tongues-speakers in the church. Thirdly, there are several indicators that Paul objected to the Corinthian practice of speaking in tongues in worship services without an accompanying translation. He makes it very clear that his preference throughout is for the immediate intelligibility of prophesying over un-interpreted tongues in church services (vv. 23-25, 39).

In addition, he would rather speak five words in church that could be understood than ten thousand in a tongue that no one can understand (v. 19). He also admonishes the glossolalists to follow his example and not to speak in tongues in church if an interpreter is not present to translate for them (v. 28). On the other hand, the other regulations set down to control the use of this gift in worship services (see v. 27) not only give the impression that glossolalia had free reign in Corinth, it implies also, Smith asserts, that the Corinthians had "put a high premium on glossolalia as a

gift of the Spirit.”²⁷⁴

The complete lack of any reference to tongues elsewhere in Paul’s writings, including Rom 12:3-8, which is “a kind of brief recapitulation of 1 Corinthians 12,” says Smith, is further evidence that the Corinthians had over-estimated the importance of this gift.²⁷⁵ The inference being that glossolalia had to be a problem in Corinth otherwise Paul would not have had occasion to mention it.

The Point of 1 Corinthians 12:8-10

It has been shown that 1 Cor 13-14 affirms that some Corinthians appear to have rated the gift of tongues much more highly than they should have and that they were indeed abusing this gift. Moreover, the consistent positioning of the gift of tongues at the bottom of all three lists of charismata in chap. 12 gives the impression that Paul wanted to “deemphasize what the Corinthians were over-emphasizing.”²⁷⁶

Still, it is argued by exegetes such as Witherington that the point of the list in 12:8-10, “is simply to show that there are varieties of gifts.”²⁷⁷ Fee similarly writes that Paul’s interest in this passage “is simply to illustrate the *diversity* of the Spirit’s activities/manifestations in the church” mentioned earlier in the chapter.²⁷⁸ With v. 11 also in mind, Barrett asserts that “Paul’s aim at the moment is not . . . to establish a rating or hierarchy of gifts, but rather to insist that all gifts whatsoever, important or unimportant, showy or obscure, come from the same source.”²⁷⁹ If the opposite were

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 312.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 310.

²⁷⁶ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 257.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 590.

²⁷⁹ Barrett, *1 Corinthians*, 286.

the case, “he would be guilty of doing the same as the Corinthians.”

In short, v. 11 basically sums up and rounds off the argument to this point, by reiterating that there is a diversity of spiritual gifts which are the product of one God, who distributes them through his Spirit for the benefit of the church. This has been Paul’s emphasis throughout, even though the reason for such, as Fee points out, is not immediately apparent from the text itself. However, it will become increasingly clear from what follows that Paul’s concern here, as we have already intimated, is over the Corinthians’ misuse and misunderstanding of the charismata, especially the gift of tongues,²⁸⁰ the exact nature of which we are still unaware.

Historically the phrase γένη γλωσσῶν (12:10) has been interpreted as “kinds of tongues” and, as such, has been taken to mean the various families of human language.²⁸¹ But modern scholarship appears to have shied away from this interpretation in favour of the alternative reading, “species of tongues,” which allows for a diversity of tongues, not just one. On this basis, scholars such as Edwards, Robertson and Plummer; Witherington, Grosheide, and others contend that glossolalia could refer to any one or more of the multiple expressions of this gift suggested by commentators and may not refer to human languages at all.²⁸² In spite of their protestations, this phrase is inconclusive, therefore it must, again, be left to other passages to determine what is meant by the term “tongues.”

The final clause of v. 11 states that the Holy Spirit distributes the gifts as he

²⁸⁰ Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 599; cf. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 209.

²⁸¹ Hofmann, among others, interpreted γένη γλωσσῶν in this manner (see Edwards, *1 Corinthians*, 322).

²⁸² Cf. Edwards, *1 Corinthians*, 322; Robertson and Plummer, *1 Corinthians*, 267-268; Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 258; Grosheide, *1 Corinthians*, 289.

sees fit, which reminds us again that the charismata are acts of grace²⁸³ and that they are not given on the basis of personal merit²⁸⁴ or “human preferences or strivings.”²⁸⁵ Moreover, it implies that “no one in the Christian community receives all the gifts and no one is without a gift.”²⁸⁶ Consequently, it does not allow people to dictate what gifts they should have.²⁸⁷ Nor does it give occasion for one to boast, or, conversely, to feel inferior on the grounds of the possession or lack thereof of this or that gift.²⁸⁸ Hence, the Corinthians were not to pride themselves on their giftedness²⁸⁹ or to attempt to upstage each other on account of their various gifts.²⁹⁰ The diversity of the charismata is not only ordained by God (vv. 4-6, 8-11), and is good for the church as a whole (v. 7), it is a necessity if the church is to function effectively.²⁹¹ This is brought out in Paul’s analogy of the human body with the church (vv. 12-27), which is the subject of the next chapter.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that Paul’s initial response to the Corinthians’

²⁸³ Barrett, *1 Corinthians*, 286; cf. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 209; Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 989; Hering, *1 Corinthians*, 129.

²⁸⁴ Cf. Robertson and Plummer, *1 Corinthians*, 269; Hering, *1 Corinthians*, 129.

²⁸⁵ Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 989.

²⁸⁶ Kistemaker, *1 Corinthians*, 426.

²⁸⁷ Barrett, *1 Corinthians*, 286.

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 286, 290-291; cf. Hering, *1 Corinthians*, 130; Kistemaker, *1 Corinthians*, 426.

²⁸⁹ Robertson and Plummer, *1 Corinthians*, 269.

²⁹⁰ Morris, *1 Corinthians*, rev. ed., 170.

²⁹¹ Cf. Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 600.

misconceptions about giftedness and spirituality is to stress that the Holy Spirit is responsible for all spirituality in humans. Moreover, he is the source of numerous gifts which he bestows upon the church as he sees fit, the purpose of which is to edify the entire church. This includes the gift of tongues. The essential character of this gift is not made clear in 1 Cor 12 but Paul's reference to the Corinthians' pre-conversion experiences in the mystery religions (v. 2) has often been taken to mean that glossolalia is essentially unintelligible and ecstatic. Significantly, the extra-biblical sources available do not support this hypothesis.

We have found also that modern scholarship prefers to interpret the phrase γένη γλωσσῶν (12:10) as "species of tongues" rather than as "kinds of tongues" which, historically, has been interpreted as human languages. This allows for more than one type of tongue and may or may not include human languages. Still, this phrase is open to conjecture and of itself is inconclusive.

On the other hand, we found that the gift of tongues probably appears at the bottom of the list of charismata in vv. 8-10 because the Corinthians had put it first, which signifies that tongues had caused serious problems in Corinth and that, here, Paul is trying to put this gift into perspective. It does not mean that this list constitutes a ranking of the gifts in order of importance.

CHAPTER 5 - THE HUMAN BODY ANALOGY

To illustrate the need for a diversity of gifts in the Christian church and to show that all the gifts are of equal importance, Paul uses the analogy of the human body. This metaphor implies that each member of the body of Christ has a unique function in the church that no one else can perform. What is more, Paul stresses that it is the Spirit of God that determines the part each believer plays in the effective running of the church. This implies that all are to be content with the gift/s that the Spirit has apportioned them and ought not to hanker after the gifts that they do not already possess.

If this is the case, then what are we to make of Paul's imperative to "eagerly desire the greater gifts?" (1 Cor 12:31a, NIV). Does Paul contradict himself? Are some gifts more important than others after all? Should Christians strive to acquire these gifts if they do not already have them? What does the term "greater" mean? Does it indicate authority or does it have another meaning? The answers to these questions form the basis of this chapter.

Unity in Diversity

The human body, says Paul, is a single unit made up of many members which, although they have their own distinct function, work in harmony for the common good of the whole.²⁹² The church is no different. "It is an organic unity with a multiplicity of parts,"²⁹³ which, if it is to function properly, must work together for the benefit of the entire church (1 Cor 12:12, 14). What this tells us is that church unity

²⁹² Kistemaker, *1 Corinthians*, 429.

²⁹³ Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Corinthians: A Literary and Theological Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 84.

comes through diversity; that “there is no such thing as true unity without diversity.”²⁹⁴ Paul is reinforcing what he has implied earlier, namely that it is not necessary for all Christians to have exactly the same gifts, or to perform exactly the same functions in order to be genuinely spiritual people.

“That,” observes Fee, “was the Corinthian error, to think that uniformity was a value, or that it represented true spirituality.”²⁹⁵ What makes a person spiritual is not uniformity, or giftedness, but the reception of the Spirit of God (v. 13). It is the Spirit that enables us to appreciate the things of God and “essentially distinguishes the believer from the nonbeliever”²⁹⁶ (1 Cor 2:9-14). It is the Spirit that makes us sons and daughters of God (Rom 8:14-17).²⁹⁷ It is the Spirit that leads us to confess that Jesus is Lord (1 Cor 12:3). And, it is the Spirit that is responsible for the “great diversity just argued for in vv. 4-11.”²⁹⁸ Without the Spirit of God,” says Witherington, “there are no Christians.”²⁹⁹

Apparently, some of the members of the Corinthian church with the so-called “lesser” gifts wondered whether they even had a right to be in the church at all,³⁰⁰ so intimidated were they by the arrogance and assumed piety of those in the congregation with the so-called “greater” gifts (vv. 15-16). To encourage these lowly ones and to show them that they, too, are needed in the church, Paul not only

²⁹⁴ Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 602.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 603.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ Cf. Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 258.

³⁰⁰ Morris, *1 Corinthians*, rev. ed., 171.

emphasizes that the body is made up of all kinds of different parts which are mutually dependent on each other, he illustrates that each part is unique and cannot perform the function of another.³⁰¹ The eye, he says, cannot perform the function of the ear, nor the ear that of the eye, and yet, the body needs both to function normally (v. 17).³⁰² God has willed it this way, he adds (v. 18).

Diversity is not accidental.³⁰³ It is deliberate. It is an “ordinary fact”³⁰⁴ of church life. This means that God’s care and creativity extends to every member of the body, not just to the professedly “more important and spectacular.”³⁰⁵ No one, regardless of their giftedness, is any more important to the body of Christ than anyone else. Again, it is implied that not just the Corinthians but all Christians are to be content with the gift/s that the Spirit has apportioned them and ought not to covet one another’s gift/s.³⁰⁶ Discontent, assert Robertson and Plummer, is “not only the outcome of selfishness,” it is “rebellion against God’s will.”³⁰⁷ “Coveting,” states Bittlinger, “denies completely the very nature of the body. It is childish, self-centred thinking”³⁰⁸ and, like discontent, calls into question the wisdom of God and criticizes

³⁰¹ Ibid.; Robertson and Plummer, *1 Corinthians*, 273.

³⁰² Morris, *1 Corinthians*, rev. ed., 171.

³⁰³ Ibid.

³⁰⁴ Héring, *1 Corinthians*, 130.

³⁰⁵ Morris, *1 Corinthians*, rev. ed., 172.

³⁰⁶ Talbert, *Reading Corinthians*, 85; Robertson and Plummer, *1 Corinthians*, 273-274; cf. Bittlinger, *Gifts and Graces*, 59; Barrett, *1 Corinthians*, 296.

³⁰⁷ Cf. Robertson and Plummer, *1 Corinthians*, 274; Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 258-259.

³⁰⁸ Bittlinger, *Gifts and Graces*, 59.

his actions.³⁰⁹

The Absurdity of a One Member Body

The absurdity of making more of one gift than another is brought out in v. 19 where Paul rhetorically asks, “And if they were all one member, where *would* the body *be*?” It does not matter how important any given member of the body is, whether it is the eye, ear, hand or foot, to name a few; if that is all an organism consists of, it “would be a monster, not a body,”³¹⁰ and a totally useless one, at that.³¹¹ All the different parts are needed to form a perfect body. Therefore, to prefer one gift over another is as ludicrous as the eye saying to the hand, or the head saying to the feet, “I have no need of you” (v. 21).

This signifies that the more gifted members of the Corinthian church were self-sufficient, especially in regards to spiritual matters (cf. 4:7-8),³¹² and that they looked down on their less gifted brethren whom they thought they could do just as well without. This was as bad, if not worse, than the lowly ones thinking that they were not worthy enough to even warrant a place in the church. To correct this misperception, Paul implies that just as hands, feet, eyes and ears, etc. need each other for the body to function normally, the church simply cannot manage without all of its members, the seemingly lowly ones as well as those who are of a higher standing (12:22).³¹³

To further drive home the point that one member is just as important as

³⁰⁹ Ibid., 60.

³¹⁰ Morris, *1 Corinthians*, rev. ed., 172.

³¹¹ Kistemaker, *1 Corinthians*, 434; Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 246.

³¹² Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 260.

³¹³ Morris, *1 Corinthians*, rev. ed., 172-173.

another, he reminds the reader that even in the natural world the less honourable and less presentable parts of our bodies are treated with just as much respect as the more presentable parts, and at times are probably more valued (vv. 23-24).

The Need to Care for Each Other

For the third time in this short discourse, Paul insists that this diversity in the body of Christ is ordained of God (1 Cor 12:24), thus shoring up the notion that there should be no partiality, rivalry or divisions in the Corinthian church on account of the gifts.³¹⁴ On the contrary, each member should be genuinely happy for those believers whose gifts differ from their own and, without self-interest, care for one another (v. 25). Indeed, it is in their best interests to do so. In the same way that the whole body suffers when one of its members suffers, the whole church is impacted by the changing fortunes of its individual members. If one suffers, all suffer. If one rejoices, all rejoice with that member (v. 26). But not only that, caring for one another guards against the envy that was characteristic of those Corinthians “seeking honor only for their own gift.”³¹⁵

In 1 Cor 12:27, Paul states that which, by now, must have been patently obvious to the Corinthians, namely, that everything he has been saying applies to them.³¹⁶ “Now you are the body of Christ and members individually,” he says. They were not his literal body, of course, but they were his metaphorical body here on earth. As such, they were to embrace the concept of unity in diversity. They were not to seek all of the gifts or even the same gift. Rather, they were to exercise the gift/s

³¹⁴ Cf. Furnish, *Theology of 1 Corinthians*, 90.

³¹⁵ Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 104.

³¹⁶ Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 617; Morris, *1 Corinthians*, rev. ed., 174.

the Spirit had apportioned them for the edification of the whole church.³¹⁷ They were not to use them for their own selfish purposes. They were to be used to do the work of Christ.³¹⁸

Prioritizing the Gifts

Again the variety of gifts is emphasized (1 Cor 12:28).³¹⁹ Paul feels that the matter is so important that he appears to be repeating himself, however, on closer inspection there are subtle nuances in each repetition. As noted in the previous chapter, the list of charismata here is slightly different from the one found in vv. 8-10. Apostles, prophets, and teachers head this list. They are followed by various functions: miracles, healings, helps and administrations, with tongues appearing last of all, once again, presumably because this gift was a problem in Corinth,³²⁰ not because it was the least of the gifts.³²¹

Nevertheless, some scholars see a prioritizing of the gifts, especially the apostolic, prophetic and teaching ministries, in the numerical sequence (“first,” “second,” and “third,” etc.) to be found in this verse. Talbert completely rejects this idea, claiming that the numerical sequence employed here is “merely used to enumerate a sequence.” Moreover, he reasons that if Paul was placing the apostolic office above that of every other ministry and function in the church, then, he, as an apostle of Christ would be guilty of the one-upmanship he has been seeking

³¹⁷ Héring, *1 Corinthians*, 132; Robertson and Plummer, *1 Corinthians*, 278. Cf. Kistemaker, *1 Corinthians*, 440.

³¹⁸ Barrett, *1 Corinthians*, 292.

³¹⁹ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 261.

³²⁰ Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 104.

³²¹ Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 619.

throughout to destroy.³²² Talbert may have a valid point if it were not for Paul's reference to the "greater" gifts in 12:31, which confirms that at least some sort of ranking of the charismata does exist, whatever that entails.

There are two main theories as to what this prioritizing of the gifts means. The first is that the gifts are ranked "in order of authority."³²³ This is improbable considering Paul's foregoing analogy between the human body and the church implies that all spiritual gifts are of equal importance, no matter what their role is. Moreover, Paul's statement which says that tongues-speakers would be as great as those who prophesy in church if they interpret their speech for the benefit of the whole church (1 Cor 14:5) also militates against it. It infers that greatness comes from ministering to others and not from possessing this or that gift.³²⁴ In other words, greatness is not to be found in the gift itself but in the way it is used (see chap. 10). The second hypothesis is that it indicates the degree to which the gift is able to assume the "responsibility in founding or maintaining churches."³²⁵ This is the more likely explanation of the two.

Apostles, Prophets and Teachers

Thiselton maintains that apostles are first in the sense that they actually pre-date the NT church and basically were responsible for raising it up.³²⁶ Kistemaker adds that they served the entire church. Accordingly, the apostles' ministry was not

³²² Talbert, *Reading Corinthians*, 85.

³²³ Cf. Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 261.

³²⁴ Cf. Barrett, *1 Corinthians*, 316.

³²⁵ Ibid.

³²⁶ Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 1014.

limited to one congregation alone.³²⁷

As for prophets, they usually ministered in only one locality. Hence, their influence was not as widespread as that of the apostles. Nevertheless, they were engaged in the general instruction of the members of the local congregations in the area of Christian conduct. Thus, they “stood next to the apostles in the work of laying the church’s foundation (Eph 2:20) and, in rank, they were second to the apostles.”³²⁸

Teachers, on the other hand, mainly expounded the Scriptures in the local church setting.³²⁹ Their job, says Blomberg, was to supplement the evangelism of the apostles and prophets “with discipleship and the passing on of the cardinal truths of the faith.”³³⁰

Possibly the most significant aspect of the apostolic, prophetic and teaching ministries is that all three were primarily involved in the proclamation of the Word of God.³³¹ Without it the early church is unlikely to have been established, let alone to have grown and developed as it did, hence the overall importance of these offices in the fledgling church’s make-up.

Barrett, Bruce and Lang, Thiselton observes, tend to view the apostolic, prophetic and teaching ministries as a single, threefold ministry of proclamation, which, Barrett insists, constitutes “the primary Christian ministry.”³³² Everything

³²⁷ Kistemaker, *1 Corinthians*, 441.

³²⁸ Ibid., 442; cf. Grosheide, *1 Corinthians*, 298.

³²⁹ Kistemaker, *1 Corinthians*, 442-443.

³³⁰ Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 247.

³³¹ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 261.

³³² Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 1014; Barrett, *1 Corinthians*, 295.

else, he says, is secondary to this office.³³³ Whether or not Barrett, Bruce and Lang are correct in combining these ministries into one super-ministry of proclamation is irrelevant.

What is of interest, though, is Barrett's assumption that the proclamation of the Word of God transcends all other functions and activities of the church. Paul's later comment tends to bear this out when he states that the one who prophesies is "greater" than the one who speaks in tongues in worship services, unless the latter interprets their speech for the edification of the whole church (1 Cor 14:5b). Zodhiates's definition of prophesying serves as an exemplar. He affirms that prophesying refers to "'witnessing and the forthtelling of God's grace.'" ³³⁴ In other words, prophesying is all about the proclamation of the Word of God, which by its very nature edifies the church (14:3; cf. Rom 10:17).

On the other hand, speaking in un-interpreted tongues that no one can understand (1 Cor 14:2) in worship services has the opposite effect. It is futile (v. 9), unless interpreted. However, to interpret these tongues for the benefit of the church, Paul says, would be to elevate the glossolalist to the same level of greatness as that of the one prophesying. The only conclusion that we can draw from this is that the "greatness" Paul speaks of in 12:31a and 14:5b refers to the degree to which anyone or anything edifies the church.

Since the functions of the apostolic, prophetic and teaching "roles are carried out by the proclamation of the Word," ³³⁵ it is not hard to see why Paul ranks the

³³³ Barrett, *1 Corinthians*, 295; cf. Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 261.

³³⁴ Zodhiates, *Anointed*, 507.

³³⁵ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 261.

apostles, prophets and teachers first on his list of charismata in 12:28. They had more opportunities to edify the church than anyone else. It may also explain why they head the comparable lists of gifts in Rom 12 and Eph 4.

Not One Gift is Available to All Believers

To hammer home the need for a diversity of gifts in the Christian church, Paul asks a series of seven rhetorical questions, all of which demand the answer, no (1 Cor 12:29-30): “*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?*” Whether the Corinthians liked it or not, “not one of the gifts,” says Blomberg, “is intended for all believers.”³³⁶ All cannot be apostles, or prophets, or teachers, or workers of miracles, or healers, or speakers in tongues, or interpreters of tongues. If everyone were the same, then the church, Fee reminds us, would be “like a body with only one part.”³³⁷ It would not only be a monster, it would be “fatal to the whole.”³³⁸

The Corinthians had to learn that “Christians differ from one another in the gifts they have received from God.”³³⁹ They also had to learn that one’s standing with God does not depend on the possession of this or that gift, whether it be the office of an apostle, a prophet, a teacher, or even the ability to speak in tongues.³⁴⁰ Spiritual giftedness has nothing to do with one’s standing with God. It is not about self or self-

³³⁶ Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 247.

³³⁷ Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 622.

³³⁸ Robertson and Plummer, *1 Corinthians*, 282.

³³⁹ Morris, *1 Corinthians*, rev. ed., 176.

³⁴⁰ Cf. Zodhiates, *Anointed*, 472.

edification; it is all about the edification of others.³⁴¹

Having carefully argued to this point in his letter that “all members of the [church] community should prize a diversity of complementary gifts and be content with the particular gifts allotted them by the Spirit,”³⁴² does Paul now contradict himself by urging his readers to “earnestly desire the best gifts?” (12:31a). The verb translated as “earnestly desire,” here, is ζηλοῦτε, which can be translated either as an imperative (“eagerly desire”) or as an indicative (“you are eagerly desiring”). Most commentators interpret it in the imperative mood, “But *earnestly desire* the best gifts” (emphasis ours).

The Imperative Case

This reading appears to be supported by two other passages in 1 Corinthians where it is clear that the verb ζηλοῦτε is used in the imperative. The first is in 14:1 where Paul, in summing up his treatise on love (1 Cor 13), urges the Corinthians to ζηλοῦτε δὲ τὰ πνευματικά, μᾶλλον δεῖνα προφητεύητε. The other is the conclusion to his argument regarding τῶν πνευματικῶν (12:1) in 14:39: ζηλοῦτε τὸ προφητεύειν καὶ τὸ λαλεῖν μὴ κωλύετε γλώσσας.³⁴³ While both are important passages, 14:1 is particularly relevant to the argument in hand.³⁴⁴

As noted in the previous chapter, τὰ πνευματικά and τὰ χαρίσματα are alleged to be synonymous terms by the vast majority of NT scholars. Consequently,

³⁴¹ Cf. Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 1023-1024.

³⁴² William F. Orr and James Arthur Walther, *1 Corinthians*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 1976), 217.

³⁴³ E.g., Kistemaker, *1 Corinthians*, 445; Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 107; J. F. M. Smit, “Two Puzzles: 1 Cor 12:31 and 13:3: Rhetorical Solution,” *NTS* 39 (1993): 0247; Orr and Walther, *1 Corinthians*, 217.

³⁴⁴ Cf. Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 247.

ζηλοῦτε δὲ τὰ πνευματικά (14:1) is generally interpreted as “eagerly desire spiritual gifts.” As such, this passage appears to parallel 12:31a where Paul says ζηλοῦτε δὲ τὰ χαρίσματα τὰ μείζονα. Since both passages seem to be saying the same thing, it is widely held that the incontrovertible rendering of ζηλοῦτε as an imperative in 14:1 demands that it be similarly translated as an imperative in 12:31 (“eagerly desire the greater gifts,” NIV).

Problems with the Imperative Case

This argument would appear to be watertight if it were not for the fact that it has already been shown that to equate τὰ πνευματικά with τὰ χαρίσματα is to severely restrict the meaning of the former. When πνευματικά is interpreted in the neuter gender, as it is in 14:1, it involves much more than just the gifts of the Spirit.

To recapitulate, πνευματικά refers to the things of God which we are incapable of appreciating without the Spirit’s help. This comprises, namely, his divine will and providences, including the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, and the plans he has for us in the here and now, and in the hereafter (2:9-14). To this we could add God’s plans for the gifts of the Spirit (12:7; cf. Eph 4:11-17), the confession of the Lordship of Christ (1 Cor 12:3), faith, hope, and love (13:13). One could mention further the other fruit of the Spirit: joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal 5:22-23). The armour of God also comes to mind: truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, salvation, faith (again) and the word of God (Eph 6:14-17).

Χαρίσματα, on the other hand, refers specifically to the gifts of the Spirit. On this basis, it would be as linguistically inappropriate to substitute the term χαρίσματα for πνευματικά in 1 Cor 14:1 as it is in 12:1 (περὶ δὲ τῶν πνευματικῶν). And yet, the main reason for rendering ζηλοῦτε as an imperative in 12:31a is based on this

substitution.

As for the imperative: “desire earnestly to prophesy” (14:39), this injunction is more likely to refer to witnessing and speaking forth on God’s behalf (which all believers are able to do) than to the actual gift of prophecy (see chap. 7). If so, this passage would still be a genuine example of the use of ζηλοῦτε in the imperative mood, but one could not use it to establish or confirm that God is using it to encourage people to strive for one gift or another.

In addition, the traditional rendering of ζηλοῦτε as a command to eagerly desire the greater gifts (12:31a), as alluded to above, stands in stark contrast to all that Paul has said in vv. 1-30 about:

1. The need for a diversity of gifts in the church.
2. “Unity in diversity” in the body of Christ.
3. The Spirit’s prerogative to distribute the gifts as he sees fit.
4. How one gift is as good as another and that all should be content with the gift or gifts that God has given them.
5. Not all believers receiving all of the gifts of the Spirit or even the same gifts.
6. How there is not one gift of the Spirit that every believer can receive.

This interpretation not only questions God’s judgment in the way that he distributes the gifts (cf. vv. 11, 18, 24) but it reinforces the distinctions the Corinthians seem to have made between the “greater” and the “lesser” gifts.³⁴⁵ Moreover, it is not like Paul to encourage a practice that has already led to acute problems in the church. Gerhard Iber makes this point, says Martin:

. . . when he remarks that Paul would hardly encourage the Corinthians

³⁴⁵ Talbert, *Reading Corinthians*, 85.

to strive selfishly after the greatest gifts after he has just admonished them to be content with the gift the Spirit had apportioned to them (12:11), according to how God had arranged in the body (12:18). The trouble . . . is that there was a competitive spirit present and an inordinate desire for members to covet the so-called ‘greater’ gifts.³⁴⁶

In the same vein, Bittlinger submits that:

The trouble in Corinth was precisely that everybody wanted to be the hand or the eye (1 Cor 12:15, 16). They were distinguishing between greater and lesser gifts. Everybody was coveting the so-called “greater” gifts. There was no apparent reason why Paul should strengthen them in this unspiritual striving. As far as he could see it was their childish immaturity that had made them want the “greatest” gifts.³⁴⁷

In other words, if Paul is encouraging the Corinthians to seek the more spectacular gifts of the Spirit at the expense of the lesser but equally important gifts, then he would be feeding the very monster he is at pains to destroy throughout his discourse (see v. 19).

More Arguments for the Imperative Case

Advocates for the rendering of ζηλοῦτε as an imperative in 12:31a give the impression that they cannot see anything wrong with striving for this or that gift, providing the Spirit’s sovereignty in apportioning the gifts is respected. In fact, Blomberg suggests that it is “entirely proper for them [Christians] to pray for and even try to cultivate certain gifts, so long as they leave room for the Spirit to refuse to grant their desires if he so chooses.”³⁴⁸ Believers, says Keener, should not be sitting around “passively waiting for a random gift to materialize.” They should be out there trying to make it happen. Paul, he says, implies that God often grants our prayerful

³⁴⁶ Martin, *Spirit and Congregation*, 34.

³⁴⁷ Bittlinger, *Gifts and Graces*, 73.

³⁴⁸ Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 248.

requests.³⁴⁹

Robertson and Plummer similarly comment that not everyone can have all the best gifts, but that should not stop us from striving to obtain them through prayer and habitual preparation, “a continual desire is in itself a preparation.”³⁵⁰ Barrett maintains that in spite of what Paul says about unity in diversity in the body of Christ and the interdependency of each member of that body, it was proper for Paul to encourage the Corinthians to strive for the greater gifts. It was entirely appropriate, he infers, to offset the damage caused by the Corinthians’ over-estimate of the value of the gift of tongues by imploring them to acquire, by “prayer and self-preparation,” the gift of prophecy or the gift of teaching. This, he says, would enable them to be far more effective in the life of the church.³⁵¹

In the same vein, both Furnish and Conzelmann propose that the imperative to “earnestly desire the greater gifts” takes the focus off what the Corinthians perceived to be the greater gifts and places it on what actually “benefits the whole community (12:7) by building it up.”³⁵² Conzelmann submits that the gifts which build up the whole community are the ones “that allow of no self-development and no self-contemplation on the pneumatic’s part.”³⁵³ Thiselton similarly states that “the ‘greatest’ [gifts] are not those that minister to status or to self, but to those which

³⁴⁹ Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 107.

³⁵⁰ Robertson and Plummer, *1 Corinthians*, 282.

³⁵¹ Barrett, *1 Corinthians*, 296.

³⁵² Furnish, *Theology of 1 Corinthians*, 97-98; Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 215.

³⁵³ Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 215; cf. Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 1024; Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 261; Furnish, *Theology of 1 Corinthians*, 97-98; Héring, *1 Corinthians*, 133; Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 107; Robertson and Plummer, *1 Corinthians*, 282.

serve the good of others and *build* the community.”³⁵⁴

The More Excellent Way

A perceived shift in attention away from what the Corinthians thought were the greatest gifts to those which build up the community of believers appears to be widespread among scholars. Moreover, it has led to the notion that the “more excellent way” (12:31b) of “love” (chap. 13) does not stand in contrast to ζηλοῦτε δὲ τὰ χαρίσματα τὰ μείζονα (v. 31a).³⁵⁵ Rather, as Keener suggests, “the phrase advises believers as to which gifts edify the church,”³⁵⁶ and shows us, Witherington adds, “the proper way and context in which all gifts should be exercised.”³⁵⁷

More Problems with the Imperative Argument

One of the problems with this line of reasoning is that we have already established that every one of the gifts of the Spirit, including the gift of tongues, is meant to edify the church (12:7). There are no exceptions. The other is that all spiritual gifts can be used for selfish purposes if their possessors choose to so abuse them. We have already noted that besides the gift of tongues, the gifts of prophecy, wisdom, knowledge, faith, and helps were almost certainly misused in one way or another in Corinth. Does this mean, then, that these gifts, like tongues, are similarly disqualified from being a “greater” gift? Apparently not!

The very same commentators who categorize the gifts into groups that serve

³⁵⁴ Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 1024.

³⁵⁵ Cf. Robertson and Plummer, *1 Corinthians*, 283.

³⁵⁶ Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 107.

³⁵⁷ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 261-262; cf. Robertson and Plummer, *1 Corinthians*, 283.

self-interest and those which edify the church usually put the gift of prophecy at the top of their list of community building gifts. As for wisdom, knowledge, faith, and service to others, surely they are just as important to the effective running of the church as the gift of prophecy is deemed to be. In fact, without these attributes the apostolic, prophetic and teaching offices, for instance, would be totally ineffective. It is apparent that the church needs its apostles, its prophets and its teachers to be wise and knowledgeable people of faith, who are servant-leaders. The problem in Corinth was not with the gifts themselves but with the way they were perceived and were being used by their various recipients. It will become increasingly obvious that this was also true of the gift of tongues.

Another problem with the idea that there is nothing wrong with striving to acquire certain gifts, providing the Spirit's sovereignty in apportioning them is not compromised, is that it assumes this is an acceptable and legitimate biblical practice. Contrary to the argument mounted by Blomberg, Keener, Robertson and Plummer, and others earlier in this chapter, it is contended here that there is no scriptural precedent for such a quest. Some would dispute this conclusion on the grounds that 1 Cor 14:12 gives the impression that Paul is urging the Corinthians to seek the gifts that edify the church, as opposed to those that do not. 1 Cor 14:12 says: "Even so you, since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, let it be for the edification of the church that you seek to excel."³⁵⁸ But as we have noted above, this idea is based on a false dichotomy of the charismata. There is only one type of spiritual gift – those that build up the church. It is more likely that Paul is imploring them to channel their enthusiasm into building up the church instead of using it to edify self (see chap. 10).

First Corinthians 14:13 is likewise purported to endorse the claim that striving

³⁵⁸ Cf. Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 624.

for the charismata is a legitimate biblical pursuit. This verse appears to be saying that those who speak in tongues should pray for the additional gift of interpretation:

“Therefore let him who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret.” However, the original Greek text supports the interpretation that when the local glossolalist prayed in tongues in public, he was to simultaneously interpret his speech for the benefit of the whole church (see chap. 10). If these alternative readings of vv. 12-13 are found to be correct, then neither of these passages can be used to either establish or confirm the legitimacy of hankering after a gift that one does not already possess. The same can be said for Jesus’ promise that whatever the disciples asked for in his name he would give it to them (Jn 14:14; 15:7, 16). It is understood that this promise is conditional upon such requests conforming to God’s will. Again, it is very clear from 1 Cor 12 (vv. 11, 18, 24) that it is not God’s will for all members of the body of Christ to have all of the gifts of the Spirit or to have the same gift as each other.

The Indicative Case

If, on the other hand, the verb ζηλοῦτε is interpreted in the indicative mood in 12:31a (“But you are eagerly desiring the greater gifts”) all the problems associated with the imperative reading of this passage can be avoided. Unlike the latter, this interpretation does not appear to contradict Paul’s emphasis in 1 Cor 12; that a diversity of gifts is ordained by God and that each member should therefore be content with whatever gift the Spirit has given to them.³⁵⁹ Rather, it confirms that which has been implied throughout, namely, that in order to raise their spiritual status in the church the Corinthians had been “jealously coveting” one or more of the

³⁵⁹ Cf. J. F. MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 280-281.

gifts.³⁶⁰

As pointed out by Prior, this is not the first time that Paul has “chastised them for their covetous spirit.”³⁶¹ In 1 Cor 3:3, he says, “You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not worldly?” In true secular Greco-Roman fashion the Corinthians, notes MacArthur, “coveted others’ admiration. They craved the applause of men. They desired to be seen as ‘spiritual.’”³⁶² And, in order to fulfil these goals, they “were selfishly seeking the most prominent, most ostentatious, most celebrated gifts.”³⁶³

Commentators who espouse the indicative view include the mid-nineteenth commentator Albert Barnes, who, as MacArthur points out, names his contemporaries, Doddridge, Locke, and MacKnight as also holding this position.³⁶⁴ More recent scholars who have adopted this position³⁶⁵ include G. Iber,³⁶⁶ A. Bittlinger,³⁶⁷ J. Murphy-O’Connor,³⁶⁸ J. MacArthur Jr³⁶⁹ and David Baker.³⁷⁰ On the

³⁶⁰ Ibid., 280.

³⁶¹ David Prior, *The Message of 1 Corinthians: Life in the Local Church*, BST (Leicester: IVP, 1985), 223.

³⁶² MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, 281.

³⁶³ Ibid.

³⁶⁴ Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament: 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1832, reprinted 1975), 240; cf. MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, 280.

³⁶⁵ See Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 624.

³⁶⁶ G. Iber, “Zum Verständnis von 1 Cor. 12:31,” *ZNW* 54 (1963): 42-52.

³⁶⁷ Bittlinger, *Gifts and Graces*, 73-75.

³⁶⁸ Murphy-O’Connor, *1 Corinthians*, 122.

³⁶⁹ MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, 280-281.

³⁷⁰ David L. Baker, “The Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 12-14,” *EQ* 46 (1974):226-227.

other hand, Ralph Martin sees it as an “eminently reasonable suggestion.”³⁷¹

Van Unnik’s View

A third view, that of Willem van Unnik, maintains that the verb ζηλοῦτε in 1 Cor 12:31 is neither an imperative nor an indicative. Instead, it means that “the Corinthians who have received the various gifts of the Spirit should be zealous in them, that is to say: zealously practice them, and that not in an ordinary way, but as much as they can, even to the highest degree (καθ’ ὑπερβολήν).”³⁷² In other words, they are not to strive for the gifts of the Spirit, but rather “they must be zealously active in them.”³⁷³ For support, Van Unnik appeals to a very small selection of extra-biblical writers such as Josephus, Philo, Plutarch, Eusebius, and others, who used ζηλοῦτε “in the sense of ‘devoting oneself to something’, of ‘zealously doing something’ or ‘zealously practicing something’.”³⁷⁴ Appeal is also made to certain passages in the NT where ζηλοῦτε appears to convey this same meaning. They include Rom 12:13; 1 Thess 5:15 and Rom 14:19.³⁷⁵

In addition, he reasons that there was no need for the Corinthians to strive after the charismata because 1 Cor 1:7 shows that they were already in possession of them

³⁷¹ Martin, *Spirit and Congregation*, 34.

³⁷² Van Unnik claims that the Corinthians were to zealously practice the gifts to the “highest degree” because this verse is a total unit and should never have been divided into two separate sections by the scholars, with the first half of the text rounding off Paul’s argument in 1 Cor 12 and the second half introducing the theme of 1 Cor 13. Accordingly, καθ’ ὑπερβολήν is said to relate to the verb ζηλοῦτε and not to the way of “love” which follows.

³⁷³ Willem C. van Unnik, “The Meaning of 1 Corinthians 12:31,” *NovT* 35/2 (1993): 154.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 152.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 153.

all. He further contends that striving after the gifts was contrary to what Paul says in 12:11 about the Spirit's prerogative to distribute the gifts as he sees fit and, therefore, that it would be a futile exercise on their part.³⁷⁶ Moreover, Van Unnik does not believe that Paul was at odds with the Corinthian enthusiasts over their ideas and behavior and that his comments in 1 Cor 12 and 14, including 12:31, constitute a polemic against the same. On the contrary, he insists that the point that Paul is making in these chapters relates to "glossolalia and prophecy within the context of the church that has gathered together in a particular place, where even unbelievers attend." In other words, he maintains that these chapters concern the value of prophecy and tongues in regards to their effectiveness in communicating God's word to the local congregation.³⁷⁷

It will become apparent as this treatise progresses that Paul would rather the Corinthians prophesy than speak in tongues in church. However, Van Unnik's claim that Paul is referring to the tongues phenomenon *per se* rather than attacking the Corinthians' abuse of this gift in chaps. 12 and 14 undermines his entire argument. There is no question that Paul encouraged the Corinthians to use the gift of tongues properly (see chap. 10), but, as Chadwick, Smith, Walvoord, and others observe, these chapters were written in order to curb the Corinthians' zeal for the use of tongues in church services, not to encourage and/or promote it (see above). Besides, the Corinthians' enthusiasm for this gift had caused so many problems for the local church that it is highly unlikely that Paul would now encourage them to maintain or exceed this level of enthusiasm.

³⁷⁶ Ibid, 150.

³⁷⁷ Ibid., 143.

The Greater Gifts

It has been shown that most commentators are of the opinion that the gifts which the Corinthians prized the most were the more prominent supernatural gifts, especially the gift of tongues.³⁷⁸ It is plausible therefore, that the possessors of these gifts comprised the spiritually arrogant group in the church (4:6-7) who thought they were better than everybody else and could function just as effectively without their less gifted associates (12:21). The need for Paul to play down the status of the glossolalist who does not interpret their speech in worship services (14:5b) suggests that those who could speak in tongues were the most conceited of them all.

On the other hand, the lowly ones, that is, those represented by the foot and the ear, appear to have been resigned to their lot in the church's life and might have been discouraged enough to leave the church (vv. 15-16). They may have burned with envy (ζηλοῦτε can have this negative sense³⁷⁹) of those whom they perceived to be more gifted than themselves, but, contrary to what MacArthur says above, it is highly unlikely that the more prominent supernatural gifts are the ones referred to by the term τὰ μείζονα in 12:31a.

The more showy supernatural gifts may have constituted the "greatest" gifts, as far as the Corinthians were concerned, but Paul does not give the slightest hint in this passage that he is referring to what the Corinthians thought were the "best" gifts. It is more likely that μείζονα refers to Paul's prioritized list of gifts in 12:28 and that the "most ostentatious" and "most celebrated" gifts were in fact used by their possessors to establish their credentials as apostles, prophets and teachers and, thus, their right to lead the church.

³⁷⁸ Cf. Ibid., 280; Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 616.

³⁷⁹ BDAG, 427.

The Apostolic, Prophetic and Teaching Offices

We have already established that glory and honour were craved by Greeks, and no one was more revered than their outstanding thinkers and orators, hence wisdom and eloquence were held in high esteem in the Greco-Roman world of the first-century A.D. This was not only true of secular society, but also of the church. As a result, the rising stars both within and without the church attached themselves to notable persons of wisdom and eloquence in the hope that they might bask in the reflected glory that comes through association. Thus they hoped to raise their own prospects of either following in their footsteps or enhancing their personal status in their respective communities. We have found that those who were held in the highest regard by the Corinthian believers were their favourite teachers, who, in the case of Peter and Paul, happened to be apostles and prophets as well. As a result, various rival factions emerged within the church with each group vying for supremacy over the other.

We gather from what Paul says in defense of his own apostolate in his next letter to the Corinthians, that eloquence and wisdom were thought to be common attributes of this office by the Corinthians (2 Cor 11:5-6, 12-13, 18-20; cf. 1 Cor 2:1-5). As a result, a display of the same on the part of the aspiring apostles, prophets and teachers in Corinth would be obligatory if they were to have any chance whatsoever of establishing their claims to these offices of the church.

Prophets and Glossolalists

The rules and regulations set down by Paul to curtail the disorderly and apparently excessive use of both prophecy and tongues in public worship (14:26-33) give the distinct impression that the local prophets and glossolalists were thus displaying their unique gifts of utterance in the assembly. Furthermore, Paul's

reference to the self-edification of the tongues-speakers (v. 4) may indicate that the local glossolalists ostentatiously paraded their gift in public,³⁸⁰ using the regular church services as a forum for self-display. This implies that they were the more aggressive of the two in flaunting their leadership credentials before the church, although both parties appear to be as guilty as each other of “bringing the worship assembly into a state of chaos.”³⁸¹ B. C. Johanson argues the case for the prophets and the glossolalists being the main, if not the only contenders in this “partisan struggle” to fill, what he calls, the “tangible leadership” vacuum created by the departure of Paul, Apollos, and possibly Peter.

There are several key factors, he says, which have led to this hypothesis:

1. If 14:22 is taken as a rhetorical question and σημεῖόν is understood to mean “a sign of divine inspiration,” then the glossolalists “may be seen as claiming apologetic value for tongues while denying the same for prophecy.”
2. The linking of the schisms in Corinth to the charismata (12:25).
3. The “narrowing of Paul’s argument concerning spiritual gifts in I Cor. xii-xiv to focus on tongues and prophecy.”
4. “Paul’s censure of both prophets and glossolalists.”
5. Paul’s previously mentioned statement that the one who prophesies is greater than the glossolalist who speaks in tongues which are not interpreted (14:5b).³⁸²

³⁸⁰ Mitton, “Notes on Recent Exposition,” 227; Alford, *Greek Testament*, 317.

³⁸¹ B. C. Johanson, “Tongues, A Sign for Unbelievers?: A Structural and Exegetical Study of 1 Corinthians XIV. 20-25,” *NTS* 25/2 (1979): 196.

³⁸² *Ibid.*, 202.

6. Tongues and prophecy are the only two charismata mentioned in each block of references to the gifts of the Spirit prior to chap. 14 (12:8-10, 28-30; 13:1-3, 8-9).³⁸³

Some exegetes may question the validity of Johanson's argument that 14:22 implies a "denial of apologetic value for prophecy by the glossolalists," but, even so, the other arguments stand on their own.

On top of this, Johanson claims that 12:28 indicates that the prophets would be the most logical successors to the leadership role left vacant by their absent teachers and, therefore, that the glossolalists may be seen as "challenging the authoritative status which fell more naturally to the prophets."³⁸⁴ This would also account for a more aggressive campaign on the part of the glossolalists to fill the leadership vacuum in Corinth.

In a similar vein to that of Johanson, J. P. M. Sweet maintains that:

It looks as if some Corinthians were claiming, as πνευματικοί, the right of judging others, including Paul, and of not themselves being called to account (cf. xiv. 37-8), and were insisting that the sign for believers of pneumatic status and authority was the ability to speak with tongues.³⁸⁵

The latter part of this statement refers to the sign value of tongues mentioned in 14:22. It indicates that the problem with tongues-speaking in Corinth was not one of mere status-seeking, but rather that the glossolalists felt that their gift actually entitled them to take over the reins of church leadership in the absence of their revered teachers. If this is the case, then the Corinthians had not only over-valued the gift of tongues and were guilty of parading them in public, they had also over-

³⁸³ Ibid., 196.

³⁸⁴ Ibid., 196, 202.

³⁸⁵ Sweet, "A Sign for Unbelievers," 245.

estimated this practice.³⁸⁶ This situation posed a far more serious threat to the local church than someone who, lacking a particular supernatural gift, coveted it. The latter would be problematic enough, but if the glossolalists, who were ill-equipped to lead, were to assume the leadership of the church, it could potentially destroy it (cf. 3:16-23). This would explain why it is so important for Paul to get across the message that churches, like the human body, need a diversity of members in order to function properly. It also explains why apostles, prophets, and teachers are the most qualified to perform the task of establishing and nurturing churches (12:28).

The Proper Motive for Using Spiritual Gifts

In this context, Paul's treatise on love in 1 Cor 13 appears to be a mere progression of thought which, Hays claims, "serves a clear argumentative purpose: Paul is trying to reform the Corinthians' understanding and practice of spiritual manifestations in worship."³⁸⁷ Talbert similarly remarks that the Corinthians' "motivation in manifesting their spiritual gifts was wrong. Paul, therefore, responds, 'And I will show you a still more excellent way' (12:31b). Chapter 13, then, focuses on love as the motivation for applying the gifts."³⁸⁸

So rather than showing the Corinthians what gifts to strive for and how to use them properly, an indicative reading of the verb ζηλοῦτε would show them what their motivation should be in manifesting their spiritual gifts. This is especially true if we make 12:31a and 12:31b one sentence and translate καί as "but." Other supporting evidence includes:

³⁸⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, 241.

³⁸⁷ Hays, *1 Corinthians*, 241.

³⁸⁸ Talbert, *Reading Corinthians*, 85-86.

1. Paul's reference to the futility of the loveless manifestation of tongues, prophecy and knowledge in 1 Cor 13:1-3.
2. The temporary nature of these gifts as compared to the permanence of love (vv. 8, 13).
3. The contrast between love and the spiritual arrogance, rivalry, dissensions and self-seeking so characteristic of the factionalism endemic in the Corinthian church (vv. 4-7; see 1:10-4:21).

On the strength of the argument so far, it seems far more appropriate to suggest that the term the "best gifts" in 1 Cor 12:31a refers to the apostolic, prophetic and teaching offices, rather than to the more spectacular and showy gifts. It would appear also that the Corinthians were coveting the authoritative status that attended these offices and were misusing their gifts, especially the gifts of tongues and prophecy, to reinforce their claims to these offices.

Conclusion

In 1 Cor 12 Paul stresses that if the church is to function properly it needs to have a divergence of gifts just as much as the human body needs to have many different parts. As a result, the Holy Spirit gives different gifts to different believers. The human body analogy also implies that the gifts of the Spirit are of equal importance and that no one can perform the function of another. On this basis, believers ought to be content with the gift or gifts that the Spirit has apportioned them and should not seek those gifts which they do not already have.

However, if the clause ζηλοῦτε δὲ τὰ χαρίσματα τὰ μείζονα (12:31a) is translated as an imperative ("eagerly desire the greater gifts") it contradicts this emphasis. It encourages the Corinthians to not only strive for gifts that they do not have but, further, to seek the "greater" gifts. This interpretation not only usurps the

Spirit's prerogative to distribute the gifts as he sees fit, but it ignores the need for a diversity of gifts in the body of Christ if it is to function normally.

On the other hand, if this phrase is translated as a statement of fact: "You are eagerly desiring the greater gifts," it takes nothing away from the human body analogy that Paul uses to establish these principles. It would be merely recording what was happening in Corinth at the time.

As for the term "greater" in 1 Cor 12:31a, we have found that it is more likely that it refers to the apostolic, prophetic and teaching offices. Even though Paul insists that all gifts of the Spirit are of equal importance, he does rank them according to their relative effectiveness in raising up and maintaining churches, rather than in order of importance. The most effective gifts in this respect are the functions of the apostles, prophets and teachers.

We also found that there is ample evidence to suggest that these offices were coveted by some of the members of the local congregation who, in order to establish their own apostolic, prophetic and teaching credentials, were misusing their own gifts in public worship services. This was especially true of the glossolalists and the prophets.

Accordingly, it seems more appropriate to render the verb ζηλοῦτε in 1 Cor 12:31a as an indicative rather than an imperative. A comparable paraphrase of this interpretation would read thus: "You are coveting the greater gifts, but I will show you a more excellent way."

CHAPTER 6 - LOVE VERSUS GIFTEDNESS

In 1 Cor 12 Paul has established that spirituality comes via the Holy Spirit. Moreover, he repeatedly emphasizes that the Spirit, in building up the church, decides who will receive what gifts, all of which are for the collective good of the whole body of believers, and not for the glorification of any individual recipient. It would appear, however, that the Corinthians were trying to raise their own status in the local assembly by coveting what Paul calls the greater gifts, namely, the apostolic, prophetic and teaching offices (see 1 Cor 12:27-31). According to Johanson and Sweet, the prophets and glossolalists were using their gifts to enhance their claims to these higher status offices (see chap. 5).

At the end of chap. 12, Paul introduces his readers to a far better Christian pursuit than that of eagerly desiring the greater gifts. He calls this pursuit the “more excellent way” (v. 31b), the way of love. In chap. 13 he describes this love and states that it is much greater and more enduring than everything else, including the more spectacular spiritual gifts. But first, in order to give his words full voice, we need to address the matter of the authorship and the positioning of this chapter in 1 Corinthians. In other words, we need to establish whether or not it is in fact Paul’s work or the work of somebody else which has been adapted or simply inserted into the text by Paul or by an anonymous third party.

We also need to determine also if this passage is perhaps a parenthesis and therefore totally irrelevant to the debate raging over spiritual gifts in the chapters either side of it. Another theory is that certain linguistic and contextual links between chap. 13 and chap. 8 indicate that it is simply out of place where it is currently positioned. This possibility needs to be examined, as does the more popular theory that this classic hymn on love is critical to the wider debate over the gifts and

therefore is situated exactly where it ought to be.

The Origin and Relevance of 1 Corinthians 13

First Corinthians 13 is different from the rest of the book in that it appears to have a literary rather than an epistolary style.³⁸⁹ In other words, its prose is more lyrical than conversational. This has led many interpreters to question both its origin and its relevance to the wider debate concerning the charismata in chaps. 12 and 14.³⁹⁰

Some acknowledge this passage to be Pauline but argue that it interrupts the discussion on spiritual gifts and has little or no bearing on the subject. According to Thiselton, J. Weiss has led “one of the most sustained attacks on the contextual integrity of the chapter.”

Weiss's principal argument is that chap. 13 constitutes “a polemic against gnostics and gnosticism, and that it belongs with 8:1-13, not with 12:1-14:40.” This hypothesis is based on the common use of the word φυσικό in 13:4, where Paul states that “love is not ‘puffed up’” (οὐ φυσιοῦται), and 8:1, where he says that “Knowledge puffs up (ἡ γνῶσις φυσιοῖ), but love builds up (ἡ δὲ ἀγάπη οἰκοδομεῖ).” Weiss sees the omission of the word ἀγάπη in 12:1-30 and 14:2-40 as a further indication that this chapter is out of place in its present position.³⁹¹

Conzelmann adds that chap. 13 is a self-contained unit which stands alone. Moreover, he insists that the transitions from 12:31 to chap. 13 and from chap. 13 to

³⁸⁹ Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 1027.

³⁹⁰ Cf. Barrett, *1 Corinthians*, 299; Furnish, *Theology of 1 Corinthians*, 97; Hays, *1 Corinthians*, 221; Nigel Watson, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, EC (London: Epworth Press, 1992), 139.

³⁹¹ Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 1027.

14:1 are “ragged,” or awkward. The point is also made that the relative degrading of the gifts mentioned in chap. 13 “is at variance with the summons in 14:1” that the Corinthians are to eagerly desire τὰ πνευματικά, μᾶλλον δὲ ἵνα προφητεύητε.³⁹² On the other hand, Héring claims that the transitional links in 12:31 and 14:1 are “typical examples of editorial linkages,” which are meant to get the discussion about the charismata back on track.³⁹³

Others maintain that chap. 13 was written independently of 1 Corinthians and that it may not even be Paul’s work. Rather it is a set-piece “of developed tradition” that may have pre-dated 1 Corinthians which has been adapted and inserted into the context either by Paul himself or by some unknown editor, possibly to make a point about the charismata.³⁹⁴ Marion L. Soards’ comments are representative of this group. Firstly, she stresses that the previously mentioned transitional links in 12:31 and 14:1 sit far better with each other than they do with chap. 13 and that the “theme of love” in this passage “relates only indirectly” to the Corinthian situation. Secondly, she notes, with Conzelmann, that chap. 13 is a self-contained unit. Thirdly, she observes that “comparable Greek and Hellenistic Jewish parallels to this meditation on love” were not uncommon in Paul’s day and are found in a wide variety of ancient sources. Finally, she affirms that Christ is not even mentioned in this chapter. This may suggest that the author is not even a Christian, let alone an apostle.³⁹⁵

Against these claims, Margaret Mitchell argues that the objection that chap. 13

³⁹² Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 217.

