

Misunderstandings about Spirituality

(Correcting Misconceptions about the Sign Gifts)

A study of 1st Corinthians, chapters 12, 13, and 14

Lesson notes by Rev. Phillip D. Mosher © 2013

Unless otherwise noted, the New American Standard Bible - 1995 edition is quoted herein.

Location of Corinth



Corinth is at an altitude of approximately 1,880 feet.



Shown above is the Acrocorinth mesa, the acropolis of Corinth, rising 1,800 feet above the plain to the southwest of the city, with the Apollo ruins in front of it. Archeologists believe there were three Temples to Aphrodite at Corinth, one being on the top of Acrocorinth, housing some 1,800 prostitutes (male and female) used in worship.

General Background to the book of Corinthians

The Romans destroyed Corinth around 146 BC. Julius Caesar rebuilt it as a Roman city in 44 BC. It is estimated that the population was 400,000. Its major religion was of Apollo but the cult of Aphrodite was strong. These are two Greek gods, believed to be descendants of Zeus.

In Acts 16:9 it is recorded that the Apostle Paul received a call to go into Macedonia (upper Greece). He went to the area of Philippi where persecution from the zealous Jews forced him to flee to Berea and then Thessalonica. From there he was forced to Athens. Ultimately he ended up in Corinth around 50 AD (Acts 18), where he remained for at least 18 months, planting a church, and teaching the whole counsel of God.

It is believed that Paul wrote four letters to this church, the first before 1st Corinthians (1st Cor. 5:9-11) and the third after. They have not been preserved. It is believed that this was the most difficult church for Paul (2nd Cor. 2:1). The fact that they did not respect his authority as an Apostle is seen in both letters.

In 1st Corinthians Paul addresses the spiritual immature attitude of the church. He calls them “fleshly” and “infants”, a people unwilling to learn and grow in the knowledge of the Lord and of His Word (1st Cor. 3:1-3).

In Chapters 1 thru 6, he first deals with problems in the church: 1) Factions (1:10-4:21), 2) Sexual immorality sanctioned by the church (5:1-13), 3) Law suits before unbelievers (6:1-11); 4) Fornication (6:12-20).

Next he answers questions and gives instructions: 1) Marriage (7:1-40), 2) Christian liberties (8:1 – 11:1), 3) Traditions and women (11:2-16), 4) The Lord’s Table (11:17-34), 4) True spirituality and the misuse of gifts (chapters. 12 – 14). 5) Truth of the resurrection (15).

In chapter 16 he speaks of the collection and his future plans.

Cultural Background of Corinth

This was a port city with approximately 400,000 residents. It had a temple for Aphrodite, the daughter of Zeus, the goddess of love and fertility with hundreds of male and female prostitutes. This religion would sound a gong as night approached to call the men to “worship.” This religion was not favored by Rome, so it functioned without political approval. Some believe that Paul’s statement in 13:1, “clanging cymbal”, is a reference to this pagan practice of fleshly “love”.

This pagan religion gives us understanding into Paul’s admonition for women to wear a head covering, in 1st Corinthians 11. The temple prostitutes did not cover their heads. This gets into the biblical truth that a true believer in Jesus was to live and act differently in this present world system — dress and behavior are testimonies.

There are remnants of the temple for Apollo still remaining at the site of the ancient city of Corinth. He was a son of Zeus. Thru music, drink, drugs, and dance, the worshipers would go into a spiritual state of ecstasy and would see visions and speak strange sounds. There

was a priestess who would interpret those sounds for the worshiper, somewhat like a fortune teller would read one's palm.

Both of these religions are the backdrop to Paul's teachings about the role of women in the church, found in chapters 11 and 14. Paul is not a "macho man" who is against women. He is dealing with a church that was established in a pagan, very worldly city that was composed of people converted out of those sensual religions where women played an important role.

Having an understanding of the religious background of the Corinthians will help us as we analyze and seek to understand what Paul wrote in chapters 12 thru 14.

The Apostle Paul uses sarcasm and irony in his letters to the Corinthians.

Irony (from the Ancient Greek εἰρωνεία *eirōneía*, meaning dissimulation or feigned ignorance) is a rhetorical device, literary technique, or situation in which there is an incongruity between the literal and the implied meaning. **Verbal irony** is a statement in which the meaning that a speaker employs is sharply different from the meaning that is ostensibly expressed. The ironic statement usually involves the explicit expression of one attitude or evaluation, but with indications in the overall speech-situation that the speaker intends a very different, and often opposite, attitude or evaluation.
(from Wikipedia)

Examples: 1:4-9 cf 3:1-4; 4:8; 6:4; 12:31

The Problem Addressed — Chapter 12 (Misunderstands of the gifts of the Spirit and their misuse)

Opening, 12:1-3 (Opening to Chapters 12 thru 14)

In these three verses Paul introduces his concern and purpose.

Now concerning spiritual^a *gifts*, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware.^b (12:1, NASB-95)

Other Translations:

(KJV-1769) Now concerning spiritual *gifts*, brethren, I would not have you ignorant.

(HCSB) Now concerning what comes from the Spirit: brothers, I do not want you to be unaware.

(CJB) But, brothers, I do not want you to go on being ignorant about the things of the Spirit.

(YLT) And concerning the spiritual things, brethren, I do not wish you to be ignorant. (This translation, done in 1898, best transmits the sense of the Greek.)

Greek Interlinear (Nestle-Alden 27th)

Περὶ	δὲ	τῶν	πνευματικῶν,	ἀδελφοί,	οὐ	θέλω		ὑμᾶς		ἀγνοεῖν
περί	δέ	ὁ	πνευματικός	ἀδελφός	οὐ	θέλω		σύ		ἀγνοεῶ
Concerning	but	the	spiritual	brothers	not	I want		you		to not know
P	CLT	DGPN	JGPN	NVPM	BN	VPAI1S		RP2AP		VPAN

JGPN = Adjective, Genitive, Plural, Neuter; VPAN = Verb, Present, Active, Indicative

Translations by PDM

But, concerning spiritual things (matters or persons), brethren, I do not want you to be uninformed.

To properly interpretation these chapters, it is important to distinguish between the Greek words πνευματικός (*pneumatikós*), first used in these chapters in the opening phase of the first verse, and χάρισμα (*charisma*), which in these chapters first appears in 12:4. Separate word studies for these two words accompany these lesson notes (see footnotes a and e). These words are not synonyms, and understanding this makes all the difference in one’s interpretation of the chapters.