³⁹³ Héring, *1 Corinthians*, 134.

³⁹⁴ Cf. Furnish, *Theology of 1 Corinthians*, 97; Barrett, *1 Corinthians*, 297.

³⁹⁵ Marion L. Soards, *1 Corinthians*, NIBC (Peabody, MA: Hendrikson, 1999), 271.

does not fit with chaps. 12 and 14 because the word ἀγάπη is not used in either chapter is easily refuted because 8:1, the very same verse that Weiss uses to formulate his displacement theory, actually equates ἀγάπη with οἰκοδομή which features prominently in chap. 14.³⁹⁶

There are problems also with the claim that the transitional links between 12:31 and chap. 13 and between chap. 13 and 14:1 are awkward, and are “typical examples of editorial linkages.” This would be a valid point in regards to 12:31 if the verb ζηλοῦτε in this verse (ζηλοῦτε δὲ τὰ χαρίσματα τὰ μείζονα) is in fact an imperative. But, as the previous chapter suggests, this verb is most likely an indicative. Again, this would indicate that Paul’s thoughts in chap. 13 are merely an extension of his thesis on spiritual gifts in chap. 12, not an excursus on love.

As for the other transitional link in 14:1, this chapter will show that this imperative (ζηλοῦτε δὲ τὰ πνευματικά, μᾶλλον δὲ ἵνα προφητεύητε) is not at cross-purposes with what Paul says about love in chap. 13. Rather, it contrasts the Corinthians’ misguided zeal for the charismata with the correct use of ἀγάπη and τὰ πνευματικά. The purpose of τὰ πνευματικά, we shall find, is to equip the believer to prophesy so that they can edify the church (see chap. 7).

However, the most powerful argument against the displacement theory is that there are too many “verbal and conceptual links” between 1 Cor 13 and the rest of the book to “show that this chapter is not a hymn or an independently composed oration on love.”³⁹⁷ C. T. Craig comments that “*almost every word in the chapter has been*

³⁹⁶ Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 1028.

³⁹⁷ Hays, *1 Corinthians*, 221.

*chosen with this particular situation at Corinth in mind . . .*³⁹⁸ Orr and Walther observe that, except for giving over one's body to be burned, all of the gifts that appear in 13:1-3 (tongues, prophecy, understanding all mysteries, knowledge, faith, and acts of service) are specifically mentioned in either chap. 12 or chap. 14 (mysteries are mentioned in 14:2).³⁹⁹ Thiselton notes that chap. 13 includes other themes in 1 Corinthians that concern worship, such as food offered to idols (chaps. 8-10), proper attire in worship services (11:2-16), and the Lord's Supper (11:17-34).⁴⁰⁰ Witherington states that:

. . . love is said to be *not* the very things that Paul has already said that the Corinthians are: jealous (cf. 3:3), self-promoting, puffed up (cf. 4:6), shameful (cf. 5:2; 11:4), each one a seeker of his or her own advantage (cf. chs. 8-10), easily provoked, and reckoners of wrongdoing (cf. ch. 6).⁴⁰¹

Most exegetes acknowledge this "close correspondence" between chap. 13 and the rest of the epistle and have completely rejected the concept that it interrupts Paul's discussion on the charismata. They have also rejected the notion that it may have originated in some extraneous source which preceded 1 Corinthians, or that its author was not even a Christian, let alone the apostle Paul. On the contrary, they deem it to be Paul's composition and, with Craig, hold that it has been written specifically with the Corinthian situation in mind.⁴⁰²

Blomberg insists that Paul's purpose in writing this chapter is "to help solve the specific problem of the destructive manner in which the Corinthians were using

³⁹⁸ C. T. Craig, "1 Cor," *IB*, 10:165, as quoted by Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 1029.

³⁹⁹ Orr and Walther, *1 Corinthians*, 290.

⁴⁰⁰ Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 1027.

⁴⁰¹ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 265.

⁴⁰² Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 1029. Cf. Furnish, *Theology of 1 Corinthians*, 97.

their spiritual gifts.”⁴⁰³ Spicq,⁴⁰⁴ Grosheide,⁴⁰⁵ Bruce⁴⁰⁶ and Morris⁴⁰⁷ similarly urge that it is an integral part of Paul’s argument against the Corinthians’ abuse of the gifts of the Spirit, especially the gift of tongues.

To Hays, as noted earlier, “it serves a clear argumentative purpose: Paul is trying to reform the Corinthians’ understanding and practice of spiritual manifestations in worship.”⁴⁰⁸ At the same time, he adds that this chapter plays an important role “in Paul’s overall appeal for the healing of divisions in the church.”⁴⁰⁹ In the same vein, Glen claims that it is Paul’s answer to the “rivalry and divisiveness that has been the persistent problem throughout the letter.”⁴¹⁰ Mitchell likewise sees it as the antidote to Corinthian factionalism. When read in this context, chap. 13 paints a very bleak picture indeed of the “religious perversity and activism” at large in the local assembly.

Giftedness Alone Does Not Confer Spiritual Status; Love is the Characteristic of True Spirituality

Thus far we have found that the Corinthian church possessed all the gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor 1:4-7) but, in the main, they had failed to give God the glory for their individual giftedness. Instead, they took the credit themselves (see 1 Cor 4:7).

⁴⁰³ Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 261.

⁴⁰⁴ See Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 1027.

⁴⁰⁵ Grosheide, *1 Corinthians*, 303.

⁴⁰⁶ Bruce, *1 & 2 Corinthians*, 117.

⁴⁰⁷ Morris, *1 Corinthians*, rev. ed., 176.

⁴⁰⁸ Hays, *1 Corinthians*, 221.

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 222.

⁴¹⁰ Glen, *Pastoral Problems*, 170.

Moreover, some Corinthians had equated giftedness with spirituality and, because of their own giftedness, thought that they were not only very important people⁴¹¹ but that they had spiritually arrived and were in no need of further spiritual food (4:6-8).

In 1 Cor 13:1-3, Paul strikes at the very heart of this “distorted piety” by declaring that giftedness of itself contributes nothing to genuine spirituality.⁴¹² He makes the point that, without love, the gifts of the Spirit are morally worthless⁴¹³ and, as if to mock “the Sophistic boasting going on among the inspired and eloquent ones in Corinth,” he over-exaggerates his own giftedness and attributes to drive home his point.⁴¹⁴

This is what he says: “If I could speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but lack love, I am nothing more than a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I could prophesy, understand all mysteries, possess all knowledge, have a faith that can move mountains, be charitable to the point of self-deprivation, and even be martyred for Christ’s sake, and yet lack love, I am nothing.” Of course, Paul is not claiming to be able to do all of these things (see below), but what he is saying here is that even if he were the most gifted and devout person on the face of the earth, without love he would be spiritually bankrupt.⁴¹⁵

The expression “the tongues of men and of angels” (13:1) covers all kinds of speech,⁴¹⁶ but most commentators are of the opinion that it refers specifically to the

⁴¹¹ Cf. Morris, *1 Corinthians*, rev. ed., 180.

⁴¹² Cf. Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 268.

⁴¹³ Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 108; Hays, *1 Corinthians*, 222.

⁴¹⁴ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 268-269.

⁴¹⁵ Cf. Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 654; R. P. Spittler, “Spiritual Gifts,” in *ISBE*, 4 vols., gen. ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 604.

⁴¹⁶ Morris, *1 Corinthians*, rev. ed., 176.

gift of tongues. Hence, this verse is generally interpreted to mean that without love tongues-speakers and their utterances are as hollow and as empty as the discordant tones of a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal (v. 1). This analogy was meant to shock all those in Corinth who thought that the mere possession of the gift of tongues was the sign of a Spirit-filled life and that a public display of the same would raise one's status in the assembly. But, according to this verse, the primary evidence of the Spirit is not tongues but love.⁴¹⁷ Paul makes a similar point about speech in an earlier passage directed at his Corinthian detractors. No matter how well a person can speak, what counts with God is whether or not his divine power is manifest in the life. Only those who have the Spirit abiding within are subjects of his Kingdom (1 Cor 4:18-20).

Unless knowledge is also tempered with love, Paul says, the wise amount to nothing spiritually (v. 2). This, too, was meant to shock the Corinthians who following the conventions of secular society, held the wise and the eloquent in high esteem. The same can be said for all those who have the gift of prophecy and/or a faith that works miracles. Without love, their spirituality amounts to nothing (v.2).⁴¹⁸ Even zeal for God expressed in deeds of mercy and self-sacrifice is worthless, unless motivated by love (v. 3). "First-century people," states Morris, "commonly saw great merit in deeds of charity and in suffering. Paul totally rejects all such ideas. Love is the one thing needful. Nothing can make up for its lack,"⁴¹⁹ not even giftedness or self-sacrifice.

The make-up of this list of items in 1 Cor 13:1-3 does not merely include the gifts upon which the Corinthians had placed a great deal of value, but, as Conzelmann

⁴¹⁷ Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 633.

⁴¹⁸ Morris, *1 Corinthians*, rev. ed., 178.

⁴¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 179.

observes, it follows their order of merit.⁴²⁰ Not only that, all these gifts have been abused in one way or another by the Corinthians and appear to have had the opposite effect to that of their intended purpose of edifying the church (cf. 12:7). For instance, as we have noted earlier, the glossolalists were ostentatiously parading their gift in public, most likely in order to spiritually upstage those in the congregation who, like themselves, were hoping to assume the leadership of the church in the absence of their former teachers (14:1-26). This was self-inflationary and without regard to the edification of their hearers (v. 4).⁴²¹ The prophets were similarly flaunting their gift before the church, probably in order to establish their right to lead the assembly. At the very least, their unruly and undisciplined behaviour was partially to blame for the bedlam which characterized the Corinthian worship services (14:29-33).

Knowledge, on the other hand, as Fee points out, was misappropriated by the Corinthians and had become an occasion for pride (8:1). Worse still, it had the potential to cause the downfall of believers for whom Christ died (v. 11). Moreover, the Corinthians' wisdom, adds Fee, had led to the quarrelling and rivalry that was tearing the church apart (1:10; 3:4).⁴²² There are no specific references in 1 Corinthians to the misuse of the faith that works miracles; nevertheless, its inclusion in this catalogue of abuse would suggest that it had indeed been taken advantage of by its possessors.

In all three lists of charismata in 1 Cor 12 (vv. 8-10, 28, 29-30) the gift of tongues appears either last or next to last. We have already found that most

⁴²⁰ Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 221-222.

⁴²¹ Cf. Spiros Zodhiates, *To Love is to Live: An Exegetical Commentary on First Corinthians Thirteen*, rev.ed., ECS (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1998), 19; Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 631.

⁴²² Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 631.

commentators interpret this to mean that glossolalia had been grossly overrated by the Corinthians and that it was a serious problem in the assembly, which Paul was now trying to put into perspective. Placing it at the head of the list of gifts declared to be totally worthless when not accompanied by love (13:1-2) reinforces this assumption. It implies that the Corinthians were using this gift in a loveless manner and that this practice was more pronounced in Corinth than the loveless exercise of the other gifts and attributes mentioned in vv. 1-3. Moreover, it confirms that which has been assumed throughout, namely that the Corinthians thought that speaking with tongues equated to genuine spirituality.

Be that as it may, Paul's aim in 13:1-3 is not to debunk tongues and the other gifts and attributes mentioned in this passage.⁴²³ To the contrary, he has already established that these gifts are as necessary and as important to the body of Christ as any other gift of the Spirit and that they all share a common purpose, that of edifying the church (12:7-10). Nor is it Paul's intention here to contrast the gifts of the Spirit with love. That contrast comes later in vv. 8-13. "His point," says Hays, "is not that love supersedes spiritual gifts, but that it should govern their use in the church—as chap. 14 will clearly demonstrate."⁴²⁴

Similarly, Furnish claims that the statements in 13:1-3 regarding the uselessness of gifts, deeds of mercy, and self-sacrifice when love is not present, are meant to "shift attention away from the spiritual gifts themselves to what must accompany them, and thus to the purpose for which they are bestowed. That purpose, Paul has said, is to benefit all (12:7), not to enhance one's own status within the

⁴²³ Hays, *1 Corinthians*, 222; cf. Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 642.

⁴²⁴ Hays, *1 Corinthians*, 222; cf. Talbert, *Reading Corinthians*, 86.

community.”⁴²⁵

Kistemaker likewise affirms that Paul wants the Corinthians to employ their spiritual gifts in the setting of love so that “the church will be edified and strengthened.”⁴²⁶ Compared to the Corinthians’ self-inflationary use of the gifts, love has the best interests of others at heart.⁴²⁷ Therefore, as Talbert notes, it “stands supreme as the more excellent motivation for the manifestation of spiritual gifts.”⁴²⁸ In fact, without the motivation of love, the gifts of the Spirit are incomplete, ineffectual, and of no real value.⁴²⁹ Worse still, unless believers are motivated by love it does not matter what they say, believe, or do, or even what gift or gifts they may possess; they are not only not very important, but they are not even Christians.⁴³⁰

The Character of Love

Having exposed the Corinthian error that giftedness constitutes genuine piety, Paul now turns his attention to the matter of love itself. The Greek word rendered as “love” in 1 Cor 13 is ἀγάπη. The early Christians made this word their own by using it specifically to define the type of love that we see expressed by Christ on the cross. “It is,” says Morris, “a love for the utterly unworthy, a love that proceeds from a God who is love. It is a love lavished on others without a thought whether they are worthy or not. It proceeds from the nature of the lover, not from any attractiveness in the

⁴²⁵ Furnish, *Theology of 1 Corinthians*, 99.

⁴²⁶ Kistemaker, *1 Corinthians*, 452.

⁴²⁷ Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 1035.

⁴²⁸ Talbert, *Reading Corinthians*, 86.

⁴²⁹ Ibid., Orr and Walther, *1 Corinthians*, 294; cf. Zodhiates, *To Love is to Live*, 37.

⁴³⁰ Talbert, *Reading Corinthians*, 86; Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 635.

beloved.”⁴³¹ This sort of love is entirely different to both natural human affection (φιλία) and the love usually associated with physical attraction (ἔρως).⁴³²

“For the NT writers,” Witherington observes, “love is a matter of behavior, not feeling. In particular it is other-directed behavior, not self-directed action.”⁴³³ Paul’s use of ἀγάπη in 1 Cor 13:4-7 is no exception. In this passage, Paul does not describe the intrinsic nature of love, but rather, he defines it in terms of what it does and does not do, and with good reason.

As mentioned earlier, all Greeks, including the Corinthian believers, had an insatiable appetite for learning and prided themselves on their wisdom – their ability to solve intellectual difficulties philosophically. Under the circumstances, the last thing they needed from Paul was another philosophical argument, albeit on love, which they could mull over and subsequently turn to their own ends. What the Corinthians needed more than anything else was a good, old-fashioned lesson in practical Christianity, as opposed to philosophy alone. As described elsewhere in the epistle, they were jealous, boastful, rude, self-seeking, irritable, resentful and enamored with wrong, to list just some of their blameworthy behaviour which was tearing the local assembly apart.

Paul opens his account on love with two positive statements, namely, that “love is patient” and “love is kind.” These attributes of love, as several commentators have observed, are, in Hay’s words, “qualities that Paul elsewhere ascribes to God

⁴³¹ Morris, *1 Corinthians*, re. ed., 177.

⁴³² Ibid.

⁴³³ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 269.

(Rom. 2:4).”⁴³⁴ In the first instance, love, like God, does not blunder into things.

This characteristic stands in stark contrast to the Corinthians, who, as Thiselton points out, “were all too ready to jump the gun both in their assumptions about Paul and other ministers (1 Cor 4:5) and in anticipating their own triumphs (4:8).”⁴³⁵

As for the word “kindness,” this is the only time that the verb *χρηστέυεται* occurs in the NT. It means “to show kindness” in the sense of being concerned for the welfare and happiness of others and to actively seek to better their lot in life, regardless of who they are.⁴³⁶ This is a far cry from the indifference shown by the gluttonous rich in Corinth, to the needs of the poor by eating all of the food at the local “love-feasts” before the latter had arrived (1 Cor 11:17-22). It was a far cry also from that shown by the more spectacularly gifted members of the church who thought that they could do just as well without their lesser-gifted fellows (12:20-22).

A series of negative statements about what love does not do immediately follows, which, Watson comments, “must have struck the more perceptive among his [Paul’s] first readers as uncomfortably relevant to their situation.”⁴³⁷ Glen, referring to these same expressions writes: “The list reads like a summary of the qualities that Paul has observed in all the forms of problematic behavior throughout the letter.”⁴³⁸ Soards puts it rather succinctly when she says that it critiques “the Corinthian situation elegantly but abstractly.”⁴³⁹

⁴³⁴ Hays, *1 Corinthians*, 226; cf. Orr and Walther, *1 Corinthians*, 295; Watson, *1 Corinthians*, 142.

⁴³⁵ Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 1047.

⁴³⁶ Orr and Walther, *1 Corinthians*, 295.

⁴³⁷ Watson, *1 Corinthians*, 142; cf. Hays, *1 Corinthians*, 226;

⁴³⁸ Glen, *Pastoral Problems*, 172; cf. Hays, *1 Corinthians*, 226.

⁴³⁹ Soards, *1 Corinthians*, 273.

The first item on this list of what love does not do is “envy” (ζηλοῦ). This is the same word that Paul uses in 3:3 (ζῆλος) to characterize the status-seeking elements in Corinth who were attempting to raise their profile in the local assembly by riding on the coat-tails of their absent teachers’ established reputations. It is used again in 12:31 for those who were coveting (ζηλοῦτε) the “high status” gifts. The point Paul is making in 13:4 is that love, as Thiselton puts it, “*does not begrudge the status and honor of another, but delights in it for the sake of the other.*”⁴⁴⁰ More specifically, it does not play off one teacher against another or love the one and not the other, and their followers.⁴⁴¹

The second item on this list is “boasting.” As noted earlier, blowing one’s own trumpet was a real problem in the Corinthian church. In particular the Corinthians bragged about their own wisdom (3:18), their favourite teachers (3:21), their own giftedness (4:7-8), the immoral practices of one of its members (5:6), and their own spirituality (cf. 1:29-31; 14:37). This was status-seeking and triumphalism at its worst. Again, Paul stresses that love does not engage in this sort of activity. True believers, he says, are not selfish or conceited, but think more highly of others than they do of themselves (Phil 2:3).

The third item on Paul’s list of what love does not do is “pride.” Love, Paul declares, is not puffed up. As noted above, the word Paul uses in 13:5 for “puffed up” is φυσιόω. This verb occurs just seven times in the entire NT. Six of these occurrences, including this one in v. 5, are found in 1 Corinthians. All, except for the latter, as Fee observes, are “used exclusively . . . to describe the Corinthians

⁴⁴⁰ Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 1048.

⁴⁴¹ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 269.

themselves, especially in contexts where they stand over against the apostle.”⁴⁴² The Corinthians were proud of their giftedness (4:6, 18-19). They were spiritually arrogant even though they did nothing about the incest that was going on in the church (5:2) and they were proud of their knowledge (8:1). Love, says Paul, is not like that. It is not inflated with its own importance. It is not status-seeking or attention-getting.⁴⁴³ It is not pretentious in any way.⁴⁴⁴ On the contrary, it is respectful of others and is concerned for their welfare.⁴⁴⁵

Another thing that love does not do, Paul asserts, is “act shamefully.” The word he employs to convey this idea is ἀσχημονεῖ. The only other use of this verb in the epistle, indeed in the NT, is found in 7:36 where Paul refers hypothetically to the shameful behaviour of an unmarried man towards his betrothed. The adjectival form of the word is likewise limited. It occurs just once in the entire NT, in 1 Cor 12:23. In this verse Paul mentions that for the sake of propriety certain parts of the human body (he calls them the “uncomely” (ἀσχημουν) parts) need to be covered up. All three contexts (13:5, 7:36 and 12:23), notes Thiselton, differentiate between what is good and acceptable social conduct and the “thoughtless pursuit of the immediate wishes of the self regardless of the conventions and courtesies of interpersonal life.”⁴⁴⁶

According to Hays, this shameful conduct probably includes the sexual misconduct mentioned above (5:1-2), the impropriety of the women who prophesied

⁴⁴² Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 638.

⁴⁴³ Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 1049.

⁴⁴⁴ Cf. Hays, *1 Corinthians*, 226.

⁴⁴⁵ Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 1049.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid.

in church with their heads uncovered (11:2-16), and the humiliation of the poor by the gluttonous rich at the love-feast which preceded the Lord's Supper (11:20-22).⁴⁴⁷

Thiselton associates it with the egocentric, disruptive display of one's gifts and rhetoric in the Corinthian assembly, especially that of the local glossolalists and prophets. He insists that 13:5 lays the foundation for what Paul says about propriety in public worship in 14:40: "Let all things be done decently and in order."⁴⁴⁸ In this respect, love stands over against the sophist-like attention-seeking of the glossolalists and prophets and does not make its presence felt at the expense of decorum.

Next, Paul writes that love is not "self-seeking" (ζητεῖ τὰ ἑαυτῆς). "This," notes Fee, "is the fifth consecutive item that specifically echoes earlier parts of the letter, this time 10:24 and 33."⁴⁴⁹ In 10:24 Paul associates self-seeking with self-edification and emphasizes that all believers are to seek to edify others rather than self. This was particularly directed at those Corinthians who were insisting on their right to eat food offered to idols, even though it may have been detrimental to the faith of others. In 10:33, Paul similarly stresses that no one, including himself, is to seek their own advantage. Instead, all are to seek the good of others.⁴⁵⁰

"In some ways," says Fee, "this is the fullest expression of what Christian love is all about. It does not seek its own; it does not believe that 'finding oneself' is the highest good; it is not enamored with self-gain, self-justification, self-worth."⁴⁵¹ Rather than looking out for self, love looks out for others (including one's enemies),

⁴⁴⁷ Hays, *1 Corinthians*, 226-227; cf. Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 638.

⁴⁴⁸ Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 1049-1050.

⁴⁴⁹ Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 638.

⁴⁵⁰ Cf. Hays, *1 Corinthians*, 227.

⁴⁵¹ Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 638.

regardless of the cost to self. Barrett expresses it thus: “Love not merely does not seek that which does not belong to it; it is prepared to give up for the sake of others even what it is entitled to.”⁴⁵²

This is precisely what Christ did for the human race. He “did not seek his own advantage (v. 5b; cf. Rom 15.1-6; Phil 2.4, 6) but gave himself for others.” Paul willingly followed suit (1 Cor 10:31-33) and unashamedly implores the Corinthians to imitate his Christ-like example of “self-renunciation for the sake of others” (11:1). If they were to comply with this injunction it would not only resolve the matter of food offered to idols but it would also have a profound effect on the way the Corinthians treated the poor and how the prophets and glossolalists conducted themselves in public. These problems, asserts Thiselton, are also alluded to by the reference to self-seeking in 13:5.⁴⁵³

The linking of self-seeking with speaking in tongues in Corinth is of particular interest to the wider tongues debate. If, for example, self-seeking is synonymous with self-edification, as 1 Cor 10:24 suggests, then it is reasonable to assume that Paul’s later statement regarding the self-edification of the tongues-speaker in 14:4 is referring to the glossolalist’s quest for personal gratification in the exercise of their gift and not to its innate qualities. If this is the case, it confirms that the Corinthian glossolalists had adopted the attention-seeking methods of the sophists and were ostentatiously parading their gift in public.

To paraphrase Hays, it is hard to pinpoint exactly what behavioural problems Paul had in mind when he added to the above list that love is “not easily provoked” and “keeps no record of wrongs,” but it probably relates to the “rivalry and

⁴⁵² Barrett, *1 Corinthians*, 303.

⁴⁵³ Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 1051.

dissensions in the Corinthian church.”⁴⁵⁴ Fee acknowledges that both items are relevant to the local situation but tends to think that Paul has the bigger picture of the church at large in mind.⁴⁵⁵ Either way, whether on a local or a global scale, the point Paul is making here is that love is not easily offended. Instead, it looks for the best in others and gives them the benefit of the doubt. Love even seeks to excuse the wrong that others do, like Christ did, for example, when on the cross he sought forgiveness for his murderers on the grounds that they had no idea what they were doing.

The final item on Paul’s list of what love does not do is that it does not delight in evil (ἀδικία). This, says Thiselton, probably stands over against any one of the following issues in Corinth:

1. The gloating over the wrongdoing of the incestuous couple in 5:1-6.
2. The unjust prosecution of one’s fellow believers in the secular courts (6:1-11).
3. “The competitive, status-seeking culture in Corinth which would encourage taking **pleasure** at the loss of esteem suffered by another if their complicity or involvement in some **wrongdoing** came to be exposed.”⁴⁵⁶

However, because the term ἀδικία features prominently in Paul’s castigation of the practice of taking one’s fellow believers to court unjustly, it is the most likely of the three options.⁴⁵⁷

Whatever the case may be, love, says Paul, takes no pleasure in the misfortune

⁴⁵⁴ Hays, *1 Corinthians*, 227.

⁴⁵⁵ Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 638-639.

⁴⁵⁶ Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 1054.

⁴⁵⁷ Hays, *1 Corinthians*, 227.

or the demise of others. On the contrary, it applauds their success and rejoices with them in their achievements. Love sees all people as God's children and, unlike the more spectacularly gifted and self-righteous believers in Corinth, it treats all members of the body of Christ the same. What is more, love is open and honest. In other words, it has no hidden agendas and it does not make out truth to be something which it is not.⁴⁵⁸ Rather, it embraces the truth for what it is and rejoices in it. That is, love embraces "God's way of righteous living," which, says Hays, is "a pointed contrast to the Corinthians' present conduct as Paul sees it."⁴⁵⁹

On top of this, love protects (v. 7). This includes protecting the interests of the church and its individual members; a concept, it seems, that was totally foreign to the Corinthian psyche (cf. 1 Cor 1:11-13; 12:25). But not only that, love "believes all things, hopes all things." In the words of Fee, "it trusts God in behalf of the one loved, [and] hopes to the end that God will show mercy in that person's behalf."⁴⁶⁰ And last but not least, love never gives up on people, no matter what they do. Like Christ on the cross, love puts up with everything that the powers of darkness can bring against it, including the ingratitude, the indifference, the ridicule, the contempt, the persecution and the like of those upon whom it is so freely lavished.

This entire paragraph about what love does and does not do (13:4-7), says Witherington, "goes directly against the enmity conventions that existed in the Greco-Roman world, which set up tremendous rivalries between sophists, patrons, and officials, all of whom were striving for public recognition and honor."⁴⁶¹ More to the

⁴⁵⁸ Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 1055-1056.

⁴⁵⁹ Hays, *1 Corinthians*, 227.

⁴⁶⁰ Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 640.

⁴⁶¹ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 270.

point, it condemns the adoption of these practices by the Corinthian church and appeals to its members to give up their schismatic ways and to seek unity instead.⁴⁶²

To be even more specific, it is clear from what Paul says about the Corinthians' obsession with the "greater gifts" in 12:31 that this passage is aimed primarily at the would-be apostles, prophets and teachers among them. In true sophistic fashion, these aspiring leaders of the church had not only coveted the authoritative status that came with these offices but they had flaunted their gifts and expended their energy in pursuit of the same. The gradual shortening of the list of nine charismata in 12:4-10 to just three (prophecy, tongues, and knowledge) in 13:8-13 strongly suggests that the prophets, glossolalists, and those with the supernatural gift of knowledge were at the forefront of this activity. The rules and regulations set down by Paul to curb the excesses of both the prophets and the glossolalists in Corinth (see 14:27-33), and his special focus on knowledge in chap. 8, appear to reinforce this assumption.

The Temporary Nature of the Gifts

Perchance that these three groups of gifted believers had not yet processed the message that they were on a futile and perilous spiritual path, Paul now delivers the fatal blow to their misguided zeal. In 1 Cor 13:8-13, he effectively tells them not to put their trust in prophecy, tongues, or knowledge. All three gifts, he says, have their use-by dates. In other words, prophecy, tongues and knowledge are not going to last. They will cease or, alternatively, be done away with at the second coming of Christ – if not sooner. There are three different views as to when these particular gifts will become obsolete, all of which centre around the meaning of the term *το τέλειον*

⁴⁶² Hays, *1 Corinthians*, 227-228.

(“the perfect”) in 13:10: “But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.”

The Completed Canon of Scripture View

The first is the view that the term “perfect” refers to the completion of the canon of Scripture in the patristic period. Hence, the supernatural gifts of the Spirit, which it claims were specifically given to authenticate the preaching of the Word of God, were largely done away with by the time the NT Scriptures had been compiled, widely accepted, and had become the basis of the post-apostolic gospel message.⁴⁶³

William G. Bellshaw says:

With the completion of the New Testament there no longer was a need for men to be used as instrumentalities to give forth God’s authoritative message. This is now contained in the written Word. Men now simply proclaim it. The gift of tongues authenticating these messages also was no longer necessary. All of the things relating to this partial testimony will be made idle or rendered inoperative (the literal meaning of “shall be done away”). The gift of tongues and related gifts were for the first years of the church’s history (v. 11), while God was still in the process of revealing His Word to mankind (v. 12).⁴⁶⁴

This viewpoint is based on the understanding that:

1. The idiom ἐκ μέρους (“in part”) in 13:9 (“For we know in part, and we prophesy in part”) implies that at the time of writing the revealed will of God was still incomplete.
2. The word τέλειος in v. 10 refers to “a time when it will be completed.”⁴⁶⁵

⁴⁶³ See J. W. MacGorman, “Glossolalic Error and Its Correction: 1 Corinthians 12-14,” *RE* 80 (1983): 396.

⁴⁶⁴ William G. Bellshaw, “The Confusion of Tongues,” *BibSac* 120 (1963): 151-152; cf. Powers, “Missionary Tongues?” 46.

⁴⁶⁵ Bellshaw, “The Confusion of Tongues,” 151.

The latter, in turn, is based on its limited, but by no means exclusive, use by Paul and several other NT writers in the sense of “whole” or “complete.”⁴⁶⁶ What makes this interpretation even more plausible, says Robert L. Thomas, is that the NT gives the impression that the gift of apostleship was for the apostolic era only. In particular Eph 2:20 indicates that the roles of the apostles and the prophets were limited to the foundational stages of the Christian church and not to the actual building of such.

That task, says Thomas, was left for others to complete. When this passage in Ephesians is read in conjunction with Paul’s claim to be the last in the line of commissioned apostles (see 1 Cor 15:8-10), it is argued, he adds, that it also indicates that the gift of apostleship was of limited duration.⁴⁶⁷ That is, it would not continue beyond the apostolic age. Most scholars tend to agree with this conclusion with some of them arguing that if the gift of apostleship did end in the first-century A.D., it is likely that some of the other gifts of the Spirit did not survive the apostolic period either.⁴⁶⁸

Edgar reasons that the whole gamut of miraculous gifts was included. Firstly, Acts 2:43 and 5:12, he says, make it clear that the apostles and not the church were responsible for the miracles performed in NT times. Secondly, he claims that Mk 16:20 and Heb 2:3-4, which speak of the miraculous exploits of the apostles, indicate that at the time of writing (around 70 A.D.) miracles were already a thing of the

⁴⁶⁶ Cf. Robert L. Thomas, “Tongues . . . will Cease,” *JETS* 17/2 (1974): 81-82.

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁴⁶⁸ Cf. Walvoord, “The Holy Spirit,” 119; Rogers, “The Gift of Tongues,” 143.

past.⁴⁶⁹ It has also been suggested that the warning not to add to the prophetic word of the Apocalypse (Rev 22:18) indicates that the gift of prophecy was likewise of limited duration.⁴⁷⁰ The latter is hinted at in the following statement by Vine:

With the completion of Apostolic testimony and the completion of the Scriptures of truth (“the faith once for all delivered to the saints,” Jude, 3, R.V.), ‘that which is perfect’ had come, and the temporary gifts were done away. For the Scripture provided by the Spirit of God were ‘perfect.’ Nothing was added to them, nothing taken from them.⁴⁷¹

In Toussaint’s words, “this view is very tenable theologically” but, as he and others are quick to point out, it cannot be defended exegetically.⁴⁷² There is a consensus among commentators that the term “that which is perfect” mentioned in 13:10 is explained in v. 12. However, there is nothing in this verse to suggest that it refers to the close of the canon of Scripture. Rather, it speaks about the conditions following the *parousia* and thus identifies the “perfect” with “the rapture and resurrection of the church.”⁴⁷³

Additionally, some scholars object to the actual interpretation of τέλειος in 13:10 as “whole” or “complete.” As noted above, Paul’s use of this adjective is not limited to this meaning. He also uses it, Forbes says, to describe those who are perfect; to call believers to be perfect, and to refer to a time when all will be perfect.⁴⁷⁴ Thomas suggests that if it was Paul’s intention to convey the idea of

⁴⁶⁹ Thomas R. Edgar, “The Cessation of the Sign Gifts,” *BibSac* 145 (1988): 380-382.

⁴⁷⁰ Cf. Thomas, “Tongues,” 82.

⁴⁷¹ W. E. Vine, *First Corinthians*, 184, as quoted by Stanley D. Toussaint, “Symposium on the Tongues Movement: First Corinthians Thirteen and the Tongues Question,” *BibSac* 120 (1963): 312.

⁴⁷² Toussaint, “1 Corinthians 13,” 312; cf. Forbes, *Prophecy*, 86.

⁴⁷³ Toussaint, “1 Corinthians 13,” 312; cf. Forbes, *Prophecy*, 86-87.

⁴⁷⁴ Forbes, *Prophecy*, 91; cf. BDAG, 995-996.

“completion” in v. 10 then it would have been more appropriate for him to have used *ek pantos* instead of *to teleios*. “This idiom,” he says, “would have made the antithesis with *to ek merous* absolutely symmetrical.” Both are quantitative whereas *to teleion* is qualitative.⁴⁷⁵

Finally, Forbes and Hays insist that Paul could have had no inkling of the formation of the NT canon.⁴⁷⁶ This event did not occur until at least a century or more after his death. Paul did not even think that the world would last that long. It is clear from what he says about the translation of the saints in 1 Thess 4:13-18 that he fully expected some of his contemporaries to live to see the coming of Christ.

The Mature Church View

The second theory as to when the supernatural gifts of the Spirit are to be done away with is the mature church theory. In a nutshell, this theory claims that these gifts, including tongues, prophecy and knowledge, were for the formative years of the Christian church but that they were no longer needed once the church had reached maturity.⁴⁷⁷ Exponents of this view tend to justify it on the grounds that “the adjective τέλειος . . . is often used to describe that which is mature.”⁴⁷⁸ It is clear, says Thiselton, that Paul uses the word in this sense in 1 Cor 2:6 to refer to the mature Spirit-filled Christian and, again, in 14:20 to appeal to the Corinthian glossolalist to start thinking like an adult rather than a child.⁴⁷⁹ This notion of τέλειος receives even greater impetus in 13:11 where, as Toussaint points out, “the illustration of the

⁴⁷⁵ Thomas, “Tongues,” 82-83; cf. Forbes, *Prophecy*, 87.

⁴⁷⁶ Forbes, *Prophecy*, 86; Hays, *1 Corinthians*, 229.

⁴⁷⁷ Toussaint, “1 Corinthians 13,” 312.

⁴⁷⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁹ Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 1065.

child and adult . . . implies a comparison is being made between maturity and immaturity.”⁴⁸⁰

In the case of tongues, some argue further that the middle voice of the verb παύσονται (v. 8) indicates that they “will cease in and of themselves” as opposed to prophecy and knowledge being rendered inoperative (καταργέω).⁴⁸¹ This is understood to mean that even though this gift had been bestowed on some of the members of the Corinthian church, it has not been bestowed on anyone else since that time or, alternatively, since the end of the apostolic age.⁴⁸² The virtual silence of church history concerning this gift is cited as further evidence of its first-century demise. MacArthur’s comments are representative of the argument for a first century demise of glossolalia. He states that:

History records that tongues did cease. Again, it is significant that tongues are mentioned only in the earliest books of the New Testament. Paul wrote at least twelve epistles after 1 Corinthians and never mentioned tongues again. Peter never mentioned tongues; James never mentioned tongues; John never mentioned tongues; neither did Jude. Tongues appeared only briefly in Acts and 1 Corinthians as the new message of the gospel was being spread. But once the church was established, tongues were gone. They stopped. The later books of the New Testament do not mention tongues again. Nor did anyone in the post-apostolic age. Cleon Rogers wrote, “It is significant that the gift of tongues is nowhere alluded to, hinted at or even found in the Apostolic Fathers.” Chrysostom and Augustine - the greatest theologians of the eastern and western churches - considered tongues obsolete. Chrysostom stated categorically that tongues had ceased by his time. Writing in the fourth century, he described tongues as an obscure practice, admitting that he was not even certain about the characteristics of the gift. ‘The obscurity is produced by our ignorance of the facts referred to and by their cessation, being such as then used

⁴⁸⁰ Toussaint, “1 Corinthians 13,” 312.

⁴⁸¹ Forbes, *Prophecy*, 85.

⁴⁸² MacGorman, “Glossolalic Error,” 395-396; cf. Toussaint, “1 Corinthians 13,” 314-315.

to occur but now no longer take place,' he wrote.⁴⁸³

The voice of church history is also silent regarding the miraculous gifts of the Spirit. Similarly, it is reasoned that this silence confirms that they too were discarded by the time the early church had reached maturity.⁴⁸⁴ Says Edgar: "*the only reasonable explanation for the lack of these gifts in church history is that God did not give them. If He had given them, they would have occurred.*"⁴⁸⁵

In spite of the apparent reasonableness of these arguments there are several factors which tend to go against this hypothesis. Firstly, the child and adult illustration in v. 11 is not talking about a maturing church as such, but rather, as Toussaint points out, it portrays the principle that is found in v. 10 of one thing being superseded by another.⁴⁸⁶ In this particular case, the immature thoughts of a child are superseded by those of a mature adult. This same principle is illustrated again in v. 12 where Paul contrasts seeing in a mirror with that of seeing face to face. There is nothing gradual about this transition. It is a radical change from one way of looking at things to another.

Secondly, Toussaint reminds us that v.12 is introduced by an explanatory γάρ. This, he says, "indicates verse 11 is not an illustration of the early church being superseded by the mature church, but instead it shows that verse 11 is a picture of Christ's presence overruling our present condition."⁴⁸⁷

⁴⁸³ MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, 283-284; cf. George B. Cutten, *Speaking with Tongues Historically and Psychologically Considered* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1927): 32; George W. Dollar, "Church History and the Tongues Movement," *BibSac* 120 (1963), 316-321.

⁴⁸⁴ Cf. Dollar, "Church History," 316-321.

⁴⁸⁵ Edgar, "Cessation of the Sign Gifts," 374.

⁴⁸⁶ Toussaint, "1 Corinthians 13," 313; cf. Hays, *1 Corinthians*, 229.

⁴⁸⁷ Toussaint, "1 Corinthians 13," 313.

Thirdly, MacGorman claims that the translation of the verb παύσονται (v. 8) as “will cease in and of themselves” is a spurious interpretation. The correct translation of this verb, he argues, is simply “they will cease.” There is nothing in its form, he adds, to indicate a specific terminus point for the gift of tongues, let alone a first-century ending to this gift. To him, the context suggests that all of the charismatic gifts will be done away with at the *parousia*, including the gift of tongues. Until then, the church, he infers, will need these gifts in order to function effectively as the body of Christ. Fee similarly acknowledges that the gifts will not last forever and that they are needed to build up the church in the present age, “when such edification is needed.”⁴⁸⁸

In addition, Hunter urges that the relative silence of the early church fathers regarding tongues-speech can just as effectively argue the case for the normative use of tongues in the post-apostolic period. “The general rule of thumb for these early writings,” he says, “is that a subject was treated when there was sufficient abuse of the phenomenon or extraordinary academic interest to warrant a commitment on the subject.”⁴⁸⁹ The patristic writers, he adds, never “set out to write an unabridged systematic theology or elaborate commentaries on the books of the NT. Had this been the case the demand for explicit data would be more reasonable.”⁴⁹⁰

Forbes maintains that the historical evidence suggests that tongues-speaking was known in at least three separate areas over the first three hundred and fifty years or so of the church’s life.⁴⁹¹ As noted earlier (see chap. 1), the clearest reference to

⁴⁸⁸ Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 647.

⁴⁸⁹ Hunter, “Tongues-Speech,” 136.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁹¹ Forbes, *Prophecy*, 84.

tongues-speaking in the writings of the apostolic fathers is that of the second-century scholar Irenaeus of Lyons. He claims ““that he has heard many brethren in the churches possessing prophetic gifts and speaking in tongues of all sorts by the Spirit (παντοδαπαῖς λαλούντων διὰ τοῦ πνεύματος γλώσσαις), bringing to the light the hidden things of men, and expounding the mysteries of God.””⁴⁹² According to Forbes, there is no reason not to take this statement at face value and to argue for the late second-century manifestation of the gift of tongues and the other prophetic gifts in Irenaeus’ churches.

Tertullian, who worked out of Carthage in North Africa, similarly claims that he is not only acquainted with certain gifts of the Spirit, but also that he can easily produce from within his assemblies the same gifts, including the interpretation of tongues. If this is the case then the latter, reasons Forbes, infers that the gift of tongues was also present.⁴⁹³

On the other hand, Novatian, the schismatic Roman priest of the third century, speaks of the various charismata (including tongues and healings) in the present tense as opposed to the perfect tense when referring to the possession of the same by the apostles. This strongly suggests, claims Forbes, “that at least some of the charismata were present in Novatian’s churches” around 240-250 A.D.⁴⁹⁴ Ambrose makes the same distinction between the past and the present tense when referring to the institution of the apostolic office and various other gifts in the apostles’ day and the bestowal of the gifts of tongues and healings in his era (337-397 A.D.) respectively.⁴⁹⁵

⁴⁹² As cited by F. Godet, *1 Corinthians*, 1:200.

⁴⁹³ Forbes, *Prophecy*, 79.

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 80-81.

⁴⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

Finally, it cannot be proven but folklore would have it that the fourth-century monk Pachomius, who established eleven monasteries in the Theban district of Egypt, actually spoke with tongues. “In the light of this evidence, it becomes impossible to argue,” writes Forbes, “that glossolalia was a limited, anomalous phenomenon within the Apostolic generation.”⁴⁹⁶ The same can be said for the miraculous gifts of the Spirit.

In some circles the inclusion of the longer ending of the Book of Mark (16:9-20) into the main body of the text, which has been dated as early as A.D. 200 and as late as 382, is considered to be an indication of the widespread contemporary use of tongues. If this supposition is correct, speaking in tongues was far more common in the post-apostolic era than the extant literature indicates.

The Second Coming View

The third and most popular theory as to when prophecy, tongues and knowledge will be abolished is the *parousia* view. According to this hypothesis τὸ τέλειον (1 Cor 13:10) means “the perfect” rather than “complete” or “mature” and, as alluded to above, refers to the return of Christ and to the ideal condition that will exist following the *parousia*.⁴⁹⁷ The latter is based on the assumption that the rapture and the resurrection of the saints is the only event that makes complete sense of the “face to face” and the “knowing fully” imagery employed by Paul in v. 12.⁴⁹⁸ Secondly, this view does not differentiate between the passive and middle forms in v. 8.⁴⁹⁹

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid., 84.

⁴⁹⁷ Thomas, “Tongues,” 83; Forbes, *Prophecy*, 86; MacGorman, “Glossolalic Error,” 396; Toussaint, “1 Corinthians 13,” 313.

⁴⁹⁸ Thomas, “Tongues,” 83.

⁴⁹⁹ Forbes, *Prophecy*, 86.

Consequently, it does not arrive at an earlier date for the cessation of the gift of tongues compared to that of prophecy and knowledge, as the mature church view does. All three “revelatory gifts,” as Hays calls them, will be discarded at the *parousia* because they no longer serve a useful purpose.⁵⁰⁰ At that time, the kingdom of heaven will be revealed in all its glory. Nothing will be kept from the redeemed.

Thomas raises four major objections to this view:

1. Τέλειος is not used elsewhere in Paul’s writings in the sense of “perfect” and thus is unlikely to have this meaning in 13:10.⁵⁰¹
2. As noted previously, this term is qualitative whereas ἐκ μέρους (“in part,” v. 12) is quantitative. “As such the two are not compatible antitheses.”⁵⁰²
3. In order “to produce a temporal distinction between [faith, hope, and love] and the three spiritual gifts mentioned earlier [prophecy, tongues, and knowledge],” the *parousia* view maintains that faith, hope and love extend beyond the second coming of Christ.⁵⁰³ Thomas rejects this idea on the grounds that Paul’s emphasis throughout the entire paragraph (1 Cor 13:8-13) is on “the temporal superiority of love,” even though he concedes that v. 8a indicates that love endures forever. In keeping with this theme, Thomas claims that the word νυνί (“now”) in v. 13a must have a temporal force, which means that Paul’s reference to the constancy of faith, hope and love in v. 13b applies to

⁵⁰⁰ Hays, *1 Corinthians*, 229.

⁵⁰¹ Thomas, “Tongues,” 83.

⁵⁰² Ibid.

⁵⁰³ Thomas, “Tongues,” 85.

the present dispensation and not to the hereafter. Accordingly, the comparison Paul makes between the enduring character of faith, hope and love and the temporary nature of the gifts of prophecy, tongues, and knowledge (v. 8) strongly suggests that the latter “do not necessarily cover the entire period up to the *parousia*.”⁵⁰⁴ Thomas also makes the point that the idea that love alone survives the *parousia* agrees with what Paul says elsewhere about faith being replaced by sight (2 Cor 5:7) and hope giving way to the reality of redemption (Rom 8:24-25) when Christ returns.⁵⁰⁵

4. The child to adult analogy (1 Cor 13:11) implies that the transition from immaturity to maturity is a gradual one and not an abrupt, momentary change. To compare the church universal to an immature child, which is essentially what the *parousia* view does, is completely out of character with the rest of Paul’s writings. Paul consistently envisages the church to be a “growing” church which matures over time. Besides, the notion that Paul’s claim to adult status (v. 11) equates to perfection at the time of the *parousia* is at odds with the very next verse where he admits that even as an adult he has his limitations. That is, he only has partial knowledge.⁵⁰⁶

The Crux of the Matter

The timing of the abolition of the supernatural gifts of the Spirit, including the

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid., 84.

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁶ Thomas, “Tongues,” 85.

gift of tongues, has been a contentious issue in theological circles ever since the rise of the modern tongues movement in the early twentieth century. Indeed, a great deal depends on whether or not they have already ceased. For instance, if the close of the NT canon and the mature church views are correct in placing the cessation of the gifts in either the apostolic or post-apostolic eras, then the whole modern tongues movement collapses. It would not be able to justify its existence.

On the other hand, if the argument can be sustained that the supernatural gifts are not done away with until the *parousia*, then there may be some substance to the claim that the modern tongues movement is the modern day counterpart of the early, Spirit-filled, apostolic church. The problem is that all three views, as we have found above, have their inherent weaknesses and therefore are unable to present a substantial enough case to establish their individual claims.

It is proposed that the point Paul is making in 1 Cor 13:8-13 is that the gifts of prophecy, tongues and knowledge were only temporary and that one day they would be made redundant. The actual timing of this event is considered irrelevant. Hence the Corinthians' obsession with the greater gifts (12:31) and their flaunting of the ones they already possessed, in particular the revelatory gifts, was both unwarranted and immature. This is similar to a child's fascination with childish things which Paul with "decision and finality" had put behind him when he became a man.⁵⁰⁷ As Paul considered himself to have reached adulthood, he urges the Corinthians to likewise seek maturity and leave behind their own childish ways – their immature infatuation with, and their abuse of, transient gifts.

⁵⁰⁷ Cf. Morris, *1 Corinthians*, rev. ed., 183.

Childish Babbling

Smith notes that there may even be an allusion to tongues “in Paul’s statement that when he was a child he spoke as a child.”⁵⁰⁸ That is, it may infer that tongues, like the senseless babbling of an infant, are unintelligible. This idea is based on several factors. Firstly, as mentioned in the previous paragraph, the Corinthians had an inordinate view of speaking in tongues. Secondly, the use of the verb λαλέω (speak) in v. 11 is used in conjunction with γλῶσσαι (tongues) in 1 Cor 13:1 and throughout chap. 14. Thirdly, the same contrast between thinking like children and thinking like adults is found again in 14:20 where Paul appeals to the Corinthians to put their childish attitude towards tongues behind them and to grow up spiritually. Their immaturity, no doubt, was reflected in the way they used this gift. However, as expressed and/or alluded to above, this analogy is not concerned with the nature of the revelatory gifts as such, but rather with the Corinthians’ attitude toward these gifts.

The Pre-eminence of Love

It is clear from 1 Cor 12 that the gifts of the Spirit played an important part in the formation of the early church. On the other hand, it is unclear whether or not they have a role to play in the effective running of the latter-day church. But even if the charismata are a vital part of the eschatological church, it is contended that they are not, and never will be, as important as faith, hope and love. We have already found that not all believers receive all of the gifts of the Spirit or even the same gift/s but all must have faith, hope and love in order to be mature Christians.⁵⁰⁹ In this respect, they are far more important than even the highly prized apostolic, prophetic and

⁵⁰⁸ Smith, “Glossolalia,” 310.

⁵⁰⁹ Jamieson, Faussett and Brown, *Commentary of the Whole Bible*, 1218.

teaching offices or the revelatory gifts of prophecy, tongues and knowledge.⁵¹⁰ But not only that, faith, hope and love outlast the gifts. As noted earlier, they continue on after the gifts have been abolished but whether or not all three virtues make the transition from this world to the next is still open to conjecture. The only thing we can be certain of is that love is the greatest of them all (13:13) and that it goes on forever (cf. 13:8). Love is not only eternal but without it, that is, without the type of love demonstrated at Calvary, we would have nothing to have faith in or to hope for.

Conclusion

What Paul is saying in 1 Cor 13 is that without love the Corinthians' quest to be genuinely spiritual individuals is as futile as the loveless exercise of the charismata and that, like the gifts, they will not be a part of the kingdom of heaven. As a result, Paul begs them, rather, he commands them, to "pursue love" (14:1). It alone has the capacity to transform sinful humanity into the image of God and thus to bring about the spiritual maturity that the Corinthians craved and, on account of their giftedness, thought that they already had achieved. Consequently, the pursuit of love is infinitely more desirable and acceptable in God's sight than seeking the status and authority which came with the apostolic, prophetic and teaching offices; the greater gifts of which Paul almost certainly speaks in 12:31. Accordingly, it should be the driving force, the motivation behind everything the earnest Christian does, including the manifestation of their spiritual gifts.⁵¹¹

⁵¹⁰ Morris, *1 Corinthians*, rev.ed., 185.

⁵¹¹ Cf. Talbert, *Reading Corinthians*, 86.

CHAPTER 7 - TONGUES VERSUS PROPHECY

In 1 Cor 13 Paul seeks to counter the Corinthian misconception that giftedness alone proves true spirituality. Firstly, he makes the point that the most gifted and devout person amounts to nothing without love. Second, he defines love so that the Corinthians cannot possibly misunderstand or misconstrue its true character, as they had done with giftedness and spirituality. Thirdly, Paul says that the gifts on which the Corinthians had placed so much value (prophecy, tongues and knowledge) are only temporary. Therefore, he asks them to change their priorities and instead to pursue love: the “more excellent way” (1 Cor 12:31).

Yet, despite this emphasis in 1 Cor 13 on love’s ascendancy over the gifts, does Paul suddenly contradict himself by urging the Corinthians “to strive for the spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy?” Does he with this admonition deny the Spirit’s sovereignty in allocating the gifts, the transitory nature of the gifts, and their secondary importance to love? This is the impression we get from many translations of 1 Cor 14:1. For example, the NKJV states “Pursue love, and desire spiritual *gifts*, but especially that you may prophesy.” The NIV goes one step further and renders “to prophesy” as “the gift of prophecy.” It reads: “Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy.”

Most commentators endorse this translation of 14:1 although they are divided as to whether the term τὰ πνευματικά, which is usually translated as “spiritual gifts” in this verse, refers to the “greater gifts” in general or to tongues and prophecy in particular. This difference of opinion is based on how one translates the particle δέ in the second clause of this verse (ζηλοῦτε δὲ τὰ πνευματικά).

The Resumptive Theory

Some argue that the use of δέ in 14:1 is resumptive.⁵¹² That is, they insist that this clause picks up the theme of 12:31a (ζηλοῦτε δὲ τὰ χαρίσματα τὰ μείζονα) and that, in conjunction with the last clause in 14:1 (μᾶλλον δὲ ἵνα προφητεύητε), it specifies that the gift of prophecy is one of the “greater gifts” and that the Corinthians are to seek this gift above all the other gifts of the Spirit.⁵¹³

For obvious reasons this particular use of δέ is the preferred option of those who argue that Paul’s treatise on love in chap. 13 is a digression which has no relevance to the debate over spiritual gifts that dominates the chapters either side of it. Héring, who belongs to this school of thought, goes so far as to suggest that originally the clause regarding the greater gifts in 12:31 (ζηλοῦτε δὲ τὰ χαρίσματα τὰ μείζονα) was followed immediately by μᾶλλον δὲ ἵνα προφητεύητε in 14:1, which equates to: “aspire to the so-called higher spiritual gifts, but still more to prophecy.”⁵¹⁴

The notion that 1 Cor 14:1 resumes Paul’s train of thought in 12:31 is popular also with some exegetes who do not agree with the parenthetical school of thought. For example, Hays, who leaves no stone unturned in his quest to prove the relevancy of chap. 13 to the wider debate concerning spiritual gifts, says:

After the interlude of chapter 13, Paul resumes his discussion from chapter 12 of the various roles of spiritual gifts in the body of Christ. The first clause in 14:1a sums up the message of chapter 13: pursue the way of love (cf. 12:31b). The second clause (“eagerly desire spiritual gifts”) picks up the same verb (*zēloute*) used in 12:31a, now specifying more closely the proper aim of such desire: the gift of prophecy should

⁵¹² Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 1083.

⁵¹³ Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 653-655; Hays, *1 Corinthians*, 235; Morris, *1 Corinthians*, rev. ed., 186; cf. Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 268; Prior, *1 Corinthians*, 235; Watson, *1 Corinthians*, 145.

⁵¹⁴ Héring, *1 Corinthians*, 145.

be especially sought.⁵¹⁵

The Adversative Theory

Others, like Meyer, Edwards and Barrett, for example, reject the resumptive theory and prefer the adversative translation of δέ (but) instead.⁵¹⁶ That way ζηλοῦτε δὲ τὰ πνευματικά is not seen in isolation to διώκετε τὴν ἀγάπην as the resumptive theory suggests. Rather, it signifies what is to take place in conjunction with love,⁵¹⁷ thus insuring, as Robertson and Plummer insist, that love itself does not do away with the need for spiritual gifts.⁵¹⁸ Says Kling: “In urging the former [love] he [Paul] was not intending to disparage the latter [spiritual gifts], as they [the Corinthians] might be disposed to infer.”⁵¹⁹ On the contrary, Grosheide maintains that Paul was merely “assigning to the charismata their proper place and indicating the principle according to which they must be used.”⁵²⁰

This particular theory sits well with the notion that both Paul and his readers were aware of the self-serving Corinthians’ wanton abuse of the gifts of utterance, especially the gift of tongues, and the need for Paul to once and for all set them straight on the role of these particular gifts. That is, the gifts of utterance, like the other charismata, are meant to benefit others (cf. 12:7) and are not to be used as “a means of self-affirmation and cause of disruption.”⁵²¹ In fact Gillespie and

⁵¹⁵ Hays, *1 Corinthians*, 235.

⁵¹⁶ Meyer, *Epistles to the Corinthians*, 2:3; Edwards, *1 Corinthians*, 357; Barrett, *1 Corinthians*, 315; cf. Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 1083.

⁵¹⁷ Meyer, *Epistles to the Corinthians*, 2:3.

⁵¹⁸ Robertson and Plummer, *1 Corinthians*, 305.

⁵¹⁹ Kling, “Corinthians,” 282.

⁵²⁰ Grosheide, *1 Corinthians*, 316.

⁵²¹ Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 1083.

Conzelmann argue that the “greater gifts” (12:31) refer specifically to the gifts of tongues and prophecy with prophecy being the greater of the two.⁵²² According to Thiselton, the immediate context tends to bear this out. Beginning with the last clause in v. 1, Paul, he points out, encourages the Corinthians to seek the gift of prophecy (v. 1) above that of tongues (v. 2) on the grounds that prophesying edifies, exhorts and comforts others (v. 3) whereas tongues do not (v. 4).⁵²³

Either way, whether one sees δέ as resumptive or adversative, or interprets the term τὰ πνευματικά in 14:1 as the “greater gifts” in general or limits them to tongues and prophecy in particular, the outcome is essentially the same: Paul encourages the Corinthians to seek the gift of prophecy over all the other spiritual gifts, including tongues.

Three Basic Assumptions

One or more of the following assumptions is usually cited in support of this outcome. Firstly, because the verb ζηλοῦτε is an imperative in 14:1 it is argued that the verb is likely to adopt the same mood in 12:31a, indicating that in 14:1 Paul is now specifying what the higher gifts are that Paul urges the Corinthians to eagerly desire. Secondly, it is claimed that the term πνευματικά in 14:1 is a synonym for χαρίσματα in 12:31a and therefore means “spiritual gifts.” The third argument cited is that the last clause in 14:1, (μᾶλλον δὲ ἵνα προφητεύητε) expresses object, either directly or indirectly. However, the idea that the Corinthians were to seek the gift of prophecy over the other gifts of the Spirit can be challenged on all three counts.

⁵²² Thomas W. Gillespie, *The First Theologians: A Study in Early Christian Prophecy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 129-130; Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 233; cf. Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 654.

⁵²³ Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 1083-1084.

The first challenge concerns whether the verb ζηλοῦτε in 12:31a should be translated as a command to eagerly desire the greater gifts simply because its occurrence in 14:1 is in the imperative mood. As previously argued, the context appears to favour reading ζηλοῦτε as a statement of fact, and not as a command. In other words, it is simply recording that the Corinthians were eagerly desiring the so-called “greater” gifts.

This view has been argued at length in chap. 5 of this treatise, but bears repeating here. To recapitulate, the Corinthians had mistakenly thought that the more spectacular gifts of the Spirit were a sign of spiritual superiority. Those with these high profile gifts had consequently shown contempt for their less gifted brothers and sisters, and had used the same to divide and destroy the church rather than to build it up as the charismata were supposed to do (see 12:7).

In 1 Cor 12 Paul uses the human body analogy to illustrate that a diversity of gifts is essential to the effective running of the church, and that each individual member has a unique function in the body of Christ that no one else can perform. Hence, all believers are to be content with the gift or gifts that the Spirit has apportioned them and should not strive for those gifts which they do not already possess. If Paul, therefore, is urging the Corinthians to eagerly desire the greater gifts (12:31a), he would be contradicting himself by encouraging the Corinthians to strive for gifts they do not already have. His argument throughout has been that it takes many and varied gifts for the body of Christ to function effectively, and that it is the Spirit who distributes the gifts as he sees fit. Since all gifts are essential to the overall effectiveness of the church and because the Spirit is responsible for their distribution, all believers should be content with the gifts apportioned to them and therefore ought not to covet those gifts which they do not already possess. It also calls into question

the Spirit's wisdom in the distribution of the gifts.

Recall also that to circumvent these problems, advocates for the rendering of ζηλοῦτε as an imperative in 12:31a generally argue that:

1. There is nothing wrong with striving for a specific gift providing the Spirit's sovereignty in apportioning the gifts is respected.
2. Paul is merely shifting the attention away from what the Corinthians thought were the greatest gifts, to those which build up the community of believers as opposed to those gifts that minister to self-interest.
3. The "more excellent way" does not stand in contrast to
 ζηλοῦτε δὲ τὰ χαρίσματα τὰ μείζονα, but rather it shows us what gifts to strive for and how to use them properly.

The trouble is that these arguments are likewise fraught with problems. For instance, we have already found that there is no scriptural evidence to suggest that it is an acceptable practice to solicit God for the gifts of the Spirit on any grounds. It can be argued that the apostles were known to have petitioned God for a further infilling of the Spirit to that of Pentecost, so that with the aid of signs and miracles they could continue to preach the word of God with boldness (Acts 4:29-31). However, they were not asking for gifts which they had not already received (Acts 2:43; cf. Heb 2:4); they were merely asking for the continuance of gifts already bestowed. Hence the Spirit's sovereignty in distributing the gifts was not compromised.

In addition, the charismata cannot possibly be categorized as "greater" or "lesser" gifts on the basis that some gifts edify the church and some do not. Clearly all of the gifts should edify the church (12:7). However, no gift edifies the church when it is used for selfish purposes or if the possessor chooses to abuse their gift for self-aggrandizement. The fact that Paul emphasises that all spiritual gifts are of equal

importance in the body of Christ does not prevent him from recognising the various advantages of having certain gifts in certain situations. For example, Paul notes that some gifts are more effective in raising up and maintaining churches and he categorises the functions of the apostles, prophets and teachers as being more effective in church establishment or building. Other gifts such as readings, hospitality and the various nurturing gifts may take precedence if the goal were church maintenance, another very important function of the growing church.

From what Paul says elsewhere in the epistle about the Corinthians' teacher/pupil relationships, their various party factions, and the spiritual elitism that was rife in the local assembly, it is evident that some members of the church were coveting the authoritative status that came with the apostolic, prophetic and teaching offices. It is also evident that they were flaunting their gifts in public in order to establish their claims to these offices. It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that Paul's use of the term the "greater gifts" refers to the apostolic, prophetic and teaching offices. Those who interpret the verb $\zeta\eta\lambda\omicron\upsilon\tau\epsilon$ as a command in 12:31a tend to ignore this evidence.

Furthermore, it is clear from the arguments presented in the previous chapter that Paul's treatise on love in chap. 13 does not show the Corinthians how to use the charismata. Rather, it is saying that without love the Corinthians' quest to be a genuinely spiritual people will never be realized unless they allow love to be the driving force in their lives.

On the other hand, if the verb $\zeta\eta\lambda\omicron\upsilon\tau\epsilon$ in 1 Cor 12:31a is translated as an indicative rather than an imperative it avoids the many pitfalls associated with translating it as a command. As a matter of fact, it complements rather than conflicts with all that Paul has said in vv. 1-30 about:

1. The need for a diversity of gifts in the church.
2. Unity in diversity in the body of Christ.
3. The Spirit's prerogative to distribute the gifts as he pleases.
4. How all are to be content with the gift or gifts that God has given them.
5. Not all believers receiving all of the gifts of the Spirit, or even the same gifts.
6. How there is not one gift of the Spirit that every believer can receive.

Not only that, if the verb ζηλοῦτε in 1 Cor 12:31 is translated as an indicative rather than an imperative, and if the δέ and the καί in this verse are taken as adversative (“but”), it means that Paul is simply contrasting the Corinthians’ zeal for the “greater” gifts with the “more excellent way.” In other words, he is not qualifying what he means by the term the “best” gifts and how they ought to be used. This makes far better sense of chap. 13 which, as we have noted in the previous chapter, primarily targets the Corinthians’ misuse and misunderstanding of the charismata.

More importantly for the question in hand, if the verb ζηλοῦτε in 1 Cor 12:31 is an indicative rather than an imperative, it means that the phrase ζηλοῦτε δὲ τὰ χαρίσματα τὰ μείζονα in this verse does not mean: “eagerly desire the best gifts.” This, in turn, means that the phrase ζηλοῦτε δὲ τὰ πνευματικά in 14:1 is not picking up on this phrase in 12:31 and running with it, by now identifying what the so-called greater gifts are that the Corinthians were to eagerly desire. On the contrary, it follows Paul’s theme throughout the epistle of edifying others by encouraging the Corinthians to channel their energies into building up and maintaining the church to glorify God as a united group instead of focusing on their own individual needs.

The second challenge to the idea that 1 Cor 14:1 urges the Corinthians to eagerly desire the gifts of the Spirit, especially the gift of prophecy, concerns whether

Paul uses πνευματικά in this verse as a synonym for χαρίσματα in 12:31a. In other words, is it legitimate to interpret this use of πνευματικά as “spiritual gifts” and thus, in turn, as the charismata in general or as “tongues” and “prophecy” in particular?

In our earlier discussion of the word πνευματικῶν (see chap. 3) we found that πνευματικά literally means “spiritual things” or “spiritual people,” depending on whether it is plural form of the neuter or masculine gender respectively. In 14:1 it is neuter plural and therefore refers to “spiritual things.” In the same chapter (chap. 3), we also found that the term πνευματικά entails much more than just spiritual gifts. Paul makes it very clear as to what this expression means in 1 Cor 2:9-16. According to this passage, πνευματικά refers to the things of God which we are incapable of appreciating without the Spirit’s help, namely, his divine will and providences, including the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, and the plans he has for us in both the here and now, and in the hereafter; plans which incorporate his blueprint for the gifts of the Spirit (see 12:7; Eph 4:11-17). Other things of the Spirit of which Paul speaks include the confession of the Lordship of Christ (1 Cor 12:3), various kinds of ministries and services (vv. 5-6), the charismata (vv. 8-10), faith, hope and love (13:13), the other fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23), as well as the individual items which make up the whole armour of God (Eph 6:14-17).

The term χαρίσματα, on the other hand, is used by Paul in 12:4, 9, 28-31 to refer specifically to the gifts of the Spirit for ministry, which, as noted above, come under the umbrella of τὰ πνευματικά, but are by no means the sum total of the things of the Spirit.⁵²⁴ Hence Paul’s change of wording from χαρίσματα in

⁵²⁴ It could be argued that even if the charismata are not the sum total of the things of the Spirit they are nonetheless spiritual things and, therefore, according to 1 Cor 14:1, are to be eagerly desired. However, while they do come under the umbrella of the things of the Spirit what Paul says about them still stands. God determines who gets what gift and his sovereignty in this regard must be respected. Other things

12:31a to πνευματικά in 14:1 suggests that the latter is referring to far more than just spiritual gifts.

The third challenge to the idea that 1 Cor 14:1 encourages the Corinthians to seek the gift of prophecy over all the other spiritual gifts concerns the common translation of the last clause in this verse (μᾶλλον δὲ ἵνα προφητεύητε) as an object clause: “especially the gift of prophecy” (NIV). There are two different but equally legitimate methods employed in reaching this conclusion.

The Epexegetic Theory

Firstly, it is alleged that this construction is epexegetic; that is, it “explains, clarifies or qualifies (modifies)” the main sentence: ζηλοῦτε δὲ τὰ πνευματικά. Fee’s comments are typical of this school of thought. He contends that, in this instance, ἵνα probably functions like a ὅτι and therefore that the whole sentence reads: “Be eagerly desiring the things of the Spirit, but rather *namely that* you prophesy.”⁵²⁵ It is argued further that the reasons for this qualification can be found in the verses that follow where Paul contrasts tongues with prophecy and prefers the latter to the former, because the one who prophesies edifies the church whereas the one who speaks in tongues does not.⁵²⁶

The Sub-final Clause Theory

The other school of thought is that μᾶλλον δὲ ἵνα προφητεύητε constitutes a sub-final clause. In other words, it is argued that προφητεύητε is the second

obviously come with the seeking. It is these no doubt that are to be pursued while the gifts are to be left to God to dispense.

⁵²⁵ Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 655, fn. 12; cf. Kling, “Corinthians,” 282.

⁵²⁶ Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 655; Kling, “Corinthians,” 282.

grammatical object of the verb ζηλοῦτε and, therefore, that it is the one object above all others to be sought after when striving after τὰ πνευματικά; the first grammatical object of this imperative being τὰ πνευματικά. The NIV translation of this verse is a classic sub-final interpretation. It reads: “Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy.”

According to A. T. Robertson, sub-final clauses are usually found with verbs of striving, beseeching, commanding or fearing and, except for the latter, are seen with or are followed by the conjunction ἵνα.⁵²⁷ This use of ἵνα is rare in Classical Greek, but is quite common in Koiné Greek – the Greek of the NT. Robertson gives numerous examples of sub-final clauses in the NT, including this one in 1 Cor 14:1.⁵²⁸ In this verse, the imperative which ἵνα follows is ζηλοῦτε, the same verb discussed at length above. The fact that ἵνα follows an imperative in 1 Cor 14:1 is regarded as a very strong argument that μᾶλλον δὲ ἵνα προφητεύητε is in fact a sub-final clause and, therefore, that προφητεύητε is the one object above all others to be sought after when striving after τὰ πνευματικά.

As popular as the object clause theory might be it is by no means the only possible or probable interpretation of ἵνα with the subjunctive in 14:1. As a matter of fact, there is always an element of doubt as to the true meaning of ἵνα with the subjunctive. For example, in Classical Greek this construction always constitutes a final clause. That is, it always expresses purpose. In Koiné Greek its normal use is also to express purpose.⁵²⁹ Nevertheless, ἵνα with the subjunctive is rarely final when

⁵²⁷ A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1934), 992-993.

⁵²⁸ *Ibid.*, 993; cf. Lenski, *1 & 2 Corinthians*, 576.

⁵²⁹ Cf. BDAG, 475.

it follows an imperative. It may signify purpose but the onus is on the student of NT Greek to prove it. Such proof can only be determined by the context. Says J. H. Moulton: “The burden of making purpose clear is . . . thrown on the context . . .”⁵³⁰ Robertson, speaking in favour of this principle, adds: “The commentator must have grammar, but he needs the grammar of the author on whose work he is making comments.”⁵³¹

In other words, what commentators must keep in mind when commenting on any NT author’s work is that while similar grammatical constructions may be found in the writings of other canonical writers such constructions may not necessarily have the same intent from one author to the next. Hence, any given author’s use of grammar must be taken into consideration when determining the meaning of what he says. That is why the context is so critical to gaining a correct understanding of a writer’s use of ἵνα, including that of Paul.

Problems with the Object Clause Hypothesis

The problem with the object clause theory regarding the ἵνα clause in 14:1 is that it implies that Paul is commanding the Corinthians to especially desire the gift of prophecy over the other gifts of the Spirit. This contradicts everything that Paul has already said about the charismata in chaps. 12 and 13, as well as encourages a practice which he deplores in chap. 12; that is, making one gift more important than another. These contradictions are, in the main, the same contradictions raised by reading the verb ζηλοῦτε as a command in 12:31a and by translating πνευματικά as “spiritual gifts” in 14:1. That is, Paul would have been contradicting what he had said about:

⁵³⁰ J. H. Moulton, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, vol. 1, 3rd ed., Prolegomena (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1985), 207.

⁵³¹ Robertson, *Grammar of the Greek NT*, 998.

1. The need for a diversity of gifts in the church.
2. The Spirit's prerogative to distribute the gifts as he sees fit.
3. The fact that one gift is as necessary as another and that all should be content with the gift/s God has given them.
4. The fact that not all believers have all of the gifts of the Spirit or even the same gifts.
5. The fact that there is not one gift of the Spirit, not even the gift of prophecy, that every believer can receive (12:29-30).⁵³²

Counter Arguments

Thiselton anticipates this very problem in his remarks concerning the common translation of the verb ζηλοῦτε, in 1 Cor 14:1, as “eagerly desire” (NIV) or “strive for” (NRSV). The former, he says, gives the impression that Paul is appealing to the individual to seek the gifts of the Spirit when in fact he never encourages this type of activity. The latter, on the other hand, “positively conflicts with Paul’s insistence” that the charismata are gifts of grace and violates the Spirit’s right to dispense the same as he sees fit. To compensate Thiselton proposes that ζηλοῦτε should be translated as “be eager for.” This interpretation, he says, allows for “a corporate concern for the well-being of *the community*, i.e., that these gifts may operate in the church, which is Paul’s horizon of concern.”⁵³³ In other words, Thiselton is saying that there is nothing wrong with the church seeking these gifts on a corporate level providing that the individual does not follow suit.

However, this interpretation does not make sense in that the Corinthian church

⁵³² Cf. Furnish, *Theology of 1 Corinthians*, 97.

⁵³³ Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 1082.

already had all the gifts that it needed (see 1 Cor 1:7). Furthermore, Thiselton's proposition does nothing to resolve the anomaly of the gift of prophecy being set apart from the other gifts of the Spirit by the object clause theory. In fact, if it is taken to its logical conclusion, it similarly encourages the church to be most eager for this particular gift. Again, this is contrary to Paul's earlier remarks that the charismata, including the gift of prophecy, are of equal importance and that no gift should be preferred above another.

One way to allay the above concerns without compromising the object clause theory regarding μάλλον δὲ ἵνα προφητεύητε in 14:1 is to distinguish between the meaning of the verb προφητεύητε in this phrase and the special revelation and foretelling of the future, and other manifestations normally associated with the Old and NT prophetic office. As a matter of fact, most commentators make this distinction, and there are good reasons for doing so. Firstly, this verse implies that all Christians can in fact prophesy, whereas 12:29 indicates that not all believers can have the gift of prophecy, so there must be a difference between the two. Secondly, the subsequent verses (vv. 2-5) give the impression that, in this instance, προφητεύητε refers to "intelligible, articulate, communicative acts of speech which have a positive effect on others and, in turn, on the whole community."⁵³⁴ Thiselton (with Hill, Muller, and Gillespie) argues that these "acts of speech" amount to the ordinary sharing of the gospel message with others through the preaching, proclamation, or teaching of God's Word.⁵³⁵ This would allow for more believers to prophesy than otherwise would be the case. It would explain how Paul could

⁵³⁴ Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 1084.

⁵³⁵ Ibid.; cf. Prior, *1 Corinthians*, 235; Watson, *1 Corinthians*, 144; Barrett, *1 Corinthians*, 316; Hays, *1 Corinthians*, 235.

encourage the entire Corinthian church to prophesy without violating the Spirit's right to distribute the gifts as he sees fit, and without conflicting with what he has previously said about the need for a diversity of gifts in the body of Christ.

The Testimony of Jesus

What makes this argument even more plausible is that the phrase the "testimony of Jesus," in the book of Revelation, conveys a similar thought. This expression, "the testimony of Jesus," can mean either "the testimony from Jesus" or "the testimony about Jesus." The Greek allows for both.⁵³⁶ Furthermore, Rev 12:17 indicates that every true believer from Jesus' day until the end of the world would have this testimony. This means that they would be a witness "to" Jesus or a witness "for" Jesus, or both, and that their message therefore would be exactly the same as his.

In Rev 19:10 the testimony of Jesus is called "the spirit of prophecy." The latter is an unusual expression which has given rise to several different theories as to its true meaning. The most popular is that it refers to the Holy Spirit who is the inspiration behind all prophetic speech. Still, this is unlikely to be the case. While it is clear from Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost that all believers have the Holy Spirit (see Acts 2:38-39), it is just as clear from other passages in the NT that it is not in their power to impart it to others. Believers may help to facilitate the reception of the Holy Spirit through supplication and the laying on of hands (see Acts 8:14-20; 19:6), but when it comes to the actual bestowal of the Spirit the Bible says that it is "the gift of God," which implies that only he can impart it (Acts 8:20; 5:32; 10:45;

⁵³⁶ Desmond Ford, *Crisis*, 3 vols. (Newcastle, CA: Desmond Ford Publications, 1982), 2:694; Leon Morris, *Revelation*, rev. ed., TNTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 222.

11:17; cf. Matt 3:11; Jn 14:16, 26; 16:7; Acts 1:4-5). On the grounds that the spirit of prophecy is part and parcel of the testimony of Jesus, which all Christians have to give to the world, the former must therefore refer to something other than the Holy Spirit, even though he is the inspiration behind it.

Another theory is that the spirit of prophecy refers to the gift of prophecy.⁵³⁷ But, as we have noted numerous times already, not all believers can have this gift and yet, as Rev 12:17 indicates, all have the testimony of Jesus and therefore all possess the spirit of prophecy. Consequently, the gift of prophecy and the spirit of prophecy cannot refer to the same thing.

A more plausible theory is that the spirit of prophecy refers to the inherent character of prophecy.⁵³⁸ Robert H. Mounce uses the expression in this sense when he says “the message attested by Jesus is the essence of prophetic proclamation.”⁵³⁹ In other words, he is saying that the one indispensable quality of prophetic speech is “the testimony of Jesus.” This makes witnessing and prophesying coincident. More importantly, since all of God’s children have this testimony, it means that prophesying is something that all Christians can do whether or not they have the gift of prophecy. Prophesying in this respect is even broader in scope than the preaching, proclamation, or teaching of the word of God. It is as basic as sharing the love of God with someone else in an informal, personal manner.

⁵³⁷ Ford, *Crisis*, 2:694.

⁵³⁸ This meaning of πνεῦμα is not uncommon in the New Testament. For example, Paul uses it in this sense in Rom 7:7 where he speaks of the “spirit” of the law, which he subsequently identifies as the attribute of love (13:8-10). Another example of such is John’s claim that the acceptance or rejection of “the divine-human person of Jesus Christ” constitutes “the spirit of truth” and “the spirit of error” respectively (see 1 Jn 4:1-6).

⁵³⁹ Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 342.

Other Problems for the Object Clause Theory

While prophesying in the sense of preaching, teaching, or witnessing may account for the problems associated with translating *μᾶλλον δὲ ἵνα προφητεύητε* as an object clause, it does create its own unique problems for the exegetical and sub-final schools of thought. To render *μᾶλλον δέ* as “especially” is to pit prophesying against the entire range of *τὰ πνευματικά* which, for Paul, would be completely out of character. As mentioned previously, he has left no stone unturned in his efforts to establish that the things of God do not stand in opposition to one another but rather that they complement each other. This is especially true of the charismata. Each gift, he says, has its unique role to play in the overall edifying of the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:7; cf. Eph 4:11-16).

Furthermore, if Paul wanted the Corinthians to prophesy more than he wanted them to eagerly desire the other things of the Spirit, then, he would have been “putting the cart before the horse” (so to speak) by telling them to go ahead and try to speak words that build others up spiritually before they had even acquired something spiritually worthwhile to say. If they, as the Grecian arm of the visible church on earth, were to accomplish their task of taking the gospel to the world (cf. Matt 28:18-20), they needed love and the other things of the Spirit (including a knowledge of God’s will and ways) to accomplish it. Ford asks the question: “How can any take the gospel to the world [prophesy] if not clear on what the gospel is?”⁵⁴⁰ Only those who have an experiential knowledge of God’s love and grace, and are familiar with His will and ways, can effectively pass this knowledge on to others; that is, only those who have grasped the nature of true spirituality are able to prophesy. On the other hand, a believer who already has the knowledge of God’s will and ways would not

⁵⁴⁰ Ford, *Crisis*, 2:269.

need to desire that he may prophesy: he could just go ahead and do it.

Conversely, it can be argued that the ensuing contrast between prophesying and speaking in tongues (14:1-5, 22-25, 39) indicates that at the very least Paul has a declared preference for prophesying over tongues and that this contrast is meant to illustrate his preference for prophecy over τὰ πνευματικά in general, including the charismata. Against this notion, the following chapters will endeavour to show that the contrast in 1 Cor 14 is not between prophesying and the gift of tongues *per se*, but rather between prophesying and the Corinthians' misuse of tongues in the local worship services for self-edification. Therefore, this preference applies only to this situation and not to the gifts *per se*.

The Purpose Clause Theory

On the other hand, if μᾶλλον δὲ ἵνα προφητεύητε were a purpose clause rather than an object clause, 1 Cor 14:1 would read thus: "Pursue love and eagerly desire τὰ πνευματικά, but rather in order that you may prophesy." This would make prophesying the aim or goal of eagerly desiring τὰ πνευματικά and not the object to be desired most of all. This means that none of the problems associated with the object clause theory, including those related to rendering the verb προφητεύητε as prophesying instead of the gift of prophecy, would arise.

Firstly, if prophesying is not a supernatural gift and is something that all believers can do whether or not they possess the specific gift of prophecy, then, encouraging the Corinthians to seek τὰ πνευματικά in order that they may prophesy has no bearing on what Paul says about giftedness in 1 Cor 12 (see above).

Second, if the aim or goal of seeking τὰ πνευματικά is to prophesy, then Paul cannot possibly be contrasting the ability to prophesy with any of the other things of the Spirit, including the gifts of the Spirit. The intention to prophesy cannot

be the purpose the Corinthians should have for desiring spiritual things and yet, at the same time, be contrasted with them. The context indicates that Paul is not pitting one gift against another gift, but rather that he is contrasting the proper motive for eagerly desiring the things of the Spirit with the improper motive the Corinthians had for pursuing the greater gifts.

Recall that Paul begins his discourse in 1 Cor 12:31 on the “more excellent way” with a contrast of motives. That is, he compares the Corinthians’ inordinate desire for the greater gifts with the “more excellent way,” which he then goes on to explain in chap. 13 is the way of “love.” In 14:1, Paul rounds off this discourse by encouraging the Corinthians to pursue love and to make it the driving force in their life.

Paul continues his argument by pointing out the difference between the Corinthian glossolalist’s motive for praying in tongues in church and the motivation which drives those who prophesy. This causes him to modify his earlier command to eagerly desire τὰ πνευματικά with the clause μᾶλλον δὲ ἵνα προφητεύητε in v. 1.⁵⁴¹ The glossolalist’s goal, he claims, is to edify self (vv. 2, 4), presumably, as argued previously, to upstage those in the local congregation who, like themselves, are coveting the greater gifts and, thus, are hoping to assume the leadership of the church in the absence of their former teachers, Paul and Apollos. According to 12:7, this self-edification constitutes a flagrant abuse of the gift’s intent. Again, this verse states that the purpose of the gifts of the spirit, including the gift of tongues, is to benefit the church, not self.

By way of contrast, Paul emphasises that those who prophesy edify, encourage

⁵⁴¹ The γάρ in v. 2 is explanatory, which means that Paul is about to give “the reason for the final clause in v. 1” (see Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 656, fn. 14).

and comfort others (vv. 3-4). In other words, they have the interests of others at heart and, therefore, unlike the local glossolalists, they are not the slightest bit interested in stroking their own egos. This comparison indicates that Paul's primary concern in 14:1 is not with contrasting the various charismata as such. Rather he is trying to prevent the Corinthians from now desiring τὰ πνευματικά with the same selfish motive that the glossolalists had demonstrated in their eager desire for the greater gifts of the Spirit (12:31); namely a self-seeking pursuit of high status.

We can understand how the Corinthians might have pursued the knowledge of God's will and ways, for example, with a self-serving motive. As noted earlier, first-century Greeks craved wisdom and knowledge in the hope that it might boost their political or social standing in the local and the wider community. We have also found that the Corinthian church had adopted the conventions of secular society and thus held these human attributes in high esteem. Consequently, if the knowledge of spiritual things constitutes the greatest knowledge of all, Paul would be concerned that the Corinthians might now crave such knowledge merely to elevate themselves to the highest possible status, unrivalled in their learning.

More to the point, the Corinthians had already made merchandise of the grace God and had turned his intended blessings into a curse. For example:

1. They were in the habit of using their individual gifts for self-edification (see chap. 4).
2. They could perform seemingly loving acts in a loveless manner, such as giving away all of their possessions to the poor (12:3).
3. They had turned their so-called "love feasts" into occasions of selfish gratification without regard for the needs of the hungry poor (11:17-22).

NT Support for the Purpose Clause Theory

It is evident elsewhere in the NT that God gave all spiritual things, including the supernatural manifestations of the Spirit such as tongues, healings, signs and wonders, among others, to enable believers to prophesy. These scriptural references lend further support to the purpose clause theory.

In Jn 14:12-14; 15:26-27 and Acts 1:4-5, 8, for instance, Jesus told the apostles that after His departure the Holy Spirit would come upon them and empower their gospel witness in the world by performing through them the same wonderful works he himself had done. Moreover, the Holy Spirit would teach them all things, and remind them of all that Christ had taught them (Jn 14:26). He would also comfort them (vv. 16-18). At times, the Spirit would even give them the words they were to speak (Matt 10:19) and would confirm the same with miraculous signs and wonders (Mk 16:20).

This promise was initially fulfilled at Pentecost as described in Acts 2. As the 120 (including the apostles) were assembled together in one place,

. . . 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 2:1-4).

The report of the sound of the rushing mighty wind from heaven and the attending phenomena of tongues of fire and the gift of foreign languages drew a large crowd of curious onlookers, but it was the manifestation of the latter which convinced them that something supernatural had taken place. The disciples were unschooled Galileans and yet, collectively, they were speaking fluently in over a dozen different languages or dialects (vv. 8-11). This was nothing short of miraculous. Of course the skeptics in the crowd ridiculed the phenomenon, putting it down to drunkenness (v.

14). But Peter defended it by claiming that what they had just witnessed had been foretold by the prophet Joel centuries earlier.

Briefly, Joel had predicted that in the last days God's Spirit would be poured out upon his people and that they would be imbued with "charismatic prophetic manifestations"⁵⁴² (Acts 2: 17-18; cf. Joel 2: 28-29). In other words, they would receive prophetic gifts; gifts that would either facilitate or confirm the spoken word. We gather from the apostles' aforementioned prayer asking God to empower them to preach the word with all boldness, that healing the sick and other miraculous signs and wonders were some of the authenticating signs which enhanced the proclamation of the gospel message (see Acts 4:24-33).

With regard to speaking in tongues, the linking of this phenomenon in Acts 2 with the promised outpouring of the Spirit in Joel 2 effectively means that this gift is not just an authenticating sign, but rather it is, in and of itself, a form of prophecy.⁵⁴³ To Hill, the Pentecost phenomenon merely enabled the disciples to communicate the gospel to people from other lands in an intelligible and edifying way.⁵⁴⁴ Arrington similarly comments that:

Upon being baptized with the Spirit, they [the disciples] were to prophesy, linking therefore the gift of the Spirit with the universal outbreak of prophecy. The same connection is made between the Spirit and prophecy in Num. 11:24-29, where the Spirit is transferred from Moses to the elders.⁵⁴⁵

In the narrative regarding Moses and the elders, when the Spirit rested upon

⁵⁴² French L. Arrington, *The Acts of the Apostles: An Introduction and Commentary* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988), 7.

⁵⁴³ Cf. Stagg, Hinson and Oates, *Glossolalia*, 27-28; Johnson, "Tongues," 596.

⁵⁴⁴ Cf. David Hill, *New Testament Prophecy*, MTL (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1979), 122.

⁵⁴⁵ Arrington, *Acts*, 28.

the 70 elders, including Eldad and Medad, they prophesied (v. 26). Saul likewise prophesied when the Spirit of God came upon him following his anointing by Samuel as the future king of Israel. And so it was with many other OT characters when the Spirit of God came upon them. In the words of Bruce: “So now the descent of the Spirit on the disciples [at Pentecost] was attended by prophetic speech, but prophetic speech of a peculiar kind – utterance in ‘other tongues.’”⁵⁴⁶

The subsequent baptism in the Holy Spirit of Cornelius and his household (Acts 10) was no different. “Indeed, they received the same prophetic Spirit that the disciples had received at Pentecost (Acts 2:14-21)”⁵⁴⁷: “For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God” (10:46). Bruce contends that “magnify God” in this verse is the equivalent of declaring the “wonderful works of God” in 2:11,⁵⁴⁸ which Peter identifies as prophecy in 2:13-16. Moreover, Arrington notes how Peter testified that “ ‘the Holy Spirit fell on them, just as he did upon us [the disciples] at the beginning’ (11:15),” and “that God gave the Holy Spirit to Cornelius, ‘just as he also did to us’ (15:8).”⁵⁴⁹ The twelve Ephesian Christians mentioned in Acts 19, upon being baptized with the Holy Spirit, also spoke in tongues and prophesied (v. 6). That is, they used tongues to prophesy. We can make this assumption on the basis that Luke’s account of the initial description of tongues-speaking in Acts 2 “establishes the normative event that sets the precedent for all of the Book’s later accounts of this

⁵⁴⁶ F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, rev. ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 52.

⁵⁴⁷ Arrington, *Acts*, 113.

⁵⁴⁸ F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of Acts*, NIC; (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1954), 230.

⁵⁴⁹ Arrington, *Acts*, 113.

phenomenon,”⁵⁵⁰ as Peter’s account of the Acts 10 phenomenon certifies.

The Early Church Fathers

The writings of the early church fathers are no different. As chap. 1 of this paper shows, these ancient works indicate that in the majority of cases the patristic writers also linked glossolalia with prophesying, evangelism, or preaching the gospel. We found that Irenaeus actually substitutes the word “prophecy” for tongues in Acts 10:46. So does Gregory Nazianzus and others in the fourth century A.D. Origen, on the other hand, was the first of many post-apostolic writers, including Chrysostom, Augustine, Ambrosiaster and Theodoret, to link glossolalia to evangelism and, thus, indirectly to prophesying. We also found the gift of tongues is not the only gift that the early church fathers associated with prophesying. Besides linking tongues with prophesying in Acts 10:46, Irenaeus speaks of prophetic “gifts,” not just the gift of tongues, which are meant to expound the word of God. Basil of Caesarea also makes it clear that he, too, understood the gifts of the Spirit to be intrinsically prophetic.

The Modern Era

Thus far we have found that there appears to be no conflict whatsoever between the above purpose clause theory and Paul’s earlier statements regarding the human body analogy with all of its implications for spiritual giftedness. We have also found that it is evident from both the NT and Church history that spiritual things, including the charismata, are meant to enable the believer to prophesy. And yet, very few, if any, modern scholars give this theory anything but a cursory examination. Those who do tend to dismiss it with little or no comment. Lenski is typical of such. He follows Robertson and advocates the sub-final/object clause theory. However,

⁵⁵⁰ Sven Ostring, in a personal communication (April 2007).

when it comes to the purpose clause theory he merely states that “all of the older commentators and translators find a purpose in these ἵνα clauses, which is incorrect.”⁵⁵¹ Robertson and Plummer are just as brief. They simply say that “the ἵνα [in 14:1] is definitive, not telic.”⁵⁵² Kling, commenting on this same ἵνα clause, claims that “in this there was undoubtedly a design; but not such as to warrant Meyer’s rendering, ‘in order that ye may prophesy.’”⁵⁵³ Apparently, Meyer is the exception to the rule. He maintains that “the ἵνα [in this verse] states the design of the ζῆλοῦτε, which we must again mentally supply (comp. ver. 5).”⁵⁵⁴

The significance of the purpose clause theory to the general tongues debate is that it indicates that the purpose of Paul’s discussion of the tongues phenomenon in the subsequent verses (vv. 2-5) is to correct the Corinthians’ abuse of the same, and not to instruct them theologically as to the nature of this gift.⁵⁵⁵ More importantly, the following chapters will endeavour to show that Paul’s word for word repetition of the above ἵνα clause in v. 5 implies that the contrast in this verse is not between tongues and prophecy. Rather, it will be shown that it is between the abuse of the gift of tongues and the proper motive for exercising this gift, namely, to prophesy.

Conclusion

In this chapter we found that most commentators believe that 1 Cor 14:1 resumes the theme of 12:31a where Paul allegedly commands the Corinthians to

⁵⁵¹ Lenski, *1 & 2 Corinthians*, 576.

⁵⁵² Robertson and Plummer, *1 Corinthians*, 305.

⁵⁵³ Kling, “Corinthians,” 282.

⁵⁵⁴ Meyer, *Epistles to the Corinthians*, 2:4.

⁵⁵⁵ Cf. Gordon D. Fee, “Toward a Pauline Theology of Glossolalia,” *Crux* 31 1 (1995), 22.

eagerly desire the greater gifts, by now specifying exactly what the greatest gift is that they should eagerly desire; namely, the gift of prophecy.

This belief is based on several assumptions. Firstly, that the verb ζηλοῦτε in 12:31a (ζηλοῦτε δὲ τὰ χαρίσματα τὰ μείζονα) is in the imperative mood. Secondly, that the expression τὰ πνευματικά in 14:1 is a synonym for χαρίσματα and, therefore, refers to spiritual gifts in general or to tongues and prophecy in particular, depending on one's point of view. Thirdly, that the ἵνα clause in 14:1 is sub-final and, therefore, indicates that here Paul is admonishing the Corinthians to eagerly desire the gifts of the Spirit, especially the gift of prophecy.

On the other hand, we found that even though the verb ζηλοῦτε in 14:1 is an imperative, the immediate and wider contexts indicate that there are numerous problems associated with translating it as an imperative in 12:31 and, therefore, that it is more appropriate to translate it as an indicative in this verse. We also found that:

1. The previous occurrences of the word πνευματικά in this epistle indicate that it refers to much more than just the charismata and, therefore, it would be more consistent with the context if we were to render it simply as “spiritual things.”
2. The sub-final clause theory flies in the face of the human body analogy in 1 Cor 12, and contradicts vv. 29-30, which indicate that there is not one gift of the Spirit, not even the gift of prophecy, that every believer can receive.

Conversely, it has been shown that the ἵνα clause in 14:1 retains its contextual integrity when translated as a purpose clause. This makes prophesying the aim or goal of eagerly desiring τὰ πνευματικά and not the second or main object of the imperative ζηλοῦτε. Thus it avoids all of the problems associated with translating it

as a sub-final clause. Accordingly, a comparable paraphrase of 14:1 would read:

“Follow the way of love and eagerly desire the spiritual things, but rather in order that you may prophesy.”

CHAPTER 8 - TONGUES - INTELLIGIBLE OR UNINTELLIGIBLE SPEECH

In chapter one of this paper, we found that, for most of the Christian era, the prevailing idea in Christendom was that speaking with tongues constituted a public gift of real human languages given for witnessing. This gift was necessary when and where there was a language barrier to effective evangelism without it. The primary source for this view was the tongues phenomenon recorded in Acts 2.⁵⁵⁶ By the mid-to-late-nineteenth-century, however, the mood had changed significantly in regard to the exact nature of this gift. According to Godet, hardly anyone in the late nineteenth-century believed that the gift of tongues referred to speaking in unlearned foreign languages.⁵⁵⁷

This profound shift away from the human language viewpoint has prevailed throughout the Modern era and is due, in the main, to the notion that the Corinthian church's circumstances and the expressions used by Paul in chaps. 12-14 do not warrant interpreting tongues as diverse human languages. In other words, modern commentators have generally abandoned the human languages interpretation on the assumption that the Pentecost phenomenon is different in kind from that of the Corinthian phenomenon. Most have assumed that it refers to some sort of unintelligible ecstatic speech.

In this chapter (chap. 8) the various arguments raised in favour of the non-human languages view that were mentioned briefly in chap. 1 will be presented in full. The major arguments on the human languages side of the debate will also be stated in full. The validity of these arguments will be addressed in chaps. 9-12 and a

⁵⁵⁶ Kling, "Corinthians," 252.

⁵⁵⁷ Godet, *1 Corinthians*, 1: 202.

summary of the conclusions drawn will follow in chap. 13.

No Biblical Evidence for Evangelism

A major factor in the swing away from the traditional view that the gift of tongues refers to the miraculous ability to speak in foreign human languages, and that it was given for the purpose of evangelism, is the lack of evidence that the Corinthians ever used glossolalia to spread the gospel.⁵⁵⁸ Edwards argues that if the gift of tongues does refer to speaking in unlearned human languages, it is remarkable that Paul does not urge them to use this gift for evangelism even though it would have been ideally suited to this purpose.⁵⁵⁹ According to Thiselton, this omission on Paul's part creates a huge problem for the foreign languages interpretation because the gift of miraculously speaking other human languages has always been linked to mission and does not appear to make any sense apart from it.⁵⁶⁰

Alford makes the point that a gift of foreign languages was in fact unnecessary in the Greco-Roman world of Paul's day. Both Greek and Latin, he says, were "generally understood throughout the Roman world" and were more than adequate to accomplish the task of taking the gospel of salvation to the ends of the earth. Accordingly, Alford maintains that glossolalia "was meant to excite inquiry, not to instruct the mind of the Christian."⁵⁶¹ Godet similarly questions the relevance of a foreign languages gift, claiming that these same two languages (Greek and Latin) were relatively easy to master and could have evangelized the world just as

⁵⁵⁸ Conybeare and Howson, *Life and Epistles*, 460-461; Shore, *Epistles to the Corinthians*, 340; Edwards, *1 Corinthians*, 319.

⁵⁵⁹ Edwards, *1 Corinthians*, 319.

⁵⁶⁰ Thiselton, *1 Corinthianse*, 976-977.

⁵⁶¹ Alford, *Greek Testament*, 315.

effectively.⁵⁶² Farrar makes the same point, but substitutes the word Aramaic for the word Latin. The apostles, he states, did not need to acquire foreign languages because the Jews could speak both Aramaic and Greek “and therefore could address Jews and Gentiles throughout the civilized world.”⁵⁶³

Language Directed Towards God

Another powerful argument against the human languages/evangelism hypothesis is that 1 Cor 14:2 implies that tongues-speech is directed towards God, not towards other human beings.⁵⁶⁴ If there were any hint that tongues were used or were to be used for evangelism, says Thiselton, “Paul could not have said ‘the person who speaks in a tongue speaks not to people but to God’ (14:2), let alone, ‘the person who speaks in a tongue builds up only himself/herself (ἐαυτόν, 14:4).’”⁵⁶⁵ Meyer argues that if glossolalia refers to speaking in foreign languages, then what Paul says in 14:2 about no one being able to understand the glossolalist’s speech would be “false” if someone was present who could understand the languages spoken.⁵⁶⁶ He further reasons that, had tongues meant languages, Paul would have discussed this topic in an entirely different manner from the one in which he has, namely, “according to the presence or non-presence of those who understood foreign languages.”⁵⁶⁷

Edwards, on the other hand, claims that tongues are “conspicuously” unintelligible and asks if it is indeed illogical to “say of any man that speaks in a

⁵⁶² Godet, *1 Corinthians*, 1:221.

⁵⁶³ Farrar, “1 Corinthians,” 398.

⁵⁶⁴ Fee, “Toward a Pauline,” 28; Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 584.

⁵⁶⁵ Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 976-977.

⁵⁶⁶ Meyer, *Epistles to the Corinthians*, 1:366; cf. Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 977.

⁵⁶⁷ Meyer, *Epistles to the Corinthians*, 1:366.

foreign language that he speaks not to men, but to God?”⁵⁶⁸ Beet writes that Paul’s words in v. 2 imply clearly that without the additional gift of interpretation mentioned in v. 5 no one would be able to understand what the speaker says. If no one could understand the speaker, he says, then, glossolalia could not possibly refer to human languages.⁵⁶⁹ Powers declares this argument to be the main problem with the foreign language view. There is not even a hint in Paul’s writings, she says, that anyone would ever be able to understand these tongues without them being interpreted or that someone might walk in off the street “who would understand the tongue being spoken.” The point is that without the supernatural gift of interpretation tongues are unintelligible.⁵⁷⁰

Among other things, Fee points out that because prophecy is directed towards other people the contrast between tongues and prophesying in 1 Cor 14 indicates that glossolalia is not people orientated.⁵⁷¹ Robertson likewise questions the validity of the human language view on the basis that Paul says that he prefers prophecy to tongues because it is more useful since it edifies others, whereas tongues do not. In a similar vein to that of Edwards, Robertson expresses doubt as to whether Paul would have had this preference if tongues were in fact foreign languages. If they were foreign languages they would have been profitable in preaching the Word of God to the nations of the world. Furthermore, because the glossolalist is the only one edified by his speech (v. 4), Robertson insists that this characterizes tongues-speaking as “something internal, a kind of inspired and impassioned soliloquy, or it may be

⁵⁶⁸ Edwards, *1 Corinthians*, 320.

⁵⁶⁹ Beet, *Epistles to the Corinthians*, 241.

⁵⁷⁰ Powers, “Missionary Tongues?” 48.

⁵⁷¹ Fee, “Toward a Pauline,” 28.

meditation uttered aloud.”⁵⁷² Most scholars throughout the modern era tend to agree with Robertson, claiming, in the main, that the “principal exercise of speaking in tongues was to be in private.”⁵⁷³

The Private Nature of Glossolalia

Those who follow the private nature of glossolalia argument do so on the basis that:

1. The glossolalist’s speech is directed towards God and edifies the speaker only (14:2, 4).⁵⁷⁴
2. Paul is reluctant to exercise the gift of tongues in church (vv. 18-19).⁵⁷⁵
3. The glossolalist is not to use his gift in church unless an interpreter is present to interpret his speech for him, but rather is to remain silent and speak to himself and to God (vv. 27-28).⁵⁷⁶

Thiselton, on the other hand, argues that Paul’s admonition to the speaker in tongues to “‘pray for the power to produce articulate speech,’” as he puts it, “‘becomes in effect Paul’s most explicit statement in the chapter that ideally, speaking in tongues should not occur at all in public.’”⁵⁷⁷

⁵⁷² Robertson, *Epistles to the Corinthians*, 225-227.

⁵⁷³ Walvoord, “Holy Spirit,” 117; cf. Muller, “Neo-Pentecostalism,” 45.

⁵⁷⁴ Cf. Thiselton, “The ‘Interpretation’ of Tongues,” 16; Fee, “Toward a Pauline,” 26; Hering, *1 Corinthians*, 146.

⁵⁷⁵ Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 113.

⁵⁷⁶ Cartledge, “Nature and Function,” 48; cf. Thiselton, “The ‘Interpretation’ of Tongues,” 16.

⁵⁷⁷ Thiselton, “The ‘Interpretation’ of Tongues,” 16.

The Analogy of Musical Instruments

In addition to the above, many arguments have been mounted against the foreign language stance from the linguistic perspective. One such argument concerns the analogies with musical instruments played haphazardly and the indistinct call of the trumpet in times of war in 1 Cor 14:7-9. These metaphors, it is argued, imply that tongues-speech is just as senseless and as unintelligible to those who hear it as these “jarring and discordant sounds” are to those who experience them.⁵⁷⁸ According to Robertson, the speaker in tongues “would leave most people with a vague, indefinite impression, as of a wild, rude melody—the utterance of feelings felt to be infinite, and incapable of being put into words.”⁵⁷⁹ Meyer insists that if Paul had been thinking of tongues as foreign languages, the analogy in v. 7 would be unsuitable, because languages are distinct whereas the indiscriminate sounds of musical instruments played aimlessly are not.⁵⁸⁰

The Analogy of Human Languages

Again arguing from the linguistic perspective, Powers proposes that Paul’s use of a completely different word for languages (φωνῶν) in 14:10-11 is another indicator that γλωσσῶν cannot possibly refer to human languages.⁵⁸¹ In this passage Paul compares tongues to foreign languages, but, says Powers, it is highly unlikely that he

⁵⁷⁸ Cf. Robertson, *Epistles to the Corinthians*, 227; Edwards, *1 Corinthians*, 320; Forbes, *Prophecy*, 59.

⁵⁷⁹ Robertson, *Epistles to the Corinthians*, 227.

⁵⁸⁰ Meyer, *Epistles to the Corinthians*, 2:9.

⁵⁸¹ Powers, “Missionary Tongues?” 48; cf. Meyer, *Epistles to the Corinthians*, 1:366.

would have made this comparison “if he thought tongues were foreign languages.”⁵⁸² Dunn similarly asserts that “Paul would not have used foreign or ‘different languages’ (γένη φωνῶν) as an analogy (both unintelligible speech) if he had thought glossolalia was itself a foreign language.”⁵⁸³ As Fee points out, analogies are not drawn between like phenomena but between unlike phenomena.⁵⁸⁴ However, if tongues were foreign languages then the analogy would be between one language and another.⁵⁸⁵

Interpretation versus Articulation

Also arguing from the linguistic perspective, Thiselton proposes that in the wider context of 1 Cor 12:10-14:40 the word διερμηνεύη in 14:13 (“Therefore let him who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret”) is more likely to mean “‘to articulate’ or to ‘put into words’ something that was previously inarticulate”⁵⁸⁶ rather than “to translate.” This implies, in turn, that the glossolalist’s speech is more likely to be unintelligible than intelligible. Thiselton bases this hypothesis on the use of the various ἐρμηνεύω terms in Philo and Josephus, claiming that at least seventy-five percent of the uses of διερμηνεύω and διερμήνευσιν in Philo refer to the intelligible articulation of previously inarticulate thought or feelings.⁵⁸⁷

In recent times, Thiselton’s hypothesis has come under attack from both Forbes and Turner, but especially Forbes. He acknowledges that in a reasonable

⁵⁸² Robertson, *Epistles to the Corinthians*, 228; Powers, “Missionary Tongues?” 48.

⁵⁸³ Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit*, 244.

⁵⁸⁴ Fee, “Toward a Pauline,” 28; cf. Forbes, *Prophecy*, 63.

⁵⁸⁵ See Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 977; cf. Meyer, *Epistles to the Corinthians*, 1:366.

⁵⁸⁶ Forbes, *Prophecy*, 65.

⁵⁸⁷ Thiselton, “The ‘Interpretation’ of Tongues,” 15-36.

number of cases Thiselton is correct in saying that Philo uses various ἐρμηνεύω terms to refer to the intelligible articulation of previously inarticulate thoughts or feelings. However, he adds that in numerous other cases ἐρμηνεύω and διερμηνεύω are required to be translated as “to translate” or “to interpret or to expound.” Forbes argues, moreover, that had Thiselton’s study included Philo’s use of all the various ἐρμηνεύω terms without the διά prefix he would have found that the ratio between the two meanings had shifted dramatically, with some sixty percent of this usage now supporting the case for translating ἐρμηνεύω and its cognates as “to translate” or “to interpret or to expound.” This omission makes Thiselton’s claim unsound. As for Josephus, he uses the term predominantly in a linguistic sense.⁵⁸⁸

“Unconvincing” is the word Turner uses to describe Thiselton’s hypothesis. Like Forbes, he acknowledges that ἐρμηνεύειν compounds can mean to “articulate” or to “put into words,” but asserts that when juxtaposed with γλώσσαις λαλεῖν these compounds “more naturally” mean “translate” or “interpret.”⁵⁸⁹

Thiselton concedes that Forbes has a point when he says that the ratio between the two possible meanings of ἐρμηνεύω shifts in Philo when it is considered alongside its compound forms. Nevertheless, he seeks to justify his argument by claiming that he is “only arguing that the verbs can mean ‘to produce articulate speech in appropriate contexts,’ and that 1 Cor 12-14 provides such a context.”⁵⁹⁰

The Mind is Unfruitful

Another argument drawn from linguistics concerns the term “unfruitful” in 1

⁵⁸⁸ Forbes, *Prophecy*, 67-69.