Paul is addressing the matter of true spirituality of a person or practice. His desire was for the church in Corinth to have a clear understanding of what true spirituality is, how it is obtained, and how it is manifested in the assembly.

^a πνευματικός (*pneumatikós*), from Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, vol. 1, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*: **pertaining to being derived from or being about the Spirit—“spiritual, from the Spirit”.**

See: “A Word Study — πνευματικός” (file titled spirituals-G4152.docx)

^b ἀγνοεῶ (*agnoeō*), to not have information about—“to not know, to be unaware of, to be ignorant of, ignorance. (used in: Acts 3:17; 17:30; 2nd Cor. 2:11; 1st Thes. 4:13), from Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, vol. 1, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*:

By knowing the past, one can often explain the present, 12:2-3.

² You know that when you were pagans, *you were* led astray to the mute idols, however you were led.

³ Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, “Jesus is accursed”; and no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.

Paul the Apostle (1 Cor. 1:1) writes as a representative of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul was appointed by God to a very special office in the Early Church — *he was an Apostle*. Because of that office, he was endowed with divine wisdom, divine inspiration/guidance, and divine authority accompanied with supernatural powers.

Verse 2 brings to the attention of the reader the pagan background of these infants in Christ within the church at Corinth. Without knowledge of the cultural and historical setting behind these chapters, the passage’s immediate context, and the original language, these chapters can be poorly translated and interpreted. Neglect of these has led to inaccurate doctrines and their application within churches in our day. For example, in the earlier years of the twentieth century in conservative churches, women always wore hats, which came from a misunderstanding of chapter 11:1-16. Even today, in some churches, women are not allowed to speak, coming from a misunderstanding of chapter 14:33-35.

Verse 3 presents a test. Jesus is the eternal God who appeared, having been born of a virgin maiden. The eternal God entered time, dressed Himself in a human body, and submitted Himself to being man. He suffered at the hands of evil men and died on the Cross, shedding His blood as the “Lamb of God” to pay the sin debt of humanity so that those God had created in His image could be saved. He rose from the tomb on the third day and ascended to heaven from where He will return to fulfill God’s promises by establishing His Kingdom and sitting on David’s throne as King of kings and Lord of lords (Jer. 33). Only a true believer, speaking by the indwelling Holy Spirit, will acknowledge that *Jesus is Lord*, meaning all of the above. Non-believers and false teachers will deny Jesus’ divinity, His redemptive sacrifice, and His sovereign Lordship over creation (Psalm 2). Anyone who tries to degrade and deny who Jesus is, His authority over all, and the authority of His Word will suffer the consequences (14:37-38; 16:22, & 2nd Peter 2:1-3^c). In his first epistle, John tells us that such unbelievers are liars because the Holy Spirit is testifying to these truths to their hearts which they are denying. In essence, they are calling God’s Spirit a liar. ^d

^c 1st Corinthians 14:37–38 “If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord’s commandment. But if anyone does not recognize *this*, he is not recognized.”

1st Corinthians 16:22 “If anyone does not love the Lord, he is to be accursed. Maranatha.”

2nd Peter 2:1–3 “¹But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. ² Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; ³ and in *their* greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.”

^d 1st John 5:10 “The one who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself; the one who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has given concerning His Son.”

The Spirit gives gifts with a purpose, 12:4-11.

⁴ Now there are varieties of gifts,^e but the same Spirit.

⁵ And there are varieties of ministries^f, and the same Lord. ⁶ There are varieties of effects^g, but the same God who works all things in all *persons*.

⁷ **But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.**

⁸ For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰ and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another *various* kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues.

¹¹ But one and the same Spirit works all these things, **distributing to each one individually just as He wills.**

The message of this paragraph has been placed in a chiasmic structure. Verse 7 is central, being the purpose statement of the paragraph with the verses before and after surrounding and embellishing that purpose. Consider it the “bull’s-eye” of the paragraph, the center of the target. Starting with the outer ring of that target, in verses 4 and 11, Paul informs the readers that there are various grace-gifts (*charisma*) and that all of them are bestowed by the Spirit of God according to *His will*. Moving in to the next ring, in verses 5-6 and 8-10, Paul tells us that there are various ministries (*diakonía*), various workings (*enérgeíma*), and various abilities (*charisma*, grace-gifts), and that these are all bestowed by the Spirit *according to the plan and will of God*. Verse 7, the “bull’s-eye” statement, informs us of the purpose behind all that God is doing thru ministry of the Spirit: It is **“for the common good.”** God has in focus the Body of Christ, manifested through local churches and their members. He gifts believers and enables them for ministries because He desires for the Body of Christ to grow to maturity in Christ. All is done in accordance with God’s will and for the benefit of the Body of Christ — **“distributing to each one individually just as He wills.”**

Looking more specifically at the grace-gifts (*charisma*) of the Spirit, this paragraph is not giving an exhaustive list. Other grace-gifts are found in Romans 12 and 1st Peter 4:10-11. The New Testament also tells of people who are gifted with special abilities and of especially gifted men that God has given to the Church as leaders in Christ centered ministries

^e *χάρισμα* (*charisma*), a gift of grace, see the accompanying word study on Χάρισμα, file charma.docx. Grace-gifts are special abilities bestowed by the Spirit upon a person when he/she is born of the Spirit (John 1:12; 1st Cor. 12:13). (See attached word study)

^f *διακονία* (*diakonía*), ministries, services

^g *ἐνέργημα* (*enérgeíma*) to effect. Effect, working. The suffix *-ma* makes it the result or effect of *enérgeia*, energy. In the NT, used only in 1 Cor. 12:6, 10 of the **results of the energy of God in the believer**. Though *enérgeíma* is translated “operations,” it is actually the results energized by God’s grace. (from: Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*)

(Ephesians 4:8-12). The important thing is that God gifts His children with special abilities with a purpose in view — the growth and maturity of the Body of Christ. None of these gifts are designed *for personal benefit*. Throughout the dispensation of the Church, God has been giving grace-gifts to believers “for the common good” of the Church.

Looking at the Grace-Gifts (charisma)

In the NT there is no exhaustive list of these gifts. The important thing is that we know that God is in control, and that He is gifting people for the benefit of the Church. From our parents during natural birth, we each receive talents. From God during at our spiritual birth we each received grace-gifts (charisma). The following are some of the grace-gifts bestowed by the Holy Spirit.

From 1st Corinthians 4:8-10

Wisdom = A special insight and understanding of God’s Word and of spiritual matters

Word of knowledge = A special depth of perception in divine Truth and an ability to explain it to others (Wisdom and Knowledge are similar)

Faith = A strong faith that believes thru difficulties

Healings (plural in Greek) = The ability to cure illnesses.