⁵⁸⁹ Turner, *Holy Spirit*, 227.

⁵⁹⁰ Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 976.

Cor 14:14-15. This word is said to signify that glossolalia is inherently unintelligible to both the speaker and the hearers. Keener, as well as Bruce, are of the opinion that it simply means that the speaker in tongues is unaware of what he is saying.⁵⁹¹ Conzelmann, Grosheide, Lanier, and others, claim that “unfruitful” means that the hearer cannot understand the glossolalist’s speech and therefore is not benefited by it.⁵⁹² Following this argument, writers such as Horsley, Best, and Keener are among the many who suggest that Paul had been influenced by the Platonic tradition of many of his contemporaries. This tradition taught that there was a form of divine inspiration or possession that actually displaced or suspended the activity of the mind, here expressed by the term “unfruitful.”⁵⁹³ As a result, the glossolalist has no idea what he is saying and the general feeling is that neither has anyone else.

The Pagan Connection

Apart from being unfruitful and, therefore, unhelpful, the argument is made that Corinthian glossolalia mirrors pagan ritual. Paul uses the verb *μαίνεσθε* (“mad”) to describe the response pagan observers would have to an hypothetical all-tongues worship service (14:23). This is the same word the Greeks used to describe the religious frenzy associated with the pagan mystery religions, where the worshippers were swept away into uncontrolled ecstasy by demonic powers.⁵⁹⁴ This association, Johnson argues, suggests that, as far as appearances go, Paul could see no difference

⁵⁹¹ Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 113; Bruce, *1 & 2 Corinthians*, 131.

⁵⁹² Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 237-238; Grosheide, *1 Corinthians*, 326; Lanier, “With Stammering Lips,” 266.

⁵⁹³ Horsley, *1 Corinthians*, 180-181; Best, “The Interpretation of Tongues,” 47; Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 112; cf. Mitton, “Notes of Recent Exposition,” 226-227.

⁵⁹⁴ Cf. Pfitzner, *1 Corinthians*, 224-225.

between glossolalia and the mantic prophesying of the pagan cults.⁵⁹⁵

Many modern writers who espouse the non-human speech interpretation, as pointed out by Cartledge and by Turner, have in fact appealed to phenomenological similarities between early Christian glossolalia and inspired speech in Hellenistic religion as proof of the ecstatic nature of glossolalia.⁵⁹⁶ In particular, they cite the wild, erotic, self-emasculating and ecstatic frenzy associated with the worship of Dionysius and Cybele, and the ecstatic speech of the oracle and its subsequent interpretation by the priest at Delphi.⁵⁹⁷

Paul's remarks about the Corinthians being "led astray to dumb idols" in their pre-Christian days (12:2) have added weight to this argument. Commentators such as Witherington, Hurd, House and others tend to see in them "an analogy between pagan and Christian ecstasy, or between the ways in which people are led by the spiritual forces behind pagan and Christian religion."⁵⁹⁸ House sees further evidence of the influence of the mystery religions on the Corinthians' style of worship, as portrayed in the wording of 14:12. The term πνευμάτων (lit., "spirits"), he says, "implies their present devotion was to spiritual matters *per se*, independent of Christ-centered worship and congregational-oriented edification."⁵⁹⁹

Other so-called "tell-tale" signs of the ecstatic nature of glossolalia are said to

⁵⁹⁵ Johnson, "Tongues," 6:597.

⁵⁹⁶ R. A. Harrisville, *Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament: 1 Corinthians* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1987), 141-142; cf. Cartledge, "Nature and Function," 141; Turner, *Holy Spirit*, 227.

⁵⁹⁷ House, "Tongues," 137-138; Cartledge, "Nature and Function," 141-142; cf. Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 981-982; Forbes, *Prophecy*, 17-21; Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit*, 242-243.

⁵⁹⁸ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 274; Hurd, *The Origin of 1 Corinthians*, 227; House, "Tongues," 141.

⁵⁹⁹ House, "Tongues," 145.

be “the accusation of drunkenness” in Acts 2:13, Paul’s appeal for order in 14:27 f., and the previously mentioned contrast between praying in tongues and praying with the mind in 14:14.⁶⁰⁰ Further, it is argued that Paul’s exclusive use of λαλ- as the root for “speaking” in connection with tongues favours the ecstatic utterance interpretation, because it “can indicate incoherent speech like animal sounds and the sounds of musical instruments.”⁶⁰¹ On the other hand, Pentecostal Christians generally hold that the Greek word πνεῦμάτι, which is translated as “in the spirit” in 14:2, refers to the Holy Spirit. Consequently, they assume that every time a person speaks in tongues their utterances are Holy Spirit induced and therefore are ecstatic. Further, it is alleged that the “necessity for interpretation in 1 Corinthians but not in Acts implies ecstatic speaking in 1 Corinthians over against human languages in Acts.”⁶⁰²

The Gift of Tongues in Acts and 1 Corinthians

Some writers have even questioned the authenticity of Luke’s account of the Acts 2 tongues phenomenon, claiming that it is untrustworthy.⁶⁰³ These scholars contend that it is a deliberate attempt on Luke’s part to obscure the fact that these tongues were ecstatic and unintelligible, like those Paul later encountered at Corinth. Furthermore, they argue that Luke’s narrative may be based on a secondary source that had already altered the facts regarding this phenomenon or had simply

⁶⁰⁰ Gundry, “‘Ecstatic Utterance’,” 303; Smith, “Glossolalia,” 316-317.

⁶⁰¹ Gundry, “‘Ecstatic Utterance’,” 304.

⁶⁰² Ibid., 303.

⁶⁰³ Kling, “Corinthians,” 252; cf. Meyer, *Epistles to the Corinthians*, 1:364-372.

misinformed Luke of the same.⁶⁰⁴

Questions of historicity include, among other things, the complete lack of other NT references to Pentecost and whether the church's "initial formative experience of the Spirit" took place in Jerusalem or Galilee.⁶⁰⁵ Other writers propose that Luke's account of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-47) should be discounted altogether. They allege there was an earlier and therefore more authentic draft of the Book of Acts which did not contain chap. 2 and that the latter, therefore, emanated from an inferior source. This particular reconstruction of Acts has two effects: (1) chap. 2 is eliminated as a primary source; and (2) the giving of the Holy Spirit in 4:31 is seen to be the earliest account of such.⁶⁰⁶

Species of Tongues

Other writers proffer that an either/or option between "ecstatic" and "non-ecstatic" or "linguistic" speech in 1 Cor 12-14 "does not and cannot do justice to Paul."⁶⁰⁷ As noted earlier, the expression "kinds of tongues" in 12:10 can be interpreted as "species of tongues."⁶⁰⁸ This interpretation, it is argued, indicates that there is a diversity of tongues rather than just one type of glossolalic speech and, therefore, "that the manifestations of this gift varied much," with most limiting them

⁶⁰⁴ Stagg, Hinson, and Oates, *Glossolalia*, 25. For a detailed list of the arguments against the reliability of Luke's narrative see Andrew T. Lincoln, "Theology and History in the Interpretation of Luke's Pentecost," *ET* 96/7 (1985): 206-209.

⁶⁰⁵ Lincoln, "Theology and History," 206-209.

⁶⁰⁶ Stagg, Hinson and Oates, *Glossolalia*, 29.

⁶⁰⁷ Thistleton, *1 Corinthians*, 982.

⁶⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 970, 982.

to one form or another of ecstatic, non-human speech.⁶⁰⁹ According to Cyril Williams, the word “ecstasy” is too vague a term to limit ecstatic speech to just one type of unintelligible speech. It can range in scope, he says, from “mild dissociation to extreme uncontrollable rapture.”⁶¹⁰ “Most scholars,” says Forbes, “use the term in its modern sense, loosely defining it as ‘having to do with an abnormal state of mind, a religious frenzy’, or similar. . . . Others use the term more loosely, seemingly as a synonym for ‘inspired’.”⁶¹¹ Thiselton is adamant that at least some species of tongues fall within this spectrum, but to say that they all do, he suggests, would be stretching the point and extremely difficult to prove.⁶¹²

Angelic Speech

Another popular non-human speech theory is the concept that glossolalia constitutes angelic speech.⁶¹³ This hypothesis is based on the contrast between the “tongues of men” and the “tongues of angels” in 13:1: “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.” When this passage is read in conjunction with Paul’s statement that “no one but God can understand the glossolalist’s speech” (1 Cor 14:2), some scholars conclude that the former refers to ordinary human speech, and the latter to glossolalia.

⁶⁰⁹ Robertson and Plummer, *1 Corinthians*, 267; cf. Grosheide, *1 Corinthians*, 289; Héring, *1 Corinthians*, 127-128.

⁶¹⁰ Cyril G. Williams, *Tongues of the Spirit: A Study of Pentecostal Glossolalia and Related Phenomena* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1981), 30.

⁶¹¹ Forbes, *Prophecy*, 53-54.

⁶¹² Thistleton, *1 Corinthians*, 983.

⁶¹³ Cf. Powers, “Missionary Tongues?” 47-48; Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 108; Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 209; Sweet, “A Sign for Unbelievers,” 253.

Dunn, on the other hand, argues that because 1 Cor 13:1-3 is presumably talking about different types of charismata, the phrase “tongues of men” in v. 1 refers to “inspired speech of different kinds in the vernacular,” rather than to ordinary, everyday speech. That is, it refers to inspired preaching, prophesying, teaching, singing, and praying, etc. Secondly, he claims that the “mysteries” that are mentioned in v. 2 refer to the content of the angelic speech in the previous verse. And then, on the basis that the word μυστήριον in Paul’s writings always refers to “eschatological secrets known only in heaven,” he reasons that these mysteries cannot be expressed in human terms (cf. 2 Cor 12:4). Consequently, the mysteries spoken in the Spirit by the glossolalist in 1 Cor 14:2 are, in all likelihood, in a heavenly language.⁶¹⁴ Hence, he says, the phrase ‘tongues of angels’ refers to “Paul’s and/or the Corinthians’ description of glossolalia.”⁶¹⁵

Others, like Fee, for example, claim that 1 Cor 13:1 “refers to two kinds of glossolalia: human speech, inspired of the Spirit, but unknown to the speaker or hearers; and angelic speech, inspired of the Spirit to speak in the heavenly dialect.”⁶¹⁶ However, on the premise that “the construction of the first clause probably signals intensity toward the end: ‘If I speak in the tongues of men and *even* of angels . . .’”⁶¹⁷ the latter, it is argued, is of a “higher order” of speech than the God-given ability to speak in unknown human languages. Roy Ciampa and Brian Rosner describe it as ““a

⁶¹⁴ Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit*, 244; cf. Turner, *Holy Spirit*, 228.

⁶¹⁵ Dunn, *Jesus*, 244.

⁶¹⁶ Fee, “Toward a Pauline,” 28.

⁶¹⁷ D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1987, reprint Milton Keynes, UK: Authentic Media, 2010), 52.

deluxe version’ of that same gift.”⁶¹⁸ Hence, the “tongues of angels” are widely believed to be an esoteric heavenly language; that is, a language not normally spoken by humans.

The problem with this particular interpretation of 1 Cor 13:1 is that Paul, as Fitzmyer proposes, may be “simply indulging in rhetorical hyperbole, and using a bit of irony, as he joins contrary terms to express the totality of those who use speech.”⁶¹⁹ In other words, Paul is not implying that the “tongues of angels” are “an extension of human tongues,”⁶²⁰ or that they are “‘the very epitome of the gift of tongues’ (*EDNT*, 1:14), or even ‘the language of worship’ (Spicq, *Agape*, 145).”⁶²¹ Rather, he is saying that if he could speak in all types of languages, including the language of the angels, it would be of no spiritual benefit to anyone unless it was motivated by love. The contrast he is making therefore is not between human languages and angelic speech, but rather with love.⁶²² The obvious use of hyperbole in vv. 2-3 strongly suggests that this is indeed the case.⁶²³

Forbes notes that an entirely “different case in support of the ‘angelic language’ interpretation is put forward by Earle Ellis.” Ellis, he says, argues that Paul’s repeated use of the term “spirit/s” in 1 Cor 14:12, 14-16 and 32 (and

⁶¹⁸ John C. Poirier, *The Tongues of Angels: The Concept of Angelic Languages in Classical Jewish and Christian Texts*, WUNT II 287 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 48; Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans/Apollos, 2010), 626.

⁶¹⁹ Joseph A Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, AYB 32 (New Haven, CT/London: Yale University Press, 2008), 492; Hasel, *Speaking in Tongues*, 123.

⁶²⁰ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 611.

⁶²¹ Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 492.

⁶²² Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 53.

⁶²³ Forbes, *Prophecy*, 58; MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, 276; cf. Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 108.

elsewhere) strongly suggests that both he and the Corinthians believed that it is through spiritual beings that tongues and prophecy come to us, “which reinforces the case in favour of angelic languages.”⁶²⁴

Even though the above arguments differ in their interpretation of the phrase the “tongues of men” in 1 Cor 13:1, they all equate the “tongues of angels” with glossolalia and identify the same with an esoteric heavenly language, or languages. “Sometimes it is thought that Paul is alluding to what he heard in his vision and will call *arrēta rhēmata*, ‘things that no human can express’ (2 Cor 12:4), but angels,” as Joseph Fitzmyer points out, “are not mentioned there, and there is no reason to think that the *rhēmata* were uttered by such beings.”⁶²⁵

The case for “angelic speech” is usually urged with reference to the belief in the dual concept of divine languages and the human use of such as a means of communicating with the gods in the Hellenistic world; or to “the concept of angelic languages in Jewish apocalyptic literature.”⁶²⁶ In regards to the former, Forbes has shown that there is no evidence to sustain the belief that divine languages were used to communicate with the gods in Hellenism. He concedes that there is a long pedigree of heavenly languages in Greek thought, but using them to address the gods “cannot be shown to have pre-Christian origins.” This idea, he asserts, appears to have developed much later and, therefore, it is inappropriate to use it to establish that

⁶²⁴ Forbes, *Prophecy*, 58-59; cf. E. Earle Ellis, *Prophecy and Hermeneutic in Early Christianity: New Testament Essays*, WUNT 18 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1978), 30-44.

⁶²⁵ Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 492; cf. Poirier, *Tongues of Angels*, 59-63.

⁶²⁶ Forbes, *Prophecy*, 58; Johnson, “Tongues,” 6:597; Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 973.

Christian glossolalia constitutes an “angelic” or “heavenly” language.⁶²⁷ On the other hand, there are several references to angelic speech in the intertestamental period, which, it is argued, not only parallel glossolalia, but also have had a direct bearing on Paul’s understanding of the same.⁶²⁸

The most celebrated of the alleged parallels with Corinthian glossolalia in the pseudepigrapha is that of the *Testament of Job*. This Testament is an imaginative work that describes the patriarch Job’s deathbed scene, including his bequeathing of a beautiful sash to each of his three daughters, Hemera, Kasia, and Amaltheia’s Horn. When these sashes are worn by these three women they, reportedly, experience a change of heart and are enabled to “praise God with hymns in angelic languages” (see *T. Job* 48:1-50:3).⁶²⁹ U. B. Muller, as Forbes notes, “is so certain of both the parallel, and the Hellenistic origins of glossolalia, that he argues that the Testament must be seen as a Hellenistic Jewish work, on the basis of this passage (as well as others).”⁶³⁰ However, Forbes stipulates that before these conclusions can be legitimately drawn, it needs to be proven that the Testament itself pre-dates Christianity and has not been subject to “Christian or other interpolation in the critical chapters,” otherwise its value “as an independent parallel falls away.”⁶³¹

Unfortunately for the “angelic speech” school of thought, it is impossible to

⁶²⁷ See Forbes, *Prophecy*, 154-155.

⁶²⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, 182.

⁶²⁹ Hiu, *Regulations Concerning Tongues and Prophecy* in 1 Corinthians 14.26-40: *Relevance Beyond the Christian Church*, LNTS 406 (London/New York: T. & T. Clark, 2010), 31-33; Poirier, *Tongues of Angels*, 63-77; Turner, *Holy Spirit*, 236; cf. Forbes, *Prophecy*, 183; Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 973; Theissen, *Psychological Aspects*, 288-290; Currie, ““Speaking in Tongues”,” 282-284; Horsley, *1 Corinthians*, 180-181.

⁶³⁰ Forbes, *Prophecy*, 184.

⁶³¹ *Ibid.*

determine an exact date for the *Testament of Job*. If the work is Jewish, and if it was written in Egypt, the date usually ranges from the first century B.C. to no later than the Jewish revolt in Egypt in 115-117 A.D. If it is Christian, Poirier says, there is no reason not to extend it by up to another 300 years.⁶³²

As to the matter of Christian or other interpolation, it has been suggested that the *Testament of Job* underwent a Montanist redaction in the second century A.D., but this is unlikely, says Hiu, in that “there is no evidence of hymnic prophecy, glossolalia or angelic languages . . . , nor the use of ‘sashes’ or ‘girdles’ in Montanist practice.”⁶³³ Forbes highlights the same weaknesses in this suggestion, but adds that “it remains quite possible, however, that there was a Christian or Gnostic (τὴν διάλεκτος τῷ ἀρχόντων!) redaction at some period.”⁶³⁴ Once again, the inability to determine an exact date for the Testament renders it impossible to either prove or refute this possibility. To this point in time, it has not been proven that the *Testament of Job* is pre-Christian; neither has it been shown that “it was contemporary with early Christianity, or that it is free from editorial influence from within Christianity.”⁶³⁵ Until this takes place, it is impossible to establish that it is of Jewish origin or that it constitutes a legitimate pre-Christian parallel to glossolalia.”⁶³⁶

Other intertestamental Jewish works that have been cited in support of the “angelic speech” hypothesis include the *Apocalypse of Zephaniah*, the *Ascension of Isaiah*, the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, “and various passages from the Qumram

⁶³² Poirier, *Tongues of Angels*, 63-64.

⁶³³ Hiu, *Regulations Concerning Tongues and Prophecy*, 32.

⁶³⁴ Forbes, *Prophecy*, 184-185.

⁶³⁵ Ibid.

⁶³⁶ Forbes, *Prophecy*, 185; cf. Poirier, *Tongues of Angels*, 64.

writings.” While there is some evidence in these ancient sources “for humans relying on angelic knowledge, [and] some [evidence] for the concept of the angels having their own language,” only one of these works, the *Apocalypse of Zephaniah*, actually refers to “the use of such languages by humans.”⁶³⁷

The *Apocalypse of Zephaniah* is thought to have been written somewhere between 100 B.C. and 175 A.D., with the first century A.D. being the most likely date. In addition, it appears to be free of “Christian elements” or Christian “theology,” which strongly suggests that it was written by a Jew.⁶³⁸ In this work (*Apoc. Zeph.* 8.4-5) Zephaniah recounts that while in heaven he was placed in a boat. “Thousands of thousands and myriads of myriads of angels,” he says, “gave praise before me. I, myself, put on an angelic garment. I saw all those angels praying. I, myself, prayed together with them, I knew their language, which they spoke with me.”⁶³⁹ The relevance of this passage to the “tongues of angels” in 1 Cor 13:1 and to Corinthian glossolalia in particular, like that of the *Testament of Job*, is that it too involves the use of angelic languages in prayer and praise. A cursory reading of 1 Cor 14:2 may give the impression that glossolalia was used for the same purposes. As the remainder of this treatise will endeavour to show, even though the Corinthians were using the gift of tongues to pray in church, this usage was contrary to the gift’s intent.

According to Poirier, Zephaniah’s account of his “adventure in heaven”

⁶³⁷ Ibid., 186; cf. Poirier, *Tongues of angels*, 77-109; Hiu, *Regulations Concerning Tongues and Prophecy*, 33-37.

⁶³⁸ Poirier, *Tongues of Angels*, 77-78; Hiu, *Regulations Concerning Tongues and Prophecy*, 33-34.

⁶³⁹ Poirier, *Tongues of Angels*, 78; cf. Hiu, *Regulations Concerning Tongues and Prophecy*, 33.

“provides our first example of angeloglossy in a writing whose Jewish provenance is fairly (but not *entirely*) secure.”⁶⁴⁰ But that, in itself, is problematic for the “angelic speech” school of thought. As Hiu observes, there is not one shred of evidence in early Jewish writings to even suggest that the Jews were familiar with the concept of glossolalia, let alone that they understood it as angeloglossy.⁶⁴¹ If this is the case, and if Paul did link the two phenomena, it is highly unlikely that he got the idea from this passage in the *Apocalypse of Zephaniah*. The only thing that we can be sure of from this passage, and from the one taken from the *Testament of Job*, is that an “angeloglossy” does exist and that in some circles, as Forbes points out, it was an acceptable *mode of praise*.⁶⁴² The same can be said for the other pseudepigraphic works mentioned above. Proof that angeloglossy equates to glossolalia must therefore come from elsewhere.

Prayer Language, Prattle, or Pre-Cognitive Groanings

Other writers, although they are few in number, theorize that glossolalia constitutes a kind of idiosyncratic prayer language which is dominated by archaic or foreign terms. Exponents of such tend to base this idea on the supposition that some ancient authors used the term γλῶσσαι as “a technical term to designate an archaic language, often used in a cult, and sometimes speech that was incomprehensible like that of the Pythia of Delphi.”⁶⁴³ Heinrici is the exception. He argues this case from a linguistic point of view.

⁶⁴⁰ Poirier, *Tongues of Angels*, 79.

⁶⁴¹ Hiu, *Regulations Concerning Tongues and Prophecy*, 32.

⁶⁴² Cf. Forbes, *Prophecy*, 185-186.

⁶⁴³ Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 979; Héring, *1 Corinthians*, 128; cf. Forbes, *Prophecy*, 60.

Still others equate glossolalia with sub-linguistic noise. They argue that “loveless glossolalia” is portrayed as “meaningless sound” (1 Cor 13:1); it is compared to the prattle of a little child (13:11); it is described as incomprehensible to others, but not to God (14:2); and it is depicted as mindless speech (14:14-15). On the other hand, they play down the analogy with foreign languages in 14:9-11, preferring instead to liken glossolalia to the discordant sounds of musical instruments played aimlessly (vv. 7-8). They also contend that Paul’s failure to use ἕτερος and διάλεκτος in his discussion on tongues indicates that he “does not think of glossolalia as linguistic.” In addition, they argue that the gift of interpretation is not to be taken in the literal sense of “translation,” but rather, in the broader sense of “explanation” or “interpretation.”⁶⁴⁴

There are those also who identify glossolalia with the “inarticulate groanings” of the Spirit-inspired believer in Rom 8:26. Several parallels between the Corinthian phenomenon and these “sighs too deep for words,” as some call them, are put forward as evidence of the same. In both cases “the Spirit is understood to be praying in or through the believer,” the words spoken are incomprehensible to the speaker, and the speech is directed towards God.⁶⁴⁵ Modern exponents of this interpretation include scholars such as F. Godet, H. Lietzmann and H. R. Balz.⁶⁴⁶

Ernst Käsemann argues the case for glossolalia in v. 26 from an entirely different point of view. Peter O’Brien’s summary of Käsemann’s arguments, are noted below. Firstly, unless the “sighs too deep for words” in this verse are referring to glossolalia, Paul would be contradicting what he says elsewhere in the NT about

⁶⁴⁴ Forbes, *Prophecy*, 60-61.

⁶⁴⁵ Fee, “Toward a Pauline,” 26-27.

⁶⁴⁶ See O’Brien, “Romans 8:26, 27,” 70.

the meaning of prayer and the assurance that God actually hears and answers our prayers. Secondly, speaking in tongues is revelatory in nature and therefore interpreting στεναγμοῖς ἀλάλητοις as such sits well with the apocalyptic language used in the preceding verses of Rom 8. Thirdly, to interpret this expression as “speaking in tongues,” “preserves the divinity of the Spirit and does not make him subject to our weaknesses.”⁶⁴⁷ Käsemann also argues that the correct translation of ἀλάλητοι is “unspeakable,” not “wordless,” and, therefore, that it is comparable to the “inexpressible [heavenly] words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter” of 2 Cor 12:4.⁶⁴⁸

Gerd Theissen, on the other hand, postulates that the Christian’s ignorance of their Spirit-inspired “inarticulate groans” shows that Paul was both familiar with, and profoundly influenced by, the Platonic concept of inspiration, which taught that possession by the deity suspends the activity of the mind. This ignorance, he postulates, was essentially no different to the “unconscious processes” which found expression in pagan ecstatic speech, which, in order to be rationally appropriated, demanded interpretation. In the same way, unintelligible glossolalic speech, which Theissen calls the “language of the unconscious,” is “capable of consciousness” through interpretation, he says.⁶⁴⁹ Accordingly, Theissen proposes that glossolalia makes known to us thoughts and feelings which were formerly inaccessible.⁶⁵⁰

The above list of hypotheses, are by no means the sum total of the non-human speech theories. For example, another is “riddle speech.” However, they are

⁶⁴⁷ Ibid; cf. Wedderburn, “Romans 8.26—Towards a Theology of Glossolalia?” *SJT* 28/4 (1975): 370.

⁶⁴⁸ Wedderburn, “Romans 8.26,” 371-372.

⁶⁴⁹ Theissen, *Psychological Aspects*, 287-291.

⁶⁵⁰ Ibid., 307.

representative of all such theories in that they tend to cover the principal reasons behind the modern swing away from the traditional human language/evangelism viewpoint.

The Human Languages Response

Compared to the vast array of modern exegetes who advocate that glossolalia refers to some sort of non-human speech, there are few scholars who have retained the traditional view that this gift constitutes the ability to speak in other human languages without having to learn them first. Most offer no better reason for doing so than the explicit mention of foreign languages in Acts 2. In fact, no significant attempt to counter the arguments put forward by scholars who have abandoned the old historical view occurred until 1952 when J. G. Davies' article, "Pentecost and Glossolalia," appeared in *JTS*.

Davies' View

In the *JTS* article Davies briefly argues against the charge of editorial manipulation in Acts 2 and then offers what he believes to be adequate linguistic and contextual evidence for the foreign languages view in 1 Cor 12 and 14. With respect to the charge of editorial manipulation, he appeals to the interdependence of the accounts of Babel (Gen 11) and Pentecost to establish that known languages are the intended meaning in Acts 2.⁶⁵¹ The linguistic evidence he offers for foreign languages in 1 Corinthians concerns the previously mentioned term ἑρμηνεία. Davies surveys the usage of this word and its cognates in the LXX and the NT (apart from its occurrences in 1 Corinthians) and determines that the predominant usage and primary meaning of such is "translation." This, he contends, warrants the suggestion

⁶⁵¹ Davies, "Pentecost and Glossolalia," 228-229.

that its usage in connection with glossolalia in 1 Corinthians refers to translating a foreign language.⁶⁵²

The contextual evidence Davies cites for languages in 1 Corinthians concerns Paul's loose quotation of Isa 28:11. This OT passage refers to the unintelligible speech of the invading Assyrian army as a sign of judgement on Israel's wilful unbelief. Paul similarly refers to glossolalia as "a sign of judgement on unbelievers." From this, Davies concludes that "it is reasonable to assume that St. Paul understood glossolalia to be talking in foreign languages."⁶⁵³

Gundry's View

Gundry restates the foreign language viewpoint with recourse to more stringent argumentation than relied on by Davies. His main concern is to attack the New English Bible's use of "'ecstatic utterance' or a similar phrase using the word 'ecstatic' for what is commonly known as speaking in tongues" and the general interpretation of tongues as ecstatic utterance by modern commentators.⁶⁵⁴ Firstly, he argues that in NT and Greek literature generally the "use of the term [γλῶσσαι] for 'understandable language' far exceeds its use for 'obscure speech,' especially in biblical Greek."⁶⁵⁵ He then points out that, excluding the references to tongues in Acts 2, 10 and 19 and in 1 Cor 12-14, there are only two cases in the NT and the LXX where γλῶσσαι has the meaning of unintelligible speech with both cases referring to stammering (Isa 29:24; 32:4), and not to ecstasy. As a result he believes that, without

⁶⁵² Ibid., 229-230; cf. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit*, 243-244; BDAG, 393.

⁶⁵³ Davies, "Pentecost," 230.

⁶⁵⁴ Gundry, "'Ecstatic Utterance'," 299.

⁶⁵⁵ Ibid; cf. Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 113.

very strong evidence to the contrary, we would be hard pressed to “overthrow the natural understanding of speaking in tongues as speaking in used human languages.”⁶⁵⁶ Edgar similarly asserts that “*γλῶσσα* means ‘language’ and is never used [in the NT] for ecstatic speech.”⁶⁵⁷

Secondly, Gundry concurs with Davies that even though the word *διερμηνεύω* can have various meanings in Greek literature, when it is used in connection with glossolalia, as it is in 1 Corinthians, it “normally refers to translating a language.”⁶⁵⁸ Moreover, its usage in the NT (again excluding those references in 1 Corinthians) and the LXX, he says, militates against using it to refer to the explaining of mysterious utterances.⁶⁵⁹

Thirdly, Gundry asserts that Luke uses *γλῶσσα* and *διάλεκτος* synonymously “for the languages spoken in the countries” from which those in attendance at Pentecost came (see Acts 2:6-11). Gundry considers this proves that Luke equated speaking in tongues with speaking in foreign languages. Furthermore, because of Luke’s association with Paul, Gundry deems it very likely that Luke’s account of the tongues phenomenon mirrored Paul’s understanding of it.⁶⁶⁰

Gundry supports this hypothesis by discrediting the notion that Paul’s reference to the tongues of angels in 1 Cor 13:1 suggests that glossolalia is a heavenly rather than an earthly language, emphasising the previously mentioned hypothetical

⁶⁵⁶ Gundry, “‘Ecstatic Utterance’,” 299-300.

⁶⁵⁷ Edgar, “The Cessation of the Sign Gifts,” 371-386; cf T. R. Edgar, *Miraculous Gifts* (New Jersey: Loiseaux, 1983), 110-194 (not available to the author).

⁶⁵⁸ Gundry, “‘Ecstatic Utterance’,” 300.

⁶⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁰ Ibid.

and hyperbolic nature of this passage.⁶⁶¹ In addition, it can be argued that although the comparison with human languages in this verse indicates that the “tongues of angels” are likely to be as real as the “tongues of men,” it is presumptuous to assume that it indicates that glossolalia is synonymous with speaking in the language of the angels. This verse refers to both types of tongues, which means that if it were to hold the key to unlocking glossolalia’s secrets, the tongues spoken in Corinth could equally have been human languages.⁶⁶² Gundry also attacks the concept that 1 Cor 14:2 points towards the ecstatic interpretation, claiming that neither πνεύματι nor μυστήριον, in this verse, indicate or favour ecstasy.⁶⁶³

Some proponents of the unintelligible ecstatic speech hypothesis contend that tongues are unintelligible because they are ecstatic. Gundry’s response to this argument is that this is not “a necessary or even a probable inference.”⁶⁶⁴ Paul’s comments, he asserts, are based on two presuppositions. Firstly, that the tongue spoken is unintelligible “because (and when) neither the speaker nor anyone else in the congregation happens to have the gift of interpretation.” The second presupposition is that the local members had limited linguistic backgrounds.⁶⁶⁵ They probably understood Greek and Latin, he says, some may even have understood Aramaic but beyond that they would require a translator if any other language were spoken.⁶⁶⁶

⁶⁶¹ Ibid., 301.

⁶⁶² Hasel, *Speaking in Tongues*, 123; cf. Forbes, *Prophecy*, 58; Lanier, “With Stammering Lips,” 275.

⁶⁶³ Gundry, “‘Ecstatic Utterance’,” 301-302.

⁶⁶⁴ Ibid., 302.

⁶⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁶ Ibid., 303.

Gundry also disputes the claim that Paul's exclusive use of $\lambda\alpha\lambda$ - as the root for "speaking" in connection with tongues favours the ecstatic utterance interpretation. Besides pointing out the contextual problems associated with such he adds that " $\lambda\alpha\lambda$ - did not ordinarily mean incoherent speech in Hellenistic times."⁶⁶⁷ Further, he rejects the assertion that "the accusation of drunkenness" in Acts 2:13, "the possible impression of madness" given in 1 Cor 14:23, and Paul's appeal for order in 14:27 f., "are tell-tale indications of ecstasy in the speaking of tongues."⁶⁶⁸ The "charge of drunkenness," says Gundry, "actually highlights the characteristic of tongues as human languages by throwing into bolder relief the recognition of the languages on the part of Jews and Gentile proselytes from other countries."⁶⁶⁹ On the other hand, the possible impression of madness, he says, "stems solely from the Corinthian failure to require accompanying translation" every time tongues were used in church.⁶⁷⁰

Gundry also refers the reader to Paul's rules for orderly conduct in church services, claiming that they apply to the prophets and questioning women as well as to the glossolalists. In the case of the prophets and the said women, the need for orderliness, he urges, does not stem from incoherent speech but rather from all trying to speak at once. But not only that, these rules imply that the tongue-speakers and the prophets could control their own speech. This, he says, indicates that neither group was "seized with uncontrollable excitement" or ecstasy when using their respective gifts.⁶⁷¹

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid., 304.

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁹ Ibid., 304-305.

⁶⁷⁰ Ibid., 305.

⁶⁷¹ Ibid., 305-306.

As further evidence that tongues mean foreign languages, Gundry tenders:

1. That Paul's reference to "foreigners" in 14:10-11 "should clear away any vestige of doubt that he thinks of the gift of tongues as miraculous speaking in unlearned human languages."
2. The comparison between tongues and the sounds that are produced by inanimate musical instruments like the harp and bugle (14:7-8) indicates that "tongues must be distinctly spoken languages just as notes from the harp and bugle must be distinct to be effective."
3. The use of the term 'words' when referring to glossolalia "further favours this understanding" (14:19).
4. Paul's use of Isa 28:11 to make a point about glossolalia in 14:21-23 indicates that the latter also refers to foreign languages.⁶⁷²

Forbes' View

Another prominent scholar in the modern era who has made a significant contribution to the ongoing tongues debate is Christopher Forbes. Reference has already been made to his rebuttal of Thiselton's claim that the term *διερμηνεύη* in 14:13 is more likely to mean "to articulate" than "to translate." Reference has also been made to Forbes' undermining of the history-of-religions appeals to supposedly parallel phenomena in Hellenism by showing conclusively that a substantial parallel with early Christian glossolalia does not exist (see chap. 4). The likelihood therefore that the problem Paul deals with in 1 Cor 12-14 is based on the Corinthians' pre-Christian religious experience is very low indeed. As a result, scholarship has generally abandoned the history-of-religions approach when seeking to establish the

⁶⁷² Ibid., 306-307.

ecstatic nature of glossolalia.⁶⁷³ It has also been mentioned that Forbes found that there is no evidence to sustain the belief that divine languages were used to communicate with the gods in Hellenism.⁶⁷⁴

Forbes also dismisses Ellis' theory that "tongues have come to us through the ministry of spiritual beings and therefore constitute angelic languages" on the grounds that Paul repeatedly emphasizes that the various charismata are the gifts of *one* Spirit (the Holy Spirit), rather than many spirits.⁶⁷⁵ On the other hand, Grudem, a non-human language protagonist, refutes Ellis's argument on the basis that he "cannot produce a single case in Paul where πνεῦμα unambiguously means a *good* spiritual being."⁶⁷⁶ These arguments aside, Forbes, as mentioned earlier, rejects the angelic speech hypothesis on the grounds that its foundational text (1 Cor 13:1) is both rhetorical and hypothetical in nature.⁶⁷⁷

What is more, Forbes agrees with Gundry that although γλῶσσα could mean archaic or mysterious expressions, one cannot justifiably say that it "became a technical term for such expressions."⁶⁷⁸ Besides, practitioners, he says, have not been able to cite one example of the use of archaic words or phrases in relation to cultic practices, and there appears to be no evidence that γλῶσσα was used in connection with unintelligible utterances at Delphi.⁶⁷⁹

⁶⁷³ See Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 980.

⁶⁷⁴ See Forbes, *Prophecy*, 154-155.

⁶⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁶⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 61-62.

⁶⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁶⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 60.

Forbes also questions the relevance of the term “ecstasy,” claiming that it is “one of the most misused terms in the vocabulary of New Testament scholarship in our area,” with most scholars “loosely defining it as ‘having to do with an abnormal state of mind, a religious frenzy,’ or similar.”⁶⁸⁰ In a similar vein to that of Gundry, he states that if this term were applicable to tongues it would also apply to prophecy, because the same rules essentially control both gifts. Thus, he declares, it would be impossible to argue the case for ecstasy in regard to tongues and not prophecy.⁶⁸¹

In addition, Forbes denounces as “false” Dunn’s assertion “‘that the analogy Paul uses in 14:10f. between glossolalia and foreign language cannot be taken as evidence that Paul thought of glossolalia as foreign language’.”⁶⁸² He concedes that analogies are not drawn from like phenomena, but insists that Paul’s comparison here is not between one human language and another. Rather, it is between naturally acquired languages and those miraculously bestowed by God. This is regardless of whether the latter constitutes foreign languages or inarticulate speech, although Forbes thinks the weight of evidence leans more heavily towards languages than to inarticulate speech.⁶⁸³

With regard to Paul’s comparison between glossolalia and the discordant sounds of musical instruments played haphazardly (14:7-9), loveless glossolalia (13:1), and the prattle of a little child (13:11), Forbes, assuming that glossolalia refers to foreign languages, respectively submits that:

1. The glossolalists were failing to communicate.

⁶⁸⁰ Ibid., 53.

⁶⁸¹ Ibid., 55-56.

⁶⁸² Ibid., 62-63.

⁶⁸³ Ibid., 63.

2. They were “inconsiderate and arrogant.”
3. The reference to childish speech may not even refer to glossolalia.⁶⁸⁴

As for Paul’s statement that glossolalia is unintelligible to men but not to God (14:2), Forbes suggests that it “could accord well enough with either [the unintelligible ecstatic speech or human languages] view.”⁶⁸⁵ Foreign languages, he surmises, would be as incomprehensible to one who is unfamiliar with the language spoken as unintelligible non-human speech would be.

Forbes suggests that the phrase “my mind is unfruitful” (v. 14) also “makes perfect sense either way,” for, in his opinion, Paul makes it quite clear that under normal circumstances the glossolalist does not understand his own speech. If they did, he says, there would be no need for them to pray for the additional gift of interpretation (v. 13). On the other hand, Forbes claims that there is not enough evidence in v. 14 to conclusively say that the term “unfruitful” means that the glossolalist’s mind is inactive when they are speaking in tongues. Besides, Paul’s emphasis on intelligibility and the participation of the mind in the exercise of the gift of tongues (v. 15), he suggests, militates against a cognitive vacuum.⁶⁸⁶

Problems From Within the Human Languages Camp

On the basis of these arguments Forbes confidently asserts “that Paul, like Luke, understands glossolalia as the miraculous ability to speak unlearned human languages.” It would appear, however, that in order to display a degree of

⁶⁸⁴ Ibid., 63-64.

⁶⁸⁵ Ibid., 64.

⁶⁸⁶ Ibid.

tentativeness, he chooses to add: “And (possibly) divine or angelic languages.”⁶⁸⁷

This concession, on Forbes’ part, gives the impression that he does not fully endorse the foreign language argument, but rather allows for the possibility of multiple species of tongues. This undermines, rather than underpins, the human languages viewpoint.

Another matter which tends to undermine the human languages cause is the fact that virtually no one in this camp currently believes that tongues were intended to overcome a communications barrier where the preaching of the gospel is concerned. Neither do they believe “that the apostles communicated the gospel in supernaturally given foreign languages.”⁶⁸⁸ For instance, Gundry claims that there is no evidence for a display of diverse human languages in the NT and that Greek could just as effectively have been used to reach all in Corinth. In a similar vein to that of Alford, Godet, and Farrar, he reasons that at Pentecost, the languages of Greek, Aramaic, or Hebrew, could have done the job as well as, if not better than tongues. All three languages, he says, “were regularly used in first-century Palestine.”⁶⁸⁹

This departure from the traditional “tongues for evangelism” viewpoint has resulted in the foreign languages advocates insisting that even though the Lukan and Pauline tongues phenomena are basically the same they have different functions. They believe that the latter is used by God to communicate with his people when used in conjunction with the gift of interpretation and/or to edify the speaker.⁶⁹⁰ Gundry is the odd man out in this respect. He sees the Corinthian manifestation of tongues as

⁶⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁸ Powers, “Missionary Tongues?” 45.

⁶⁸⁹ Gundry, “‘Ecstatic Utterance’,” 303.

⁶⁹⁰ Cf. Powers, “Missionary Tongues?” 45; Turner, *Holy Spirit*, 226-227; Gundry, “‘Ecstatic Utterance’,” 303.

“primarily a convincing miracle,” not a communicative tool.⁶⁹¹ Either way, the non-human languages camp has just cause to question the relevancy of such a gift if not for evangelistic purposes in that, as we have already noted, the notion that glossolalia refers to speaking in other human languages has always been linked to mission and does not appear to make any sense apart from it.⁶⁹²

The remainder of this treatise will revisit most of the arguments on both sides of the tongues debate that have been presented above. In the process, it will endeavour to produce compelling evidence that glossolalia, like the Acts 2 tongues phenomenon, was meant to be used for evangelism and, therefore, constitutes the God-given ability to speak in other human languages without having to learn them first. As mentioned at the outset of this chapter, a summary of the conclusions drawn will be given in chap. 13.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have shown that there are two major schools of thought concerning glossolalia. The first is the historical view which claims that speaking in tongues refers to the God-given ability to speak in other human languages without having to learn them first, and that it was given for the purpose of evangelism. The second view is that glossolalia refers to some sort of non-human speech, be it ecstatic or otherwise. Various theories regarding the exact nature of this non-human speech have emerged over time. These theories include “unintelligible ecstatic speech,” “angelic or heavenly language,” “archaic or idiosyncratic language,” “sub-linguistic noise,” and “inarticulate Spirit-inspired groaning,” to name a few. The most

⁶⁹¹ Gundry, “Ecstatic Utterance’,” 303-304.

⁶⁹² Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 976-977.

dominant theory is that tongues constitute unintelligible ecstatic speech.

CHAPTER 9 - TONGUES VERSUS THE ABUSE OF TONGUES

Thus far in our study of 1 Cor 12-14 we have found that most, if not all commentators agree that:

1. The Corinthians had grossly exaggerated the importance of speaking in tongues and that their enthusiasm for this gift had caused serious problems in the local assembly.
2. The Corinthians considered glossolalia to be the highest status symbol of all and, therefore, the ultimate evidence of spiritual maturity.
3. The local glossolalists were ostentatiously parading their gift in public, using the regular church services as a forum for self-display.
4. The Corinthians' misconception and abuse of the gift of tongues had contributed to the pride, jealousy, rivalry, boasting and elitism endemic in the Corinthian assembly.
5. The primary purpose of 1 Cor 12-14 is to correct this abuse and to restore equilibrium in the local church.

Evidence for the Abuse of Tongues in Corinth

Numerous indicators of the severity and nature of the abuse of tongues in Corinth have already been cited. They include:

1. The inordinate number of times that "speaking in tongues" is mentioned in 1 Cor 12-14.
2. The fact that the gift of tongues consistently appears either last or next to last on Paul's "gift lists" in chap. 12, thus inferring that the Corinthians' zeal for this gift was misplaced, and that they were actively promoting it in their assembly.

3. The locating of the gift of tongues at the head of a select list of gifts and Christian attributes deemed by Paul to be spiritually worthless if used in a loveless manner (13:1-3). This strongly suggests that this gift was not only used in a loveless manner but that it was the first among gifts misused in this way by the Corinthians.
4. Paul's implication in drawing a contrast between the temporary nature of prophecy, tongues, and knowledge and the permanence of love in 1 Cor 13:8-13 is that the Corinthians had over-inflated the value of all three gifts. Here in this passage he is seeking to restore perspective to the Corinthians' perception of the assumed importance of the preferred gifts. The subsequent emphasis on tongues-speaking in 1 Cor 14 indicates that Paul has the gift of tongues particularly in mind.
5. Paul's statement that "the one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless the latter interprets his/her speech for the edification of the whole church" (14:5b), shows that the local tongues-speakers were claiming superiority to the non-tongues-speakers in the assembly. This interpretation sits well with 1 Cor 12:15-25 which gives the impression that the lesser gifted members of the Corinthian church were made to feel inferior to the more spectacularly gifted members. The latter, it would appear, were acting as if they were better than everybody else (cf. 4:6-8) in the church and thought that they could function just as effectively without their less gifted associates.
6. Paul's preference is for the immediate intelligibility in the congregation of prophesying rather than the use of un-interpreted tongues. His refusal to speak in tongues in church services (14:18-19), and his desire for others to

follow suit if an interpreter is not present to translate their speech (vv. 27-28), indicates clearly that he felt that the use of un-interpreted tongues in public worship was inappropriate.

7. The rules and regulations set down by Paul to curtail the disorderly use of tongues and prophecy in public worship services (14:29-33) give the distinct impression that both groups, the glossolalists and the prophets, were displaying their unique gifts of utterance in an unacceptable way in the local assembly. If Sweet and Johanson's individual assessments of the situation are correct, it would appear that both parties were locked in a battle over the right to assume the leadership of the church in the absence of their former teachers, with the glossolalists claiming their gift entitled them to fill the apparent leadership vacuum in Corinth (see chap. 5, pages 22-23). If this is the case, then the glossolalists, as we have previously stated, had not only over-inflated the gift of tongues in the life of the church members and were mistakenly parading them in public, they had also over-estimated the role of tongues in the developing church.

The Nature of Tongues in Corinth

The only record we have of the Corinthians' actual use of tongues in public worship services in Corinth is Paul's statement in 1 Cor 14:2: "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." Notwithstanding the above evidence that the Corinthian glossolalists were flaunting their gift in public, it would appear that scholars on both sides of the tongues debate have ignored the possibility that this verse may in fact refer to the misuse of tongues by the user in order to claim superior status in the Corinthian assembly. Instead, they prefer to see it as a definitive statement regarding

the inherent qualities of tongues-speaking *per se*. The purpose of this current chapter is to show that this omission on the part of the exegetes may have led to a gross error in the interpretation of Paul's meaning in this verse, as well as provide an explanation consistent with Paul's other statements on the topic.

As noted in the previous chapter, the non-human languages view of tongues-speaking is based, primarily, on the assumption that 1 Cor 14:2 implies that the glossolalist's speech is directed towards God and not towards other human beings. Accordingly, it is argued that no one, not even those who speak in tongues, can understand the glossolalist's speech – except, of course, for those who have the gift of interpretation, be it the glossolalists themselves or another interpreter.⁶⁹³ Consequently, speaking in tongues is said to constitute some form of unintelligible speech. In addition, the mysteries spoken in the spirit by the glossolalist (πνεῦμάτι δὲ λαλεῖ μυστήρια, v. 2c) are said to reinforce this hypothesis, with the term πνεῦμάτι purportedly indicating that tongues-speaking is ecstatic.

The Mystery of Godliness

Many exegetes, including Robertson and Plummer, Cartledge, and Hasel, agree that the term μυστήριον (mystery) in the NT usually relates to truth about God that was once hidden but is now revealed in the life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus and, therefore, that it generally refers to the “mystery of godliness.”⁶⁹⁴ Consequently, it is assumed that even though Paul does not stipulate what type of

⁶⁹³ Cf. Meyer, *Epistles to the Corinthians*, 2:4.

⁶⁹⁴ Robertson and Plummer, *1 Corinthians*, 306; Cartledge, “Nature and Function,” 147; Hasel, *Speaking in Tongues*, 124-126; cf. Godet, *1 Corinthians*, 30:266; Gundry, “‘Ecstatic Utterance’,” 302; Kistemaker, *1 Corinthians*, 478; G. Bornkamm, “μυστήριον,” in *TDNT*, edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, translated and edited by G. W. Bromiley, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-1976), 4:819; BDAG, 662.

mysteries he has in mind in 1 Cor 14:2, its general usage elsewhere dictates that it is likely to have the same meaning here. Hence tongues-speakers, even though they are unaware of what they are saying, offer back to God eschatological secrets that have been made known to the saints through the atonement of Jesus Christ (see Rom 16:25-26; Col 1:25-29).

Of itself, the term μυστήριον does not appear to indicate whether or not these mysteries are unintelligible. The key to unlocking this secret is generally understood to be found in the relationship between μυστήρια and πνεύματι in 1 Cor 14:2, with the latter indicating that the source of the former is the “spirit,” whatever the term “spirit” is purported to mean in this context.

The Holy Spirit versus the Human Spirit

The general understanding of the word πνεύματι in 1 Cor 14:2 is that it refers either to the Holy Spirit or to the glossolalist’s own spirit.⁶⁹⁵ Either way, the assumption is that the glossolalists are completely unaware of the content of their own speech and that the mysteries spoken in the spirit are unintelligible, ecstatic, and celestial. To interpret πνεύματι as the Holy Spirit, as both Godet and Héring point out, for example, implies that the Spirit actually takes possession of tongues-speakers and utters, through them, words that are incomprehensible to humans.⁶⁹⁶ As noted in the previous chapter, other NT passages appear to convey a similar thought. For example, the reference in Rom 8:26 to the Spirit-inspired, inarticulate groans of the believer reaching out to God, and the “unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a

⁶⁹⁵ Kistemaker, *1 Corinthians*, 477. For numerous examples of both interpretations see Ronald Trail, *An Exegetical Summary of 1 Corinthians 10-16* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 206-207.

⁶⁹⁶ Cf. Godet, *1 Corinthians*, 266; Héring, *1 Corinthians*, 146.

man to utter” in 2 Cor 12:4 appear to support the argument of a mysterious language generated by the Holy Spirit.⁶⁹⁷ The logical outcome of this interpretation is that every time a person speaks in tongues their utterances are Holy Spirit-induced.

On the other hand, those who render πνεύματι as the glossolalist’s own spirit, usually identify it with the emotive rather than the cognitive side of the human psyche or insist that it emanates from and is directed by the Holy Spirit and is therefore ecstatic.⁶⁹⁸ The idea that it refers to the emotive side of the glossolalist’s psyche is based primarily on the apparent dichotomy of the νοῦς and the πνεῦμα in 14:14-15, which, it is argued, effectively rules out the use of the mind when speaking with tongues.⁶⁹⁹

Potential Problems with the Mystery of Godliness Hypothesis

Even though μυστήριον in the NT usually refers to the “mystery of godliness,” there is ample evidence to suggest that it does not always mean the same thing. In fact, there are at least five different occasions in the NT where this term is used to designate mysteries other than those relating to the revealing of God’s formerly hidden purposes. These mysteries include “the mystery of iniquity” (2 Thess 2:7), “the mystery of the seven stars and the seven golden candlesticks” (Rev 1:20), “the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her” (Rev 17:7), and “all” mysteries (1 Cor 13:2). The latter include “God’s eschatological purposes and

⁶⁹⁷ Cf. Godet, *1 Corinthians*, 266.

⁶⁹⁸ Cf. Meyer, *Epistles to the Corinthians*, 2:5; Marion L. Soards, *1 Corinthians*, NIBC (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 282-283; Kistemaker, *1 Corinthians*, 478; Godet, *1 Corinthians*, 266; Lenski, *1 & 2 Corinthians*, 577; Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 281.

⁶⁹⁹ See previous comments under the heading “The Mind is Unfruitful” in chap. 8.

acts” but are not limited to them, as Paul’s use of hyperbole in v. 2 implies. Another example is found in Rom 11:25, where μυστήριον refers to “God’s reason for the partial hardening of Israel’s heart.”⁷⁰⁰ Some may even consider the mystery surrounding “the transformation of the surviving Christians at the Parousia” (1 Cor 15:51) to be yet another example of such. However, technically speaking, it constitutes part of the “mystery of godliness” and therefore should be included in the examples of the same.⁷⁰¹

Indeed, the meticulous manner in which Paul qualifies the meaning of μυστήριον on all of these occasions, including those pertaining to the “mystery of godliness,” would suggest that his failure to follow suit in 1 Cor 14:2 is intentional and that its meaning here is related to none of those mentioned above. In addition, the meaning of μυστήριον is not limited to spiritual matters alone. It may refer to anything spiritual or intellectual that requires illumination.⁷⁰²

It is clear from Godet’s comments about μυστήρια in 1 Cor 14:2 that either meaning could apply in this verse. The term “mystery,” he says, “usually denotes the Divine plans which remain a secret to men, so long as God does not reveal them,” but adds that it can also refer “to the secrets of man in relation to other men.” It would appear from his subsequent comments that his personal preference is for the latter. The essence of the glossolalist’s speech, he writes, “remains between God and him, and is a mystery to the hearers.”⁷⁰³ In other words, the mystery in v. 2 is not to be found in the words that are spoken but rather in the inability of the hearers to

⁷⁰⁰ Cf. BDAG, 662; G. Bornkamm, “μυστήριον,” *TDNT*, 4:822-824.

⁷⁰¹ Cf. BDAG, 662.

⁷⁰² H. K. Moulton, *The Analytical Greek Lexicon Revised*, RRL (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978), 273; cf. BDAG, 662.

⁷⁰³ Godet, *1 Corinthians*, 30:266.

comprehend these self-same words. Meyer also rejects the “mystery of godliness” hypothesis by suggesting that the “mysterious character of the speaking with tongues” is in “the mode of expression” rather than in the things that are said.⁷⁰⁴ In a similar vein to that of Meyer, Grosheide understands the term *μυστήρια* in this passage to refer “not so much to the great mysteries of salvation but rather to those things which, though they have been expressed, are not clear to everybody.”⁷⁰⁵

In a radical departure from the usual “mystery of godliness” interpretation of 1 Cor 14:2, A. P. Stanley claims that here *μυστήριον* is used in the same way that perhaps it is used in Rev 17:5 (“Mystery, Babylon the Great”). That is, it is not used “in the sense of secrets *revealed*, but in the sense (nearly approaching to the modern meaning of the word ‘mystery’) of secrets *concealed*.”⁷⁰⁶ In more recent times, Dunn has raised the same point. He claims that the mysteries referred to here do not relate to eschatological secrets which have been revealed in Christ, but rather apply to “heavenly secrets not yet revealed or in unrevealed form (cf. II Cor. 12.4); that is, mysteries of which only the angels in heaven have knowledge.”⁷⁰⁷ The problem with this theory is that if the “unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter” (ibid) constitute the mysteries expressed by tongues-speakers, as Dunn infers, then God himself would be guilty of aiding and abetting tongues-speakers to utter that which they are not permitted to speak.

In addition to the previous argument that it would be out of character for Paul to fail to identify the type of mystery in 1 Cor 14:2 unless it is intended to refer to

⁷⁰⁴ Meyer, *Epistles to the Corinthians*, 2:5.

⁷⁰⁵ Grosheide, *1 Corinthians*, 318; cf. Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 269.

⁷⁰⁶ A. P. Stanley, *The Epistles of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, 2 vols (London: John Murray, 1855), 1:313.

⁷⁰⁷ Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit*, 244.

secrets or mysteries in general, it is worth noting that at the time of the writing of this epistle, the mystery of godliness was no longer an enigma to the Christian church. According to Rom 16:25-26 and Col 1:25-28, it has, since Calvary, been “made manifest” to the saints and was to be made available to the Gentiles through them. Thus, to offer these mysteries back to God when they were supposed to be shared with those who had not yet heard of them defeats the purpose for their disclosure, or, as Thiselton puts it, undermines Paul’s argument regarding the same.⁷⁰⁸

The Holy Spirit versus the Glossolalist’s Own Spirit

Concern also surrounds the notion that πνεύματι in 1 Cor 14:2 refers to the Holy Spirit and, therefore, that every time the glossolalist speaks, his/her utterances are Holy Spirit-induced. In particular, Paul uses the Greek word πνεῦμα to refer not only to the Holy Spirit in 1 Corinthians, but also to the “spirit of man” (2:11), the “spirit of the world” (2:12), and his own spirit (14:14-15). What is more, he usually specifies exactly which “spirit” he is referring to in any given passage, if not in the immediate context, then, in the broader context. So the vital question here is whether or not πνεύματι as it appears in this context refers to the Holy Spirit.

Whenever NT writers refer to the Holy Spirit the definite article usually appears with the noun πνεῦμα. Nevertheless, there are instances where πνεῦμα without the article is also used to refer to the Holy Spirit, but these occurrences are relatively uncommon. In 1 Cor 14:2, the article is not present and therefore πνεῦμα may or may not refer to the Holy Spirit. In fact, there is no reason to interpret it as the Holy Spirit over and above any other “spirit” that is mentioned in 1 Corinthians unless the immediate or wider context so indicates. As it stands, the Holy Spirit is not even

⁷⁰⁸ Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 1085.

mentioned in 1 Cor 14, nevertheless it could be argued that since 1 Cor 12-14 is an organic whole, Paul's references to the Holy Spirit in 12:3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 11 and 13 strongly suggest that πνεῦμάτι in 14:2 also refers to the Holy Spirit.

Although this is a plausible argument, it is even more likely that πνεύματι refers to the glossolalist's own spirit in 14:2. In v.14 of this same chapter Paul says that if he were to use tongues to pray in church as the Corinthians had been doing, his own spirit, rather than the Holy Spirit, would be the source of his prayer: "For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful."

On the basis of this admission, many scholars, including Meyer, Edwards, and Grosheide, for example, conclude that πνεύματι in v. 2 refers to the glossolalist's own spirit and not to the Holy Spirit.⁷⁰⁹ Morris, without giving his reasons for doing so, agrees. He comments that "some think that *spirit* here refers to the Holy Spirit (*e.g.* RSV, 'in the Spirit'), but it seems rather to refer to the person's own spirit (*cf.* v. 14)."⁷¹⁰ Two of the more popular translations of the Bible, namely the NIV and the NASB, actually translate πνεύματι in 14:2 as "with his spirit" and "in *his* spirit" respectively; that is, the glossolalist's own spirit.

Faced with the evidence that the "spirit" in 14:2 is more likely to refer to the glossolalist's own spirit than the Holy Spirit, many commentators, as previously mentioned, still credit the glossolalist's speech to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The evident dichotomy of the νοῦς and the πνεῦμα in 14:14-15, they say, effectively rules out the use of the mind when speaking with tongues and thus indicates that the source of the same is not from within but from without; namely, from above.

⁷⁰⁹ Meyer, *Epistles to the Corinthians*, 2:5; Edwards, *1 Corinthians*, 357; Grosheide, *1 Corinthians*, 318.

⁷¹⁰ See Morris, *1 Corinthians*, rev. ed., 187.

Furthermore, it is assumed that if tongues-speaking bypasses the mind and ministers directly to the human spirit, the latter has an emotive rather than a cognitive function.

To evaluate this view it is necessary to examine other Biblical references regarding the human spirit, both in the OT and in the NT, especially in reference to what Paul says about it elsewhere in 1 Corinthians.

The Human Spirit in the Old and the New Testaments

Both the Old and the New Testaments confirm that the human spirit has an emotive function, but to say that this is its main and only function ignores the overwhelming evidence that it does much more than merely feel emotions.

According to Steve Bond, the human spirit has “a wide range of functions including thinking and understanding, emotions, attitudes, and intentions.”⁷¹¹ For example, the emotions associated with the human spirit in the Bible usually include “sorrow (Prov 15:4, 13), anguish (Exod 6:9; Jn 13:21), anger (Prov 14:29; 16:32), vexation (Eccl 1:14), fear (2 Tim 1:7), and joy (Lk 1:47).”⁷¹² Some examples of the various attitudes and intentions represented by the human spirit usually include Caleb’s obedient and therefore different spirit compared to those of his contemporaries (Num 14:24). The Scriptures also portray the human spirit as stubborn (Deut 2:30), contrite (Ps 34:18), unfaithful (Ps 78:8), haughty (Prov 16:18), trustworthy (Prov 11:13), humble (Prov 16:19; 29:23; Isa 57:15; 66:2), willing (Exod

⁷¹¹ Steve Bond, “Human Spirits,” in *HBD*, gen. ed. Trent C. Butler (Nashville, Tennessee: Holman Bible Publishers, 1991): 1300; cf. BDAG, 833.

⁷¹² Ibid.; cf. J. W. Simpson Jr., “Spirit,” in *ISBE* 4, gen. ed. G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 600; Friedrich Baumgärtel, “πνεῦμα,” in *TDNT*, edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, translated and edited by G. W. Bromiley, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-1976), 6:361.

35:21), and deceitful (Ps 32:2), with many other examples indexed.⁷¹³ Examples of the human spirit functioning in a cognitive way include Ezek 11:5, 13:3; Mk 2:8 and Isa 26:9.

There is an obvious connection between the human spirit and the wicked scheming and lying counsel of the idolatrous princes and their associates in Jerusalem, in Ezekiel's day. This has caused numerous translations of the Bible to render the Hebrew word *rû(a)h*, the word for "spirit" in Ezek 11:5, as "mind" (e.g., AV, RSV and NIV) or as "thoughts" (NASB).⁷¹⁴ Secondly, the denunciation by Ezekiel of the false prophets in Jerusalem as prophets who "follow their own spirit" (13:3), indicates, as J. W. Simpson points out, that they were "communicating their own thoughts, not a message from God."⁷¹⁵ Thirdly, Mk 2:8 informs us that Jesus knew "in his spirit" what his enemies were thinking when he forgave the sins of the paralytic in Capernaum; namely, that they regarded his claim to be able to forgive sin as blasphemy. Accordingly, our spirits can harbour our deepest thoughts, whether they are expressed or kept secret.⁷¹⁶ Finally, using two different metaphors to express the same thought, Isaiah exclaims: "With my soul I have desired You in the night, yes, by my spirit within me I will seek You early" (Isa 26:9). This implies, observes Simpson, that "the [human] spirit, as the place of the innermost thoughts of a person, is also a place in which the search to know God occurs."⁷¹⁷ The NT apparently

⁷¹³ Simpson, "Spirit," 600; Bond, "Human Spirits," 1300; cf. Friedrich Baumgärtel, "πνεῦμα," *TDNT*, 6:361-362.

⁷¹⁴ Cf. Milton C. Fisher, "Spirit," in *BEB* 2, gen. ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1998), 1992.

⁷¹⁵ Simpson, "Spirit," 600; cf. Friedrich Baumgärtel, "πνεῦμα," *TDNT*, 6:361.

⁷¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 601.

⁷¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 600.

conveys the same thought. Dunn states: “*πνεῦμα* is used nearly 40 times [in the NT] to denote that dimension of the human personality whereby relationship with God is possible (Mk. 2:8; Acts 7:59; Rom. 1:9; 8:16; 1 Cor. 5:3-5; 1 Thess. 5:23; Jas. 2:26).”⁷¹⁸

The Human Spirit in 1 Corinthians 2:11 and 5:3-5

As a matter of fact, Paul himself gives the distinct impression that the human spirit has the capacity to know, think, reflect and judge. The statement in 1 Cor 2:11 regarding the “spirit of man” is one example of this line of thinking: “For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.” In other words, Paul is saying that in the same way that a person’s spirit is cognizant of one’s thoughts and one can either keep these thoughts to oneself or convey them to others, the Holy Spirit knows God’s thoughts and chooses to convey them to humans.

To Luther the word “spirit” here refers to “the soul itself and the will of man.”⁷¹⁹ St. John Parry, supported by Mare, states that the concept of “spirit” in this verse “is specially regarded as that activity of personality, which reflects, thinks and knows: in this operation it uses the *mind*.”⁷²⁰ In fact this understanding of the human spirit in 1 Cor 2:11 is widespread. Conzelmann goes so far as to say that “here *πνεῦμα* has in the first instance a purely anthropological sense and is practically

⁷¹⁸ J. D. G. Dunn, “Spirit, Holy Spirit,” in *NBD*, 2nd ed., org. ed. J. D. Douglas (Leicester: IVP, 1962), 1137.

⁷¹⁹ Martin Luther, *Lectures on Romans*, LW, 50 vols., ed. H. C. Oswald (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972), 25:424.

⁷²⁰ R. St. John Parry, *The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1916), 25; cf. W. H. Mare, “1 Corinthians,” in *EBC*, ed. F. E. Gaebelin, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1976), 10:202.

synonymous with *νοῦς*, ‘mind’ (v. 16).”⁷²¹ Paul also mentions the human spirit in 1 Cor 5:3-5, this time referring to his own spirit. Here the impression is given that the human spirit not only thinks but also judges:

3 For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed. 4 In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, 5 deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

Barrett argues that the “spirit” (“absent in body but present in spirit”) in v. 3 has often been confused with the Holy Spirit because in the Greek original it has the article with it. As mentioned earlier whenever “spirit” appears with the article it usually refers to the Spirit of God. However, in view of the contrast with the body (which also has the article), and because Paul says that his spirit (“my spirit”) would be present when the Corinthians dealt with the incestuous member who was sleeping with his stepmother (v. 4), it is more likely that *πνεῦματι* here refers to Paul’s own spirit. It would appear therefore that Paul, in Barrett’s words, is using it “psychologically rather than theologically.”⁷²² It follows that Paul’s spirit can know of, think about, and pass judgment on this immoral act, even though he is in far away Ephesus (the Corinthians presumably had told Paul about this case in their letter to him). Paul’s point is that his separation is only physical. He is still with them in mind and heart.

On the strength of the above examples of the different functions of the human spirit in Paul and elsewhere in the Scriptures, we can confidently assume that the human spirit not only represents our emotions, attitudes, and intentions, but also

⁷²¹ Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 66.

⁷²² Barrett, *1 Corinthians*, 123.

harbours our deepest thoughts, whether they are expressed or not.⁷²³

The Νοῦς

On the other hand, the term νοῦς can have several different meanings.

According to J. Behm, it is used in the NT to refer to the “mind,” “practical reason,” “understanding,” and “thought” or “judgment.”⁷²⁴ Alexander Sand puts it this way:

Noῦς can indicate the *understanding* of a matter, the individual *capacity to judge*, and human *views and convictions*. At times, νοῦς approximates – σοφία or is a designation for the proper disposition - in contrast to earthly-human, therefore false, conduct.⁷²⁵

In other words, νοῦς can refer to much more than just the mind. That is, it can apply to any one of the many functions associated with the cognitive processes, which, in the current context, means that the expression “my understanding is unfruitful” (1 Cor 14:14) may not necessarily mean that the mind is rendered inactive when speaking in tongues takes place. A word’s initial usage in any given NT book tends to govern its subsequent meaning in the same book, unless the context or the author specifically says otherwise. So the key to unraveling the meaning of νοῦς in v. 14 is more than likely to be found in Paul’s previous uses of the word in 1 Corinthians.

Paul’s initial use of νοῦς in this book is in 1:10 where he calls the divisive Corinthians to a unity of mind: “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

⁷²³ Simpson, “Spirit,” 601.

⁷²⁴ J. Behm, “νοῦς,” in *TDNT*, edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, translated and edited by G. W. Bromiley, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-1976), 4:958-959.

⁷²⁵ A. Sand, “νοῦς, νοός, ὁ,” in *EDNT*, ed. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 2:478.

among you; but *that* you be perfectly joined together in the same mind [νοῦ] and in the same judgment.” Although Paul does not define what he means by “mind” in this verse he does so in 2:16, where he refers to those who are spiritual (those who have attained to the unity of mind of which he speaks in 1:10) as having “the mind of Christ”: “For ‘who has known the mind [νοῦν] of the Lord that he may instruct him?’ But we have the mind [νοῦν] of Christ.”

The Mind of Christ

The “mind of Christ,” in this context refers to God’s purposes for the human race and the means whereby he accomplishes them (see vv. 9-15). Godet puts it this way: “The term *νοῦς*, properly, *understanding*, and hence *mind* . . . denotes the mind of God as to the destination of humanity and the best means of realising it.”⁷²⁶ Mare makes the same link between the mind and the understanding, by suggesting that to have “the mind of Christ” means to understand God’s will for mankind and how he goes about accomplishing it.⁷²⁷

To Paul, God’s one purpose in creating the human race, says Godet, was that he might establish:

A society of intelligent and free beings, of men perfectly holy, made capable of reflecting God’s glory, and of serving as instruments for His holy action, in filial communion with the Father and in fraternal union with the Son: . . . All His particular plans are subordinate to this end. To understand all things from this viewpoint is the wisdom of which Paul speaks [in 1 Cor 1 and 2]; it is this Divine wisdom which, long kept hidden, is at length unveiled to mankind by the gospel of the cross.⁷²⁸

⁷²⁶ Godet, *1 Corinthians*, 27:163.

⁷²⁷ Cf. Mare, “1 Corinthians,” 10:203.

⁷²⁸ Godet, *1 Corinthians*, 27:140; cf. Ethelbert Stauffer, “ἵνα,” in *TDNT*, edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, translated and edited by G. W. Bromiley, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-1976), 3:329.

When this wisdom was realized in the person of Jesus Christ the “princes of human thought did not discern it. They had no perception of the glorious destination which God has assigned to humanity, and hence they rejected and crucified Him, who first realized it in His person.”⁷²⁹ It is evident from the widespread envy, strife and dissension within the Corinthian church that its members had no concept of this wisdom, either. While they played their petty, factional games they were, effectually, no better than Christ’s murderers (3:1-4; cf. 2:14) and were in danger of failing to realize God’s plans in their own lives unless they were radically to change their attitude or way of thinking. Hence, the urgency of Paul’s appeal for them to be of the same “mind” and “thought” (1:10). This “unity of mind” of which Paul speaks is none other than the unity that Jesus prayed would characterize all believers, in his prayer on the night before he died (Jn 17:15-26). It is a unity that essentially reflects “the unity of will and purpose that exists between the Father and Himself.”⁷³⁰ Says Tasker:

This unity, like the love which produces it, is supernatural . . . [and] will only be reached so long as the believers keep in touch with their exalted Lord and contemplate the glory which has been His from eternity. He has always been the object of His Father’s love; and the mutual love of Christian believers must have as its effective cause and its sustaining power their insight into the glory of their Master. As the eternal object of His Father’s love He has a knowledge of the justice and holiness of God such as the world can never have. And it is the wonder of the Christian religion that that knowledge is given to all who accept Jesus as God’s Apostle, and who are conscious of His presence as He continues to make known to them the mind and purposes of God (25, 26).⁷³¹

By claiming that he has “the mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16), Paul acknowledges

⁷²⁹ Ibid., 141.

⁷³⁰ R, V. G. Tasker, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC (Leicester: IVP, 1960, reprinted 1995), 189.

⁷³¹ Ibid., 191.

that he not only has the self-sacrificing attitude of Christ (see Phil 2:5-8) but he actually possesses the knowledge of God's will and ways of which he speaks in 1 Cor 1 and 2. In other words, he claims, as Fee puts it, that he understood the "actual thinking or plans of Christ" in regards to his purposes for the human race and the best ways to accomplish them.⁷³² It is this knowledge - his knowledge, says M. Limbeck, that Paul wants the Corinthians to now make their own, and thereafter "to shape the conduct of their lives."⁷³³ Paul's painstaking efforts to encourage the Corinthians to use their gifts and to channel their energies into edifying the church (14:12) rather than self, especially those with the gift of tongues, clearly show that his knowledge includes the place and purpose of the gifts of the Spirit in God's great scheme of things (cf. 12:7).

On the basis of this earlier usage of *νοῦς* in 1 Cor 1:10 and 2:16, and because it is Paul's intention in chaps. 12-14 to inform the Corinthians about spiritual things in general, his use of *νοῦς* in 14:14-15 probably refers to his understanding or knowledge of God's will and ways, rather than to the mind itself. The former would also include an understanding of the proper use of the gift of tongues. Nevertheless, if Paul were to speak with tongues in the same manner as the local glossolalists, he claims that his knowledge of the gift's intent would be of no benefit to him or to anyone else for that matter. The general feeling is that *ἄκαρπός* (v. 14) means that this exercise did not benefit the church. To Conzelmann the latter could not be clearer. The criterion for this verse, he says, is the same as in v. 12, that is, "the contribution to edification." In fact, the whole passage (vv. 13-19), he adds,

⁷³² Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 53, fn. 29.

⁷³³ M. Limbeck, "θέλω," in *EDNT*, vol. 2, ed. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 138.

elucidates this very principle, namely, that edification is the community's "critical principle." Thus, the emphasis in v. 14, he concludes, is on doing whatever you can to edify the church.⁷³⁴

Therefore, if Paul were to speak with tongues in the same way that the local glossolalists were using their gift in church, he would be fully aware of what he was saying, he would be the source of the same, and he would be using this gift in a manner that was contrary to its original intent. This, in turn, implies that those who were speaking mysteries in the spirit (14:2) were cognizant of their own speech and that they were the inspiration behind it. It could also mean that they were deliberately keeping the knowledge of what they were saying to themselves, in order to upstage the non-tongues-speakers in the church.

Evidence that Glossolalists could Understand their own Speech

That the Corinthian tongues-speakers could in fact understand their own speech is evidenced by the fact that the "he" in the phrase "unless indeed he interprets, that the church may receive edification" (see 14:5) probably refers to the glossolalists themselves. The most common view is that this pronoun refers to an unknown third party gifted in interpreting tongues. However, if this were the case, the Greek demands that a separate interpreter be identified elsewhere in the same text, as in v. 28, for instance, but no such individual is identified. One must therefore assume that the "he" refers to the tongues-speakers themselves. As a speaker in tongues must understand his own speech before being able to interpret it, this verse indicates that the Corinthian glossolalists fully understood their own utterances.

Another reason to believe that Corinthian tongues-speakers were conversant

⁷³⁴ Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 237-238.

with their own speech is that they appear to have determined beforehand what they would say in the assembly: “How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, and has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification” (1 Cor 14:26). To be able to do this they had to be in total control of their own utterances – their timing and content. Otherwise, how could they plan beforehand what they would say if they had to wait until they were moved at the moment of utterance by the Holy Spirit?

Placing control of this gift in the hands of its recipient, however, entailed a risk that the gift might be abused: demonstrated by the Corinthians’ exploitation of this gift. For such abuse Paul blames the human element and exonerates the Holy Spirit. “God,” he says, “is not *the author* of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints” (1 Cor 14:33). Thus Paul distances God from the confusion endemic in the local assembly (see v. 23), including that generated by the glossolalist’s perceived grandstanding.

The rules and regulations set down by Paul to curtail the latter (14:27-28) also indicate that the gift was permanent and the speaker in tongues had complete control over the gift. Firstly, no more than two or three glossolalists were to speak in any given church service. Secondly, they were to speak one at a time. Finally, they were not to speak in tongues at all if an interpreter was not present to interpret their speech for them.

Fee sees this “appeal . . . to self-control and to deference”⁷³⁵ as being nonsensical if the speaker in tongues had been unable to control his behaviour and speech. If they had no control over what they were saying and when they said it how could they possibly obey any of these injunctions? If nothing else, this shows that the

⁷³⁵ Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 695.

speaker in tongues could at least speak, or refrain from speaking in tongues, at will. To Morris, the directive not to speak in tongues in church unless an interpreter is present “shows that we are not to think of ‘tongues’ as the result of an irresistible impulse of the Spirit, driving the man willy-nilly into ecstatic speech. He could *keep quiet*, and that, Paul says, is what he must do unless there is an interpreter.”⁷³⁶

Self-edification

The reference to the edification of the tongues-speaker in 1 Cor 14:4 is further reason to believe that the Corinthian glossolalists were actually abusing their gift in the local assembly. The expression, “edify self” (v. 4), has traditionally been understood to mean to “build up in the faith” or to “grow in grace.” But not all see it this way. Some refer to it as “self-edification” in the sense of “self-centredness” and therefore view it as pejorative.⁷³⁷ Others tend to see it as both, depending on whether the tongues-speaker is exercising his gift in private or in public, respectively.⁷³⁸

The word “edification” (οἰκοδομεῖν) usually “applies to the erection of buildings” but Paul, as Morris observes, “is fond of using it metaphorically for the development of Christian character.”⁷³⁹ Examples of this usage can be found in 1 Thess 5:11; Rom 14:19 and 1 Cor 14:3, 17. However, in each of these cases οἰκοδομεῖν refers to the building up of others in the faith, not of self. Nevertheless, it has been asked whether it is possible that it can also mean building up oneself in the Faith.

⁷³⁶ Morris, *1 Corinthians*, rev. ed., 195.

⁷³⁷ See Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 657.

⁷³⁸ Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 1094-1096.

⁷³⁹ Morris, *1 Corinthians*, rev. ed., 121; cf. BDAG, 696.

Jude uses οἰκοδομεῖν in the sense of building up oneself in the faith: “But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit” (Jude 20). However, he makes clear exactly the sort of edification he means by adding the phrase, “on your most holy faith.” Paul, on the other hand, never uses οἰκοδομεῖν in any of his letters to mean building up oneself in the faith. When he refers to an individual Christian growing in grace, he prefers to use the term αὐξάνω (see Eph 4:15).

Furthermore, when Paul uses οἰκοδομεῖν elsewhere in 1 Corinthians in connection with the self, it is primarily in the sense of promoting one’s own interests at the expense of others. For example, recall what he says about the Corinthians’ abuse of Christian liberty in regard to the eating of food offered to idols. Hoping to correct this evil, Paul writes: “All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify. Let no one seek his own, but each one the other’s *well-being*” (1 Cor 10:23-24). In other words, they are not to seek their own edification, but they are to seek the edification of others.⁷⁴⁰ Says Godet: “It is the idea of οἰκοδομεῖν, *edifying*, which rules in this verse.”⁷⁴¹ “Let no man seek his own [edification]” is definitive. There are no “ifs” or “buts” attached. All self-edification is covered here, including that pertaining to the Corinthian glossolalists’ use of tongues in church to pray out loud (14:2-4).

According to Godet, the self-seeking or self-edification that Paul condemns in 1 Cor 10:23-24 represents “every pursuit of self-interest which is inspired by egoism: ‘Let no man seek his own enjoyment or advantage; but let him in his conduct always

⁷⁴⁰ Cf. MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, 279.

⁷⁴¹ Godet, *1 Corinthians*, 2:94.

take account of the interests of others.”⁷⁴² Morris similarly paraphrases this passage: “The Christian has a concern for the well-being, *the good*, of others. It is important to promote the best interests of other people, not selfishly to seek our own.”⁷⁴³

Recall also that Paul declares that whatever a person does, which, in the case of the Corinthian tongues-speakers, would include the exercise of their particular spiritual gift, it was to be done to the glory of God (1 Cor 10:31-33). No one, including himself, he says, was to “*seek individual advantage*.”⁷⁴⁴ All were to seek to profit or advantage (συμφέρειν) others in the sense of facilitating their salvation.⁷⁴⁵ In this way the church itself is edified or built up.⁷⁴⁶ (Συμφέρειν, the word translated as advantage in 10:33, and οἰκοδομεῖν are used interchangeably in 10:23-24.)

Recollect further that self-seeking or self-edification is contrary to the spirit of love (1 Cor 13:5), without which tongues-speakers and their gift are morally worthless (13:1). On this basis, the linking of self-seeking with speaking in tongues in 14:4, as previously discussed (see chap. 6), strongly suggests that using this gift to pray out loud in the Corinthian assembly (14:2) was nothing more than an exercise in self-gratification.⁷⁴⁷ It also confirms that the Corinthians had adopted the attention-seeking methods of the sophists and were using them, as Calvin suggests, for self-

⁷⁴² Ibid., 2:94.

⁷⁴³ Morris, *1 Corinthians*, rev. ed., 146.

⁷⁴⁴ Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 936.

⁷⁴⁵ Cf. Spiros Zodhiates, *Speaking in Tongues and Public Worship: An Exegetical Commentary on First Corinthians Fourteen*, ECS (Chattanooga, TN: AMG, 1998), 81.

⁷⁴⁶ Furnish, *Theology of 1 Corinthians*, 88-89.

⁷⁴⁷ Cf. MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, 179.

display.⁷⁴⁸

In addition, Paul's emphasis throughout chap. 14 on the edification of the church (see vv. 2-5, 12-13, 21-26 and 29-31) gives the distinct impression that the tongues-speakers in Corinth were not using their gift for this purpose. Finally, the need for Paul to stress that "the one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless the latter interprets their speech for the edification of the whole church" (v. 5b) implies that tongues-speakers were of the opinion that they were a cut above everyone else in the church.

This accounts for Paul's untiring efforts in chaps. 12 and 13 to put the charismata in their right perspective, including the gift of tongues. It also explains why he qualifies his imperative to eagerly desire τὰ πνευματικά with the phrase: μᾶλλον δὲ ἵνα προφητεύητε. The last thing he wants the Corinthians to do is to make merchandise of the things of God in the same way that the glossolalists used their gift in self-edification. The space devoted to addressing this abuse in the remainder of 1 Cor 14 shows just how widespread and intense their defection from the true path must have been.

The following chapter will argue that the contrast in 1 Cor 14:5a-5b is not between the gift of tongues and the gift of prophecy, but rather that it is between using tongues to edify self and using tongues to prophesy. If this is the case, it means that the Corinthian phenomenon is no different to the Acts 2 phenomenon. In other words, it means that speaking in tongues constitutes the miraculous ability to speak in other human languages.

⁷⁴⁸ Cf. Calvin, *1 Corinthians*, 286-287.

Conclusion

In this chapter we found that the “spirit” in 1 Cor 14:2 probably refers to the human spirit rather than to the Holy Spirit and that it has a cognitive as well as an emotive function. Accordingly, we found that glossolalists were not only the source of their own speech, but that they also understood it and were therefore capable of controlling it. On the other hand, because all forms of self-edification are condemned by Paul (10:23-24), it would appear that the Corinthians were using tongues in church in order to gain status and thereby upstage the non-tongues-speakers in the church. Hence, they may have had no intention of sharing what they were saying with the other members of the church. This was a flagrant abuse of a gift that was supposed to be used to edify the church (12:7). Accordingly, we can confidently assume that Paul’s statement about tongues in 1 Cor 14:2 is referring to the local glossolalists’ abuse of the same and not to the intrinsic nature of the tongues phenomenon *per se*.

The fact that glossolalists could understand their own speech does not prove that their gift constituted the ability to speak in other human languages without having to learn them first, but it does undermine the platform upon which the non-human languages school of thought is built. Namely, that no one, not even glossolalists themselves can understand the language spoken. On the other hand, the following chapter will argue that the contrast in 1 Cor 14:5a-5b is not between the gift of tongues and the gift of prophesying, but rather that it is between using tongues to edify self and using tongues to prophesy. If this is the case, it means that the Corinthian tongues phenomenon is no different to the Acts 2 phenomenon. In other words, it means that speaking in tongues constitutes the miraculous ability to speak in other human languages.

CHAPTER 10 - THE HUMAN LANGUAGE ARGUMENT

The NKJV translation of 1 Cor 14:5 is typical of most English versions. It reads as follows: “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.”

Because Paul here expresses the wish that *all* could speak with tongues, this passage has been used at times to prove that the gift of tongues is potentially a universal gift and, therefore, that it is available to all believers, including today’s Christians. But this idea appears to contradict Paul’s earlier comments in 12:29-30 where he implies that all cannot be apostles, or prophets, or teachers, or workers of miracles, or healers, or speakers in tongues, or interpreters of tongues. This means that there are no universal gifts, not even the gift of tongues. In the main, commentators prefer to take this wish on Paul’s part to mean that he does not have a problem with tongues themselves. Nevertheless, they conclude from the following phrase (μᾶλλον δὲ ἵνα προφητεύητε) that he would rather the Corinthians prophesy than speak with tongues.⁷⁴⁹

This chapter will argue that this conclusion is fraught with contextual problems and that the contrast in this verse is not between speaking with tongues and prophesying, but rather it is between the Corinthians’ abuse of tongues and the proper use of the same; namely, to prophesy. Consequently, speaking in tongues would then refer to the miraculous ability to speak in other human languages without having to learn them first.

⁷⁴⁹ Cf. Kistemaker, *1 Corinthians*, 481.

Claims of a Contrast in 1 Corinthians 14:5 between Tongues and Prophecy

There appear to be several very good reasons to believe that the comparison in 1 Cor 14:5a-b is between speaking with tongues and prophesying and that Paul's preference is for prophesying over that of speaking with tongues.⁷⁵⁰

In 1 Cor 14:5c, Paul affirms that the one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues because he edifies the church whereas the glossolalist without interpretation does not. Nevertheless, the latter can enjoy the same status as the one who prophesies if his or her words are interpreted for the benefit of the whole church.

1. In 1 Cor 14:6, Paul points out the futility of speaking in tongues in worship services without interpreting the words spoken and contrasts this with speaking or praying or prophesying intelligibly in the local vernacular.
2. In 1 Cor 14:18-20, Paul insists that in church he would rather speak five intelligible words that everyone present can understand than ten thousand words in a tongue that no one present can understand. He then appeals to the Corinthians to follow suit.
3. In 1 Cor 14:23-25, Paul states that tongues are for a sign to unbelievers whereas prophesying is for believers. He then illustrates what he means in this statement by contrasting the negative impression that an all-tongues church service would make on any unbelievers present (they would regard such Christians as mad), with the positive impression that an all-prophesying church service would make on unbelievers (they would be convicted and converted). In other words,

⁷⁵⁰ See Lenski, *1 & 2 Corinthians*, 622.

Paul says that an all-tongues church service would drive people away from Christ whereas an all-prophecy church service would lead people to Him.

4. In 1 Cor 14:5, 13, 28, Paul restricts the use of the gift of tongues in worship services unless it is immediately interpreted and, therefore, becomes intelligible to all. Yet in the same chapter he admonishes the church to actively seek to prophecy (v. 39). Nevertheless, the primary reason behind the notion that the contrast in 1 Cor 14:5a-b is between tongues and prophecy, and that the latter is Paul's preferred choice of the two, is that the *ἵνα* clause in this passage is said to express object rather than purpose.⁷⁵¹

The Sub-final Clause Theory

The *ἵνα* clause in 1 Cor 14:5b is exactly the same as the one that is found in v. 1 (μᾶλλον δὲ ἵνα προφητεύητε), except that in this case it follows a verb of wishing rather than an imperative. Object is usually expressed where verbs of wishing are followed by an infinitive, but it can also be expressed when they are followed by *ἵνα* with the subjunctive, even though the latter usually expresses purpose. In such cases *ἵνα* with the subjunctive assumes the role of the infinitive, which is a common occurrence in Κοινή Greek.⁷⁵² Accordingly, the *ἵνα* clause in 1 Cor 14:5b is usually translated as a sub-final clause, thus making prophesying the second, and main, grammatical object of the verb θέλω (I wish), the first being the simple infinitive construction λαλεῖν γλῶσσα ("to speak with tongues"). Hence, Paul would like

⁷⁵¹ Cf. Kistemaker, *1 Corinthians*, 481.

⁷⁵² BDAG, 476; James H. Moulton, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, vol. 1, 3rd ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1908, reprinted 1957), 205-206.

every believer in Corinth to be able to speak in tongues, but his greater wish for them is that they might prophesy.⁷⁵³

According to J. H. Moulton, 1 Cor 14:5 is a particularly good example of an instance where ἵνα with the subjunctive assumes the role of the infinitive and expresses object with “a greater urgency” to that of the earlier infinitive λαλεῖν γλωσσαι, because “θέλω has both constructions [the infinitive and ἵνα]” in this verse.⁷⁵⁴ Robertson and Plummer echo these same sentiments by saying that “the change from the infinitive to ἵνα is perhaps meant to make the wish more intense; but this is sufficiently expressed by the μᾶλλον.”⁷⁵⁵ To corroborate these remarks they add that even though this is the only time that Paul uses θέλω ἵνα in his epistles, it is not the only place where this construction can be found in the NT. It also appears in all four Gospels (see Matt 7:12; Mk 6:25, 9:30; Lk 6:31; Jn 17:24) with ἵνα, in each case, giving the object of the wish.⁷⁵⁶

Thiselton’s comments regarding the ἵνα clause in 1 Cor 14:5b are a mirror image of those of Robertson and Plummer. As for the conjunction μᾶλλον δέ in this clause, he says that it makes the intensity of Paul’s wish overwhelming and its comparative force, he adds, “is crucial for the argument.”⁷⁵⁷ He explains it thus:

Paul’s pleasure in, and preference for, the use of the gift of prophesying ... is expressed in this word [μᾶλλον] which denotes both *to a greater degree* (as in Phil 1:12) and also a preferential rather (as in

⁷⁵³ Carl W. Conrad, *[B-Greek] 1 Corinthians 14:5 – ‘In order that’* (2003) <http://www.ioa.com/~cwconrad/>; cf. Kistemaker, *1 Corinthians*, 481; Soards, *1 Corinthians*, 283; Horsley, *1 Corinthians*, 182-183; Godet, *1 Corinthians*, 268-269.

⁷⁵⁴ Moulton, *Grammar of NT Greek*, 208.

⁷⁵⁵ Robertson and Plummer, *1 Corinthians*, 307.

⁷⁵⁶ Ibid; cf. G. G. Findlay, *St. Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1901), 903.

⁷⁵⁷ Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 1097-1098.

1 Cor 7:21) in the dual sense of more and *instead* of (as in Matt 10:6), where the latter is frequently marked by *μᾶλλον δέ* (as here). This is strengthened by the following description of **the person who prophesies as greater** (NRSV, NIV; *μείζων*), which NJB rightly contextualizes as denoting here not greater in status but, in accordance with the logic of Paul's argument, **of greater importance than the one** (Greek singular) **who speaks in tongues**.⁷⁵⁸

The particle *δέ*

As expressed by Thiselton, the relative importance of the one who prophesies over that of the one who speaks in tongues is cited as yet another reason for reading the *ἵνα* clause in 1 Cor 14:5b as an object clause. This would make prophesying the second, and main, thing Paul wishes for in this verse. That is, scholars treat the particle *δέ* in the very next clause (*μείζων δὲ ὁ προφητεύων ἢ ὁ λαλῶν γλώσσαις*) as if it were an explanatory “*γάρ*” and, thus, believe that Paul is now introducing his reason for saying that he would rather the Corinthians prophesied than spoke with tongues.⁷⁵⁹ In other words, taking the *ἵνα* clause in 1 Cor 14:5b as an object clause, Paul is now explaining why he would prefer the Corinthians should prophecy rather than speak in tongues; that is, because the gift of prophecy is superior to the gift of tongues.⁷⁶⁰

To make the point clearer, here is a paraphrase of this reading of v. 5: “I would like you all to be able to speak in tongues, but I would like it even more if you could all prophesy. My reason for preferring that you prophesy rather than speak in tongues is that the one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone explains what the tongues-speaker is saying so that the church might benefit

⁷⁵⁸ Ibid., 1098; cf. Godet, *1 Corinthians*, 2:269.

⁷⁵⁹ Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 658-659; cf. Robertson and Plummer, *1 Corinthians*, 307; Trail, *1 Corinthians 10-16*, 210; Kling, “Corinthians,” 284.

⁷⁶⁰ Cf. Godet, *1 Corinthians*, 2:268-269; Lenski, *1 & 2 Corinthians*, 580; Collins, *1 Corinthians*, 493-494.

from it.”

Problems with the Sub-Final Clause Theory

If tongues were being used for purposes other than to prophesy, as was the case in Corinth, a preference for prophesying over speaking with tongues in the assembly, where no one could understand the glossolalist’s speech, is both rational and understandable. Indeed, it is because of the local congregation’s inability to comprehend what the glossolalists were saying that Paul goes to great lengths in the subsequent verses to show the utter futility of speaking with tongues in corporate worship services (1 Cor 14:6-11; 21-25). This would also explain why he says that the one who prophesies in the local vernacular is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, in church (v. 5b). Again, it would explain why Paul would rather speak five words in church that could be understood by the hearers than an infinite amount of words in a tongue that could not be understood by them (vv. 18-19). It also makes sense of v. 39 where he allows for a restricted amount of speaking in tongues to occur in worship services, providing that it is interpreted (v. 28), whereas he urges the congregation to be eager to prophesy.

One of the problems with the translation of the *ἵνα* clause in 1 Cor 14:5b as an object clause is that its protagonists tend to see this preference for prophesying over tongues as applying to the gifts themselves, regardless of whether they are manifested in the church or not. Consequently, they conclude that the gift of prophecy is superior to the gift of tongues. There is no question that this gift played a more prominent role in the raising up and maintaining of churches than most of the other gifts of the Spirit and, therefore, it was greater in that respect (see comments on 12:28-31 in chap. 5). However, it does not mean that the gift of prophecy was more important than the other gifts. If used properly all of the charismata are capable of achieving the same

common goal of edifying the church (see 12:7) and, therefore, are as important as each other in that regard. Not only that, it conflicts with Paul's earlier counsel to the Corinthians to be content with whatever gifts they had and not to hanker after those gifts which they did not have. Even though Paul is addressing the whole church when he says this, it is clear that he is referring to the individuals within the church, because, as pointed out earlier, the local church already possessed all of the gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor 1:7).

On the other hand, Paul could appear to be guilty of belittling the glossolalists and therefore of inflaming an already volatile situation where one group of believers already professed to be better than another group of Christians, simply because they believed their gifts were superior to the others (cf. 1 Cor 12:12-25). This would be compounded even further if the prophets and glossolalists, as Johanson and Sweet propose, were locked in battle over the leadership of the local assembly (see chap. 5).⁷⁶¹ In addition, this emphasis on the gift of prophecy is based on the misunderstanding that Paul's comments regarding speaking in tongues in the preceding verses (vv. 2-4) refer to the tongues phenomenon *per se* and not to the Corinthians' abuse of the same (see chap. 9). As a result, it does not align with the theme of the preceding verses (vv. 1-4) where Paul's emphasis is not on the gifts themselves, but on the proper versus the improper motive for seeking spiritual things.

Recall that, in contrast to the Corinthians' inordinate desire for the so-called greater gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor 12:31b), Paul urges his readers to pursue love instead, and to eagerly desire the things of the Spirit in order that they might have something spiritually worthwhile to share with others (14:1). Then he goes on to describe how those who speak with tongues in church, without interpreting their utterances, seek

⁷⁶¹ See Johanson, "Tongues, A Sign for Unbelievers," 196.

only to benefit themselves while mystifying and confusing their hearers, whereas those who prophesy in church benefit others. We understand, therefore, that although Paul admonished the Corinthians to pursue love and to eagerly desire the things of the Spirit, he spoke against seeking either of these things for the wrong reason. That is, he did not want them to abuse love and the things of the Spirit in the same way that the glossolalists were abusing their gift; namely, in order to raise their profile or to increase their status in the local assembly. Instead, he wanted them to procure the same so that they could prophesy and therefore benefit the church.

The above problems with contrasting the gift of tongues with the gift of prophecy in 1 Cor 14:5 can be avoided if the verb προφητεύω in this verse is understood to relate to the ordinary preaching, proclamation, or teaching of the word of God in an informal, personal manner, and not to the gift itself. Again, prophesying in this sense is something that all believers can do whether or not they have the supernatural gift of prophecy. This would allow many more believers to prophesy than would be the case if Paul were referring to the supernatural gift of prophecy. It would also explain how Paul could show a preference for prophesying over speaking in tongues, without conflicting with what he had previously said about being content, etc. with the gifts that the Spirit has already apportioned to us.

Nevertheless, it only addresses the immediate problem of the parading of the gift of tongues in the Corinthian assembly in order to edify the speaker. It fails to give the Corinthians any direction whatsoever on how to use this gift to edify the church. This is inconceivable when we consider that Paul's emphasis throughout the epistle has been on the edification of the church and that it is his major theme in 1 Cor 14.

It could be argued that the interpretation of tongues in the assembly edifies the

church (cf. v. 5c, 13), but in every case it would be the interpretation that was responsible for the same and not the tongues spoken. And yet 1 Cor 12:7 states that all of the gifts in the accompanying list of charismata, including the gift of tongues, can of themselves edify the church (see vv. 8-10).

There is yet another problem with making prophesying the second and main object of the verb $\theta\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\omega$ and, hence, the subject of the contrast with speaking in tongues in 1 Cor 14:5. According to the early church fathers and the arguments presented in this treatise in favour of translating the ἵνα clause in 14:1 ($\mu\acute{\alpha}\lambda\lambda\omicron\nu\ \delta\grave{\epsilon}\ \text{ἵνα}\ \pi\rho\omicron\phi\eta\tau\epsilon\acute{\upsilon}\eta\tau\epsilon$) as a purpose clause rather than an object clause, speaking with tongues is a prophetic gift.⁷⁶² That is, it is a gift which does not stand over against prophesying, but rather it is to be used to prophesy (see chap. 1). If this is the case, then the intention to prophesy, as noted earlier, cannot be the purpose for the Corinthians speaking in tongues and yet, at the same time, be set in contrast against the gift of tongues.

The Purpose Clause Theory

On the other hand, if the ἵνα clause in 1 Cor 14:5b is read as a purpose clause and the verb $\pi\rho\omicron\phi\eta\tau\epsilon\acute{\upsilon}\omega$ in this clause is understood to mean prophesying in the sense of proclamation or witnessing, then none of the problems associated with the various object clause theories would arise. Prophesying would become the aim or goal of Paul's wish that the Corinthians could speak with tongues, and not the second grammatical object of the same. In other words, Paul's wish would be that the

⁷⁶² This does not mean that speaking in tongues or any other gift, for that matter, constitutes the supernatural gift of prophecy. Direct revelation and foretelling the future, for example, are entirely different to the ordinary proclamation of the word of God through preaching, teaching and witnessing, and were as unique and as vital to the early Christian church as any of the other gifts of the Spirit.

Corinthians could not only speak with tongues but that they would also use them to prophesy.⁷⁶³

Since the intention to prophesy cannot be the purpose the Corinthians should have for speaking in tongues and yet, at the same time, be contrasted with them, this interpretation avoids all of the pitfalls associated with contrasting speaking in tongues with prophesying and/or the gift of prophecy. Similarly, because prophesying is coincident with being a Christian and therefore is something that all believers have the potential to do whether or not they have the gift of prophecy, it does not encroach on the Spirit's right to distribute the charismata as he sees fit.

In spite of these apparent advantages over the various object clause theories, hardly anyone has adopted this position. One commentator to espouse this view, however, is Spiros Zodhiates. He affirms that:

Paul goes from the simple infinitive construction [λαλεῖν γλώσσαις], 'to speak in languages,' which expresses the mere wish that these Corinthians could do so, to the more intense and climactic [ἵνα], 'in order that,' giving strong purpose to his wish, and in this context coupling it with the adverb [μᾶλλον], 'more so,' or 'more strongly.' The particle [δέ], translated 'but,' is a correlative conjunction here rather than an adversative one, and should therefore be translated as 'and' or 'moreover.' Paul is not contrasting the speaking in foreign languages (so naturally desirable for each of the believers in Corinth) with prophesying or witnessing, but is bringing out that the one makes the other more fully possible. To paraphrase it accurately 'I wish each one of you spoke in other languages; and it is even more wonderful to use this gift or talent to prophesy.' The fulfillment of the divine purpose completes the purpose of the natural gift."⁷⁶⁴

The "divine purpose" of which Zodhiates speaks refers to the principle Paul set forth in 1 Cor 10:31 where he urges the Corinthians to do everything to the glory of God. In other words, they were to be a constant witness "to the saving grace of the

⁷⁶³ Zodhiates, *Speaking in Tongues*, 17.

⁷⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 17-18.

Lord Jesus Christ, that in all things He might have the preeminence.”⁷⁶⁵ As a result, they were to go out of their way not to offend others and were to actively seek the good of others so that they too might be saved (v. 33). Since prophesying edifies others rather than self, using tongues to prophesy, as Zodhates points out, complies with this maxim and realizes the original purpose for speaking with tongues; namely, that it was to be used for the common good and, thus, for the edification of the church (see 12:7). It also reinforces the argument that the things of the Spirit, which include the charismata, are intrinsically prophetic (see comments on the *ἵνα* clause in 1 Cor 14:1, in chap. 7).

Tongues Mean Human Languages

The ramifications of this interpretation are significant for the non-human languages school of thought. One of the major major objections to the human languages view is that there is no evidence to suggest that the Corinthians ever used this gift for evangelism, or that Paul urged them to use it in this way, even though it would have been ideally suited to this purpose. However, if tongues can be used to prophesy and prophesying, in turn, refers to the plain, clear, and intelligible sharing of the gospel with others in the local vernacular, it follows that speaking with tongues must therefore mean real human languages, and not some form of unintelligible ecstatic speech.

This is the conclusion that Fausset draws from his study of 1 Cor 14:5. First, he translates this passage as a purpose clause: “Now I wish you all to speak with tongues (so far am I from objecting to tongues), but rather IN ORDER THAT (as my ulterior, higher wish) ye should prophesy.” Then he adds: “Tongues must therefore

⁷⁶⁵ Ibid., 17.

mean *languages*, not ecstatic unintelligible rhapsodies (as *Neander* fancied): for Paul could never ‘wish’ for the latter in their [the Corinthians] behalf.”⁷⁶⁶

Tongues as a means of Evangelism

If: (1) Fausset is right in saying that tongues mean human languages; (2) the Corinthians were bilingual at best; and (3) this gift was meant to edify the church, it is clear that it would never realize its purpose if it was used, without interpretation, in the church itself.⁷⁶⁷ Therefore, if it was to benefit the church, it was to be used out in the community where those whose native tongue the glossolalists could miraculously speak, would understand the words spoken and hopefully, like the 3,000 on the day of Pentecost (see Acts 2:41), convert to Christianity. It would appear, therefore, that even though Paul does not actually mention the word “evangelism” in 1 Cor 14, he is nonetheless urging the Corinthians to use the gift of tongues for this express purpose.

Charles W. Carter says:

The meaning of verse 5 has not infrequently been seriously confused and perverted. Paul makes it clear that he does not undervalue the divine gift of tongues (*glossais*, languages) when they are used for their God-given purpose of prophesying or preaching to those who could not otherwise understand the speaker by reason of their difference of native languages. When this need for the effective communication of the gospel is present, Paul wishes that they might all have the gift of languages to supply that need. . . . The item of importance that Paul here emphasizes, as elsewhere, is that of getting God’s saving message to the needy. If a special divine gift of languages is necessary to get the message to the people, then Paul is all for it. The all-important thing is that the message of God’s redeeming love be communicated to the spiritually needy. ‘Now I wish ... *even more that you would prophesy*’ (NASB).⁷⁶⁸

⁷⁶⁶ Cf. Jamieson, Fausset and Brown, *Whole Commentary of the Bible*, 323.

⁷⁶⁷ Cf. Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 659.

⁷⁶⁸ Charles W. Carter, *1 Corinthians*, WBC, vol. 5 (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 1979, reprinted 1986), 5:217.

A comparable paraphrase of 1 Cor 14:5a-b would thus read: “I wish that you could all speak with tongues, especially if you use it to prophesy.” This would explain why Paul uses the same terminology as that used by Luke in Acts 2.

Not only a Wish but also a Reprimand

As it stands, this translation of the *ἵνα* clause in 1 Cor 14:5b merely expresses a desire, on Paul’s part, that the Corinthians use the gift of tongues to prophesy and, thus, to edify the church. However, this usage is in direct contrast to the glossolalist’s practice of using tongues to edify self, which all three purpose clause theorists above appear to have either ignored or totally missed, by translating the particle *δέ* in this clause as a correlative conjunction rather than an adversative one.

On the other hand, if this particle was to be translated as an adversative rather than a correlative conjunction it would confirm that Paul is not only expressing a wish but that he is specifically targeting the misuse of tongues for self-edification.⁷⁶⁹ There are no other options, it having already been determined that prophesying cannot be the aim or goal of speaking with tongues and, at the same time, be contrasted with them. Hence, this interpretation, unlike the various object clause theories, continues, rather than interrupts, the theme of the previous verses where Paul’s main concern is with how to deal with this abuse.

If the local glossolalists were to respond accordingly and, hence, to embrace the principle of doing everything to the glory of God and therefore to use their gift to prophesy, it would shift the focus of attention away from self to others and thereby help to curb their status-seeking exploits in the local assembly. Not only that, it would provide the necessary instruction on how to use the gift of tongues to edify the

⁷⁶⁹ Cf. Calvin, *1 Corinthians*, 287.

church that translating the ἵνα clause in 1 Cor 14:5b as an object clause fails to give. It would also bring the Corinthians' use of tongues into line with all other NT manifestations of this gift, where, in every case, it was used to extol the wonderful works of God (see Acts 2:4-12, 16-18; 10:44-46; 19:6) (see chap. 7).

The Prophet is Greater than the Glossolalist

But what about the subsequent clause which says that the prophet is greater than the one who speaks in un-interpreted tongues in church services? Does this not indicate that Paul considers the prophet to be a more important member of the body of Christ than the glossolalist and, therefore, that he would rather the Corinthians prophesy than speak with tongues?

As mentioned earlier, this argument is based on the assumption that the phrase (μείζων δὲ ὁ προφητεύων ἢ ὁ λαλῶν γλώσσαις, 1 Cor 14:5b) is an explanatory clause and, therefore, that Paul is now giving the reason why his preference is for the gift of prophecy over that of tongues. This interpretation is plausible in that the particle δέ, as Liddell and Scott point out, has many and varied uses. In non-biblical Greek it is used to resume an interrupted discourse; it is often used in explanatory clauses; and it can be used to imply causal connection, albeit less directly than γάρ.⁷⁷⁰ However, its primary role in the NT, as Moulton points out, is to indicate that what follows is in addition (whether in apposition or continuation) to what has preceded it, rather than an explanation of the same. It is also used to resume an interrupted discourse. Hence, it “may be variously rendered *but, on the other hand, and, also, now, etc.*”⁷⁷¹

⁷⁷⁰ H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, new ed., revised and augmented by H. S. Jones and R. McKenzie (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940), 372.

⁷⁷¹ Moulton, *Analytical Greek Lexicon*, 85; BDAG, 213.