Miracles = The ability to perform great signs, see Acts 13:11

Prophecy = The ability to perceive the future (unlike prophecy meaning to proclaim God’s Word)

Distinguishing of spirits = A special ability to discern truth from error and the false from the true

Tongues = The ability to communicate in a language one does not speak and has not learned (this is not “ecstatic utterances”)

Interpretation of tongues = The ability to understand a language one does not speak and has not learned

Others (Romans 12:7-8):

Service = Abilities in working behind the scenes to get the mundane done

Teaching = Similar to “word of knowledge”, a special ability to communicate truth

Exhorts = The ability to correct and to give counsel and guidance

Giving = A special gift that gives more than the required

Leading = Administrative skills

Showing mercy = The ability to empathize and encourage

Does one need to know his/her grace-gift/gifts? I would not preoccupy myself with that search. Get involved where you are comfortable. If you do this, you will eventually recognize what God has done in you and expects from you. Remember Romans 12:3, “For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.” Don’t try to be something you aren’t. Don’t develop guilt feelings because you are not performing in areas like others or because someone believes you should be doing something that you know you are not gifted in doing. Don’t pray to ask the Lord to change the way He has programmed you. Don’t pray for gifts He has not given to you. God has a purpose for each of His children.

A lot of Christians are not involved. They are sitting on their hands rather than using them for the purpose and Glory of God. **Gifts must be developed and used or they will atrophy.**

“The spirits of prophets are subject to prophets.” (1st Corinthians 14:32) Though gifted, the believer must decide to grow in grace, to develop his God given abilities, and to use what God has bestowed upon him/her. God gifts, but the believer must perform.

The Spirit baptizes and indwells the believer, placing them in the Body of Christ, 12:12-13.

For even as the body is one and *yet* has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks [Gentiles], whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

The following verses compliment the above text:

John 1:12–13

¹² But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, *even* to those who believe in His name, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

Ephesians 1:13–14

¹³ In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, ¹⁴ who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of *God’s own* possession, to the praise of His glory.

2nd Corinthians 1:21–22

²¹ Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God, ²² who also sealed us and gave *us* the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge.

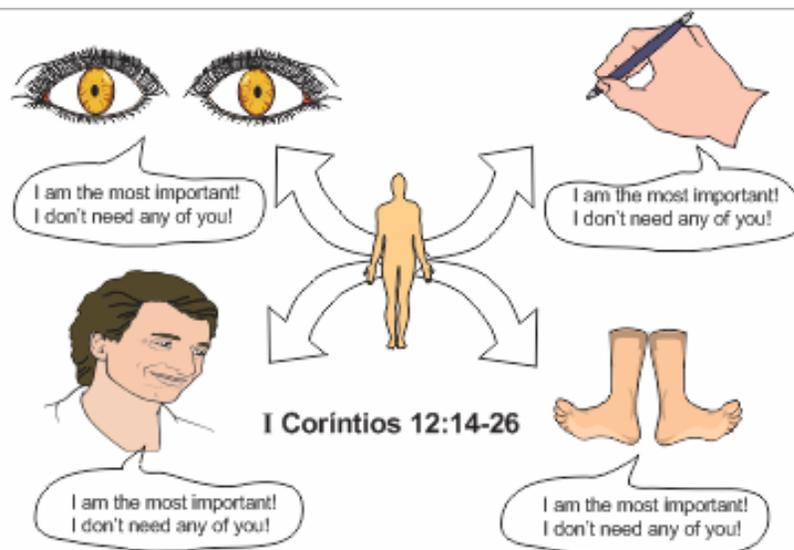
One’s status in society, the color of his/her skin, the size of his/her bank account, etc. are not important. Faith in the Lord Jesus makes all the difference in the world. That act of turning one’s life over to the Lord brings the person into a new relationship with God.

Several things happen when one appropriates the salvation offer:

1. We are born into the family of God and become sons of God. John 1:12-13; Gal. 4:7
2. We are immersed into the Body of Christ. 1st Cor. 12:13
3. We are gifted by the Spirit with spiritual abilities. 1st Cor. 12:4-30 and Rom. 12:3-8
4. We are made just before God. Rom. 3:28; 5:1
5. We receive the divine seal, the guarantee of complete and eternal restoration to fellowship with God. 1st Cor. 6:20; Eph. 1:13-14
6. We are free of any condemnation. Rom. 8:1
7. We become joint heirs with God’s Son. Rom. 8:17

The Spirit's gifts are for the whole Body, 12:14-30

¹⁴ For the body is not one member, but many. ¹⁵ If the foot says, "Because I am not a hand, I am not *a part* of the body," it is not for this reason any the less *a part* of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear says, "Because I am not an eye, I am not *a part* of the body," it is not for this reason any the less *a part* of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸ But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. ¹⁹ If they were all one member, where would the body be? ²⁰ But now there are many members, but one body. ²¹ And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." ²² On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; ²³ and those *members* of the body which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable members become much more presentable, ²⁴ whereas our more presentable members have no need *of it*. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that *member* which lacked, ²⁵ so that there may be no division in the body, but *that* the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶ And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if *one* member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.



Summing it up

²⁷ Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it. ²⁸ And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, *various* kinds of tongues. ²⁹ All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not *workers of* miracles, are they? ³⁰ All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they?

These verses hardly need a commentary. For seven times in this section (vv 14-30), Paul has emphasized that it is God through the Holy Spirit who bestows the grace gifts (charismata) upon His children (vv 7, 11, 18, 24, 28).

Verses 27 thru 30 form the concluding paragraph of this chapter. Verse 27 returns to the fact stated in verse 7, i.e. the divine purpose for the grace gifts is the building up of the Body of Christ. Verse 28 begins with gifted people and concludes with spiritual gifts. God gives gifted people (Ephesians 4:11-16) and He gives spiritual abilities to individual believers for the edification of the Church. The training of the saints and spiritual growth of the Church is God's goal. When a Christian places the focus upon himself, using his gift for personal blessing, God's objectives are thwarted. Grace gifts are not bestowed on individuals to make them better, or to make them something special, but for the church's spiritual benefit. The rhetorical questions in verses 29 and 30 state the apparent — everyone cannot be the same. The Body has many and various parts. All are essential for a well functioning body. God is working behind the scenes; and we need to function in accordance with how He has enabled us for the "common good" of the Lord's Body. It is pure frustration to try to be something one isn't. To exalt one's ability above that of another would be ludicrous and pure selfishness.

God has given every new Christian at least one spiritual gift, one spiritual ability. As with the talents we received at conception from our parents, the Holy Spirit gives each believer gifts at his/her spiritual conception. Just as we can neglect our talents and let them waste away, so can we neglect our spiritual gifts and let them become atrophied.

By perusing my interest, early in life I learned I had mechanical abilities. Those talents became efficient and refined skills as I used them to fix or make things, as I studied books and took courses in school, and as I watched and learned from others with the same abilities — all for the purpose of improving those abilities. To develop one's Spirit-given gifts, the Christian must follow the same steps: 1) Get involved where your interests are. 2) Read books and take courses to sharpen your skills. 3) Learn from others who have the same spiritual abilities and have shown great skill in using them. We will never be of use to God and the Church if we do not get involved in ministries, study, seek wisdom in using our grace gifts, and learn from others who have gone before us.

Proverbs 3:13-26, we are born with abilities, not wisdom (the skills for living before God and man). Wisdom comes with patient persistence in study, development, and use. A seeker of wisdom never quits in his quest to improve his skills.

Paul now moves to apply and to build upon the truths he has set forth in chapter 12.

Verse 31 is the punch line.

But earnestly desire^h the greater gifts.

And I show you a still more excellent way.

The first sentence is a criticism based upon the facts and designed to correct an error — self centered behavior. “Earnestly desire” is (ζηλοῦτε) *zeloute* (root *zeloo*). This verb is both in the second person plural present inductive mode and in the second person plural present imperative.ⁱ In almost all English translations it is rendered in the imperative, as is the case in the NASB quoted above. Are those translations correct? The Greek does not make a distinction, so one must carefully examine the context to determine the sense of the phrase, and one’s conclusion should impact one’s understanding and translation.

In First Corinthians Paul is dealing with spiritual problems in this church (divisions, taking spiritual conflicts to civil court, sanctioning adultery, falling back into pagan religious habits, abusing spiritual gifts). Those Christians are exalting the sign gifts, primarily that of tongues. The Apostle entered this topic (chapters 12 thru 14) because the people were abusing spiritual gifts with self-centered motives. Because of the immediate context, it is my conviction that the first sentence of this verse should be translated to reflect a current action, not as an imperative. How can I “zealously” procure a gift like tongues, when the Spirit of God decided my gifts when I accepted the Savior? (Illustration: Amy Carmichael prayed for blue eyes until she became a missionary in India.) Therefore, my paraphrased translation of 12:31 reflects my understanding of the passage and is fully supported by the Greek:

But, you are all zealously seeking the gifts that are greater *in your eyes*, and yet I show you a much better way to behave *in the church*.

“Gifts” is *χαρίσματα* (*charismata*). These gifts are spiritual abilities that the Spirit bestows on believers for the overall benefit of the Body of Christ. In these chapters, *charisma* is first used in 12:4 and it is found 5 times in chapter 12. It is not in chapter 13 and 14.

The last sentence of this verse introduces chapter 13; and though the better way is unselfish love, the admonition continues in chapter 14. Paul will show these believers a much better way to advance in spiritual things, in spirituality.

^h *ζηλόω* *zēloō* to strive, to be zealous

Zēλος (with the same meaning whether with *ὁ* or *τό*) and *ζηλόω* designate a passionate commitment to a person or cause (Stumpff 876). The motivation can vary: commitment to the highest values, fascination, contact with sacred sentiments, injured honor, rivalry or envy, contentiousness, and irritability. Correspondingly differentiated is the evaluation of the term between positive, neutral, and negative connotations. The respective standpoint plays a considerable role.

In this passage the verb is in the second person plural, present indicative or imperative mode.

Though most scholars go with the imperative, I believe the context mandates using the present indicative mode as the correct sense of the phrase and translation.

ⁱ *The Analytical Greek Lexicon*, Harper Brothers Publisher, page 182

Summing it up on 1st Corinthians 12:31

Literal Translation: “You are all zealously seeking the greater gifts, and I show you a more excellent way.”

In my earlier years as a Christian, as I was seeking a Christ-centered life controlled by the Spirit, well-intended people would come to me and say that I needed the “baptism of the Spirit and the gift of speaking in tongues” (always linked). They would quote 1st Cor. 12:31a, from the KJV, “But covet earnestly the best gifts,” and say that I needed to earnestly seek the gift of tongues, and then God would baptize me in His Spirit and give me special power for ministry. “Tongues” was the external sign for what they were calling the “baptism of the Spirit”. Though back then I disagreed with their theology and still do, it wasn’t until years later that I learned what 1st Corinthians 12:31 is actually saying. I learned that the first sentence in that verse could be translated differently than it is rendered in most translations. It is usually translated with the verb in the imperative mode as a command to procure the best gifts. This form of the Greek verb ζηλοῦτε (*zeloute*) is in the second person plural (all of you or ye) present indicative mode and the second person plural present imperative mode. How then should it be understood?

Reasons for translating ζηλοῦτε (*zeloute*) in the second person, present, indicative mode rather than in the imperative:

1. In these 3 chapters the Apostle is dealing with the matter of true spirituality; see 12:1 studied above and 3:1-3. The Corinthians believed that speaking in tongues was a sign of spirituality, an understanding that one gains from studying these 3 chapters. We believe this was a carryover from their pagan worship at the Temple of Apollo, see 12:3 studied.
2. In the church in Corinth they were misusing the gifts of the Spirit and were placing the gift of tongues above the gifts that edify; see 13:1 and 14:1-5.
3. At the time of spiritual birth, the Holy Spirit gives each new believer gifts (charismata) that are spiritual abilities; see 12:11; and vv 12-13. He is the One Who determines which gift or gifts to give each believer — a God thing. Just as Amy Carmichael could not persuade God to change the color of her brown eyes to blue, nor can we persuade the Lord to change how He has created us at the time of our birth into His family. It’s in the spiritual DNA.
4. The present imperative, “Covet earnestly the best gifts” (KJV), implies that one can have the gift he desires or thinks is best if he just seeks it in earnest. Translating the verb in the imperative would encourage selfish ambitions. It says we can have and do what we want if we just petition God hard enough. But, this ignores God’s design and plan for individuals as they are baptized into the Body of Christ and given gifts (charismata) for use in His Body, the Church.
5. The book of 1st Corinthians is sarcastic and corrective. Translating in the present indicative, “You all are zealously seeking the better gifts”, agrees with that scenario and makes this sentence a criticism that states the facts presented within the context. These chapters quite strongly support a translation in the present indicative over the present imperative of *zeloute*.
6. Following 12:31a we read: “And I will show you a more excellent way” (12:31b). This does not fit with a command statement before it, “zealously seek gifts”; but it does go very well after the present indicative verb, a criticism. What the Corinthians thought to be the better gifts would be understood from the context — the showy gifts like tongues. In context, in chapter 14 Paul tells them that the better gift is prophecy, a beneficial gift in the assembly.