If the role of the conjunction δέ in 1 Cor 14:5b is consistent with its normal NT usage and therefore marks “the superaddition of a clause,” the phrase μέζων δὲ ὁ προφητεύων ἢ ὁ λαλῶν γλώσσαις would read thus: “And he who prophesies is greater than he who speaks with tongues” or, as J. J. Lias points out, ““and he, too, who prophesies, is greater than he who speaks with tongues,”” or something to that effect.⁷⁷² Thus Paul would be commenting further on the Corinthians’ situation, rather than explaining his previous comments concerning speaking with tongues and prophesying in 14:5a-5b.⁷⁷³ Therefore, this phrase cannot be used to establish the veracity of the contrast between the gift of prophecy and the gift of tongues.

Spiritual Elitism in Corinth

Paul has been addressing the issue of spiritual elitism from the outset of his letter to the Corinthians, speaking at first of the charismata in general but progressively narrowing his area of concern. However, it is not until 1 Cor 14:5b that he identifies the glossolalists as the most arrogant of the pneumatics in the local assembly. In retrospect, his introductory remarks about giftedness being an act of grace (1 Cor 1:4-7) are the earliest indicators that something was drastically wrong with the way the Corinthians perceived giftedness. The nature of the problem is exposed in 1 Cor 4:6-8 where Paul reveals that the Corinthians took the credit for their own giftedness and equated it with spirituality. They felt that because of their giftedness they were perfect and, therefore, had nothing more to learn in this area (4:6-8). As a result, the more spectacularly gifted pneumatics in the assembly felt that

⁷⁷² Cf. J. J. Lias, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Cambridge Greek Testament for Schools and Colleges, ed. J. J. S. Perowne (Cambridge: University Press, 1899), 153; Lenski, *1 & 2 Corinthians*, 580.

⁷⁷³ See Kling, “Corinthians,” 284.

they were superior to their lesser gifted associates and that the church could get along just as well without the latter. On the other hand, it would appear that the lesser gifted members were so intimidated by this elitist attitude that they questioned whether they even belonged in the church (12:15-25).

The human body analogy in 1 Cor 12 was meant to show these spiritual snobs and those who were intimidated by them that even though the gifts of the Spirit have differing functions, each one is as necessary and as important to the body of Christ as the various members of the human body are to its general well-being. Consequently, the Corinthians were not to think that one member of the church was more important than another.

On the other hand, Paul could not have made it any clearer that giftedness and spirituality are not synonymous terms, by declaring that if the Christian pneumatic is not motivated by love he or she is spiritually bereft (13:1-3). The superiority of love over all gifts, and the fallacy of basing one's standing with God on giftedness, is again highlighted in 13:8-13. Here Paul compares the enduring character of love with the transient nature of the supernatural gifts of prophecy, tongues, and knowledge.

Even though the glossolalists were not the only ones with these elitist tendencies, there are several indicators that they were primarily responsible for them. Recall the widespread belief that the positioning of the gift of tongues at the bottom or next to last on all three lists of charismata in 1 Cor 12 (see vv. 8-10, 27-28, 29-30) was a deliberate attempt, on Paul's part, to undermine the exaggerated importance that the glossolalists had placed on this gift.

Conversely, the placing of this gift at the head of the list of charismata and Christian attributes deemed to be spiritually worthless unless those who use them are motivated by love, strongly suggests that the glossolalists were foremost in claiming

that the possession and/or the exercise of this gift was the ultimate proof of spirituality (13:1-3). In other words, the local glossolalists demonstrated the attitude that the greater Christian was the one who spoke in tongues, and so displayed their gift to prove themselves to be spiritually superior to the other pneumatics in the church. As a result, they had been misusing their gift in church services to show-off and to mystify their hearers rather than to communicate a meaningful message, presumably in order to upstage their rivals in their quest to take control of the local assembly (14:2-4).

We gather from Paul's wish that all could speak in tongues (v. 5a) that there was nothing wrong with the gift itself and that if it were used correctly it would benefit the church (12:7). But using it to edify self in the assembly, where no one could understand the words spoken (14:2), was not only contrary to the spirit of the gift, it was also a useless waste of time (vv. 6-11). Consequently, the church was the wrong place to exercise this gift unless it was translated (cf. v. 19).

True Greatness

According to the theory that the *ἵνα* clause in 1 Cor 14:5b expresses purpose rather than object, Paul seeks to correct this abuse by comparing the glossolalists' motive for speaking with tongues in church with that of using tongues to prophesy and, thus, to edify the church. Nevertheless, it does not address the root cause of the problem; namely, the glossolalists' misconception that they were better than their non-tongues-speaking associates, because their gift was superior to the other gifts of the Spirit. That is why Paul adds that the one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks with tongues in the assembly unless the latter's speech is interpreted for the benefit of the whole church (1 Cor 14:5a-b).

We gather from this statement that the reason why Paul deemed the Corinthian

prophesiers to be greater than their tongues-speaking associates is that their speech had been edifying, exhorting and comforting others, whereas the glossolalists' words had not (14:3-4).⁷⁷⁴ However, if the glossolalists were likewise to edify the hearer rather than self, then, they too, as Paul says, would enjoy the same status as that of the prophesiers.⁷⁷⁵ Paul's point, therefore, is not that the gift of prophecy is more important than the gift of tongues, but rather that greatness comes from ministering to others and not from possessing this or that gift.⁷⁷⁶ In other words, greatness is not to be found in the gift itself but in the way it is used.⁷⁷⁷ Hence, the acid test of true greatness is usefulness rather than giftedness.⁷⁷⁸

On the basis of this reconstruction of the situation in Corinth, the phrase *μείζων δὲ ὁ προφητεύων ἢ ὁ λαλῶν γλώσσαις* (1 Cor 14:5b) is not referring to the status of either tongues or prophecy. Rather, it is talking about the relative importance of those who use tongues to edify themselves as opposed to those who prophesy to and for others.⁷⁷⁹ Since 1 Cor 14:2 implies that the Corinthians could not understand the language/s spoken by the glossolalists, there is no question that Paul would rather the Corinthians prophesy than speak with tongues in church. But the above clause cannot be used to support the assumption that Paul thought that the gift of prophecy was more important than the gift of tongues. The only difference

⁷⁷⁴ Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 235; Trail, *1 Corinthians 10-16*, 210-211; Collins, *1 Corinthians*, 494; Talbert, *Reading Corinthians*, 86; Meyer, *Epistles to the Corinthians*, 2:6; cf. Willem C. van Unnik, "The Meaning of 1 Corinthians 12:31," *NovT* 35/2 (1993): 143.

⁷⁷⁵ Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 235.

⁷⁷⁶ Cf. Barrett, *1 Corinthians*, 316.

⁷⁷⁷ Cf. Kling, "Corinthians," 284.

⁷⁷⁸ Cf. Godet, *1 Corinthians*, 2:269.

⁷⁷⁹ See Lenski, *1 & 2 Corinthians*, 582.

between the two is that tongues were being used for the wrong purpose (to edify self), in the wrong place (in church), and on the wrong audience (the local congregation). Consequently, Paul indicated a desire for the Corinthians to use this gift to prophesy out in the community where it had the potential to cause the church to grow. In the event that it was used in the local assembly, it had to be interpreted in order that the church could be edified.

The Interpreter

Controversy also surrounds the identity of the interpreter in 1 Cor 14:5c: ἐκτὸς εἰ μὴ διερμηνεύῃ (“unless he interprets”). Some commentators identify the person in question as an unknown third party gifted in interpreting tongues.⁷⁸⁰ Others see him (or her) as a person who “has received two gifts, that of speaking in tongues and that of interpretation.”⁷⁸¹ Needless to say, both of these concepts are popular with the various unintelligible utterance schools of thought which believe that glossolalists cannot automatically understand their own utterances unless they are supernaturally enabled to do so. The other option is that it refers to the one speaking in tongues and that he “understood what he was saying whether or not he possessed the gift of interpretation.”⁷⁸² If the latter were the case, then the ability to do so would be akin to that of the tower builders at Babel. At this same time they were cognizant of, and able to speak in, another language. However, in this instance, the glossolalists never

⁷⁸⁰ E.g. Trail, *1 Corinthians 10-16*, 211; cf. Lenski, *1 & 2 Corinthians*, 581.

⁷⁸¹ Kling, “Corinthians,” 284; Robertson and Plummer, *1 Corinthians*, 307-308; Grosheide, *1 Corinthians*, 320; Lenski, *1 & 2 Corinthians*, 581; cf. Trail, *1 Corinthians 10-16*, 211.

⁷⁸² See Gundry, “‘Ecstatic Utterance’,” 302, n. 1; cf. Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 6th ed. (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 3rd 1857, reprinted 1964), 249.

lost the ability to converse in their native tongue.

If it can be shown that the interpreter in 1 Cor 14:5c was an unmentioned third party who had the gift of interpreting tongues, or he is a person with both the gift of tongues and the gift of interpretation of tongues, then it would have to be conceded that in all probability the Corinthian glossolalists were unable to understand their own speech. This would add considerable weight to the argument that the gift of tongues refers to some form of unintelligible speech, be it ecstatic or otherwise. On the other hand, if it can be shown that the interpreter and the glossolalist were one and the same person and that he understood his speech whether or not he had the additional gift of interpretation, it would have the opposite effect and would challenge the unintelligible speech argument.

One of the mainstays of the non-human languages school of thought is that no one but God, not even the glossolalists themselves, could understand what they were saying (1 Cor 14:2). Consequently, if the Corinthian glossolalists were aware of their own speech, this platform upon which the unintelligible utterance hypothesis is built would be compromised. It may not conclusively establish that speaking with tongues refers to speaking in other human languages, but it certainly allows for this possibility. Conversely, the argument that God exclusively understands glossolalia does not allow for a human language interpretation. Furthermore, if the Corinthian glossolalists were aware of their own speech, be it human or non-human languages, it would also indicate that they were completely indifferent to the needs of the local church by failing to share what they were saying with those around them, be it deliberate or otherwise.

The “Someone” Theory

The idea that the interpreter in 1 Cor 14:5c refers to someone other than the

glossolalist is based on:

1. The presupposition that “normally it is not the same person who *interprets*.”
2. “That in Greek the subject ‘*tis*’ = ‘someone’, or another easily guessed subject, is often understood, even when it is not expressly given in the preceding sentence.”⁷⁸³

Paul makes it very clear that the interpretation of tongues is a separate and distinct gift to that of speaking in tongues and implies that it is usually given to someone other than to the glossolalist (see 1 Cor 12:4-11, 28-30).⁷⁸⁴ Still, this does not rule out the possibility that glossolalists could understand their own speech or that at least some of them had the additional gift of interpretation. Lietzmann was troubled by the concept of the glossolalist as interpreter. However, Conzelmann proposes it as a distinct possibility by saying that 1 Cor 12:29-30 may say that “not all Christians have all gifts,” but it does not say “that each can have only one gift.”⁷⁸⁵ As a matter of fact, Paul himself had more than one gift. The record shows that he was an apostle, a prophet, a teacher, a miracle worker, and a tongues-speaker, to name a few of his many gifts. So tongues-speakers may have been gifted in various ways, including the interpretation of tongues.

On the other hand, if the interpreter in this passage were to refer to an unknown third party, the Greek demands that he be identified elsewhere in the same text, as the interpreter in v. 28 is so identified. But “*the Greek*,” as Thiselton points out, “*does not mention any other agent other than the one who speaks in tongues*,

⁷⁸³ Héring, *1 Corinthians*, 146.

⁷⁸⁴ Collins, *1 Corinthians*, 494; Kistemaker, *1 Corinthians*, 482.

⁷⁸⁵ Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 235.

who remains the subject of the verb.”⁷⁸⁶ The only contrast in this verse, says Lenski, is between the prophet and the glossolalist.⁷⁸⁷ There are no other parties involved. As for the interpreters, the last time that they were mentioned was back in 1 Cor 12:30 and they are not mentioned again until 14:28. Consequently, as pointed out by G. G. Findlay, “to supply τις with διερμην., supposing *another* interpreter [is] meant, is ungrammatical.”⁷⁸⁸ Meyer similarly writes that “the *subject* to διερμ. is not a τις to be supplied (Flatt, comp. Ewald), but ὁ λαλῶν γλ.”⁷⁸⁹ This idea is widespread in that many scholars, including Godet, Robertson and Plummer, Hays, Kistemaker, Lietzmann and Turner conclude that “the subject of *except he interpret* can be no other than the glossolalete himself.”⁷⁹⁰

The Glossolalist

Given that the interpreter in 1 Cor 14:5c is likely to be the one speaking with tongues and not someone else, how, then, are we to determine whether this individual also had the gift of interpretation or that he or she could understand his or her own speech without it?

Except for the nineteenth-century commentator Charles Hodge, few modern theologians claim that glossolalists can understand their own speech, not even those who argue for tongues as human languages. In fact Gundry, one of the prominent

⁷⁸⁶ Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 1098; cf. Thiselton, “The Interpretation of Tongues’,” 16; Collins, *1 Corinthians*, 494.

⁷⁸⁷ Lenski, *1 & 2 Corinthians*, 581.

⁷⁸⁸ Findlay, *1 Corinthians*, 903.

⁷⁸⁹ Meyer, *Epistles to the Corinthians*, 2:6; cf. Olshausen, *1 & 2 Corinthians*, 20:219.

⁷⁹⁰ Godet, *1 Corinthians*, 2:269; cf. Robertson and Plummer, *1 Corinthians*, 308; Hays, *1 Corinthians*, 236; Kistemaker, *1 Corinthians*, 482; Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 235; Turner, *Holy Spirit*, 233.

figures in this group, openly speaks against Hodge's view, claiming that it clashes with Paul's subsequent comments that the νοῦς, which Gundry identifies as the "mind," is unfruitful and, therefore, that the glossolalist cannot comprehend his or her own utterances.⁷⁹¹

On the other hand, the term νοῦς, as we have previously argued, has several meanings, including "the understanding of a matter." Consequently the phrase "but my νοῦς is unfruitful" (14:14) could be interpreted to mean that if Paul were to mimic the Corinthian glossolalists' use of tongues in church his appreciation of the gift's intent as well as of what he was saying would benefit no one in the church itself. It does not necessarily follow that Paul would be unaware of what he was saying when he spoke with tongues.

1 Corinthians 14:2

Of course the primary argument against the theory that glossolalists were familiar with their own speech, is that 1 Cor 14:2 infers that only God could understand what they were saying and, therefore, that glossolalia seems to be some sort of heavenly language, possibly the language of the angels. The reference to the latter in 1 Cor 13:1 is cited as evidence of the same. Moreover, the reference to speaking in the Spirit, in this verse, is usually taken to mean that glossolalia is Holy Spirit induced, even if the term πνεῦμάτι refers to the human spirit, which, it is alleged, is separate and distinct from the normal cognitive processes.

In response to these claims, it has already been argued that Paul is speaking generically when he says that no one but God can understand the glossolalist's speech. For example, the interpreters in the church must have understood the

⁷⁹¹ See Gundry, "'Ecstatic Utterance'," 302, n. 1.

languages spoken otherwise they could not have interpreted what was said in tongues (cf. 14: 27-28). But not only that, because the “spirit” in 1 Cor 14:14-15 refers to the human spirit and not to the Holy Spirit it is more likely that the term πνεῦματι in 14:2 refers to the human, rather than the Holy Spirit.

What is more, many of the OT references concerning the human spirit, as well as Paul’s earlier references to it in 1 Cor 2:11 and 5:3-4, show, among other things, that the human spirit engages the cognitive processes as well as feels emotion. This implies that the glossolalists were not only the source of their own utterances but that they were fully aware of what they were saying.

1 Corinthians 14:13

The phrase Διὸ ὁ λαλῶν γλώσση προσευχέσθω ἵνα διερμείη (1 Cor 14:13), which is usually translated as “Therefore let the one who speaks with a tongue pray that he interprets,” is also cited in support of the argument that glossolalists could not understand their own speech, otherwise there would be no need to ask for this gift. In other words, if they already knew what they were saying they could just go ahead and translate it without this gift.

The meaning of this phrase will be addressed in the next chapter, where it will be argued that instead of supporting the notion that glossolalists were unaware of what they were saying, it suggests that they actually understood their own speech whether or not they possessed the additional gift of interpretation.

1 Corinthians 14:27-28

Another passage said to affirm that glossolalists are ignorant of their own speech is Paul’s declaration that they are to refrain from speaking with tongues in church if there are no interpreters on hand to translate their utterances for them (1 Cor

14:27-28). The rationale behind this argument is that if the glossolalists in Corinth were aware of their own speech, there would be no need for them to use the services of an interpreter because they were capable of translating it themselves.

Despite this line of reasoning, it will be argued in chap. 12 that this injunction is only one of a cluster of three directives given by Paul for the purpose of curtailing the glossolalists' disorderly self-assertion in church services (v. 40), and not because they were speaking in some sort of non-human utterance. In other words, if the glossolalists were required to share centre stage with an interpreter (one as equally well versed as they were in their tongue) when they spoke in church, it would serve to detract from their own self-importance. Hopefully the use of an interpreter would curb the glossolalist's urge to keep using tongues to edify self in public. We assume that the interpreter in 1 Cor 14:27, for example, does not refer to the glossolalist, because the gift of interpretation is usually given to non-tongues-speakers (see 12:10), and the interpreter in 14:28 appears to be someone other than the tongues-speaker. The other conditions set down by Paul in order to stop this self-edification on the glossolalists' part are:

1. No more than two or three were to speak in tongues in any given meeting (v. 27), which implies that, as a rule, a greater number than this had been doing so.
2. When tongues-speakers spoke in tongues in church, they were to speak one at a time (v. 27), which suggests that they had probably all been speaking at once.

Thus far we have found that:

1. The subject of διερμηνεύη in 1 Cor 14:5c is probably the one speaking in tongues and not someone else in the congregation.

2. The human spirit, which has a cognitive as well as an emotive function, is the likely source of the glossolalist's speech (vv. 2, 14-15).
3. The glossolalists in Corinth were to use an interpreter in the assembly because they were disruptive rather than ignorant of their own speech (vv. 27-28).

As mentioned above, the next chapter will also show that the verb προσευχέσθω in v. 13 does not mean "to ask," but rather implies that when glossolalists pray in public they are to pray with the intention of also interpreting their speech for the benefit of the whole church. It follows, therefore, that if tongues-speakers were to interpret their utterances for the benefit of the whole church (v. 5c) they could do so without the additional gift of interpretation, because they automatically knew what they were saying. This means that the gift of tongues included the ability to understand the language spoken. However, it did not supersede the glossolalists' native tongue but was in addition to it, which means that they were still able to converse in the language of the local congregation even though it appears that they chose not to use it to pray in the assembly, for example.

Still, this conclusion raises one more question: if glossolalists can understand their own speech and therefore can translate it for the benefit of others, why do we need the gift of the interpretation of tongues? The only logical answer to this question is that if the "tongues" referred to are human rather than non-human languages, this gift would be invaluable to the church in situations where foreigners unfamiliar with the local vernacular wished to communicate with the church. An interpreter would not only understand what they were saying but he or she would also be able to share it with the church at large which, in turn, could appropriately address their needs. Accordingly, this gift, like the other supernatural gifts of the Spirit, had the potential

to cause the church to grow. Consequently, the gift of the interpretation of tongues does not necessarily relate to interpreting the glossolalist's language, even though it could be used for this purpose (see 1 Cor 14:28), but rather it refers to the ability to interpret anyone's language.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that the ἵνα clause in 1 Cor 14:5b is usually translated as a sub-final clause, thus making prophesying the second, and main, object of the verb θέλω. This indicates that the contrast in this verse is between speaking in tongues and prophesying. In this instance, most commentators tend to equate prophesying with the gift of prophecy. We have also shown that this contrast questions the Spirit's wisdom in distributing the gifts as he sees fit and clashes with some of Paul's earlier statements about the need for a diversity of gifts in the church, and the parity of the gifts in the function of the church, for example.

On the other hand, we found that if this same ἵνα clause is read as a purpose clause and the verb προφητευσῃτε is understood to mean prophesying in the sense of proclamation or witnessing, then, none of the problems associated with the sub-final clause interpretation would arise. This would make prophesying the aim or goal of Paul's wish that the Corinthians could speak with tongues, and not the second grammatical object of the same. In other words, Paul's wish would be that the Corinthians could not only speak with tongues but that they would also use them to prophesy for the edification of the church and not self.

Since prophesying is coincident with being a Christian and therefore is something that all believers can do whether or not they have the gift of prophecy, it does not conflict with the Spirit's right to distribute the charismata as he sees fit or the human body analogy in 1 Cor 12. Because prophesying refers to the clear

proclamation of the gospel in the vernacular, this means that speaking in tongues must refer to the miraculous ability to speak in other human languages without having to learn them first.

This chapter has also shown that Paul refutes the local glossolalists' misconception that the gift of tongues conferred on them a greater spiritual status than that of their non-tongues-speaking brothers and sisters in the assembly. In 1 Cor 14:5c, he makes the point that true greatness is not found in the possession of this or that gift but rather in how the gifts are used to serve others. We also found that the interpreter in 1 Cor 14:5c is more likely to refer to the one speaking with tongues than to someone else who happens to be present who has the supernatural gift of interpretation.

CHAPTER 11 - THE EDIFICATION OF THE CHURCH

The Purpose of the Gift of Tongues is to Edify the Church

In the previous chapters we have established that the edification of the Church has been on Paul's mind from the very outset of his letter to the Corinthians. For instance, in 1 Cor 3:9-23, Paul "urged upon the Corinthians the use of the right materials in building properly on 'the church's one foundation . . . Jesus Christ her Lord'."⁷⁹² Then he warns them against defiling the church with self-interest, in this instance, by adopting the same sort of personality cultism that typified the patron/client and teacher/pupil relationships prevalent in the contemporary Greco-Roman world. Even legitimate practices that might be misunderstood and thus inadvertently cause the ignorant to stumble and fall were to be avoided, he says (see 6:12, 8:9-13). Not only that, Paul stipulates that believers were to actively seek to edify others rather than self (10:23-24).

This principle is amplified in 1 Cor 10:31-33 where Paul, as noted in the previous chapter, declares that whatever we do should be done to the glory of God. We ought to offend no one, he says, including the church. Furthermore, we are to seek the good of others rather than self, so that they too might be saved. Paul makes it very clear in 12:7-10 that the gifts of the Spirit were meant to be used for this very purpose. The gifts of wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, the discerning of spirits, tongues, and the interpretation of tongues, he says, were to be used for "the common good" and not for personal gain or glory.

Unfortunately, the Corinthians had violated this principle by attributing their giftedness to self (4:7), equating it with spirituality (4:8; 13:1-3), and using it in a

⁷⁹² Prior, *1 Corinthians*, 242.

loveless and divisive manner (13:1-3; 12:15-21) to boast (4:7; 12:17-21) and to edify self (14:4). It has been argued that they also coveted the so-called “greater” gifts (12:31) in a bid to outmaneuver each other in the race to fill the leadership vacuum in the local assembly that had been created by the earlier departure of Paul and Apollos.

In 1 Cor 13, Paul compares this unacceptable behavior with the incomparable power of love. In 14:1, he admonishes the Corinthians to pursue this love at all costs and to diligently seek the things of the Spirit, in particular God’s will for the human race. They were to eagerly desire both in order that they might be equipped to share the good news of salvation with others, and not for the same selfish reasons that they craved the greater gifts (see chap. 7). In vv. 2-5, Paul stresses that the edification of the Church is of paramount importance and if it is to be edified and, in turn, one is to be truly great in the sight of God, then what one says must be intelligible.

He goes on to illustrate this point in vv. 6-11. He uses his pending visit to Corinth as an example of the uselessness of speaking with tongues in the assembly, without interpretation for the church members, drawing a series of analogies from musical instruments and the family of human languages.⁷⁹³ These analogies are often cited as evidence that speaking in tongues cannot possibly refer to speaking in unlearned human languages. It is argued that Paul would never have compared this gift to musical instruments played haphazardly or to the indistinct call of the trumpet in times of war (14:7-9) if he thought that tongues were foreign languages – the inference being that human languages are far more structured than that. In addition, it is claimed that because analogies are drawn between different rather than like phenomena, the comparison between speaking with tongues and foreign languages

⁷⁹³ Meyer, *Epistles to the Corinthians*, 2:7; Trail, *1 Corinthians* 10-16, 213; Calvin, *1 Corinthians*, 288; Collins, *1 Corinthians*, 498.

(vv. 10-11) implies that this gift does not refer to human languages.⁷⁹⁴

This chapter will argue against this proposition on the grounds that the assumption upon which it is based is flawed; namely, that this passage (14:7-11) does not refer to the tongues phenomenon *per se*, but rather to the ongoing abuse of this gift in Corinth. It will also contend that the edification of the Church is still his primary concern in vv. 6-19, and that Paul's injunction to edify the church in v. 12 does not imply that Christians are to seek gifts that edify the church as opposed to those that do not, but rather encourages the Corinthians to channel their energies into building up the church instead of self.

In addition, this chapter will show why the clause προσευχέσθω ἵνα διερμηνεύῃ (v. 13) is more likely to mean "to pray with the intention of interpreting one's speech for the benefit of the whole church," rather than "to ask [or pray] for the additional gift of interpretation" for the same reason, namely to edify the whole church. Even though the outcome would be the same in each case, the former implies that the tongues-speakers were cognizant of their own speech, whereas the latter infers that without the additional gift of interpretation they were unaware of what they were saying.

Further, it will examine the popular ideas concerning the expression "speaking with the understanding" (v. 15), as well as assess the claim that Paul's resolve not to speak in church unless his speech can be understood (v. 19) implies that glossolalia is a private rather than a public gift. It will also argue that Paul's remarks about "praying and singing with the spirit" in 1 Cor 14:14-16 relate to the Corinthians' abuse of the gift of tongues and not to the phenomenon itself. Consequently, it would

⁷⁹⁴ Fee, "Toward a Pauline," 28; cf. Forbes, *Prophecy*, 63.

be unsound to claim that glossolalia is “discourse directed toward God”⁷⁹⁵ and therefore different in kind to the Acts 2 phenomenon, based on this passage. Finally, it will address the issue as to whether or not the term “more than” in v. 18 means “with greater intensity” or “more often” rather than “with more tongues,” which, it is argued, strongly suggests that speaking in tongues does not mean speaking in unlearned foreign languages.

Paul’s Visit to Corinth

In 1 Cor 14:6 Paul says: “But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you unless I speak to you either by revelation, by knowledge, by prophesying, or by teaching?” Scholars are divided over whether or not this visit, of which Paul speaks, is hypothetical or planned. Nevertheless, there is general agreement that Paul now uses himself as an example of what to do and what not to do in church, if the latter is to be edified.⁷⁹⁶ If he were to come to them and to “play the part of the glossolalete,” as Godet puts it, his visit, Paul says, would be pointless unless he spoke to them in words that could be readily understood.⁷⁹⁷ In other words, if the church were to benefit from his visit then what he said to them must be intelligible.⁷⁹⁸

The point he is making here, says Collins, is that “his presence among the Corinthians was advantageous to them not because he was a glossolalist, but because

⁷⁹⁵ Cf. Ciampa and Rosner, *1 Corinthians*, 586.

⁷⁹⁶ Findlay, “1 Corinthians,” 903; Kling, “1 Corinthians,” 284; Calvin, *1 Corinthians*, 288;

⁷⁹⁷ Godet, *1 Corinthians*, 2:270; Barrett, *1 Corinthians*, 317.

⁷⁹⁸ Trail, *1 Corinthians 10-16*, 213; Kling, “1 Corinthians,” 284; Bruce, *1 & 2 Corinthians*, 131.

he could offer them revelation, knowledge, prophecy, or teaching.”⁷⁹⁹ This was a further rebuke to those who thought that the mere possession of the gift of tongues implied that they were more important than their non-tongues-speaking colleagues. To show the Corinthians just how futile conversing in an unknown tongue in public worship really is, Paul “gives them an illustration from music” (vv. 7-8).⁸⁰⁰

The Analogy Taken from Musical Instruments

According to Godet, the flute and the harp “were the two principal instruments which the ancients used in worship and in sad and joyful ceremonies.” Their melodies created the mood on these occasions and signified whether the participants should weep, or dance, etc.⁸⁰¹ However, if there were no meaningful variation in the sounds they produced, no one, implies Paul, would know what to do or how to respond. Unless the sounds produced conveyed some intelligible message they were no more than an “aimless jangle” that had no meaning.⁸⁰²

The same can be said for the use of the trumpet on the field of battle in ancient times. If the commander of an army wanted his men to attack or to retreat, a pre-arranged signal known to the troops was trumpeted for all to hear. In both cases the sound had to be distinct otherwise the troops would not know what to do, which would prove disastrous for them.⁸⁰³ If the signal were not clear, the trumpet would

⁷⁹⁹ Collins, *1 Corinthians*, 498; cf. Lenski, *1 & 2 Corinthians*, 582-583.

⁸⁰⁰ Zodhiates, *Speaking in Tongues*, 31; cf. Meyer, *Epistles to the Corinthians*, 2:7; Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 661.

⁸⁰¹ Godet, *1 Corinthians*, 2:272.

⁸⁰² Morris, *1 Corinthians*, rev. ed., 188; cf. Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 283.

⁸⁰³ Godet, *1 Corinthians*, 30:272.

fail in its mission. It would be useless.⁸⁰⁴

The Analogy with Foreign Languages

The point of these analogies is brought out in v. 9 where Paul declares that if the words the Corinthians speak cannot be understood by others, they are just as useless as flutes, harps, and trumpets that do not convey a meaningful message. If one's speech is not intelligible then one might just as well talk to oneself. Words without meaning are as fruitless and as pointless as speaking into the air, and are a complete waste of time, he says.⁸⁰⁵

But not only that, Paul maintains that if a speaker is not effectively communicating with the hearer, then that speaker is no better than a barbarian (v. 11).⁸⁰⁶ This term had much more significance in Paul's day than it does today. The Greeks, who prided themselves on their refined language and their eloquent speech, thought all other languages and peoples rough and boorish by comparison, so they dubbed all non-Greeks, or all those who could not speak their language, barbarians.⁸⁰⁷ Clearly, this was not an endearing term. In fact it was downright derogatory.⁸⁰⁸ Thus, Paul's choice of this word in v. 11 to describe those who were using tongues in public worship to edify themselves shows just how absurd this practice was.

The Corinthian glossolalists had hoped that by using their gift in church to

⁸⁰⁴ Morris, *1 Corinthians*, rev. ed., 188.

⁸⁰⁵ Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 1105; cf. Kling, "1 Corinthians," 285.

⁸⁰⁶ Cf. Bruce, *1 & 2 Corinthians*, 131.

⁸⁰⁷ See Calvin, *1 Corinthians*, 290; Kling, "1 Corinthians," 286; Trail, *1 Corinthians 10-16*, 222; Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 283; Barrett, *1 Corinthians*, 319.

⁸⁰⁸ Morris, *1 Corinthians*, rev. ed., 189; cf. Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 269; Calvin, *1 Corinthians*, 290.

pray, they would gain the admiration of the local assembly, but in reality, the only reward that they would get, Paul says, is to be called barbarians. In other words, “the speaking in ‘tongues’ that seemed to the Corinthians a matter for such pride,” as Morris puts it, would effectively ostracize them from the rest of the church and thus rob them of the outcome they hoped to achieve.⁸⁰⁹ Glossolalists may have thought that by using tongues in church to pray, they were spiritually upstaging those in the church who were not so gifted, but in reality they were simply demonstrating their spiritual immaturity.

Tongues Cannot mean Foreign Languages

As mentioned earlier, these analogies are often cited as evidence that speaking in tongues cannot refer to speaking in unlearned human languages. However, it is the third illustration in this cluster of analogies, “the phenomenon of different languages,” as Fee puts it, which is considered to be the main indicator that tongues do not constitute human languages.⁸¹⁰ Since analogies are drawn from different rather than like phenomena, it is argued that if Paul thought that tongues were human languages he would never have compared them to foreign languages in the first place.⁸¹¹

The use of “γένη φωνῶν rather than γλῶσσα to denote foreign languages” in vv. 10-11 is taken as further evidence that speaking in tongues cannot possibly refer to speaking in unlearned human languages.⁸¹² In fact, many modern scholars,

⁸⁰⁹ Cf. Morris, *1 Corinthians*, rev. ed., 189; Calvin, *1 Corinthians*, 289-290; Trail, *1 Corinthians* 10-16, 222.

⁸¹⁰ See Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 664-665.

⁸¹¹ Robertson, *Epistles to the Corinthians*, 228; Powers, “Missionary Tongues?” 48; Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit*, 244.

⁸¹² Powers, “Missionary Tongues?” 48; cf. Meyer, *Epistles to the Corinthians*, 1:366; Richardson, *Speaking in Tongues*, 79.

including Meyer, Conzelmann, and Fee see the use of φωνή in these verses as a deliberate attempt, on Paul's part, to prevent his readers from confusing human languages with glossolalia.⁸¹³ Meyer claims that "Paul has *chosen φωνή* to denote *language*, because in the whole section he has only the meaning *tongue* in his mind for γλῶσσα."⁸¹⁴ Conzelmann says that "Paul would have chosen the word φωνή to designate language, because γλῶσσα has already another meaning in the context."⁸¹⁵ On the other hand, Fee states that "the analogy is not that the tongues-speaker is . . . speaking a foreign language . . . but that the hearer cannot understand the one speaking in tongues any more than he can the one who speaks a foreign language." Consequently, it is of no value to him.⁸¹⁶

A Different Perspective

Forbes denounces this line of reasoning as "entirely false."⁸¹⁷ Firstly, he argues that the comparison in 1 Cor 14:10-11 is not between one foreign language and another foreign language, but between naturally acquired languages and those miraculously bestowed by God. Consequently, they are not identical and therefore they can be legitimately compared to each other. Secondly, he claims that the gift of tongues could refer to either human languages or to inarticulate speech, but he feels that the reference to the "tongues of men" in 1 Cor 13:1 supports the human languages view. On this basis, he contends that "the point of the comparison with unclear bugle calls then becomes their failure to communicate, rather than simply

⁸¹³ Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 1105.

⁸¹⁴ Meyer, *Epistles to the Corinthians*, 2:11.

⁸¹⁵ Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 236; cf. Kling, "1 Corinthians," 285-286.

⁸¹⁶ Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 664-665; cf. Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 1103.

⁸¹⁷ Forbes, *Prophecy*, 63.

their lack of clarity.” Accordingly, the inconsiderate and arrogant flaunting of the gift of tongues in public worship services would be as ineffective in building up the Christian community as mere noise would be, he says.⁸¹⁸

The Point of the Analogy with Barbarians

Hasel observes that “Paul does not condemn speaking in tongues, but he points out its limitation when it is not understood and when it does not serve its designed purpose in upbuilding the church.”⁸¹⁹ In v. 6, Paul does not speak of the gift itself, but rather of the effect that speaking in tongues would have on the church if he, like the glossolalists, were to use it exclusively when he next visited them. Hence, the ensuing analogies with musical instruments played independently of the laws of tone and rhythm, and of the intervals of scale and measure, do not refer to tongues *per se*, but to the futility of using them in the assembly where no one can understand a word spoken.⁸²⁰

According to both Forbes and Hasel, the comparison in 1 Cor 14:7-11 is not between human and non-human speech as such, but rather it is between the futility of communicating in ways that are unfamiliar to the hearer and the Corinthians’ use of tongues in church to edify self. If the point of using φωνή instead of γλῶσσα in 1 Cor 14:10-11 is to show the uselessness of communicating in a language that is unknown to the hearer rather than to differentiate between speaking in tongues and human languages, the use of the term “barbarian” in this passage may in fact indicate that glossolalists actually speak in unlearned human languages. Says Hasel:

⁸¹⁸ Ibid

⁸¹⁹ Hasel, *Speaking in Tongues*, 136.

⁸²⁰ Cf. Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 669.

The designation “barbarian” is an onomatopoeic term used for a person who speaks a strange language, i.e., he is a non-Greek person, simply a “foreigner.” The idea is that the language of a Greek person was “Greek” to anyone who did not understand it and vice versa; the language of a “foreigner” was “Greek” in the sense of being foreign to the native Greek speaker, who did not have any knowledge of the language of the “foreigner.” Paul’s remark recalls the self-pitying complaint of Ovid while in exile on the Black Sea: “I am a barbarian here because no one understands me, and the stupid Getae laugh at my Latin speech.” This illustration regarding the “foreigner” reveals once again that in 1 Cor 14 Paul means language when he writes about “tongue.”⁸²¹

Similarly, Gundry claims that this reference to a barbarian “should clear away any vestige of doubt that he thinks of the gift of tongues as miraculous speaking in unlearned human languages.” He agrees with the majority that the point Paul is making here is that “sounds must be distinct to be meaningful,” but, unlike them, he does not believe that Paul is saying that “tongues are non-languages like musical sounds.” On the contrary, he claims that “tongues must be distinctly spoken languages just as notes from harp and bugle must be distinct to be effective.”⁸²²

Seek to Edify the Church

Having thus exposed the utter futility of speaking with tongues in public worship services when no one but the interpreter and/or the glossolalist could understand the words spoken, Paul continues to exhort the Corinthians to channel their energies into building up the church instead of self. In keeping with the supposition that Paul encourages the Corinthians to strive after the gift of prophecy in order that the church may be edified (14:1-5), the clause *ζηλωταί ἐστε πνευμάτων* (1 Cor 14:12) is usually understood to mean that he is again charging them to have the

⁸²¹ Hasel, *Speaking in Tongues*, 135.

⁸²² Gundry, “Ecstatic Utterance,” 306.

right motive for desiring the charismata.⁸²³

Thus Collins writes: “Earlier he had urged them to strive after the more important gift of prophecy (14:2); now he urges them to pursue spiritual realities in keeping with the standard by which all spiritual gifts must be measured, namely the building up of the church.”⁸²⁴ Keener puts it this way: “Because they are commendably zealous for spiritual gifts, they should seek to use them to ‘edify’ the church.”⁸²⁵ In the same vein Calvin writes: “If spiritual gifts are a source of delight to you, see that they are directed to upbuilding.”⁸²⁶ Fee also maintains that Paul is urging the Corinthians to direct their “zeal toward gifts that edify” the church.⁸²⁷ The NIV similarly renders this verse as: “So it is with you. Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church.” Both Fee and the NIV imply that there are two different types of gifts – those that build up the church and those that do not. In other words, God had a different purpose in mind for different gifts: he gave some of the gifts for the purpose of building up the church, whereas he gave other gifts for presumably some other purpose.⁸²⁸

But, as we have noted earlier in this treatise, this idea is based on a false dichotomy of the charismata. According to 1 Cor 12:7, all of the gifts of the Spirit are given for the common purpose of edifying the church, including the gift of tongues

⁸²³ Cf. Collins, *1 Corinthians*, 499; Robertson and Plummer, *1 Corinthians*, 311; Kistemaker, *1 Corinthians*, 487.

⁸²⁴ Collins, *1 Corinthians*, 499.

⁸²⁵ Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 113-114.

⁸²⁶ Calvin, *1 Corinthians*, 290.

⁸²⁷ Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 666; cf. Morris, *1 Corinthians*, rev. ed., 194; Watson, *1 Corinthians*, 147.

⁸²⁸ Cf. Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 269.

(see 12:10), the gift widely held to be the exception to this rule. The latter is based on Paul's reference to the self-edification of the tongues-speaker in 14:4, which is usually taken to mean that this is a special gift that God has given for the recipient's own edification and not that of the church. We have found, however, that Paul is not referring to the tongues phenomenon *per se* in this verse, but rather he is talking about the way the Corinthian glossolalists are using their gift in church services to flaunt their assumed piety. In other words, he is saying that those who speak in tongues in church services, without interpreting their utterances for the benefit of the whole church (see v. 5), are edifying themselves, in the sense of gaining kudos for themselves.

Zealots of Spirits

However, there is a problem with the way that not only Fee and the NIV, but most, if not all commentators and translators render the clause ζηλωταί ἐστε πνευμάτων in 1 Cor 14:12 as “zealous of spiritual gifts.” Firstly, the word ζηλωταί is a noun and not an adjective and, therefore, means “zealots” instead of “zealous.” Secondly, the term πνευμάτων refers to “spirits” rather than to “spiritual gifts.” Hence, this clause literally means “zealots of spirits.”

Nevertheless, on the understanding that 1 Cor 14:1 encourages the Corinthians to eagerly desire the gifts of the Spirit, the term πνευμάτων in v. 12 is almost universally understood to refer to the Corinthians' zeal for the gifts.⁸²⁹ Alternatively, it is argued that here Paul uses this expression by metonymy for spiritual gifts in general.⁸³⁰ That is, he uses it, as Calvin points out, “in the same way as the Spirit of

⁸²⁹ Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 666.

⁸³⁰ See Calvin, *1 Corinthians*, 290; Kling, “1 Corinthians,” 287.

teaching, or of understanding, or of judgement, stands for spiritual teaching, or understanding, or judgement.”⁸³¹ Thus, it is argued that the term “spirits” refers to the “various breathings of inspirations [of the Holy Spirit] in the assemblies of the church,” or to the “various spiritual agencies producing various spiritual gifts.”⁸³² Commentators are quick to add that this does not mean that each gift has a different supernatural source, because, as Paul stated earlier, it is the self-same Spirit that apportions all of the gifts according to his will (12:11).⁸³³ On the contrary, it means that, “the Holy Spirit reveals himself in distributing a multitude of spiritual gifts to his people.”⁸³⁴

The problem with interpreting this passage as “zeal for the gifts” is that it is unlikely Paul is urging the Corinthians to seek the gifts of the Spirit in 1 Cor 14:1, or in 1 Cor 12:31, for that matter. In regards to 14:1, τὰ πνευματικά means “spiritual things,” not “spiritual gifts,” even though the latter come under the umbrella of spiritual things (see chap. 7). As for 12:31, the verb ζηλοῦτε in this verse is likely to be an indicative rather than an imperative and therefore is recording that the Corinthians were coveting the greater gifts, rather than encouraging them to seek the gifts (see chap. 5). Furthermore, if Paul did have the Corinthians’ zeal for the charismata in mind when he wrote 1 Cor 14:12, then he could have said it more easily by using the term χάρισμα, the word he uses in 12:4, 31 to refer exclusively to the

⁸³¹ Calvin, *1 Corinthians*, 290.

⁸³² Kistemaker, *1 Corinthians*, 488; cf. Godet, *1 Corinthians*, 2:276; Barrett, *1 Corinthians*, 319.

⁸³³ E.g., Meyer, *Epistles to the Corinthians*, 2:13; Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 1107; Lenski, *1 & 2 Corinthians*, 589-590.

⁸³⁴ Kistemaker, *1 Corinthians*, 488; cf. Lenski, *1 & 2 Corinthians*, 590.

gifts of the Spirit.⁸³⁵

Not only that, Paul uses the plural “spirits” in 14:32 and the singular “spirit” in 2:11; 5:3-4; 14:14-15 to refer to the prophets’ spirits, the human spirit, and his own spirit respectively. This would suggest that the term πνευμάτων in 14:12 is likely to be referring to the Corinthians’ own spirits and not to the gifts of the Spirit. In other words, he is simply referring to the Corinthians as a group, and not to the various manifestations of the Holy Spirit that supposedly find expression through the human spirit. If this is the case, then, Paul is simply saying that he now wants the Corinthians to channel their zeal in general into building up the church.⁸³⁶ This is a far cry from saying that because they are zealous for spiritual gifts, he now wants them to use the same to edify the church.

If we take the verb ζηλοῦτε in 1 Cor 12:31a as in the indicative rather than the imperative mood, it becomes clear that the Corinthians coveted the gifts of the Spirit, especially the greater ones and Paul is pointing this out to them. However, their zeal for the charismata was driven, in turn, by an even greater desire to attain and demonstrate a high spiritual status in general, as we have gathered from what Paul wrote elsewhere about them. For instance, Paul’s remarks concerning the spiritual complacency of the Corinthian pneumatics in 4:6-8 show that they equated giftedness with spirituality, they took the credit for their own giftedness, and believed that they were already spiritually mature.

Paul’s later comments regarding the futility of speaking in tongues, prophesying, wisdom, knowledge, faith, deeds of mercy, and self-sacrifice, without love (13:1-3), reinforce the concept of the Corinthians’ spiritual arrogance and imply

⁸³⁵ Cf. Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 283.

⁸³⁶ Zodhiates, *Speaking in Tongues*, 44-46.

that the Corinthians' pursuit of high spiritual status was not limited to their desire for the greater gifts alone. Therefore, to limit Paul's comments regarding the Corinthians' zeal to their desire for the charismata, not only ignores the literal meaning of Paul's words in 1 Cor 14:12, but it also misses the vital point that the Corinthians were keen to be seen as spiritually superior all round.

Furthermore, if the phrase ζηλωταί ἐστε πνευμάτων in 1 Cor 14:12 refers to the Corinthians' zeal in general and not to their zeal for the charismata in particular, it calls into question the usual rendering of πρὸς τὴν οἰκοδομὴν τῆς ἐκκλησίας ζητεῖτε ἵνα περισσεύητε (v. 12) as "seek to use the gifts of the Spirit to edify the church," or "try to excel in gifts that build up the church," or similar. Again, these translations are based on the assumption that the term "spirits" in the earlier part of this verse refers to "spiritual gifts," which, again, is too restrictive in its scope and ignores the root cause of the problem – the Corinthians' desire to be seen as spiritual people.

This does not mean that Paul did not want the Corinthians to use their gifts to edify the church. On the contrary, his discourse on "spiritual things" in 1 Cor 12-14 includes bringing the Corinthians' abuse of the charismata back into line with their intended purpose of edifying the church (12:7). However, there appears to be no biblical support for the notion that in 1 Cor 14:12 Paul is insisting that the Corinthians "try to excel in gifts that build up the church." This idea, as mentioned earlier, is based on the assumption that elsewhere Paul urges the Corinthians to eagerly desire the greater gifts of the Spirit (12:31), and to seek the gifts in general, especially the gift of prophecy (14:1). However, the problems related to this argument are addressed earlier in this chapter and militate against it.

Not only that, as we have shown earlier, the ἵνα clause in 1 Cor 14:1 (μᾶλλον

δὲ ἵνα προφητεύητε) is probably a purpose clause, which means that the Corinthians were eagerly to desire the πνευματικά in order that they might prophesy. The alternative is to read this same clause as an object clause which means that the Corinthians were to seek the gift of prophecy above all the other gifts of the Spirit. However, as we have demonstrated, this interpretation contradicts Paul's earlier comments that it is the Spirit's prerogative to distribute the gifts as he sees fit and that not all believers can or will have the same gift or gifts.

So, if Paul is referring to the Corinthians' zeal in general and not to their desire for the charismata in particular, and if he is not limiting his subsequent comments in 1 Cor14:12 to the charismata, then the question is: What is he trying to get them to excel at? Is he referring to self-improvement, as "seek to excel" implies, or is he imploring them to "seek to build up the church?"

The Good of the Community, not the Individual

The most likely outcome is that he wants them to put all of their energy into "the edification of the church." If we take the words in their order in the Greek original, "the emphasis," says Kistemaker, "falls on the church's edification of its members. Paul wants the Corinthians to pursue wholehearted edification."⁸³⁷ Thiselton maintains that no matter what their concerns are regarding spirituality or "powers of the Spirit" (as he puts it) they "must be redirected into a more Christlike **eagerness for the building up ... of the church community** as a corporate whole."⁸³⁸ To Conzelmann, the critical principle in this context is the "community principle,"

⁸³⁷ Kistemaker, *1 Corinthians*, 489.

⁸³⁸ Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 1107.

namely, “οἰκοδομή, ‘edification.’”⁸³⁹ As a result, he rejects the idea that Paul is urging the Corinthians to strive for the gifts of the Spirit so that they can use them to benefit the church as a whole. Instead, he adopts the position that the Corinthians were to seek to edify the church rather than self.⁸⁴⁰ Prior observes that throughout this chapter Paul keeps coming back to this point. He wants the members of the church to play their part in the edification of the church as a whole.⁸⁴¹

This is how both the *Modern King James Version* and Green’s *A Literal Translation of the Bible* translate 1 Cor 14:12. *The Modern King James Version* says: “Even so you, since you are zealots of spiritual things, seek to build up the church, in order that you may abound.”⁸⁴² Green’s *Literal Translation* says: “So also you, since you are zealots of spiritual things, seek to build up the church that you may abound.”⁸⁴³

Paul does not say that he wants the Corinthians to try to excel at anything – whether by working to perfect a gift or by any other means. Of course he wanted the Corinthians to excel in love, but in 1 Cor 14:12 he simply urges the Corinthians to try to build up the church so that they may all excel, in the sense of abound or prosper, together. It would have been self-defeating, on Paul’s part, if the object of the imperative “seek” was the individual member’s self-improvement.

⁸³⁹ Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 237; cf. van Unnik, “The Meaning of 1 Cor 12:31,” 144.

⁸⁴⁰ Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 237; cf. Robertson and Plummer, *1 Corinthians*, 311; Godet, *1 Corinthians*, 2:277.

⁸⁴¹ Prior, *1 Corinthians*, 242.

⁸⁴² *Modern King James Version* (Lafayette: Sovereign Grace Publishing, 1962, 1990, 1993).

⁸⁴³ Jay P. Green, Sr., *A Literal Translation of the Bible* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1987), 930.

The Corinthians' attempts to improve their own status, for example, had already caused him no end of trouble and were already hurting the church. That is why Paul admonishes them in 14:12 to strive to edify or build up the church. He is not saying that he wants them to try to excel at any particular gifts, and he never teaches that God gave different gifts for different purposes, some for the edification of the church collectively, others, such as tongues, for the personal spiritual edification of the individual pneumatic. He is simply saying that because the Corinthians are such zealous people, he wants them to redirect their zeal into building up the church instead of destroying it. Paul could not make this any clearer than by what he says in very next verse (v. 13). In this verse he does not inform the Corinthians how they can use the gift of tongues to edify the church. Rather, he shows them how they can edify the church in spite of using this gift in the assembly where no one can understand a word that was spoken.

Pray for the Gift of Interpretation

Numerous commentators, from the early church fathers to the present day, interpret 1 Cor 14:13 as “*let him [the tongues-speaker] pray for the gift of interpretation.*”⁸⁴⁴ In other words, if tongues-speakers are going to continue to use their gift in church, they should ask God in prayer to also give them the gift of interpretation so that they can interpret their utterances for the benefit of all present. This implies that the Corinthian glossolalists could not understand their own speech without this additional gift and, hence, that the phenomenon itself was

⁸⁴⁴ Meyer, *Epistles to the Corinthians*, 2:13; Marcus Dods, “The First Epistle to the Corinthians,” in *EB*, ed. W. R. Nicoll (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1890), 593.

unintelligible.⁸⁴⁵ Behind this interpretation is the conviction that 1 Cor 12:31 and 14:1 urge the Corinthians to actively seek the gifts of the Spirit.⁸⁴⁶ Many understand this passage to mean that they are to seek the gifts of the Spirit so they can channel their misguided zeal into building up the church instead of self (see comments on v. 12 above).

It has been shown, however, that had Paul been urging his readers to engage in this pursuit he would have been contradicting everything else that he had said up to this point about:

1. The need for a diversity of gifts in the church.
2. The Spirit's prerogative to distribute the gifts as he pleases.
3. The fact that one gift is as good as another.
4. The fact that Christians should be content with the gift/s God has given them.
5. The fact that not all believers have all of the gifts of the Spirit or even the same gifts.
6. The fact that there is not one gift of the Spirit that all believers can receive.

To Edwards, the problem with this interpretation “is that in ver. 14 the Apostle speaks, not of the advantage of interpreting, but of the superiority of praying with the reason over praying with the spirit only.”⁸⁴⁷ Another way of putting it would be to say that interpreting one's speech was a poor substitute for speaking intelligibly in the first place and, therefore, v. 14 is showing Paul's preference for clarity of speech over

⁸⁴⁵ See Soards, *1 Corinthians*, 287.

⁸⁴⁶ Cf. Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 269.

⁸⁴⁷ Edwards, *1 Corinthians*, 365.

interpretation.

Paul's Use of the Verb “To Pray”

A further objection to the notion that glossolalists were to pray for the additional gift of interpretation is that this interpretation depends entirely upon the verb προσευχέσθω (v. 13) meaning “to pray” in the sense of “to ask.” If the verb “pray” here means “to ask,” then Paul would be clearly urging the speaker in tongues to ask God for the gift of interpretation so that he could interpret his utterances for the benefit of the church. This would mean that glossolalists could not understand their own speech without the additional gift of interpretation and, therefore, that the gift of tongues in Corinth must have in fact been non-human, after all.

According to this interpretation, most commentators and translators have translated the ἵνα clause in 1 Cor 14:13 (ἵνα διερμηνεύῃ) as a sub-final clause; that is, as the grammatical object of the main verb προσευχέσθω. Again, when ἵνα with the subjunctive follows a command it is usually sub-final. In this instance, the ἵνα clause follows the imperative “pray.” If Paul intended the ἵνα clause in v. 13 to be the grammatical object of the verb “pray,” and if by “pray” he meant “to ask,” then he would be spelling out exactly what the speakers in tongues were supposed to pray for; namely, the gift of interpretation. The same meaning would apply if this clause were epexegetic; that is, if it was meant to merely clarify the meaning of the verb προσευχέσθω. Again, Paul would be spelling out what he wanted the speaker in tongues to ask for; namely, the gift of interpretation. Either way, this reading would only make sense if the verb προσευχέσθω in v. 13 means “to ask.”

“But the next verse,” as Dods points out, “shows that this is untenable.”⁸⁴⁸

The word “γάρ” in v. 14 is explanatory, which means that the verb “pray” in v. 13 must have the same meaning as that of προσεύχωμαι in v. 14. However, the point Paul is making in v. 14 is that if he were to mimic the local glossolalist and, therefore, if he were to pray in un-interpreted tongues in the assembly, it would be of no benefit to himself or to anyone else (see chap. 8). Consequently, he states that when he prayed in public he would pray in such a way that all could understand what he was saying. In other words, Paul is not referring to what he would ask God for in prayer, but rather to how he would pray when he offered a prayer in public. If this is the case, then the question is asked, How is the Corinthian tongues-speaker to pray when praying with tongues in the assembly?

Valla and Luther propose the interpretation: “Let him that speaks in a tongue refrain from praying in a tongue, unless he can interpret his utterance.”⁸⁴⁹ But “this rendering of ἵνα [is confusing and] is hardly allowable,” says Dods.⁸⁵⁰ On the other hand, Meyer, Beet, and Farrar, translate the ἵνα clause in 1 Cor 14:13 as a final clause. That is, they claim that Paul wants the glossolalist to “*pray with a view to interpret*” his or her speech for the benefit of the church.⁸⁵¹ In other words, “*that he may interpret* is not the matter of prayer but an end kept in view while praying in

⁸⁴⁸ Dods, “1 Corinthians,” 593; cf. Farrar, “1 Corinthians,” 458; Meyer, *Epistles to the Corinthians*, 2:13-14; Beet, *Epistles to the Corinthians*, 245; Edwards, *1 Corinthians*, 365.

⁸⁴⁹ Edwards, *1 Corinthians*, 365; cf. Dods, “1 Corinthians,” 593; Farrar, “1 Corinthians,” 458.

⁸⁵⁰ Dods, “1 Corinthians,” 593

⁸⁵¹ Ibid.

public.”⁸⁵² Says Beet: “Since edification of the church is the purpose of all spiritual gifts, he who in an assembly prays with a tongue must do so with a purpose of afterwards *interpreting* his own . . . prayer.”⁸⁵³ Héring similarly comments that if the verb προσευχέσθω has the same sense in v. 13 that it has in v. 14 (namely, “to offer a prayer in public”), then “we must translate [v. 13 as]: ‘Let him [the speaker in tongues] say his prayer with the intention of interpreting it.’”⁸⁵⁴ Consequently, the glossolalist could still use his or her gift to pray in church (cf. v. 39) so long as he or she interpreted the words spoken for the benefit of the others present.

The main objection to this interpretation appears to be the presupposition that glossolalia is not only unintelligible to the hearer, but that it is also incomprehensible to the speaker. For example, Robertson and Plummer claim that: “It was characteristic of glossolalia that the speaker could not make his speech intelligible; and apparently he had no control over the sounds that he uttered.”⁸⁵⁵ But this assumption, as we have already observed, is based primarily on the understanding that the references to speaking in tongues in 1 Cor 14:2-5 concern the phenomenon itself, when in fact it would appear that they relate to the Corinthians’ abuse of this gift. Hence, the statement that no one but God can understand what the glossolalist is saying is mistakenly understood to mean that no one on the face of the earth, including the speaker, can understand the utterances spoken.

Paul’s comments regarding the human spirit and the nous in vv. 14-15 have also been taken to mean that the glossolalist cannot understand his or her speech. But,

⁸⁵² Beet, *Epistles to the Corinthians*, 245.

⁸⁵³ Meyer, *Epistles to the Corinthians*, 2:13-14; Beet, *Epistles to the Corinthians*, 245; Farrar, “1 Corinthians,” 458; cf. Hodge, *1 Corinthians*, 286.

⁸⁵⁴ Héring, *1 Corinthians*, 149.

⁸⁵⁵ Robertson and Plummer, *1 Corinthians*, 311.

as presented in chap. 9 of this thesis, the human spirit, which is the likely source of the glossolalist's utterances, has a cognitive function as well as an emotive one, which means that they were, more than likely, cognizant of their own speech. Paul appears to take this for granted in v. 5 where he gives the impression that glossolalists can interpret their speech, with no conditions attached (see chap. 10).

Others, such as Lenski and Olshausen, for instance, simply assume that the *ἵνα* clause in 1 Cor 14:13 is not final, but rather “states the object of ‘pray.’ i.e., the contents of the prayer.”⁸⁵⁶ But this argument, as Meyer, Beet, and others, have pointed out, is indefensible, in that 1 Cor 14:14 indicates that the verb “pray” in v. 13 refers to how glossolalists should pray when doing so in public, rather than to the content of the same.

So if the *ἵνα* clause in 1 Cor 14:13 is a final rather than a sub-final clause, which implies that the glossolalists could understand their own speech and therefore could interpret it for the benefit of others, it would appear that the point Paul is making in vv. 6-13 is essentially the same as that of vv. 1-5. The latter indicates that he does not have an issue with the tongues phenomenon *per se*, but he does have a problem with the way the Corinthians were using this gift in church to edify themselves, when they should have been using it to edify the church (vv. 2-4). To rectify this situation he informs them that he would rather them use this gift out in the community where those who could understand the languages spoken could benefit from what was said (v. 5b). On the other hand, if used in church, it was to be interpreted for the benefit of all present (*ibid*).

⁸⁵⁶ Lenski, *1 & 2 Corinthians*, 590; Olshausen, *1 & 2 Corinthians*, 222-223.

The Spirit/Understanding Dichotomy

First Corinthians 14:14-15 says: “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.” Verse 14 has already been dealt with in chap. 9 of this thesis. Still, a brief summary of the issues it raises is relevant here.

Firstly, the apparent distinction between “spirit” and “understanding” in these verses is taken as the rationale for the belief that speaking in tongues constitutes speaking in non-human ecstatic utterances. In this distinction is seen a radical separation between a person’s “understanding” and his or her “spirit,” which, it is assumed, refers to the emotional side of the human psyche and is inaccessible to one’s rational side. As a result, these verses are understood to mean that the glossolalist, inspired by the Holy Spirit, expresses sentiments meaningful only to one’s spirit, but meaningless to one’s intellect.

Secondly, the word “unfruitful” in v. 14 is said to signify that glossolalia is basically unintelligible. As mentioned previously in chap. 8, Keener and Bruce claim that it simply means that the speaker in tongues is unaware of what he is saying.⁸⁵⁷ Conzelmann, Grosheide, Lanier, and others maintain that it means that the hearers cannot understand the glossolalist’s speech and therefore are not benefited by it.⁸⁵⁸ On the other hand, Horsley, Best, and Keener are among the many who suggest that Paul had been influenced by first-century Platonic thought and, therefore, that the term “unfruitful” means that the glossolalist’s mind was rendered inactive by the Holy

⁸⁵⁷ Keener, 1-2 Corinthians, 113; Bruce, 1 & 2 Corinthians, 131.

⁸⁵⁸ Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 237-238; Grosheide, *1 Corinthians*, 326; Lanier, “With Stammering Lips,” 266.

Spirit when he or she spoke in tongues.⁸⁵⁹ Consequently, the glossolalist has no idea what he is saying and the general feeling is that neither has anyone else.

Opposing these views are the earlier references to the human spirit in 1 Cor 2:11 and 5:3-4, and elsewhere in the OT Scriptures, which indicate that the human spirit not only has an emotive function, but that it has, among other things, a cognitive function as well. Since the “spirit” referred to in 1 Cor 14:2 more than likely refers to the glossolalists’ own spirit (see chap. 9), this infers that glossolalists were not only aware of what they were saying but that they were also the source of the same.

On the other hand, the term *νοῦς* has more than one proper meaning, including “the understanding of a matter.” When the phrase “but my *νοῦς* is unfruitful” (14:14) is interpreted accordingly, this clause simply means that if Paul were to mimic the Corinthian glossolalists’ use of tongues in church services, it would be contrary to what he understood the purpose of the gift to be. Therefore, it would be of no benefit to himself, or to anyone else, for that matter. It would be of no benefit to Paul himself, because it would be self-edifying (see v. 4) rather than church edifying (see 1 Cor 12:7) and, thus, it would rob him of the blessing that comes with intelligibly communicating the gospel story to others (see comments on 1 Cor 14:18 below). It would be of no benefit to the church, because his hearers would not be able to understand a word that he was saying and therefore could not be edified by it.

Praying with the Spirit and the Understanding

Consequently, Paul determined that when he would be engaged in future acts of public worship he would both pray and sing “with the spirit” and “with the understanding” (1 Cor 14:15). However, because the *πνεῦμα* and the *νοῦς* mean

⁸⁵⁹ Horsley, *1 Corinthians*, 180-181; Best, “The Interpretation of Tongues,” 47; Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 112; cf. Mitton, “Notes of Recent Exposition,” 226-227.

different things to different people these expressions also have a diversity of meanings. As far as Conzelmann is concerned, Paul is being critical of the aforementioned Platonic philosophy of inspiration which taught that the $\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$ is subservient to the divine $\pi\nu\epsilon\upsilon\mu\alpha$ and that it is either dispossessed or rendered inactive by the same, thus giving free reign to the frenzied and ecstatic worship of the pagan deities. By declaring that he would engage both his $\pi\nu\epsilon\upsilon\mu\alpha$ and his $\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$ in his acts of public worship, Paul was essentially saying that the local ecstasies (i.e., the local glossolalists) had no right to think that they too could express themselves without restraint. The inference is that the $\pi\nu\epsilon\upsilon\mu\alpha$ was to be subordinate to the $\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$.

In vv. 16-17, Paul makes the point that to use tongues in church services to edify self was irrational, unacceptable, and contrary to the principle of putting the interests of the church before those of self, which he stresses throughout is the standard by which the value of this gift is to be determined.⁸⁶⁰ Proof of the same, he infers, can be found in the effect that speaking with tongues has on all non-tongues-speaking members of the church (v.16).⁸⁶¹ Since they cannot understand what the glossolalist is saying, Paul claims that they cannot intelligently join with the speaker in his or her devotions and therefore are not benefited by them (17). More importantly, this assertion that the ἰδιῶται would not know what he was talking about if he were to sing and pray with his spirit in the local assembly, is taken to mean that glossolalia is essentially unintelligible unless it is interpreted.⁸⁶²

Because these remarks are similar to those in vv. 2-5, where Paul says that no one but God can understand a word that the glossolalist is saying unless they are

⁸⁶⁰ Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 237-238.

⁸⁶¹ Ibid., 238.

⁸⁶² Cf. Ciampa and Rosner, *1 Corinthians*, 586.

interpreted, the non-human languages camp uses them as supporting evidence to prove that glossolalia is an esoteric heavenly language that is “directed toward God.” However, this close relationship between the two passages may be its undoing. It has already been shown that Paul’s comments in v. 2 regarding the unintelligibility of the glossolalist’s speech relates to the Corinthians’ use of this gift in church to edify self, and not to the gift itself. We have also established that this usage was contrary to the gift’s intent, namely that it was meant to be used to edify the church (see 1 Cor 12:8-10). Furthermore, because the spoken word cannot edify anyone unless it is understood, it would appear that glossolalia must constitute the God-given ability to speak in other human languages without having to learn them first. A “final” reading of the ἵνα clause in 1 Cor 14:5b (μᾶλλον δὲ ἵνα προφητεύητε) would appear to support this conclusion. If this is the case, it means that, given the right audience, the glossolalist’s speech could be understood.

It is clear from the analogies given in 1 Cor 14:7-11 that unless the words spoken by the glossolalist are understood, they are a complete waste of time (see v. 9). To illustrate this point, Paul, as we have already noted, assumes the role of the self-edifying Corinthian glossolalist (v. 14) and describes the detrimental effect that his words would have on the “uninformed” in the assembly, if he were to speak in tongues (see vv. 15-16). Accordingly, these remarks about singing and praying in the spirit, like those in vv. 2-5, are not referring to the tongues phenomenon *per se*, but rather they elaborate on the said abuse. Hence, they too are unable to shed any light on the exact nature of the gift itself. It would be a different story if both passages were unrelated, but they appear to be telling the same story.

In v. 18, Paul “lets it be known that he is not arguing in his own interests when

he relatively degrades ecstasy.”⁸⁶³ He can speak in tongues more than all of the Corinthians put together, he says. Then, in v. 19, he delivers his verdict. And what a somber one it is!⁸⁶⁴ He would rather say something in church that would be a blessing to others than prattle on in a tongue that no one could understand.

It would appear that most commentators agree with this interpretation. For example, Robertson and Plummer claim that in this passage (vv. 14-19) Paul argues that the gift of tongues is inferior to the other gifts of the Spirit, “because in it the reason has no control; and [that he] the Apostle has misgivings about devotions in which the reason has no part (v. 19).”⁸⁶⁵ As far as he is concerned, “ineffable emotion” is more of a hindrance than a help to those who witness it, since they cannot intelligently participate in that which they do not understand (v. 16).⁸⁶⁶ Still, it is clear from what Paul says about the content of the glossolalists prayer in v. 16, that he believes this gift to be of value; nevertheless, its worth is lost on those who cannot comprehend the words spoken.⁸⁶⁷

To Robertson and Plummer, v.18 indicates that Paul “knows what he is talking about; [and that] he is not depreciating a gift of which he has no experience.” On the contrary, he possesses this gift, he says, “with greater intensity than all of them [that is, the Corinthians],” which Robertson and Plummer propose, may indicate that this was a little known fact, in that Paul exercised this gift in private rather than in public. Here, they claim, is “strong evidence” that speaking in tongues does not refer to

⁸⁶³ Ibid., 239.

⁸⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁶⁵ Robertson and Plummer, *1 Corinthians*, 312.

⁸⁶⁶ Ibid., 312-313.

⁸⁶⁷ Ibid., 314.

speaking in foreign languages. Paul, they argue, “does not say that he speaks ‘in *more* tongues’; and he could use his understanding in speaking Latin or Syriac just as much as in speaking Greek.”⁸⁶⁸ “The emphatic position of πάντων,” they muse, “perhaps means ‘more than all of you put together’; but ‘more than all of you’ is sufficient for the argument.”⁸⁶⁹ Regardless of possessing this gift with greater intensity than the Corinthians, unlike them, he refuses to use it irrationally in church as they do (v. 19).

On the other hand, Fee claims that this contrast between singing and praying with the πνεῦμα and the νοῦς (which he sees as the “mind”) was designed to relegate speaking with tongues to private practice, whereas rational communication in prayer and song was to characterize the church itself.⁸⁷⁰ He argues that “Paul’s point, the same one he has been making throughout, is clear enough: Praising God (or praying) in tongues, even though it is by the Spirit, does not build up anyone in the assembly (v. 17) since what is said is unintelligible.”⁸⁷¹ And that, he concludes, is the reason why the use of tongues is totally unacceptable in the assembly. It does not edify the “unlearned.”⁸⁷²

To Fee, Paul’s statement about his ability to speak in tongues, more than all of the Corinthians put together, was meant to affirm this gift, but there was more to it than that. It was also designed to add intensity to his subsequent declaration that even though this was the case, he would not use this gift in church unless it benefited the people present. This, he claims, confirms that Paul is making a distinction throughout

⁸⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁷⁰ Fee, *I Corinthians*, 671.

⁸⁷¹ Ibid., 672.

⁸⁷² Ibid., 674.

between private and public devotions. The inference is that speaking in tongues is a private rather than a public gift.⁸⁷³

These sentiments are in keeping with the presupposition that the πνεῦμα and the νοῦς are separate and distinct from each other, and with the assumption that the πνεῦμα refers to the emotional side of the human psyche whereas the νοῦς refers to the mind. However, these assumptions appear to be flawed and as a result should be treated with caution. In addition to the references in the OT and 1 Cor 2:11 and 5:3-4 which indicate that the human spirit has a cognitive as well as an emotive function, it is clear from 1 Cor 14:5c that the glossolalist was capable of interpreting his own speech, without the aid of the additional gift of interpretation. This is confirmed in vv. 13-14 where the meaning of the word “pray” does not mean “to ask.” Rather, it indicates that when the glossolalist was to pray in public he was to do it with the intention of interpreting his speech afterwards, so that the whole church could be blessed by what he or she said.

Furthermore, it is apparent from Paul’s remarks concerning the purpose of the charismata, including the gift of tongues (1 Cor 12:7), that his reference to the self-edification of the tongues-speaker in 14:4 constitutes an abuse of this gift and that he is addressing this problem throughout 1 Cor 14. On the other hand, Paul’s earlier references to the νοῦς in 1 Cor 1:10 and 2:16 would suggest that it refers to the understanding of a matter rather than to the mind itself in 1 Cor 14:14-15.

Keener presents a slightly different view to that of Conzelmann, Robertson and Plummer, and Fee. The solution to the problem of using tongues to pray in church is simple, he says. Glossolalists were to seek to interpret their speech for the

⁸⁷³ Ibid., 675; cf. Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 1117-1118; Soards, *1 Corinthians*, 288-289.

benefit of the whole church (14:13); “public prayer, like prophecy, can be edifying so long as it is intelligible. In this context, ‘praying’ and ‘singing with the mind’ (14:15) refers to interpreting the prayer or song in a tongue.”⁸⁷⁴ Similarly, Luther claims that “to speak ‘with the mind’ [understanding] is equivalent to interpreting and illuminating the sense for others.”⁸⁷⁵

This view also appears to be flawed. In 1 Cor 14:19, Paul actually explains what he means by the expression “to sing and pray with the understanding,” however this explanation does not include the idea of interpreting one’s speech for the benefit of others. For Paul, it meant that when he spoke in church he would use the local vernacular so that others could learn from his own knowledge and experience.⁸⁷⁶ He was not going to waste his time and energy by speaking in a tongue that no one else could understand. That, as discussed earlier, would be as pointless as playing musical instruments haphazardly; as useless as a trumpet giving the wrong signal in battle; and as futile as a foreigner addressing the church in his native tongue.⁸⁷⁷ But not only that, he did it for a reason, he says: namely, so that he could teach others what he knew about the plan of salvation. That way, it would bear fruit for the kingdom of heaven and thus edify the church.

This also explains why he placed a caveat on pursuing this kind of knowledge (cf. 2:9-16) in 14:5c. Unless the Corinthians intended to share it with others, that is, unless they used it to prophesy, there was no point in seeking it. Unless it was passed on to others it would be as useless and as fruitless as speaking in tongues in the local

⁸⁷⁴ Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 114.

⁸⁷⁵ Luther, *Biblia*, 327, margin note to verse 15b, “with the mind.”

⁸⁷⁶ Cf. Hodge, *1 Corinthians*, 292.

⁸⁷⁷ Cf. H. A. Ironside, *Addresses on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York: Loizeaux Brothers, 1938/1941), 442-443.

assembly (cf. v. 14). This is brought out again in v. 23 where Paul says that if this gift, upon which the glossolalists prided themselves, dominated their worship services it would turn people away from the church, rather than draw them to it (see chap. 12). Besides, it is contrary to the principle set down by Paul in 10:31-33, where he says that whatever we do should be done to the glory of God, and for the good of others. That is why Paul would not speak in tongues in church. It would not benefit the local members.

The Question of Privacy

Still, his decision not to speak with tongues in church does not, as Fee contends, confirm that Paul is making a distinction throughout between private and public devotions. That is, it does not verify that speaking in tongues is a private rather than a public gift. A cursory glance, as O. Palmer Robertson points out, may give the impression that Paul intends to contrast the private use of tongues with their public use. But a closer look at this assertion, he says, reveals that the comparison here is not between private and public utterances but between Paul's "experience in speaking in tongues, in the advancement of Christ's kingdom in general, [and] the practice of those who were so eager to promote tongues in the church at Corinth."⁸⁷⁸

Paul's preliminary remarks concerning his ability to speak in tongues more than all of the Corinthians put together (v. 18), followed by his preference for intelligibility over that of un-interpreted tongues in church services, make it very clear that he is specifically addressing the Corinthians' use of this gift for personal edification. Hence, the contrast here is not between the private and the public use of tongues, but rather between the Corinthians' use of tongues to edify self and "tongues

⁸⁷⁸ O. Palmer Robertson, *The Final Word: A Biblical Response to the Case for Tongues and Prophecy Today* (Edinburgh, UK: Banner of Truth Trust, 1993), 38.

as they relate to the church as a whole.” Thus Paul, according to Robertson, says:

‘In relating to you, my record is plain. Recognise this fact. Don’t talk to me about speaking in tongues as though I know nothing about the matter, for I have spoken in tongues more than all of you. I know first-hand about speaking in tongues. *But* with reference to the *church*, I would prefer to speak clearly in a language that will edify. Although I do as a matter of fact speak in tongues more than all of you, my concern is for edification.’⁸⁷⁹

A further point to consider is that there is nothing in the above statement that cannot be used with equal effect to validate the human languages viewpoint. As mentioned earlier (see chap. 9), foreign languages would be as incomprehensible to one who is unfamiliar with the language spoken as unintelligible non-human speech would be. Furthermore, this declaration does not mention how Paul intended to use this gift outside of the church. There may have been occasions when he used it in his private devotions but there is no way of ascertaining this. However, because he not only understood but advocates that all charismata, including the gift of tongues, were supposed to edify the church, it is far more likely that he used it in a public, rather than in a private manner.

“More Than”

As mentioned above, Robertson and Plummer argue that the word *πάνω* in v. 18 means “with greater intensity” rather than “with more tongues,” which, they claim, is “strong evidence” that speaking in tongues does not refer to speaking in foreign languages. But what do they mean by the expression “with greater intensity”? Do they mean that when Paul spoke in tongues that he did so with greater passion than the Corinthians, or do they mean that he did it more often than them? Further explanations are sought. With regard to the former, it is highly unlikely that Paul

⁸⁷⁹ Ibid., 39.

spoke in tongues with greater passion than that exhibited by the Corinthians'. In fact, it is evident from the problems that this gift had caused in Corinth that the local tongues-speakers were extremely passionate about their gift and had used it to excess in the assembly. Moreover, Paul's subsequent comments about the detrimental effect that an all-tongues church service would have on non-believers, and the rules and regulations he sets down to curtail these excesses are indicative that this was indeed the case (see vv. 23, 26-28).

On the other hand, if by "more than" Paul is referring to the frequency of occasions and the amount of time he spent speaking in tongues, then, this would mean that the glossolalist's degree of giftedness was entirely dependent upon how often he or she spoke with tongues. The fact that glossolalists in general (vv. 27-28), including Paul himself (v. 19), could decide when to speak and when not to speak in tongues in church, indicates that once bestowed the gift was permanent and that the recipient was able to use it, or refrain from using it, at will. Clearly, then, any glossolalist, and not just Paul, could exercise this gift as frequently or infrequently as he or she wanted to, which makes nonsense of the possibility that "more than" means with greater frequency and for longer on each occasion.⁸⁸⁰

That leaves just two further possible interpretations of the expression "with more than" in 1 Cor 14:18: "I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all." The first is that Paul was able to speak in a greater variety of unintelligible utterances than his tongues-speaking counterparts in Corinth. The term γένη γλωσσῶν, "species of tongues" (12:10), allows for this, although no one appears to espouse this view. Besides, it is nonsensical. If glossolalia were to constitute a supernatural

⁸⁸⁰ Cf. Thiselton, 1 Corinthians, 1117; Meyer, Epistles to the Corinthians, 2:17.

prayer language, as many believe, then what virtue is there in communing with God in a variety of tongues that the speaker cannot understand? Would not one such tongue be sufficient for this task? The second possibility is that “more than” means that Paul could speak in more foreign languages than the Corinthians could. This interpretation is not only rational, but it appears to be supported by the fact that no matter where Paul ministered it was his custom to become like one of the locals in order that he might reach some of them with the gospel. This is what he says:

Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some (1 Cor 9:19-22, NIV).

Although Greek was a universal language in Paul’s day, and he could have used it to evangelize, obviously the most effective way to get one’s message across was to assimilate into the local community, which included speaking their language. In other words, unless one communicated on their level and in their primary tongue the chances were that success would not attend one’s evangelistic efforts. It is clear from this passage in 1 Cor 9:19-22 that Paul appreciated this fact and became one with the indigenous population in every way that he could, without compromising his principles. This included speaking the local dialect. We gather from his resolve not to speak in church unless his words could be clearly understood by the entire congregation, that this comment did not apply to the Corinthian church alone, but that it applied to all churches, in all countries, to which he ministered. To use Ironside’s words, “he spoke to the Greeks in their own language, to the Romans in theirs, to the Hebrews he spoke in their tongue, and to the various barbarians in the tongues to

which they were accustomed.”⁸⁸¹

Paul did all this, he explains, for the sake of the gospel, in order that he might share in its blessings with those to whom he preached it (v. 23). That fact, more than anything else, makes complete sense of his confession: “I thank my God that I speak with tongues more than you all” (14:18). This was no idle boast on Paul’s part, but was his way of expressing his gratitude for the great blessings (over and above those of the average speaker in tongues) he gained by being able to use so many different tongues to share the good news of salvation with others. These were blessings the Corinthians had failed to gain in their own lives; but which Paul wanted them to experience for themselves. That is why he tried so hard throughout this chapter to channel their energies into building up the church instead of self.

So rather than indicate that speaking in tongues does not refer to speaking in foreign languages, as Robertson and Plummer contend, the phrase “more than” in 1 Cor 14:18 implies that the opposite is in fact the case. That is, that Paul was able to speak in more human languages than all of the Corinthians put together.

Conclusion

In this chapter we found that the following are usually interpreted to mean that glossolalia is “discourse directed toward God,” and therefore that it is entirely different to the Acts 2 tongues phenomenon...:

1. The analogies drawn from musical instruments played haphazardly.
2. The uncertain call of the trumpet on the field of battle.
3. The incomprehensible speech of a foreigner (1 Cor 14:6-11).
4. The reference to “interpretation” in v. 1.

⁸⁸¹ Ironside, *1 Corinthians*, 442-443.

5. The reference to “singing and praying in the spirit” in vv. 14-16.
6. Paul’s reluctance to speak in tongues in church (v. 19).
7. The assertion that he could speak in tongues “more than” all of the Corinthians put together (v. 18).

On the other hand, we found that all of these passages relate specifically to the Corinthians’ use of tongues in church to edify self, and not to the tongues phenomenon *per se*. For instance, the various analogies with speaking in tongues in the local assembly attack the fallacy that tongues-speakers were greater than their non-tongues-speaking brothers and sisters in the church. Paul’s point is that, unless the words spoken can be understood by others, speaking in tongues is a complete waste of time and renders the speaker no greater than a low status barbarian. Therefore, he would rather the Corinthians channel their energies into building up the church (v. 12). For tongues-speakers this meant that they were to pray with the intention of interpreting their prayers afterwards so that all could benefit from their speech (v. 13), which implies that glossolalists were fully aware of what they were saying when speaking in tongues. Accordingly, Paul’s statement that his *νοῦς* would be “unfruitful” when speaking in tongues (v. 14) does not mean that his mind would be rendered inactive by the Holy Spirit and/or that he was unaware of what he was saying when using tongues to pray in church.

On the contrary, it is more likely to mean that Paul’s personal knowledge of what he was saying when speaking in tongues would be of no use to the church because no one else could understand a word that he said. He elaborates on this point in vv. 15-16 where he says that if he were to sing and pray in church in tongues, no one would be able to join in or benefit from the exercise. In conjunction with his comments about speaking in tongues in vv. 2-5, this passage is considered to be one

of the strongest evidences that glossolalia is a God-directed, esoteric heavenly language. It is noted, however, that both passages are referring to the Corinthians' abuse of this gift and not to the phenomenon itself, which means that it lacks cogency as far as the phenomenon itself is concerned.

In addition, Paul would miss out on the blessing that comes from sharing the word of God with others. Consequently, he would rather speak five words in church that could be understood by those present than 10,000 words in a language that no one could understand (v. 19), despite him being able to speak in tongues more than all of the Corinthians put together (v. 18).

We also found that because glossolalists, as well as Paul, could speak or refrain from speaking in tongues at will (cf. 1 Cor 14:19, 27-28), the expression "more than" in v. 18 is unlikely to mean that Paul could speak in tongues "more frequently" or "for longer" than the Corinthians could. It probably means that Paul could speak in "more languages" than the Corinthians put together. Besides, Paul needed to speak in as many languages and dialects as were spoken in the communities he visited, if he was to integrate with them as he was wont to do (1 Cor 9: 23).

CHAPTER 12 - TONGUES AS A SIGN AND THE ROLE OF THE INTERPRETER

In 1 Cor 14:20, Paul appeals to the Corinthians to stop thinking like children and to start thinking like mature adults. In order to keep this appeal in perspective, we need to review again the problem that Paul had encountered in Corinth of believers equating giftedness with spirituality and his response to this misconception throughout the letter.

Firstly, it is evident from 1 Cor 4:6-8 that the Corinthians held that giftedness is “the” sign of genuine spirituality. It is also evident that, because of their giftedness, some of the Corinthians assumed that they had already attained spiritual maturity. Paul’s initial response to this spiritual arrogance and complacency, on the Corinthians’ part, is to compare their pseudo-piety with the humility of a genuine apostle. He also makes the point that a person’s standing with God does not depend upon how articulate they are, but on whether they have the Holy Spirit in their lives (4:8-20; cf. 2:4-5).

Secondly, it is clear from Paul’s reference to the Jews who perished in the wilderness because of their idolatry, sexual immorality, and complaining, etc. (10:1-12), that he wanted to warn the Corinthians who were guilty of self-adulation and/or the adulation of others, of the peril they faced. The same can be said of his comments in vv. 23-24 which stress that Christians are to look out for the interests of others rather than their own. In other words, if believers were truly spiritual they would seek God’s glory and the salvation of others, rather than their own selfish advantage (vv 31-33).

Thirdly, it is obvious from Paul’s lengthy discussion on the place and the purpose of the gifts of the Spirit in the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:1-31) that he is

endeavouring to put the gifts of the Spirit into perspective for the Corinthians. His main points in this chapter are that:

1. The Holy Spirit, instead of self, is the source of the charismata.
2. The gifts of the Spirit are for the collective benefit of the church, not for personal edification.
3. The gifts were never meant to be a source of pride or a cause of rivalry among believers.

Next, Paul extols the virtues of love over that of giftedness and admonishes the Corinthians to pursue this godly attribute at all costs, and to seek after spiritual things, so that they can edify the church (1 Cor 13:1-14:1). This runs contrary to the current practices of the local glossolalists who were using their gift in worship services to edify self (vv. 2, 4). In 14:5, Paul encourages tongues-speakers, in particular, to use their gift to build up the church rather than self and, at the same time, he attacks the fallacy that glossolalists are more spiritual (or greater) than any other worshipper in the assembly.

In addition, he emphasizes the uselessness of using tongues to speak in church services when no one present can understand what is said (1 Cor 14:6-11). As a result, he reinforces his earlier comments in vv. 1-5 about building up the church instead of self, by encouraging the Corinthians to channel their zeal, which includes their zeal for the charismata, into the task of building up the church (v. 12). For glossolalists who were using their gift to pray in church, this means interpreting their speech for the benefit of the whole church (v.13).

Finally, Paul declares that when he speaks in church services he does so in the vernacular so that all may intelligently participate in his prayer and praise, as well as learn from his knowledge and experience (1 Cor 14:14-19). Hence, he appeals to the

Corinthians, especially the glossolalists, to give up their inflated ideas about their own spirituality and to follow his example in speaking intelligibly in public worship services. He states: “Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature” (v. 20).

The Nature of the Corinthians’ Childish Thinking

The word translated as “understanding” or “thinking” in this verse is not νοῦς, but φρόν, which, Blomberg affirms, refers to the “the psychological faculty of thoughtful planning, often with the implication of being wise and provident.”⁸⁸² However, in this instance, it is used in a negative sense for the childish way in which the Corinthians have been treating the gift of tongues. Fee says: “Their childishness consists of *thinking* improperly that tongues serves as evidence of their new transcendent spirituality and thus marks off the spiritual quality of their gathering, while in fact they evidence all kinds of ethical/behavioral aberrations.”⁸⁸³ Similarly, Hays claims Paul is here suggesting “that the Corinthians’ absorption with spiritual gifts as an end in themselves is childish.”⁸⁸⁴ To Garland, Paul is not directly accusing the Corinthians of being childish, but he does imply that they were not as mature as they thought they were. This is evident from Paul’s “negative appraisal of their use of tongues in worship” services and their overestimation of this gift.⁸⁸⁵ Barrett writes that the Corinthians “were proud of their achievements, but bickered among

⁸⁸² Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 270.

⁸⁸³ Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 679.

⁸⁸⁴ Hays, *1 Corinthians*, 238.

⁸⁸⁵ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 645.

themselves, and preferred tongues to other gifts.”⁸⁸⁶ On the other hand, Thiselton argues that:

Nowhere does Paul state more clearly than in v. 20 that the way in which speaking in tongues is used at Corinth ministers to childish love of display or thoughtless self-centeredness. It is utterly pointless to seek to disengage references to childishness in ch. 13 from issues about tongues when the connection here is transparent and explicit. On the other hand, Paul does not say that speaking in tongues is childish; only that *their public use* and their tendency to minister at Corinth to *self-advertisement at the cost of concern for others* betrays the thoughtless, self-centered horizons of the child who has not yet learned to put himself or herself in the place of others and to seek to see themselves through the eyes of others.⁸⁸⁷

Clearly, none of these scholars believe that v. 20 implies that speaking in tongues is childish, but rather point out that the Corinthians’ obsession with, and public use of, this gift to edify self is childish. In other words, Paul is saying that speaking in tongues in public worship services, without interpretation, is not only meaningless and crass (see vv. 6-11), but it is also juvenile.

Of course, this, as Thiselton reminds us, is not the first time in this letter that Paul describes the locals as immature. In 13:11, he claims that when he was a child he thought like a child and he spoke like a child, but now that he is an adult he has put those things behind him and occupies himself with more mature thinking. The context in which he expresses these sentiments indicates that Paul expects the Corinthians to exhibit maturity and to discontinue their inappropriate fascination with the gifts of the Spirit; that is, he implores them to put their erroneous ideas about giftedness and spirituality behind them and to behave like mature Christians instead. “A more mature perspective,” suggests Hays, “would consider the impact of these gifts on others, not only those immediately within the church but also others in

⁸⁸⁶ Barrett, *1 Corinthians*, 322; cf. Kistemaker, *1 Corinthians*, 497.

⁸⁸⁷ Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 1119; cf. Sweet, “A Sign for Unbelievers,” 256.

Corinth who might be confronted with the gospel.”⁸⁸⁸

However, it was not in this respect alone that the Corinthians revealed their spiritual immaturity. Recall that because they also favoured one teacher over another and were envious, proud, and divisive, Paul insists that they were mere “babes in Christ” and, hence, were no more spiritual at the time of writing than when he first encountered them (see 1 Cor 3:1-4). We gather from this passage that the reference to the Corinthians’ childishness in 14:20 implies that Paul considered the glossolalists’ sophist-like flaunting of the gift of tongues in public worship services to be as equally destructive to the church’s peace and harmony as that of its prevailing egotistical, partisan spirit. We can also deduce from this passage that just as the various factions in Corinth were personally responsible for the ensuing schisms in the church, the local glossolalists, and not the Holy Spirit, were responsible for the disruptive effect that their speech was having upon the church. This presupposes that they were not only the source of their speech (see chap. 9) but that they were in total control of it.

Paul’s placing of the onus for change on those who speak in tongues (v. 20) also presupposes their complete control over this gift. It follows that if they had no say in the matter, it would be illogical to ask them to refrain from speaking in tongues in church, as Paul chose to do (cf. vv. 27-28). Paul emphasises in 1 Cor 14:20 that the way to gain spiritual maturity, and hence wisdom (cf. 4:7-8), is to bring their thoughts into harmony with the mind and will of God and thus to use their gift “for the common good” (12:7, NIV), following the example set by Paul himself (vv. 14-19).

To show the Corinthians just how childish they were to think that giftedness equates to spirituality and that speaking in tongues was a sign of spiritual maturity, Paul goes on to make the point that tongues are as a sign for unbelievers, not for

⁸⁸⁸ Hays, *1 Corinthians*, 238.

believers (v. 22). Having said that, he immediately appears to contradict himself by saying that if an unbeliever were to witness a hypothetical all-tongues worship service, he or she would consider the Corinthians to be “mad” and, consequently, would walk away from the church, rather than be attracted to it.

The word Paul uses in v. 23 for “mad” is *μαίνεσθε*, which usually means insane, crazy or mentally unbalanced; however, as noted in chap. 8 of this paper, it was also used in ancient times to describe the religious frenzy associated with the mystery-cults. This alleged association with the ecstatic worship of pagan deities has led some commentators to interpret the word “mad,” in this verse, to mean that the tongues spoken in Corinth were both non-human and ecstatic (see p. 338).

In addition, Paul’s directive that glossolalists were not to speak in church unless someone else interpreted their words for them (vv. 27-28), is considered by many to be further evidence that glossolalia was incomprehensible to humans, including to the one speaking in tongues (see p. 345). These claims, the last in our study of 1 Cor 12-14, will be analyzed in the remainder of this chapter.

The Assyrian Invasion of Judaea

To illustrate the point that tongues are as a sign for unbelievers rather than for believers, Paul refers the reader to the story of Judaea’s invasion by the all-conquering Assyrian army in the days of King Hezekiah (1 Cor 14:21). The story is told in Isa 28 of the contempt that Israel’s self-indulgent and intoxicated priests and prophets had for the prophet Isaiah’s warning; that if they did not repent of their sins and turn from their evil ways, they would incur the wrath of an angry God. That is, if they would not listen to his plain and simple entreaties, God would teach them obedience by subjecting them to the harsh discipline of an occupation army that could not speak the Hebrew tongue (vv. 11-12).

According to Thiselton, this was a simple case of poetic justice. He says:

The disdain of plain speech comes home with a vengeance: if they want something other than intelligible speech, they can have it; however, it will serve as an uncomfortable judgment, for it will place many of God's own people for whom they ought to care in the position of *aliens and outsiders*.⁸⁸⁹

Similarly, Witherington claims that: "As a judgment against hardhearted Judah, God spoke to them in a foreign tongue that they could not understand, because they would not hear the truth in their own tongue."⁸⁹⁰ Keener likewise affirms that the Judaeans "refused to hear the true prophets (29:10-12; 30:9-11); therefore, unintelligible speech is a sign of judgment that, ironically, they will understand."⁸⁹¹ Garland comments that: "Since Israel refused to heed what God spoke to them in understandable language through the prophet, God will now approach them by means of the foreign language of the conquering Assyrians."⁸⁹² In the same vein, Wayne Grudem writes that "the 'other tongues' in Isa 28.11 are Isaiah's prediction of the foreign speech which the Lord would bring to the Samaritans by way of punishment for their stubborn refusal to hear and obey his words."⁸⁹³

But what does this disciplinary action, on God's part, in Isaiah's day have in common with the Corinthians' inappropriate use of tongues in public worship to edify self? The connection between these two events is notoriously difficult to determine and is complicated somewhat by the fact that Paul's quotation of Isa 28:11 is "quite free," as Grudem puts it, in that it differs in certain respects from that of the LXX, for

⁸⁸⁹ Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 1121.

⁸⁹⁰ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 284.

⁸⁹¹ Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 114.

⁸⁹² Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 645.

⁸⁹³ Wayne A. Grudem, "1 Corinthians 14.20-25: Prophecy and Tongues as Signs of God's Attitude," *WTS* 41/2 (1979): 386.

instance. In 1 Cor 14:21, Paul says that God will speak to the rebellious Jews in Hezekiah's day, whereas the LXX claims that it is the Assyrians that will speak to them. In addition, Paul changes the tense from perfect to future in respect to the phrase, "they will not hear." "Thus it has reference not to past stubbornness but to a future refusal to hear the speech in foreign tongues."⁸⁹⁴

Thiselton thinks that Paul makes two relevant points here. Firstly, in the same way that the Assyrian army with their foreign tongue would render the Jews aliens in their own country, speaking with tongues in public worship services was inappropriate, because it had a similar effect upon the local believers. It made them feel as though they were "*foreigners in a foreign land and 'not at home' in their own home.*" Secondly, in the same way that the Israelites would resent the sound of the Assyrian tongue in their own land, speaking in tongues would not draw unbelievers to the gospel of Christ.⁸⁹⁵ Garland sums it up this way: "n the Corinthian context, speaking in 'other tongues' will fail to convey any meaningful message or bring repentance, just as it failed to do in Isaiah's day."⁸⁹⁶

Blomberg is unsure of the relationship between Isa 28:11-12 and 1 Cor 14. Nevertheless, he considers that it might have something to do with the "Hebrew syllables that resemble nonsense sounds" found in the verses either side of the passage in question (vv. 10, 13). It could be that these "sounds," he claims, were similar to the sounds made by glossolalists, when they spoke in tongues, and that the unintelligible utterances of the tongues-speakers made the same impression upon

⁸⁹⁴ Grudem, "1 Corinthians 14. 20-25," 386.

⁸⁹⁵ Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 1121.

⁸⁹⁶ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 648.

others that these syllables had made upon the unrepentant Israelites in Isaiah's day.⁸⁹⁷

The point of this OT quotation, says Barrett, is that speaking in tongues is as ineffective in building up others as the use of the Assyrian tongue was in bringing about a reformation in the lives of God's rebellious people.⁸⁹⁸ To David Lanier, the "common link seems to be the impact upon unbelievers: untranslated tongues in both instances effectively shut off the unbeliever in his unbelief."⁸⁹⁹ As far as Peter Roberts is concerned, there is little similarity between these passages in Isa 28:11-12 and 1 Cor 14, "except for the strange tongues and their ineffectiveness."⁹⁰⁰ In other words, the common denominator between the two is the words and not the OT events.

Tongues: A Sign for Unbelievers

The meaning of the expression, "tongues are for a sign to unbelievers" (v. 22), is even more difficult to determine than the nature of the connection between Isa 28:11-12 and 1 Cor 14. On the one hand, Paul claims that tongues are a sign for unbelievers, which, under normal circumstances, would imply that they would leave a good impression on them. On the other hand, he appears to contradict himself by claiming that if unbelievers were to go into a church and hear nothing but tongues being spoken there, they would think that Christians must be mad (v. 23).⁹⁰¹ Accordingly, most commentators reason that because the sound of the Assyrian tongue in the land of Israel was a sign of God's judgment on the disobedient priests

⁸⁹⁷ Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 271.

⁸⁹⁸ Barrett, *1 Corinthians*, 323.

⁸⁹⁹ Lanier, "With Stammering Lips," 275.

⁹⁰⁰ Peter Roberts, "A Sign – Christian or Pagan [1 Cor 14:21-25]" *ET*, 90/7 (1979): 201.

⁹⁰¹ Cf. Sweet, "A Sign for Unbelievers," 241.

and prophets living there in Isaiah's day, the term "sign," in this passage, is to be taken in a negative rather than a positive sense.⁹⁰²

For instance, Fee claims that this whole passage (vv. 20-25) is an attack on the Corinthians' view that tongues were a sign to believers of their spiritual maturity and of God's presence in their assembly.⁹⁰³ This is obvious, he implies, from Paul's statement in v. 22 which says that tongues are a sign, not for believers, but for unbelievers, which in light of v. 21 functions to the disadvantage of unbelievers, not to their advantage."⁹⁰⁴ Barrett also understands the term "sign" in v. 22 in a negative sense. It follows from Paul's reference to this radical disciplinary action in Hezekiah's day (Isa 28:11-12), he says, that tongues are "a sign of judgement." That is, "when they are not met with faith (cf. Heb. iv.2) tongues *serve* to harden and thus to condemn the unbeliever (cf. verses 23 f.)"; although this is not their only function.⁹⁰⁵

Witherington reasons that "in view of the Isaiah quotation" in v. 21, the word σημεῖον in v. 22 "surely means . . . a sign of judgment that they are out of touch with God. This is the effect of uninterpreted tongues on the unbelievers in Corinth. They cannot respond positively but only say that the tongues-speakers are ecstatic."⁹⁰⁶

⁹⁰² MacGorman, "Glossolalic Error," 389; cf. Lanier, "With Stammering Lips," 273; Sweet, "A Sign for Unbelievers," 242; Stephen J. Chester, "Divine Madness? Speaking in Tongues in 1 Corinthians 14:23," *JSNT*, 27 (2005): 419.

⁹⁰³ Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 681-682; cf. Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 1124; Johanson, "Tongues, a Sign for Unbelievers?" 200; Lanier, "With Stammering Lips," 273; Sweet, "A Sign for Unbelievers," 244-245, 250; Roberts, "A Sign – Christian or Pagan," 201.

⁹⁰⁴ Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 681-682.

⁹⁰⁵ Barrett, *1 Corinthians*, 323; cf. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 650; MacGorman, "Glossolalic Error," 398; Joop F. M. Smit, "Tongues and Prophecy: Deciphering 1 Cor 14:22," *Bib*, 75/2 (1994): 176.

⁹⁰⁶ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 285.

Similarly, Keener concludes that “tongues are a sign to unbelievers, like those in Isaiah’s day who heeded only judgment; apparently they communicate in a way that confounds rather than converts unbelievers (14:23).”⁹⁰⁷ On the other hand, MacArthur sees tongues as being “primarily a sign of judgment to unbelieving Israel.”⁹⁰⁸ Whereas Morris asserts that, “‘tongues’ are a judgment on wilful unbelief (as in v. 21) while prophecy is for believers in the sense that it ‘makes believers of unbelievers.’”⁹⁰⁹

To Robertson and Plummer, Paul “does not say that they [tongues] *are* a sign, but that they are intended to *serve* as such.”⁹¹⁰ To which they add: “Nor does he say what kind of a sign, but the context shows that it is for judgment rather than for salvation.”⁹¹¹ Grudem takes the opposite view. He maintains that “Paul simply says, ‘Tongues are a sign.’”⁹¹² But, unlike most commentators, he believes that Paul is using the term “sign” in the “familiar and well-established [OT] sense” of God’s approval or disapproval. In other words, he believes that it can be used in both a positive and a negative sense. On the one hand, it was a sign of judgment on unbelief. On the other hand, it was a sign to believers that God was with his people and that he wanted to bless them. In regards to the tongue of the Assyrian invader in the days of King Hezekiah, he says, it functions as a sign of judgment rather than blessing.⁹¹³ In

⁹⁰⁷ Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 115.

⁹⁰⁸ MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, 223.

⁹⁰⁹ Morris, *1 Corinthians*, rev. ed., 193.

⁹¹⁰ Robertson and Plummer, *1 Corinthians*, 317; cf. Hasel, *Speaking in Tongues*, 139.

⁹¹¹ Robertson and Plummer, *1 Corinthians*, 317.

⁹¹² Grudem, “1 Corinthians 14.20-25,” 388.

⁹¹³ *Ibid.*, 390-391.

a similar vein, David Lanier suggests that maybe “the best way to view the concept of ‘sign’ is to take it as a neutral term connoting evidence of divine activity whether for judgment or blessing.”⁹¹⁴ Garland and Fee also maintain that it has a double meaning in 1 Cor 14:22-25.⁹¹⁵ Accordingly, there would be no contradiction in this passage if σημεῖον is used in both senses. Depending on whether the hearer is a believer or not, tongues would have either a positive or a negative effect on him or her.

In response to Paul’s so-called contradictory statements in 1 Cor 14:22-25, B. C. Johanson endeavours to solve the problem by suggesting “that v. 22 should be taken as a rhetorical question which Paul formulates by inference from the preceding quotation of Isa. xxviii. 11-12 in v. 21.”⁹¹⁶ In other words, v. 22 reflects the Corinthians’ thinking about speaking in tongues rather than Paul’s own thoughts on the subject. In short, Johanson maintains that the Corinthians thought that glossolalia “was a sign that God was among them” and that it “had apologetic value, which prophecy did not.”⁹¹⁷ But, he suggests, Paul argues against this assumption by claiming that unbelievers would not be convicted by this practice, but would “think it incoherent lunacy instead.”⁹¹⁸

According to Garland, the lack of supporting textual evidence for this position, and the fact that Paul “does not state his own counterconviction,” militates against this interpretation. “It fails,” he explains, “to take into account the οὖν (*oun*) in 14:23, which serves to point out the consequences of the statement in 14:22 rather than to

⁹¹⁴ Lanier, “With Stammering Lips,” 273.

⁹¹⁵ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 650; Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 883.

⁹¹⁶ Johanson, “Tongues, A Sign for Unbelievers?” 202.

⁹¹⁷ Garland. *1 Corinthians*, 649.

⁹¹⁸ Ibid.

contradict it.”⁹¹⁹ Thus, as Smit points out, “the illustrations [in vv. 23-25] elucidate the assertions of v. 22 and cannot be read as a refutation.”⁹²⁰

Smit handles the problem of v. 22 in a different way. He claims that “Paul depicts glossolalia as a ‘sign’, which inexpert outsiders do not interpret as a gift from God, but as a *μανία* coming from the idols.”⁹²¹ But this view, says Garland, is contrary to Paul’s teaching that tongues are “a gift of the Spirit, not an unfortunate spiritual residue from the Corinthians’ pagan past, and he assures them that he speaks in tongues more than all of them. His own tongue-speaking experience is certainly not a pagan vestige.”⁹²²

In addition to the widespread belief that the word “sign” in v.22 should be taken in a negative rather than a positive sense, the converting power of prophesying over that of speaking in tongues, in church services (v. 23), is taken as further evidence that the gift of prophecy is superior to the gift of tongues. Not only that, because an all-tongues church service would repel rather than attract unbelievers, the word “mad” in v. 23, declares Grosheide, implies that speaking in tongues cannot refer to “speaking in a foreign language.”⁹²³ If it was the other way around, William Richardson argues; that is, if glossolalia constituted the ability to speak in unlearned foreign languages, it would have been an asset, not a liability, for the conversion of unbelievers, as it was at Pentecost, for example.⁹²⁴

⁹¹⁹ Ibid.

⁹²⁰ Smit, “Tongues and Prophecy,” 177.

⁹²¹ Ibid., 182.

⁹²² Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 650.

⁹²³ Cf. Grosheide, *1 Corinthians*, 332.

⁹²⁴ Cf. Richardson, *Speaking in Tongues*, 88-89.

Furthermore, because *μαίνεσθε*, the word translated as “mad” in 1 Cor 14:23, is the same word the Greeks used to describe the frenzy associated with the pagan mystery religions, L. T. Johnson interprets it to mean that essentially there was no difference between the tongues spoken in Corinth and the mantic prophesying of the pagan cults.⁹²⁵ According to Victor Pfitzner, pagan visitors to an all-tongues Christian worship service would find the service quite familiar. In other words, they would “see nothing odd about speaking in tongues; it is quite normal religious behaviour; a sign for them that a spiritual power is among them. If they happen to come into church and hear only tongues, they will feel quite at home!”⁹²⁶ In the same vein, Barrett asserts that the word “mad” (v. 23) does not mean that “You are suffering from mental disease, but You are possessed; it could suggest something like the Bacchic frenzy of men believed to be overpowered and used by a superhuman force.”⁹²⁷

Other Views

Peter Roberts argues that interpreting *σημείον* in v. 22 as “a sign of judgment” is inconsistent with the meaning of the word “sign” elsewhere in Scripture. Following Bernhard Anderson, he argues that this word refers to “the presence or activity of God; in other words, a sign is something that communicates the fact that God is present and at work” (cf. Isa 7:14 – the Immanuel sign).⁹²⁸ The Gospels also

⁹²⁵ Johnson, “Tongues,” 6:597.

⁹²⁶ Pfitzner, *1 Corinthians*, 225.

⁹²⁷ Barrett, *1 Corinthians*, 326.

⁹²⁸ Roberts, “A Sign – Christian or Pagan,” 200; cf. Lanier, “With Stammering Lips,” 277, n. 55.

bear this out, he says. Wherever “there was divine activity, there was also a sign.”⁹²⁹ On this basis, Roberts claims that “tongues are the proof of divine activity for which non-Christians look,” whereas Christians look for the more tell-tale signs of moral conformity to the will of God, for example. The problem in Corinth, he says, was that the Corinthians had gotten their priorities wrong and were attaching “supreme value as a sign to an activity which deserves to be treated as a sign only by unbelievers.”⁹³⁰

It is clear from some of the earlier comments made by Fee, Hays, Garland, Barrett, and Thiselton, that the Corinthians, as Roberts assesses, had overestimated the value of the gift of tongues and therefore had attributed to it more importance than it warranted. He also convincingly argues that there are occasions in both the Old and the New Testaments where the word “sign” refers to the “the presence or activity of God.”

Nevertheless, there are other occasions in both Testaments where this word, as Fausset points out, “is often used for a condemnatory sign (Ezek 4:3, 4; Matt 12:39-42).”⁹³¹ These occurrences serve to undermine Roberts’ argument, but it must be kept in mind that “often” does not mean “always.” In John alone it is used seventeen times “where it usually means a sign of the divine presence or activity of God.”

Accordingly, the expression, “tongues are a sign to unbelievers” (1 Cor 14:22) could very well mean that they are a sign of the divine presence, as Roberts suggests.