Here I will point out that 1st Corinthians 14:1, “Pursue [διώκω *dióko*] love, yet desire earnestly [ζηλοῦτε] spiritual *gifts*, but especially that you may prophesy”, is directed to that local church. They are to be careful in their services to exalt the teaching and preaching of God’s Word, doing that which contributes to the edification of the spiritually born in Christ and their spiritual walk. There is a translation problem here which will be addressed shortly.

Indicative = the basic mood of verbs in ordinary objective statements Imperative = the mood of a verb that expresses a command or request
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Solutions to the Problem — Chapters 13 and 14

Unselfish Love is the “more excellent way”— Chapter 13

The road to true spirituality begins with *selfless love*.

Love (agapé) gives value to spiritual gifts

¹ If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ² If I have *the gift of prophecy*, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³ And if I give all my possessions to feed *the poor*, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.

Love is not a spiritual gift but an attribute. By his emphasis on agape love as being essential in the use of spiritual gifts (charismas), and by comparing the practice of gifts without that love to the sound of a gong, the Apostle Paul is bringing into his courtroom the practices of the Aphrodite cult where emotional, sensual, self-centered love is practiced, and those called to worship there were done so by the sound of the gong. The agape love Paul is emphasizing is not self gratifying but puts others first, is purely unselfish. It is only in this environment that the grace gifts (charismas) can be effective.

Love (agapé) is unselfish

⁴ Love is patient, love is kind *and* is not jealous; love does not brag *and* is not arrogant, ⁵ does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong *suffered*, ⁶ does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; ⁷ bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Expanding upon the kind of love that is discussed in vv 1-3, Paul now lists unselfish traits of this kind of love. Behavior for the exaltation of self is not love, but it is selfish and egotistical. It edifies no one. In truth, it destroys.

Love (agapé) is forever

⁸ Love never fails; but if *there are gifts of prophecy*, they will be done away; if *there are tongues*, they will cease; if *there is knowledge*, it will be done away. ⁹ For we know in part and we prophesy in part; ¹⁰ but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away. ¹¹ When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. ¹² For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I

will know fully just as I also have been fully known.

¹³ But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.

This agape love is everlasting because it is a character trait, not a spiritual gift. Prophecy, tongues, and knowledge are gifts given by God's Spirit to edify the Church. These are temporary gifts, and in Paul's day they brought to the Church special revelations from God. The Spirit revealed truth to His people through those with these gifts. An example of prophecy: Acts 21:8-11= here these prophets announce to Paul his future imprisonment, and Acts 13:1 = Barnabas and Paul are classed as prophets, men with the gift of prophecy and knowledge. An example of tongues: Acts 19:6 = here tongues and prophecy revealed truth to those 12 men, giving to them a sign of the truthfulness of Paul's message. This was the case in Acts 2 as well. We will go farther into this when we study 14:20-25.

Every gift is linked in some way to building up the church to maturity—some (prophecy, knowledge, tongues) functioning in the early years of the Church Age and others continuing on till the church is perfected. When that perfection is achieved, the gifts will have served their purposes and will be rendered obsolete. But this will not happen to love.^j

Only agape love is eternal. It is of God, for He is love (1st John 4:8 & 16). It is different from the grace gifts because love is an attribute of God that flows from Him through His children. All of the spiritual gifts will cease to function once their purpose has been realized (13:13). The gifts of prophecies, tongues, and supernatural knowledge are all gifts of special revelation, and they "will be done away" when they are no longer necessary. Their period of existence is tied to their time of usefulness in the church and to when they will no longer be bestowed. Paul tells us that this cessation is "when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away". All of the grace gifts (charisma) are temporary. But, Prophecy, Tongues, and Knowledge are to cease when the "perfect" (or mature) comes.

Since Paul has stressed that the purpose of the grace gifts is the edification of the church (12:7 and Ephesians 4:12-13), some believe that that which is "perfect", in this case would mean complete or mature, refers to the church coming to maturity. Others believe that because those three gifts all have to do with divine revelation that that which is "perfect", again meaning complete or mature, is the completed New Testament and the biblical Canon. This and the church reaching maturity would be after 100 AD to some point around the middle of the second century. The Apostles and those that followed and preceded them, the Church Fathers, had basically passed off the scene by that time. By the middle of the second century the Church was on its own — mature. The final book of the New Testament, the Revelation, was written shortly before 100 AD and the biblical Canon was basically in place by the middle of the second century.

Still others believe that that which is "perfect" is the Lord Jesus and that these special revelation gifts will pass off the scene at His second coming. Yes, Jesus is the perfect one, but the context would better support the first two interpretations. Evidence for the maturity of the church and the completion of the Canon are equal, making it difficult to decide which is intended. Both were reached during the same period in church history. Being no longer needed, these special gifts of divine revelation have passed away; and I lean more to the completed Bible being that which is "perfect"; but I would not be dogmatic here.

^j David K. Lowery, "1 Corinthians", in , vol. 2, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, 536 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985).

Prophecy and knowledge are very close in their meaning. They have one distinct purpose: the impartation of divine truth. In this context they mean gifts of special revelation and are associated with the offices of Prophet and Apostle. A prophet was one who spoke the Word of God. In Bible times, he was given revelation from God that he proclaimed — “Thus says the Lord.” However, a prophet being one who proclaims God’s Word to the people can also be one who reads and studies the Scriptures and proclaims the truth learned and applies it to the needs of the people, much like a preacher or teacher would do today. I believe this latter sense is what is in focus in Paul’s command in 14:1. Though both senses may be in view, in chapter 14 Paul is emphasizing the “proclaiming” of God’s word over the “special revelation” side of this grace gift (charisma). The “revealing” aspect ceased when the “perfect” came. The preaching of God’s Word will not be necessary after our Lord’s second coming, when our faith and hope will have been realized. Love remains forever.

Spirituality begins with orderly behavior in the assembly, Chapter 14

First: Set priorities.

Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual *gifts*,
but especially that you may prophesy. (verse 1)

The church is to pursue (διώκω *diōkō*) agape love. This verb is in the second person plural, present, imperative, active mode. In this sentence the mode of the first verb indicates how one should translate the second verb (ζηλοῦτε *zeloute*), because the Greek of the second verb can be translated either in the second person plural present indicative or the imperative mode (see study on 12:31). I believe that both verbs in 14:1 are to be translated in the present imperative mode. These are commands to the local church to purposely pursue agape love and to zealously desire spiritual things (not gifts) in the assembly of the saints.

Again our translators have added “*gifts*” after “spiritual” (πνευματικός *pneumatikós*). Rather than making things clear, by supplying the word “*gifts*”, they have laid a foundation for building confusion. In our study, we covered this in 12:1. “Spiritual” (*pneumatikós*) is an adjective; and as in 12:1 also in 14:1, it is without an antecedent (what it modifies is not present in the sentence). Knowledge of the context should help us supply one in our translation. As in 12:1, I believe that translating this as “spiritual *matters*” or “spiritual *things*” is a more accurate rendering than “spiritual *gifts*”. *Young’s Literal Translation* (published in 1898) and the *Complete Jewish Bible* (published in 1998) both translate 12:1 and 14:1 as “spiritual things” or “things of the Spirit”. The translators of these two translations have looked at the context and come to the proper conclusion by translating the sense of the text.

The church should always function with agape love, and there should be a zealous desire for spiritual things; but along with these two foundational endeavors, the Apostle stresses that prophecy, one of the gifts (charisma) of the Spirit, is “especially” important. In other words, in their pursuit of agape and zeal for spiritual things, they should place prophecy at the top of their list of gifts of importance that are to be practiced in the assembly — because the spiritual edification of the saints should be the primary objective of every church. When people grow in their knowledge of God and His Word, they grow in spirituality. So, in this chapter we will see that the assembled church is to esteem the grace gift of “prophecy” — the proclamation of God’s Word.

Paul told Timothy to “give attention to the *public reading of Scripture*, to exhortation and teaching.” (1st Timothy 4:13, the italicized words are supplied, but that

is what was done in the synagogues.) Every Christian should have a time when he/she reads the Bible and prays. I recommend some type of program that will result in a continual reading, cover to cover, of the Scriptures. I believe that the public reading of the Bible should be a part of what is done in the assemblies of the local church, perhaps like Ezra did, with brief explanations from the pastor or spiritual leader who is doing these readings. Along with this, the church leadership should be encouraging the people to read the Word, pray, and be with God's people. The teaching of the Word is so essential in the services of the church. This should be done in every gathering. These are the elements that will produce growth both numerically and spiritually in a local assembly of believers.

But, in Corinth the members had been elevating the gift of tongues to an important place. Paul has already made it clear that the teaching and preaching of the Word of God is far more important than speeches made in unknown languages in the assembly, a gift that does not communicate anything without having been interpreted (13:1-2). To those hearing this, it is a bunch of strange sounds and babblings. All of the grace gifts (charismata) are given by the Spirit for the edification of the church (see study on 12:7 above). Prophecy, the proclamation of the truths of God, is specifically designed for that purpose. However, Paul tells the Corinthians that the sign gift of tongues (foreign languages) has a different purpose from the other grace gifts, which he will explain shortly (vv 20-25).

The word "edification" [οἰκοδομή *oikodomé*], is used in 14:3, 4, 5, 12, 17, and 26.

12:7 tells us that the grace gifts (charismata) are given for the good of the church, meaning its spiritual growth. In this chapter (14) Paul emphasizes "edification". The most important thing a church can do is those things that will cause its members to grow and mature in the Lord (Eph. 4:15; 1st Thes. 4:3, 7; 1st Pet. 2:2; 2nd Pet. 3:18). The proclamation of God's Word is foundational to the edification of the believers. It also causes the unsaved to repent and to surrender their lives to the Lord Jesus.

Second: Focus on Edification.

² For one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God; for no one understands, but in *his* spirit he speaks mysteries. ³ But one who prophesies speaks to men for **edification** and **exhortation** and **consolation**. ⁴ One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; but one who prophesies edifies the church. ⁵ Now I wish that you all spoke in tongues, but *even* more that you would prophesy; and **greater is one who prophesies than one who speaks in tongues**, unless he interprets, so that the church may receive edifying. ⁶ But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking in tongues, what will I profit you unless I speak to you either by way of revelation or of knowledge or of prophecy or of teaching? ⁷ Yet *even* lifeless things, either flute or harp, in producing a sound, if they do not produce a distinction in the tones, how will it be known what is played on the flute or on the harp? ⁸ For if

the bugle produces an indistinct sound, who will prepare himself for battle? ⁹ So also you, unless you utter by the tongue speech that is clear, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air. ¹⁰ There are, perhaps, a great many kinds of languages in the world, and no *kind* is without meaning. ¹¹ If then I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be to the one who speaks a barbarian, and the one who speaks will be a barbarian to me. ¹² So also you, since you are zealous [ζηλωταί] of spiritual [πνευμάτων] gifts, seek to abound for the edification of the church. ¹³ Therefore let one who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret. ¹⁴ For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. ¹⁵ What is the outcome then? I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also; I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also. ¹⁶ Otherwise if you bless in the spirit *only*, how will the one who fills the place of the ungifted say the “Amen” at your giving of thanks, since he does not know what you are saying? ¹⁷ For you are giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not edified. ¹⁸ I thank God, I speak in tongues more than you all; ¹⁹ however, in the church I desire to speak five words with my mind so that I may instruct others also, rather than ten thousand words in a tongue.

A barbarian is one who does not speak the national language.

It is important that those present in a meeting of the church understand what is being said and done. The objective is the spiritual edification of those assembled.

Third: Keep in focus the divine purpose for each spiritual gift.

(In this paragraph Paul gives the purpose for the sign gift of tongues.)

As background for the following paragraph, we need to look at two Old Testament passages:

Deuteronomy 28:49–50:

“The LORD will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, as the eagle swoops down, a nation whose language you shall not understand, a nation of fierce countenance who will have no respect for the old, nor show favor to the young.”

This Deuteronomy passage is in the section of Deuteronomy (starts at 28:15) that spells out what the Lord will do to Israel if they disobey Him and violate their covenant agreement with God made at Sinai. One of those punishments will be the nation’s removal from the Promised Land and the Israelites being scattered all over the world. The Jews spoke Hebrew.

Languages like Chaldean, Greek, Latin, German, Russian, etc. were foreign to them. They were strange sounds that communicated no intelligent sense to the Jews.

Isaiah 28:10-13:

“For *He says*, ‘Order on order, order on order, Line on line, line on line, A little here, a little there.’¹¹ Indeed, He will speak to this people through **stammering lips and a foreign tongue**,¹² He who said to them, ‘Here is rest, give rest to the weary,’ And, ‘Here is repose,’ but they would not listen.¹³ So the word of the LORD to them will be, ‘Order on order, order on order, Line on line, line on line, A little here, a little there,’ That they may go and stumble backward, be broken, snared and taken captive.”

The above prophecy from God thru Isaiah to Israel is founded upon the Mosaic Law in Deuteronomy which was quote and addressed above. Regarding Isaiah’s selection of the words, “Order on order, order on order, Line on line, line on line”, several commentaries^k makes the observation that the Hebrew words: “**Sav lasav, sav lasav, Kav lakav, kav lakav, Ze’ er sham, ze’ er sham,**” are monosyllables representing the “babbling of a child.” In verse 9 the questions is asked, “To whom would He teach knowledge, and to whom would He interpret the message? Those *just* weaned from milk? Those *just* taken from the breast?” indicating that God considers the Israelites to be infants in their behavior toward Him. The *Complete Jewish Bible*’s translation of Isaiah 28:9 and 10 reads: “Can no one be taught anything? Can no one understand the message? Must one teach barely weaned toddlers, babies just taken from the breast, so that [one has to use nursery rhymes]?— *Tzav la-tzav, tzav la-tzav, kav la-kav, kav la-kav z’eir sham, z’eir sham* [Precept by precept, precept by precept, line by line, line by line, a little here, a little there].” The *Jewish Study Bible* has this note on verse 10: “Murmur ... now there: The Heb. Consists of repetitive gibberish ... monotonous nonsense”.^l These words representing infant babbling are repeated in verse 13.

God prophesied thru Isaiah that because of their disobediences and behaving as infants, He was going to speak to Israel thru strange sounds that they would not understand. Those strange sounds would be a sign of a curse; and it comes because they would not listen to Him when He spoke to them in Hebrew. They refused to enter His rest as promised for their loyal obedience to the Mosaic Covenant entered at Sinai. These two Old Testament passages say that when Israel hears a foreign language, it will be to them like a child’s babbling and is a sign of God’s judgment upon them for their disobedience.

^k This commentary on Isaiah 28:10 is found in a note in the NASB-95 in the Logos Bible Software and similarly in the HCSB Study Bible..

^l *The Jewish Study Bible*, Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler editors, © 2004, Pub. Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Univ. Press, Page837

In 1st Corinthians 14:20-22, Paul has referenced the “Law” which is found in Deuteronomy 28:49–50, but he has paraphrased the prophetic judgment found in Isaiah which is based upon that law.

1st Corinthians 14:20-22

²⁰ Brethren, **do not be children** in your thinking; yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking **be mature**. ²¹ In the Law it is written, **“By men of strange tongues and by the lips of strangers I will speak to this people, and even so they will not listen to Me,”** says the Lord. ²² So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who **believe** but to unbelievers; but prophecy *is for a sign*, not to unbelievers but to those who believe [those who obey God].

1st Cor. 1:22: Jews seek signs (attesting miracles) and gentiles desire wisdom (an understanding gained thru skillful analysis).

Mature (τέλειος *téleios*) is the same word used in 13:10. God wants His children to grow up in the Lord, to be His spiritually mature sons.

Belief and Obedience are Siamese twins. They always go together.

Paul says “tongues are a sign” and uses the Law to substantiate his claim and shows to whom this sign is given. Paul tells the reader that languages foreign to the hearer are a sign to unbelievers; and by citing the “Law”, Paul indicates to the church who those unbelievers happen to be — Israelites. In Isaiah it says they would not listen to God and rest in Him or help others to do so. Every instance in Acts where we see the sign of tongues (Acts 2, 10, and 19), there were unbelieving Israelites present for whom that sign was given. Except for 1st Corinthians 12 thru 14, Acts is the only New Testament book where instances of that sign are recorded. In every case tongues, a foreign language, is a sign to Jews who were in unbelief. In Acts, each time those unbelievers became believers.

The purpose of the gift of prophecy is the edification of believers or those who will believe. To believe God and His Word is synonymous with obedience. Paul tells the church to “pursue . . . prophecy.” His emphasis in this chapter is the building up of the saints. Prophecy, the proclamation of God’s Word, is the spiritual gift that does this the best.

Tongues are a sign to unbelievers, those unbelievers being Jews who refuse to obey God. Prophecy, the proclaiming of God’s Word, ministers to those who are open to the message and will believe and obey it. However, the Corinthian Christians were using the gift of tongues as a sign of being Spirit-controlled, as a sign that they were spiritual. How wrong they were! There is no short cut to being a spiritual Christian. Study is hard work.

Fourth: Practice what ministers to the people for spiritual growth.

(Prophecy, the proclamation of God's Word)

²³ Therefore if the whole church assembles together and all speak in tongues, and ungifted men or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are mad? ²⁴ But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an ungifted man enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all; ²⁵ the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so he will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you.

1st Cor. 1:22: Jews seek signs (attesting miracles) and gentiles desire wisdom (an understanding gained thru skillful analysis).

The spiritual gift of prophecy, the proclamation of God's Word, brings conviction. It changes lives. What does the outsider in the world think of the charismatic movement? They think they are crazy fanatics. In Brazil the spiritists proclaimed that they too spoke in tongues and healed the sick. But, they could not claim that spiritism revealed a person's sin and caused him/her to repent and to believe in Jesus as his/her Savior. Spiritism does not change lives. Knowledge of God's Word and obedience toward God does.

Fifth: Follow the following guiding principles.

²⁶ What is *the outcome* then, brethren?

When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let **(1)** all things be done for edification. ²⁷ **(2)** If anyone speaks in a tongue, *it should be* by two or at the most three, and *each* in turn, and one must interpret; ²⁸ but if there is no interpreter, he must keep silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God. **(3)** ²⁹ Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment. ³⁰ But if a revelation is made to another who is seated, the first one must keep silent. ³¹ For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted; ³² and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets; ³³ for God is not *a God* of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints. **(4)** ³⁴ The women are to keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but are to subject themselves, just as the Law also says. ³⁵ If they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church.

1. The edification of the saints is primary.

2. "Tongue speaking" is to be done one at a time, limited to no more than three, and each is to be interpreted.

3. Prophets are to speak in an orderly process so that those present can learn. The exercise of spiritual gifts is under the control of the gifted person.