Most of the commentators cited above who take the word σημεῖον in a negative sense and thus translate it as a “sign of judgment,” also hold that speaking in tongues refers to speaking in non-human languages. But, as this treatise has

⁹²⁹ Roberts, “A Sign – Christian or Pagan,” 200.

⁹³⁰ Ibid.

⁹³¹ Jameison, Fausset and Brown, *Whole Commentary of the Bible*, 1219.

previously argued, there are at least two occasions in 1 Cor 14 where alternative readings of the text indicate that glossolalia, like the Pentecost tongues phenomenon (Acts 2), can be claimed to refer to speaking in unlearned human languages.

The first is v. 5b. Recall that if the ἵνα clause in this verse (μᾶλλον δὲ ἵνα προφητεύητε) is read as a purpose clause, it means that the Corinthians were to use the gift of tongues to prophesy, which implies that the language spoken must be human (see chap. 10).

The second occurrence is in v. 18, where Paul claims that he could speak in tongues “more than” the Corinthians. Firstly, it is clear from the controls put in place by Paul to curb the glossolalists’ excesses in Corinth that all tongues-speakers could speak, or refrain from speaking, in tongues at will (see vv. 27-28) and, hence, could speak for as long as or as often as they pleased. Therefore, the expression “more than” cannot possibly mean that Paul could speak in tongues more frequently and for longer than the local glossolalists. Secondly, because of Paul’s desire to integrate with each local community he visited on his various missionary journeys (see 1 Cor 9:19-23), which included speaking in the local vernacular, it is more likely that the expression “more than” (14:18) means that he could speak in more languages than his tongues-speaking counterparts in Corinth.

If these alternative readings are correct, and consequently speaking in tongues refers to the supernatural ability to speak in unlearned human languages, Luke’s account of Pentecost (Acts 2) may throw some light on the meaning of the expression “tongues are a sign for unbelievers,” in 1 Cor 14:22. We gather from the positive response of the unbelievers present on this occasion that they understood the manifestation of tongues that day to be a sign that God was indeed present in the words that were spoken, rather than a sign of judgment on themselves. Instead of

hardening and condemning them in their unbelief, these Jews were convicted and converted by the words spoken with upwards of 3000 of them joining the church that very day (Acts 2:41).

But if this is what Paul means by the term “sign” in 1 Cor 14:22; that is, if speaking in tongues is a sign to unbelievers that God is at work, how, then, are we to reconcile this interpretation with:

1. Paul’s quotation from Isa 28:11-12 where foreign languages “serve as a sign that judgment has come to Israel.”
2. The negative effect that an all-tongues worship service would have on non-Christians? (1 Cor 14:23).

To Robertson, the answer to this question can be found in the demise of Israel as God’s chosen people and the subsequent extension of the covenantal blessings to all the nations of the world. Isaiah, he says, was not the first or the last OT prophet to speak of foreign armies invading Israel as a sign of judgment on God’s people.⁹³² In Deut 28:49, Moses writes that if the children of Israel were to break their covenantal relationship with God they could expect to be conquered by nations who did not speak their language. Eight hundred years later, in the sixth-century B.C., Jeremiah also warned the Jews that if they failed to heed his call to repentance they would be overrun by the Babylonians who, likewise, could not speak the Hebrew tongue (see Jer 5:15). As a result of their continual disobedience, this prophecy was fulfilled in the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim, King of Judah, when Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem and carried the king away, into captivity (see Dan 1:1-2). In this instance, and on the occasion of the Assyrian invasion of the ten northern tribes of Israel in Isaiah’s day, Robertson maintains that the tongues of the foreign invaders in

⁹³² Robertson, *The Final Word*, 45.

the land of Israel signified a change in the history of redemption.

“In a similar way, the foreign languages spoken on the day of Pentecost,” he reasons, signified that a new day had dawned in the redemption of mankind. Like the Assyrian invasion of Israel in Isaiah’s day it was “a sign of covenantal curse for Israel. No longer would God speak exclusively to them in contrast with all the nations of the world.”⁹³³ At the same time, however, it was a sign to unbelievers that the blessings of God were as freely available to them as they had been, and still are, to Israel. In other words, the tongues spoken on the day of Pentecost “marked the transition to a truly world-wide gospel.”⁹³⁴

Not only that, Isaiah had faithfully warned the Israelites that they would be chastised for their disobedience by an Assyrian invasion, unless they took note of his words and repented of their sins. However, they persistently refused to heed his earnest entreaties. As a result, the sound of the Assyrian tongue being spoken in Israel would be a sign to them that Isaiah’s warnings were indeed true and that they needed to respond accordingly. In other words, as Grosheide points out, the sound of the Assyrian tongue in Israel in Isaiah’s day was intended as a new token of God’s grace to stir up the people of Israel to fear the Lord, even though they failed to take advantage of this opportunity.⁹³⁵

Similarly, the strange sound of the foreign tongues at Pentecost was a gracious sign to prove to the unbelieving Jews in Jerusalem that the disciples’ claims about Jesus were true, and so was intended to bring about their repentance.⁹³⁶ Thus, when

⁹³³ Ibid., 47.

⁹³⁴ Ibid., 47-48.

⁹³⁵ Grosheide, *1 Corinthians*, 330-331.

⁹³⁶ Cf. Hasel, *Speaking in Tongues*, 140.

tongues were used in public “for the conviction and conversion of infidels, [that is, in order that] they might be brought into the Christian church,”⁹³⁷ it was a positive sign to unbelievers that they were hearing a message from God.

This would explain why Paul can say that the gift of tongues, like the other charismata, edifies the church (see 1 Cor 12:4-10). It also explains why speaking in tongues is more likely to be a sign to unbelievers that God is at work, rather than something that hardens and condemns them in their unbelief. Still, not all unbelievers will respond positively to this sign of divine activity. Like the Diasporic Jews in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, there will be some who will put the phenomenon down to drunkenness or some cause other than God (Acts 2:15). Moreover, it does not explain why unbelievers would walk away from the church if they happened to attend an all-tongues worship service if, indeed, this gift constitutes the miraculous ability to speak in unlearned human languages. Would not such a gift have been an asset rather than a liability for the conversion of unbelievers?⁹³⁸

An All-tongues Worship Service

The key to understanding why an all-tongues church service would turn unbelievers away from the church, rather than attract them to it, can be found in the way that the Corinthians related to this gift and not in Paul’s loose quotation of Isa 28:11-12 in 1 Cor 14:21.

According to Roberts, the different responses that unbelievers would have to a hypothetical all-tongues church service and a service where everyone prophesied, is a further comment by Paul on the Corinthian situation rather than an exposition of the

⁹³⁷ Cf. Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 6:581.

⁹³⁸ Cf. Richardson, *Speaking in Tongues*, 88-89.

aforementioned quotation taken from Isa 28:11-12. The Corinthians, he claims, were acting like unbelievers when they should have been acting like Christians.⁹³⁹ Instead of using the gift of tongues to edify the church, the local tongues-speakers had been using their gift in church to show-off their so-called spiritual greatness. They misused tongues in this way, Fee advances, because they mistakenly believed that their gift was a sign of spiritual superiority and that its use in church indicated that God was with them in their gatherings.⁹⁴⁰

To get the Corinthians to see the foolishness of these mistaken beliefs, Paul depicts a hypothetical church service that consisted entirely of tongues, and asks the Corinthians to consider the impression it would make upon any unbelieving visitors. If tongues were really the ultimate sign of spiritual greatness and of God's presence, then would not an all-tongues church service be the greatest spiritual event ever?

The least fit to judge an all-tongues church service were the Corinthians themselves, blinded as they were by their ignorance of spiritual things (cf. 1 Cor 12:1). On the other hand, the best judges of the value of this type of service, says Barrett, were the outsiders, that is, the non-Christians.⁹⁴¹ If tongues, as argued above, were a sign to them of divine activity, then they were in the best position to determine whether or not God was at work in just such a meeting. As noted earlier, their response would be that the Corinthians were *μαίνεσθαι* (14:23); that is, they were "mad," which some commentators associate with the religious frenzy that attended the worship of the various pagan deities in the mystery-religions of the time.

⁹³⁹ Roberts, "A Sign – Christian or Pagan," 200-201.

⁹⁴⁰ Cf. Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 681-682; Hurd, *The Origins of 1 Corinthians*, 192-193; Sweet, "A Sign for Unbelievers," 251.

⁹⁴¹ Cf. Barrett, *1 Corinthians*, 325.

In addition to those commentators mentioned earlier, Stephen Chester insists that “μαίνεσθε . . . should not be understood, as is often assumed, as a pejorative reaction. Instead it is a categorization by the outsider of speaking in tongues as parallel to the phenomenon of divinely gifted madness within Graeco-Roman religion.”⁹⁴² Similarly, Pfitzner urges that the term “mad” in v. 23 should not be taken in the sense of “crazy or mentally unbalanced, but [in the sense of] spiritually possessed.”⁹⁴³ In the same vein, Prior insists that the glossolalists were “under the influence of some spiritual force on a par with those active in the mystery-cults.”⁹⁴⁴ Likewise Hays writes: “Outsiders . . . will think that this . . . is simply one more mystery cult that whips its partisans into a frenzy of frothy enthusiasm. . . . It does not mean that the persons in question are crazy.”⁹⁴⁵

“Mad”

This interpretation of μαίνεσθε is a legitimate exposition of the text in question, in that the noun μανία has a range of different meanings, including the definition “enthusiasm” and/or “inspired frenzy.”⁹⁴⁶ Nevertheless, there are several factors that militate against it. Firstly, the usual meaning of μαίνεσθε in NT times was “mad,” in the sense of “insane” or “crazy.”⁹⁴⁷ Not only that, it is used five more times in the NT (Jn 10:20; Acts 12:15; 26:24, 25) and in each case it refers to a disordered state of mind. Three of these occurrences relate to a charge of insanity

⁹⁴² Chester, “Divine Madness?” 419.

⁹⁴³ Pfitzner, *1 Corinthians*, 224-225.

⁹⁴⁴ David Prior, *1 Corinthians*, 248.

⁹⁴⁵ Hays, *1 Corinthians*, 238; cf. Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 1127.

⁹⁴⁶ See Chester, “Divine Madness?” 420.

⁹⁴⁷ BDAG, 610.

leveled at Paul by Festus, who considered his preaching of a crucified and risen Savior to be irrational (Acts 26:24-25). From the context it is clear that neither this charge nor Paul's defense had anything to do with supernatural possession or religious frenzy. These occurrences are not enough to conclude that *μαίνεσθε* must mean "insane" or "crazy" in 1 Cor 14:23, but they confirm that it was a distinct possibility.

Secondly, in keeping with its usual meaning of "insane" or "crazy," the use of *μαίνεσθε* to describe the extreme religious practices of the ancient mystery-cults appears to have been derogatory and likewise meant irrational and/or deranged. For example, Moffatt remarks: "When the Scythians watched Bacchic raptures, in which the devotees claimed to be possessed by the deity, they scoffed at the idea of 'setting up a god who drove men into insanity,' as Herodotus records (iv. 79)."⁹⁴⁸

On the other hand, Collins claims that the verb *μαίνεσθε* was used to describe the female devotees of Dionysius. These women, "whose cult was celebrated in Corinth, were known as 'mad women' (*μαίναδες*)."⁹⁴⁹ Apparently they were labeled as such, not only because of their religious frenzies but also because of their drunkenness, which was commonplace in this cult. The verb "to be mad" was simply used at times to describe those devotees who were deranged as a result of having imbibed too much wine.⁹⁵⁰ So, rather than feeling at home in an all-tongues worship service, as Pfitzner, for instance, suggests; pagan visitors would find the service rather odd and uninviting.

Thirdly, if the speakers in an all-tongues church service were really in a

⁹⁴⁸ James Moffatt, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, MNTC (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1938), 223; cf. Collins, *1 Corinthians*, 509.

⁹⁴⁹ Collins, *1 Corinthians*, 509.

⁹⁵⁰ Ibid.

religious frenzy that smacked of pagan ecstasy more than of Christian dignity, and if their conduct was due to supernatural possession, then we must ask, Who was possessing them? On the basis that the Holy Spirit was given to help evangelism, not to hurt it (see Acts 1:8), it is highly unlikely that he was involved, since an all-tongues church service would turn unbelieving visitors away from the church rather than attract them to it. Besides, Paul's reprimands concerning the Corinthians' misuse of tongues in church, and his subsequent rules and regulations (see 1 Cor 14:27-28) to curb these chaotic practices imply that, once bestowed, this gift was permanent and was under the control of the speaker, who could use it properly or improperly as he or she willed. Otherwise, Paul would have been in conflict with the Holy Spirit, in that he would have been constantly questioning and challenging the Holy Spirit at every turn. In fact, Paul distances the Holy Spirit from the bedlam caused by the flaunting of this gift in the local assembly, by declaring that "God is not *the author* of confusion, but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints" (1 Cor 14:33).

Finally, Forbes has shown conclusively that there are substantial differences between the religious frenzy associated with the ancient mystery-religions and early Christian glossolalia. The former consisted mainly of invocations, whereas tongues were revelatory and expressions of praise (see chap. 8). Hence, the likelihood that Paul is using the word *μαίνεσθε* in 1 Cor 14:23 to describe a religious frenzy akin to that found in the Hellenistic worship of pagan deities is very low indeed.

In more recent times, Chester has challenged Forbes' findings, claiming that there is enough evidence of "divine madness in Graeco-Roman religion" to warrant a significant parallel to Pauline glossolalia, even though he cannot find any "phenomena that could appropriately be labelled as 'the same thing' as speaking in tongues." The similarities, he asserts, are behavioural and therefore "could be placed

by an observer in the same social category.”⁹⁵¹ As a result, he concludes that “the exclamation *μαίνεσθε* (14: 23) is best translated as ‘You are inspired’, and can plausibly be understood as a positive response from the outsider, who recognizes tongues as a manifestation of the divine.”⁹⁵²

Chester may have a valid point if it were not for two obvious weaknesses in his argument. There is, as he acknowledges, no parallel phenomena in Hellenism to Pauline glossolalia. It is clear from Paul’s comments regarding the positive response that outsiders would express to a church service where all prophesied (vv. 24-25), that they failed to see God at work in an all-tongues worship service. The statement that unbelievers would fall down on their faces “and worship God and report that God is truly among you,” implies that the opposite is in fact the case where an all-tongues church service is concerned. On both counts, the “madness” referred to in v. 23 is unlikely to refer to “divine madness” and, therefore, cannot be a positive sign to unbelievers that the glossolalist is inspired by God. It would appear, therefore, that *μαίνεσθε* should be taken in its usual sense of “insane” or “crazy.” And that is the very point that Paul is making in 1 Cor 14:20-25. Unbelievers who witnessed an all-tongues church service would consider the congregation to be mentally unstable or deranged, rather than inspired by God.

Obviously the madness associated with an all-tongues worship service is not related to everyone speaking at once, if indeed that is what they were doing. A church service where all prophesied at the same time (v. 24) would also be bedlam and, therefore, would be as mad as an all-tongues worship service. However, a church

⁹⁵¹ Chester, “Divine Madness,” 445; cf. Martin, “Tongues of Angels,” 548 n, 4.

⁹⁵² Chester, “Divine Madness,” 445.

service where all prophesied would have the opposite effect, says Paul, in that it would lead the unbeliever to Christ rather than away from him (v. 25).⁹⁵³ It is more likely that an all-tongues worship service would be considered “mad” by outsiders because the worshippers were uttering “meaningless noise instead of normal speech,” and therefore were spending “their time in a futile way,” as Calvin puts it.⁹⁵⁴ This is the same point that Paul is making in 1 Cor 14:6-11 where, by way of a series of analogies, he illustrates the utter futility of using words in public that no one can understand (see chap. 11).

The Corinthians might “be highly pleased with themselves,” says Calvin, “but the unbelieving and uninformed will be perfectly justified in condemning them for behaving in a senseless way.”⁹⁵⁵ Thus, Paul is simply trying to get the Corinthians to see that the gift of tongues is not a sign of spiritual superiority and that its exercise in the assembly did not indicate that God was with them in their gatherings.

The outcome would be exactly the same, regardless of the type of tongue spoken, be it human or non-human languages. Again, human languages would have the same effect that unintelligible ecstatic utterances would have on those who are unfamiliar with the language spoken. Consequently, the type of tongues spoken in Corinth cannot be inferred from the fact that Paul says that an all-tongues church service would seem mad to any unbelieving visitors. If anything, the “parallel between the foreign language of the Assyrians and the tongues spoken in Corinth,” Lenski says, “rests on the fact that the latter were likewise foreign human

⁹⁵³ Cf. Godet, *1 Corinthians*, 2:295.

⁹⁵⁴ Calvin, *1 Corinthians*, 297-298.

⁹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 298.

languages.”⁹⁵⁶ Similarly, Gundry claims that “tongues must be distinctly spoken languages” because, among other things, “Paul applies Isa. xxviii. 11f. to glossolalia, for that OT passage refers to the foreign language spoken by Assyrians (and perhaps other foreign languages spoken by other invaders).”⁹⁵⁷

The Edification of the Church

On the other hand, evidence of the church’s spirituality and of God’s presence in it, says Paul, is when an unbeliever, in response to the Corinthians’ prophesying in church, exclaims that, ““God is truly among you!”” (vv. 24-25). To some commentators, including Blomberg, Fee, and Grosheide these verses, indeed this whole passage (vv. 20-25), either confirms, justifies, or explains Paul’s preference for prophecy over tongues in 1 Cor 14:2-5.⁹⁵⁸ There is no question that Paul would prefer the Corinthians to prophesy rather than to speak in tongues in their church services, but to say that he favours the gift of prophecy over that of tongues in general cannot be substantiated from 1 Cor 12-14. As mentioned earlier, Paul’s primary concern in these chapters, in fact throughout the entire book, has been for the edification of the church, which is emphasised yet again in the following verses (vv. 26-33).

When used properly, Paul can see no difference between the gift of tongues and the gift of prophecy. Both gifts have the same common purpose of building up the church (12:7) and, as the human body analogy in vv. 12-28 illustrates, they are as necessary and as important as each other in the mission of the church. Furthermore,

⁹⁵⁶ Lenski, *1 & 2 Corinthians*, 601; cf. Grosheide, *1 Corinthians*, 330.

⁹⁵⁷ Gundry, “‘Ecstatic Utterance’,” 306-307; cf. Hasel, *Speaking in Tongues*, 140.

⁹⁵⁸ Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 270; Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 685; Grosheide, *1 Corinthians*, 330-331.

Paul's wish that all believers in Corinth could speak with tongues (14:5), and his thankfulness at being able to speak in tongues more than all of the Corinthians put together (v.18), is confirmation of the same.

The trouble is that the local glossolalists, as argued throughout this work, were not using their gift according to God's plan, but were using it to boost up their own egos. And that is the issue that Paul is addressing in 1 Cor 14:20-25, not the virtues of one gift over another. Having thus exposed the fallacy of thinking that tongues were a sign of spiritual superiority and that its exercise in church indicated that God was with them in their gatherings, Paul proceeds to put a stop to the Corinthians' abuse of this gift by introducing certain rules and regulations that would govern its use in the local assembly. But first, in keeping with the "overriding principle" of edification (cf. vv. 3, 5, 12) Paul appeals to all believers in Corinth, not just the glossolalists, to use their various gifts and abilities for the good of all.⁹⁵⁹ This is what he says: "Let all things be done for edification" (v. 26).

Apparently, each Corinthian churchgoer had determined beforehand what he or she would say and do in the assembly, each having planned to show-off a doctrine, a revelation, a gospel song they had composed, a tongue, or an interpretation. Here, Paul infers that there was nothing wrong with this practice providing that whatever transpired benefitted the whole church, not just the individuals responsible for these manifestations.⁹⁶⁰ According to Fee, Paul is merely echoing the concerns of chaps. 12-14; namely "that *each one* has opportunity to participate in the corporate ministry of the body [of Christ]," and that all gifts and ministries of the Spirit be used for the

⁹⁵⁹ Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 116; cf. Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 1133; Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 278; Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 244.

⁹⁶⁰ Robertson and Plummer, *1 Corinthians*, 320;

corporate good of the church.⁹⁶¹

Rules and Regulations concerning Glossolalia

In regards to the gift of tongues in particular, Paul insists that this gift was not to be used in church at all unless it was subject to the following controls:

No more than two or three were to speak in tongues in any given meeting (v. 27), which implies that, as a rule, a greater number than this had been doing so.

Those who did speak in tongues in church were to speak just one at a time (v. 27), which implies that they had probably all been speaking at once.⁹⁶² “This guideline,” says Fee, “clearly removes tongues from all forms of pagan ecstasy, as far as Paul’s understanding is concerned.”⁹⁶³ The speaker is not “possessed” or “overpowered” by the Holy Spirit, but is in control of his or her own speech.⁹⁶⁴

Morris says the same thing in regard to point (3) below. Because the glossolalist could keep quiet in church if he or she wanted to, “This shows,” he says, “that we are not to think of ‘tongues’ as the result of an irresistible impulse of the Spirit, driving the man willy-nilly into ecstatic speech.”⁹⁶⁵

The fact that the glossolalist knew beforehand what he or she was going to say in church (v. 26) also militates against the idea that speaking in tongues constitutes ecstatic speech. Not only that, because tongues-speakers were fully aware of what they were going to say in church, it is evident that the cognitive processes were also

⁹⁶¹ Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 690.

⁹⁶² Horsley, *1 Corinthians*, 186.

⁹⁶³ Fee, *First Corinthians*, 692.

⁹⁶⁴ Ibid; cf. Fee, “Toward a Pauline,” 28; Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 117; Kistemaker, *First Corinthians*, 507.

⁹⁶⁵ Morris, *1 Corinthians* (1985), 195.

involved in this manifestation. This is further evidence that the “madness” referred to in v. 23 is neither ecstatic nor indicative of supernatural possession, or the like.

Tongues-speakers were not to speak in church at all unless they had secured the services of an interpreter first, who could and would interpret their speech for them (vv. 27-28). Many commentators see in this directive a reference to a private gift which does not function publicly in the church, with most, although not all, maintaining that it confirms that speaking in tongues constitutes some form of non-human speech.⁹⁶⁶ Cartledge, for instance, argues that even though tongues cannot edify the church unless they are interpreted and, therefore, should not be used in church unless an interpreter is present, this passage indicates that they are nevertheless “a genuine form of speaking to God.” “This means, therefore,” he says, “that Paul considers private use to be appropriate use.”⁹⁶⁷ On the other hand, Turner reasons that because “it is improbable that Paul is counseling private use of tongues in church when another is ministering, this [directive] seems to be a positive injunction to private use.”⁹⁶⁸ As a matter of fact, Turner advocates that this usage is “the main purpose of tongues by Paul.”⁹⁶⁹

No one would dispute that communing with self and with God in tongues, wherever it takes place, constitutes a private use of this gift. But to say that it is an “appropriate use” or that it is its “primary use” is arguable. Admittedly, there would not be an issue with these allegations if it could be shown that Paul’s primary concern

⁹⁶⁶ E.g., Fee, *First Corinthians*, 692-693; Grosheide, *First Corinthians*, 336-337; Conzelmann, *First Corinthians*, 245; Robertson and Plummer, *First Corinthians*, 321; Cartledge, “The Nature and Function of New Testament Glossolalia,” *EQ* 72:2 (2000): 148; Turner, *Holy Spirit*, 234.

⁹⁶⁷ Cartledge, “Nature and Function,” 148.

⁹⁶⁸ Turner, *Holy Spirit*, 234.

⁹⁶⁹ Cartledge, “Nature and Function,” 147.

in 1 Cor 14:27-28 is with “whether the gift of tongues should function in private or in public.” Additionally, there would not be an issue with these allegations if it could be shown that the phrase “speaking to self and to God in silence” included glossolalia’s normal usage outside of the church.⁹⁷⁰ But, the reality is that there is no support for either proposition in the passage itself.

As with his preference for the use of intelligible rather than unintelligible speech in church services (vv. 18-19), Paul’s immediate concern is with how to curtail the selfish and self-centred practices of the Corinthian glossolalists who were using their gift in the assembly to edify self, instead of the church. Besides, the context clearly shows that glossolalists were to restrain themselves and to speak to self and to God while in church, not while somewhere else in private, in the absence of an interpreter. “The two actions,” Robertson says, “are simultaneous. As he restrains himself until an interpreter is present, he speaks within himself while communing with God.”⁹⁷¹ Furthermore, if speaking in tongues were a private gift, it would be as ineffective in building up the church as praying out loud in tongues in church would be when no one else could understand a word spoken. This would render nonsensical Paul’s claim that its God-given purpose, like that of the other gifts of the Spirit, is to edify the church (1 Cor 12:7).

On both counts, it would appear that the directive not to speak in tongues in church unless an interpreter is present, but to speak silently to self and to God, is more likely to be a concession on Paul’s part rather than an indication of its appropriate or primary use.⁹⁷² Moreover, because speaking in foreign languages would have the

⁹⁷⁰ Cf. Robertson, *The Final Word*, 40-41.

⁹⁷¹ Ibid.; cf. Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 282.

⁹⁷² Cf. House, “Tongues,” 143-144.

same effect as non-human languages on those who are unfamiliar with the language spoken, this injunction could apply to both forms of speech. Therefore, it cannot be used to prove conclusively whether glossolalia refers to speaking in human or non-human languages. That evidence must come from elsewhere.

More importantly, if v. 40 is read in conjunction with v. 33, it becomes apparent that Paul set down this proviso primarily for the sake of decorum in church services. In v. 40 Paul concludes his discourse on spiritual things (cf. 12:1), by admonishing the Corinthians to conduct their church services in a dignified and orderly manner, as opposed to the glossolalists' complete disregard for order and propriety when using tongues in their bid to gain status (cf. v. 33). In other words, this directive was designed to put a check on the glossolalists' disorderly self-assertion in the local assembly.⁹⁷³

According to vv. 5, 13, glossolalists were capable of interpreting their own speech, which Paul encouraged them to do for the benefit of the whole church. And yet, here, in v. 28, he appears to disregard this earlier counsel by commanding them to use someone else to translate for them; and with good reason, it seems. If the glossolalists were permitted to interpret their own speech in worship services it would merely allow them to continue to occupy centre stage alone. This would not only lead to further self-aggrandisement, but it would also tend to perpetuate the confusion that their exhibitionism had helped to create in the first place (v. 33). On the other hand, if tongues-speakers were required to share the spotlight with an interpreter – one as equally well versed as themselves in the tongue spoken – it would serve to detract from their own self-importance. This would, hopefully, dampen their urge to keep using tongues to edify self in public. Farrar claims: “To control the passion which

⁹⁷³ Farrar, “1 Corinthians,” 459.

leads to it is sooner or later, to stop the manifestation . . .”⁹⁷⁴

Closing Remarks

In 1 Cor 14:39-40, Paul brings his preceding argument concerning glossolalia and propriety in worship services to an end in the same way that he began it in v. 1, that is, by urging his original readers to “eagerly desire to prophesy.” Noticeably absent from this latest imperative is the command to seek τὰ πνευματικά in order that believers may prophesy (μᾶλλον δὲ ἵνα προφητεύητε) and thus edify the church (vv. 3, 4, 5, 12, 26). There was no need to mention it again here, Paul having already established the importance of the edification of the church and, therefore, of doing everything to the glory of God (10:31-33). For tongues-speakers, this entailed using their gift to prophesy (v. 5b) (see chap. 10). However, because no one in the congregation could understand a word that they were saying (v. 2), Paul discouraged the use of speaking in tongues in worship services, preferring instead that everyone prophesied.

This is the point that he is making in v. 39, which is borne out by his subsequent allowance of tongues-speaking to occur in church, provided, no doubt, that it adhered to the strict controls set down for its use (vv. 27-28), and that it was done with all propriety and in an orderly fashion (v. 40). On the grounds that the ἵνα clause in 1 Cor 14:5b (μᾶλλον δὲ ἵνα προφητεύητε) is a purpose rather than an sub-final clause, the ideal is that tongues are used out in the community where those who are familiar with the tongues spoken would see it as a positive sign that God was at work and, consequently, are convicted and converted by it.

⁹⁷⁴ Ibid., 459-460.

Conclusion

Paul's strongest attack on the Corinthian error that speaking in tongues is a sign of superior spirituality and of God's presence with them is found in 1 Cor 14:21-25. Here, Paul makes the point that tongues serve as a sign for unbelievers, probably in the sense that they indicate that God is at work. We found, however, that an all-tongues church service would have the opposite effect on unbelievers who happened to witness it. Instead of convicting them that God was present, they would declare the Corinthians to be mad, not because it reminded them of the religious frenzy associated with the worship of pagan deities in the mystery-cults, but because it was futile to speak in a language that most, if not all, were unable to follow.

We also found that Paul's directive, that in the absence of an interpreter glossolalists were to keep silent in church, and to speak to themselves and to God (vv. 27-28), does not infer that speaking in tongues is primarily a private gift or that it constitutes non-human languages. The context shows that this speaking to self and to God is to take place in the church proper when an interpreter is unavailable and, therefore, was never meant to take place in private at home, or anywhere else for that matter.

Further, we found that if a church service was conducted in foreign languages that no one could understand, it would have the same outcome as a service comprised of incomprehensible non-human speech. Consequently, both passages (vv. 21-27 and vv. 27-28) should not be used to determine whether or not glossolalia refers to speaking in human or non-human languages.

On the other hand, we found that because glossolalists could refrain from speaking in tongues in church when an interpreter was not present, it meant that they must have been in total control of their gift and, therefore, that this gift was not

ecstatic. The fact that a glossolalist could plan beforehand what he or she was going to say in church also militates against the idea of glossolalia as ecstatic utterance (v. 26).

CHAPTER 13 - CONCLUSION

At the outset of this thesis, it was shown that from the second to the mid nineteenth-century A.D., the prevailing idea among theologians was that the biblical references to glossolalia, or speaking in tongues, meant that the glossolalist was speaking in other human languages without having to learn that language first. Furthermore, its sole purpose was for evangelism. The primary source for this view is Luke's account of the tongues phenomenon during Pentecost in Acts 2. At Pentecost, 120 of Christ's followers, including the apostles, prophesied in different dialects or languages that they had not learned before. These languages were understood by people who came from at least 16 different provinces or countries, with the result that about 3000 new believers were added to the fledgling Christian church that day.

It is clear, however, that since the mid-to-late nineteenth-century there has been a dramatic shift in the scholarly perception of what constitutes glossolalia. The vast majority of modern exegetes have abandoned the traditional human languages view. Instead, they have adopted the position that the term glossolalia describes some sort of non-human utterance. Some claim it to be a spirit language, interpretable by others, while others hold that it is ecstatic utterance or a private form of communication between God and man. Still others see glossolalia as unbridled emotion expressed in meaningless babble.

We have found that the catalyst for the belief that glossolalia constitutes non-human speech of some kind is Paul's statement in 1 Cor 14:2, which says that no one but God can understand the glossolalist's speech, including the speaker. This claim is the antithesis of Pentecost where those present heard the 120 disciples sharing the word of God in their native tongue or dialect without the need for an interpreter. In contrast, the Corinthian phenomenon, if the glossolalia were to be understood at all,

clearly called for interpretation (1 Cor 14:5, 13, 28). The argument follows that if this gift were to refer to the miraculous ability to speak in foreign languages, it is deemed highly unlikely that no one in the church would recognize the language/s spoken, especially in cosmopolitan Corinth.

Another major factor in the swing away from the traditional human languages view, is the argument that there is no evidence that the Corinthians ever used glossolalia to spread the gospel or that Paul encouraged them to use it for this purpose. This omission, on Paul's part, is said to be inexplicable if the gift of tongues constitutes the God-given ability to speak in unlearned human languages, because it would have been ideally suited to this task. In fact it is claimed that such a gift is irrelevant unless it is used for public evangelism. The necessity for such a gift in Paul's day is also brought into question, considering that Greek and Latin were universal languages that were more than adequate to accomplish the task of taking the gospel of salvation to the ends of the earth in Greco-Roman times.

In addition, the following statements, by Paul, are said to imply that the Corinthian gift of tongues was a private rather than a public gift and, therefore, that it was different from the Acts 2 phenomenon:

1. Speaking in tongues edifies the speaker rather than the church (1 Cor 14:4).
2. Paul would rather speak five words in church that could be understood by all present than 10,000 words in a tongue that no one could understand (v. 19).
3. Glossolalists were not to speak in church unless an interpreter was present, but were to remain silent and to speak to God and self.

Furthermore, adherents to the non-human languages view argue that because

speaking in tongues edifies the speaker, there are at least two types of spiritual gifts: those that edify the church and those that do not.

Finally, those who argue against foreign languages draw upon several sources of biblical evidence to support their claim. Namely:

1. The analogy drawn between speaking with tongues in worship services and the cacophony of musical instruments played aimlessly.
2. The analogy drawn between speaking with tongues in worship services and the uncertain signals given by trumpeters in times of war.
3. The analogy drawn between speaking with tongues in worship services and the gibberish spoken by low status barbarians.
4. The νοῦς/πνεῦμα dichotomy in 1 Cor 14:14-15.
5. The “unfruitfulness” of the glossolalist’s mind when speaking in tongues (v. 14).
6. The adverse reaction that unbelievers would have to an all-tongues worship service (v.23).

We have argued against the current trend of modern scholarly opinion by taking the view that glossolalia relates to human rather than non-human languages. Our primary thesis is the claim that Paul’s comments about tongues-speaking in 1 Cor 14 concern the Corinthians’ inappropriate use of this gift in the local assembly, rather than the phenomenon itself.

Most, if not all, commentators acknowledge that the Corinthians had grossly exaggerated the importance of the gift of tongues and that they were misusing this gift in their worship services. It is generally accepted that Paul’s counsel on this topic in 1 Cor 14 is corrective rather than informative. Nevertheless, comment on this passage rarely takes into consideration the abuse aspect. Most, in fact, misinterpret the abuse

as legitimate practice. For example, Paul's statement that the one who speaks in tongues edifies himself (v. 4), is generally understood to refer to the individual glossolalist's growth in grace and, therefore, that using tongues to edify self is a legitimate Christian practice. However, this understanding of the expression "edifies self" conflicts with Paul's earlier declaration that believers are not to seek their own edification, but are to seek to edify others (10:23-24). It also undermines the principle set down in 10:31-33 of doing everything to the glory of God and for the salvation of souls, rather than for one's own benefit. Furthermore, it contradicts what Paul says about the purpose of the charismata, including the gift of tongues; namely, that they are meant to edify the church (12:7-10).

There is ample evidence to suggest that the gift of tongues was an area of concern in the Corinthian church and that Paul is specifically addressing these issues in chaps. 12-14. Many commentators agree that the positioning of the gift of tongues last or next to last on all three lists of charismata in 1 Cor 12 (vv. 8-10, 28, 29-30) is an indication that the Corinthians had overrated this gift and that here, Paul is putting it into perspective. Similarly, by placing tongues-speaking at the head of the list of gifts and Christian attributes declared to be spiritually worthless, unless accompanied by love (13:1-3), Paul implies that the Corinthians were using this gift in a loveless manner, perhaps even more than the loveless exercise of the other gifts and attributes mentioned in vv. 1-3.

The only record that we have of the Corinthians' actual use of tongues in public worship services is found in 1 Cor 14:2, 4 where Paul says that they were using tongues to pray in church in order to edify themselves. And yet, inexplicably, scholars on all sides of the tongues debate tend to ignore the possibility that these verses may in fact refer to the loveless exercise of glossolalia, preferring instead to

see these verses as a definitive statement regarding the inherent qualities of tongues-speaking *per se*. This omission on the part of most NT scholars is even more remarkable as Paul claims that self-seeking, which he uses interchangeably with self-edification in 1 Cor 10:24, is the antithesis of love (13:5). Hence, his comments regarding the self-edification of the tongues-speaker (14:4) are more likely to be referring to the glossolalist's quest for personal gratification in the exercise of his or her gift, rather than to the essential characteristics of tongues-speaking itself.

To this evidence, we can add Paul's need to differentiate between the greatness of the tongues-speaker and the greatness of the prophet (1 Cor 14:5). This implies that glossolalists not only considered themselves greater than their non-tongues-speaking brothers and sisters in the church, but they had also openly claimed the gift of tongues provided evidence of their greatness. It would also suggest that they were at the forefront of the sophist-like boasting (cf. 1:29-31), the spiritual arrogance (4:7-8), and the elitism (12:21) responsible for the schisms that had developed in the church in Paul's absence (12:25; cf. 1:10-13).

Finally, the measures that Paul adopted in setting out rules and regulations to control the manifestation of the gift of tongues in worship services are an indication that using tongues to pray in church to edify self was out of place, against order and, therefore, unacceptable (1 Cor 14:27-28, 40). This is the point of the analogies between speaking with tongues in worship services and:

1. The indistinct sounds of musical instruments played haphazardly.
2. The uncertain call of the trumpet on the field of battle.
3. The unintelligible speech of a foreigner in vv. 6-11.

Rather than using them to establish the exact nature of glossolalia, Paul used these analogies to show the Corinthians the utter futility of speaking with tongues in

situations where the language spoken was unfamiliar to the audience. More importantly, because these analogies relate to the Corinthians' abuse of this gift and not to the tongues phenomenon *per se*, they are not a valid source in determining whether speaking in tongues refers to speaking in human or non-human languages. Speaking in foreign languages that could not be understood would have exactly the same effect that speaking in non-human languages would; that is, it would be meaningless discourse and therefore detrimental to orderly worship.

Moreover, if using tongues to edify self is contrary to the spirit of love (13:5) and contrary to the purpose for which this gift was given (12:7), it is untenable that speaking in tongues is Holy Spirit induced and, therefore, ecstatic. The Spirit is never inconsistent or contradictory and would not condemn self-edification (10:23) on the one hand, and then, on the other hand, condone it. In support of this argument, Paul claims that if he, like the Corinthian tongues-speakers, were to pray in tongues in church, then his spirit would be responsible for his discourse (1 Cor 14:14), not the Holy Spirit. The idea that the "spirit" referred to in 14:2 is the human spirit is widespread among scholars; nevertheless, it is still commonly argued that when glossolalists speak it is the Holy Spirit that speaks through them. This idea is based on the assumption that the expression "my *νοῦς* is unfruitful" (14:14) means that the glossolalist's cognitive processes are suspended when speaking in tongues occurs and, therefore, that his or her speech is inspired by the Spirit of God.

This concept is similar to the platonic philosophy of inspiration which taught that the *νοῦς* is subservient to the divine *πνεῦμα* and that it is either dispossessed or rendered inactive by the same. However, it is contrary to various OT references to the human spirit. It also contradicts Paul's references to the same in 1 Cor 2:11 and 5:2-4, which indicate that the human spirit has a cognitive, as well as an emotive, function

that includes the capacity to know, think, reflect and judge. This strongly suggests that glossolalists are fully aware of what they are saying when they speak in tongues. Furthermore, Paul's earlier use of the term $\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$ (1 Cor 2:16) to refer to understanding things from God's perspective strongly suggests that the phrase "my $\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$ is unfruitful" (14:14) probably means that his knowledge of the plan of salvation is of no benefit to others unless it is shared in an intelligible way.

Clearly, glossolalists can understand their own speech. In 1 Cor 14:5, Paul states that the glossolalist who speaks in tongues in church would be as great as the prophet if he were to interpret his speech for the benefit of the whole church, which implies that to do so he or she must have been cognizant of his or her own speech. However, most commentators understand this statement to mean that the glossolalist possessed two gifts: the gift of tongues and the gift of interpretation.

This idea is based on the assumption that v. 13 indicates that glossolalists cannot understand their own speech without the additional gift of interpretation. Most interpret this verse to mean that Paul is admonishing tongues-speakers to pray for the gift of interpretation so that they can interpret their speech for the benefit of the entire congregation, thus implying that the phenomenon itself is unintelligible. But the word "pray" in v. 13 does not mean "to ask for." This is made clear in the following verses (vv. 14-15), which indicate how we are to interpret the term "pray" used in v. 13. The theme of these verses is how a tongues-speaker should pray when exercising his gift in the assembly, not what he should pray for. In other words, it does not mean to pray for the gift of interpretation, but to pray with the spirit of interpretation; that is, to pray in a way that his speech could be understood by others, which infers that he fully understood his own utterances. Whether or not he possessed the additional gift of interpretation is immaterial. The relevance of the gift of interpretation is that if

foreigners who were unfamiliar with the local vernacular wanted to communicate with the church, an interpreter would not only understand what they were saying but he or she would also be able to share it with the church at large which, in turn, could appropriately address their needs.

Others claim that the “he” in v. 5 does not refer to the glossolalist at all, but relates instead to an unknown third party gifted in interpreting tongues, but this too is unlikely. If an anonymous interpreter were intended, then the Greek language demands that he or she be identified within the text itself, in the same way that the interpreter in v. 28 is identified; but no interpreter is introduced. Accordingly, the subject of the phrase “except he interprets” must be the tongues-speaker.

On the other hand, the rules and regulations set down by Paul to control the use of tongues in Corinth (1 Cor 14:27-28) imply that once the gift of tongues had been bestowed it was permanent and, therefore, that glossolalists could use or refrain from using it at will. This is further evidence that glossolalists were not imbued with the Holy Spirit every time they spoke in tongues, rendering their speech ecstatic. On the contrary, Paul distances the Holy Spirit from the self-edifying practices of the glossolalists by declaring that he is not the author of confusion, but of peace, in all the churches of the saints, which again infers that he played no part in these practices (cf. vv. 33, 40).

Although the idea that glossolalists are the source of their own utterances and therefore are cognizant of their own speech does not infer that speaking with tongues is synonymous with speaking in other human languages, it does allow for this possibility. What it does mean, however, is that the platform upon which the non-human languages view is primarily built is untenable. That platform is the contention that no human person, not even the glossolalists themselves, can understand their

speech (1 Cor 14:2). The claim that glossolalists are the source of their own utterances and, therefore, cognizant of their own speech, also supports the argument that when Paul says that no one but God can understand the glossolalist's speech he is speaking metaphorically. This allows for the possibility that other individuals within the church could also understand the words spoken. This interpretation would still retain the gist of Paul's argument. Interpreters (v.28), for instance, would be able to understand what was said.

As for the notion that there are two entirely different types of spiritual gifts – those that edify the church and those that do not, this concept is based primarily on the assumption that the self-edification of the tongues-speaker is a legitimate Christian practice. Therefore, it assumes that glossolalia is essentially different from the other gifts of the Spirit. But, if using the gift of tongues to edify self (14:4) is a flagrant abuse of the same and not an inherent quality of the phenomenon itself, this idea is indefensible.

On the other hand, if all of the charismata, including the gift of tongues, have the same common purpose of edifying the church, it is illogical to say that v. 13 is urging the Corinthians to seek gifts that edify the church over those that do not, because the latter do not exist. Consequently, this verse cannot be used to confirm that Paul is compelling the Corinthians to covet the so-called greater gifts in 1 Cor 12:31 and/or that he is urging them to desire the charismata, especially the gift of prophecy (14:1).

In fact, the verses 1 Cor 12:31 and 14:1 are contentious in themselves. For instance, the verb ζηλοῦτε in 1 Cor 12:31 is usually interpreted as a command, which means that Paul is urging the Corinthians to seek gifts that they did not already have, especially the so-called greater gifts. But this translation flies in the face of his

previous comments in chap. 12. In this chapter he highlights the need for a diversity of gifts in the church; the parity of the gifts; and that each member of the body of Christ has been equipped to perform a unique function in the church that no one else can perform. So, all believers are admonished to be content with the gift or gifts that the Spirit has apportioned them and should not strive for those gifts which they do not already possess. The interpretation of ζηλοῦτε as a command also questions the Spirit's sovereignty in distributing the gifts as he sees fit. A more tenable interpretation, therefore, is that ζηλοῦτε in 12:31a should be translated as an indicative instead of an imperative, which means that Paul is simply recording that the Corinthians were in fact coveting the "greater gifts," rather than encouraging them to eagerly desire them.

As for 1 Cor 14:1, it is usually interpreted as: "Pursue love and eagerly desire the gifts of the Spirit, especially the gift of prophecy." This interpretation is based on the assumption that the verb ζηλοῦτε in this verse is an imperative, rather than an indicative, and that here the word πνευματικά means spiritual gifts. There is no question that the verb ζηλοῦτε in this verse is in the imperative mood, however, the word πνευματικά literally means "spiritual things," not "spiritual gifts." In this instance, it may or may not include the gifts of the Spirit, but it generally entails much more than just the charismata. In 1 Cor 2:13, for instance, it refers primarily to God's will and ways, which includes his plans for the human race.

Nevertheless, most commentators use πνευματικά and χαρίσματα (Paul's usual word for spiritual gifts) interchangeably in 14:1, because Paul is said to encourage the pursuit of the greater gifts in 12:31; which, as it turns out, is unlikely to be the case. This is misleading, in that it gives the impression that believers are to seek the gifts of the Spirit, when in fact they are to be content with the gifts that they

have already received and should seek to use them effectively in the service of the church, rather than waste their time trying to do or to be something that they are not.

Moreover, because most commentators perceive that 1 Cor 12:31 is saying that the Corinthians were to eagerly desire the greater gifts, they claim that the ἵνα clause in 14:1 (μᾶλλον δὲ ἵνα προφητεύητε) is a sub-final clause and, therefore, that Paul is now identifying which gift is the greatest gift of all; namely the gift of prophecy. Accordingly, it is understood that here Paul is urging the Corinthians to eagerly desire the gifts of the Spirit, especially the gift of prophecy.

This interpretation has, in turn, had a direct bearing on the translation of the same ἵνα clause in 14:5b as a sub-final clause. The only difference between the two is that the contrast in v. 1 is between the gift of prophecy and the other gifts of the Spirit, whereas the contrast in v. 5 is between the gift of prophecy and the gift of tongues. The latter is also based on the idea that the references to speaking with tongues in the preceding verses (vv. 2-4) relate to the tongues phenomenon *per se*, and that using tongues to edify self is an acceptable Christian practice. However, all self-edification, including that of the tongues-speaker, is the antithesis of love and a violation of the principle of living for others rather than self.

The idea that 1 Cor 14:2, 4 refer to the gift of tongues itself and, therefore, that using it to edify self is a legitimate Christian practice, also implies that there is a disparity between the gifts. This, too, is an erroneous concept based on this same misconception. Each individual gift of the Spirit may have a different role to play in the body of Christ, but they all have the same common purpose of edifying the church and, therefore, are as important as each other in God's overall plan for the church. Not only that, the idea that the gift of prophecy is to be preferred to the other gifts of the Spirit, including the gift of tongues, likewise questions the wisdom of the Spirit's

appropriation of the gifts as he sees fit. It also undermines Paul's earlier comments regarding the need for a diversity of gifts in the church, etc. (1 Cor 12:29-30). If all were to acquire the same gift to the exclusion of all others then the church would be as freakish as a body that was made up of only one organ, be it an eye, an ear, or a mouth, for example (see 12:17).

Furthermore, it is clear from Paul's definition of prophesying in 1 Cor 14:3, that it refers to the ordinary proclamation of the gospel rather than to the supernatural gift of prophecy. What is more, sharing the good news of salvation with others is something that all Christians can do, whether or not they actually possess the gift of prophecy. This infers that the contrast between prophesying and speaking with tongues in the Corinthian assembly in vv. 2-4 concerns motive rather than the gifts themselves. Prophesiers, Paul says, edify the church whereas the local tongues-speakers were using tongues to edify themselves (v. 4).

In keeping with this theme, and in order to avoid the contradictions raised by comparing the gift of prophecy with the gift of tongues, it would be more appropriate to translate the *ἵνα* clause in 1 Cor 14:5b as a final clause rather than a sub-final clause. This would make prophesying the aim or goal of speaking in tongues, which would effectively bring the Corinthians' use of tongues back into line with its original purpose of edifying the church (see vv. 3-4). If the aim or goal of speaking in tongues is to prophesy, they cannot be individually set against each other, because both concepts are mutually exclusive. Therefore, the contrast in this verse must be between using tongues to edify self (v. 4) and using tongues to prophesy, and not between prophesying and speaking in tongues. According to this interpretation, 1 Cor 14:5a-b reads: "I wish you could all speak in tongues, not in order to edify yourselves, but rather in order that you may prophesy."

It would also bring the Corinthians' use of tongues into line with the other NT manifestations of this gift, where, in every case, it was used to prophesy; that is, it was used to proclaim the wonderful works of God in the vernacular (see Acts 2:4-12, 16-18; 10:44-46; 19:6). This infers that speaking in tongues constitutes the miraculous ability to speak in other human languages without having to learn them first, and not to some form or other of non-human speech, be it ecstatic or otherwise.

In addition, there are several other passages in 1 Cor 14 that may allude to glossolalia as foreign languages. Firstly, the use of the word φωνή instead of γλῶσσα in vv. 10-11 is not meant to differentiate between speaking in tongues and human languages, but rather it is to show the utter futility of communicating in a language that is unknown to the hearer. Since the analogy with barbarians, therefore, is not with the tongues phenomenon *per se*, but rather with Corinthians' use of tongues in church to edify self, the reference to such in this passage could mean that glossolalists actually spoke in unlearned human languages.

Secondly, the use of the term "more than" in v. 18 cannot possibly mean that Paul could speak in tongues "more frequently" or "for longer" than his tongues-speaking counterparts in Corinth. The rules and regulations set down by Paul to control the use of this gift in the assembly (vv. 27-28) infer that, once bestowed, this gift was permanent and, hence, that it could be used as frequently or for as long as the glossolalist desired. On the other hand, if Paul were to integrate with the locals when evangelizing, as he intended (9:19-22), then he would need to be able to speak in as many different languages and dialects as the number of communities he visited. Thus, his claim to be able to speak in tongues more than all of the Corinthians put together was no idle boast on his part. On the contrary, it was an expression of gratitude for the opportunities that this gift had afforded him in being able to share the

gospel with the many and varied tribes-people that he had ministered to on his missionary journeys. Thirdly, the use of the term “words” to describe Paul’s glossolalic utterances, as well as his speech in the local vernacular (v. 19), strongly suggests that the former were as human as the latter.

The translation of the *ἵνα* clause in 1 Cor 14:5b as a purpose clause also answers the critics’ claim that, because there is no evidence to suggest that the Corinthians used this gift for evangelism, or that Paul encouraged them to do so, it is unlikely that glossolalia refers to speaking in other human languages. If the aim or goal of speaking with tongues is to prophesy, and it therefore refers to speaking in other human languages that the Corinthians could not understand, it is clear that this gift would never realize its God-given purpose of edifying the church if it were used within the confines of the church itself. To achieve this goal it had to be used out in the community where those whose native tongue the glossolalists could miraculously speak could understand the words spoken. It follows, therefore, that even though Paul does not actually mention the word evangelism in this verse he is nevertheless urging the Corinthians to use the gift of tongues for this express purpose.

Moreover, if the gift of tongues can be used to prophesy and, therefore, it refers to the miraculous ability to speak in other human languages, the argument cannot be sustained that the measures employed by Paul to curtail its use in the Corinthian assembly (1 Cor 14:27-28) imply that it is a private rather than a public gift. In keeping with his emphasis on the edification of the church throughout this chapter, it simply confirms that the self-edification of the tongues-speakers was an abuse rather than an inherent quality of this gift and that using it in this way in the assembly was inappropriate for Christians. Besides, if speaking with tongues is a private gift, it would be as ineffective in building up the church as praying out loud in

tongues would be. Someone other than the speaker would have to hear and understand the words spoken if the church at large were to benefit from them.

Furthermore, if the gift of tongues can be used to prophesy it implies that when Paul says that no one but God can understand the glossolalist's speech (v. 2), he is referring specifically to the members of the local assembly and not to the population at large. It also explains why outsiders would consider an all-tongues worship service to be an act of insanity. If, as Paul infers, the purpose of human speech is to communicate in a meaningful way, visitors to the assembly would be dumbfounded that the church would allow or condone the corporate use of speech that conveys no meaning to the worshippers.

On the other hand, the inappropriate use of tongues in church to edify self answers the question as to why the tongues phenomenon in Corinth called for an interpreter when the Acts 2 phenomenon did not. Had the local glossolalists used their gift to prophesy in foreign regions where their speech could be understood, instead of in the assembly where no one could understand a word they were saying, there would have been no need to engage the services of an interpreter. But the Corinthians were not in the habit of using the gift of tongues for the purpose of evangelism. Paul's immediate concern, therefore, was how to curtail this activity and thus restore some semblance of decency and order in the assembly (v. 40), as well as to edify the church. An interpreter would serve two purposes in this respect. Firstly, the church itself would be made aware of what the glossolalist was saying and therefore would benefit from his or her speech. Secondly, if the glossolalist were to share centre stage with one as well versed as he or she in what was said, it would serve to detract from his or her self-importance, which perhaps would eventually lead to the eradication of this abuse.

On the strength of the above arguments it is proposed that the Corinthian tongues phenomenon was no different from the Acts 2 phenomenon and, therefore, that it also refers to the miraculous ability to speak in other human languages without having to learn them first. We also submit that both phenomena were given for the purpose of evangelism, but the Corinthians had abused their gift by using it to edify themselves instead of the church. Consequently, Paul seeks to correct this abuse by encouraging them to use tongues to prophesy (1 Cor 14:5), in the sense of proclamation rather than direct revelation and foretelling the future.

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