4. Women are prohibited from speaking in the assembly. See 1st Tim 2:11-14 & Tit. 2:3-5. This one rule, if followed, would basically eliminate the charismatic movement. Conservative, Bible practicing churches do not place women in roles, like pastor or teacher, over men.

The gift of tongues had not ceased at the time of Paul's letter. Here Paul puts restrictions upon the use of that gift in the worship service. His first point, in verse 26, is that in the assembly all that is done should revolve around one main objective — the edification of the saints. The spiritual growth of God's children should be the primary goal of each local church. People in tune with God will be a shining testimony on the outside.

Paul asserts his authority

³⁶ Was it from you that the word of God *first* went forth? Or has it come to you only? ³⁷ If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment. ³⁸ But if anyone does not recognize *this*, he is not recognized.

In verse 37, "spiritual" is *πνευματικός pneumatikós*. See 1st Cor. 2:15 "But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one." A spiritual Christian will be discerning.

The Corinthians had trouble accepting and following Paul's authority as an Apostle. This is apparent from a reading of both epistles. A spiritual believer in Jesus, one who is growing in the Lord and yielding his life to the Spirit's control, will recognize that Paul is an Apostle and that he speaks from God. Paul has written a letter that is the inspired Word of God. These words demand one's highest respect and obedience.

Paul's Summary

³⁹ Therefore, my brethren, desire earnestly [zeloute] to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak in tongues. ⁴⁰ But all things must be done properly and in an orderly manner.

In his concluding words, Paul places the gift of prophecy on the top of the list of importance in the church. A prophet of God spoke the Words of God to the people. Though in 13:8 Paul says, "prophecies will cease," at the time this was written those gifts that communicate special revelations from God to the people of God were still functioning. Today we can forbid the speaking of tongues in the church. We have no control over what one does in his home.

The Jews had gathered together the books of the Old Testament Canon (OT) at least 150 years before the birth of Jesus. Archeological findings, especially those at Qumran, confirm this; and from that time the religious leadership has recognized the OT as completed and by means of the Dead Sea findings, it is believed that the Masoretic Text represents that Canon. The last book to be written of the New Testament (NT) is Revelation around 96 CE, and the Church had gathered together the NT books to complete that Canon by around 150. When the OT Canon closed, "the prophet had departed from Israel" and the Urim and the Thummim (used by priests to determine God's will) had "disappeared".^m The Israelites recognized that no longer did God speak through the prophets, priests, dreams, etc. Once the OT Canon was complete, they had to turn to the written Scriptures to hear God speak and to learn His will. The NT prophets, apostles, and other means used by God to speak to the church have passed off the scene; and for approximately 1,900 years of Church history the people of God have had to look to the Holy Scriptures for guidance. Today God speaks thru His written Word. Tongues, prophecies, etc. have ceased. When the Canon reached maturity (perfect), the gifts of special revelation ceased to exist. **Today the Bible is our only rule for faith and practice.**

^m Ibid, *The Jewish Study Bible*, from page 1929. The Israelites recognized that no longer did God speak through the prophet, priest, dreams, etc. Once the written Word of God was complete, they had to turn to it to hear God speak.

Concluding Summary

God gifts his people. In the Old Testament we read of God gifting Daniel in every matter of wisdom and understanding and the ability to understand dreams (Dan. 1:20). To the craftsman who built the tabernacle, God gave wisdom, understanding, and abilities (Ex. 31:3; 35:31). When a person appropriates the salvation offered through the work of the Lord Jesus, the Holy Spirit makes that person a child of God. He/she is immersed into the Body of Christ and at that time of spiritual conception is given spiritual gifts (charismas) for the purpose of building up the Church of Jesus Christ.

In these three chapters, the Apostle Paul was correcting the use of spiritual gifts in the church at Corinth, with a focus on the misuse of tongues, "Tongues" being the ability to communicate in an unknown language.

Where we served in Brazil, the Summer Institute of Linguistics (known as Wycliffe Bible Translators in the USA) had a very large base. The linguists' purpose was to translate the NT into the indigenous languages and to produce materials that would help the people to learn to read their language. On that base there were several who claimed to have the spiritual gift (charisma) of speaking in tongues. However, not one of those linguists who claimed to have that gift was empowered by God to speak the language of the tribal peoples and to thus be especially gifted to give those Indians the NT in their language. On the contrary, each linguist had to strenuously analyze and learn the indigenous language before he/she could produce one Bible verse in that language. This process took anywhere from 5 to as long as 20 years. We have NEVER seen anyone claiming to have the spiritual gift of tongues use that gift to communicate the Gospel to the Indians of Brazil, or to translate the Bible, or to have a spiritual advantage in edifying the people of God.

What is important? The Apostle placed prophecy at the top of the gifts. "Prophecy" is the proclamation of the truths of God. However, from these chapters we have learned that prophecies have ceased. We no longer have prophets, but we do have teachers. In Ephesians 4, Paul tells us that God has given the Church evangelists and pastor-teachers (v11). The person gifted in evangelism is given to the Church for reaching the lost. These people are similar to the Apostles, in that they do outreach ministries and establish new churches. The pastor-teacher is a person who shepherds the people of God, as a shepherd would his sheep. He feeds and watches over them so that they grow spiritually mature and are able to multiply. These two do not receive new revelation from God. They must read and study the Bible and then communicate its message to the peoples of the world and members of the local church.

The Holy Spirit gifts the new believer with at least one spiritual gift (charisma). All of God's children are blessed with spiritual abilities. These special abilities are given to individuals for the overall edification of each Christian and the Church of Jesus Christ. The spiritual growth of God's children must be central to every local church program, because "prophecy" (the proclaiming of God's Word) is the gift that edifies. We grow as we read and study the Bible. The evangelist and pastor-teacher preach and teach divine truth from the Scriptures in an effort to bring people to a saving knowledge of Christ Jesus and to bring the saved into a growing relationship with God and His Church.

The gifts of prophecy, tongues and special knowledge are temporary gifts. They ceased to be necessary once that which is "perfect" had come. "Perfect" means mature: and because of this, we do not believe that in this context it is a reference to Jesus and His second coming. A more logical conclusion is that these special gifts that bring special divine revelations to the Body of Christ passed off the scene once the Word of God was completed with the book of

Revelation and the Canon of Scriptures was closed. The Bible reached its full maturity and the entire Canon was firmly established by approximately by 150 CE.

Paul tells us that the gift of tongues (a special ability to speak and understand a foreign language) is a sign gift, and a study of his quote from the Law (14:20-25) causes us to conclude that biblical purpose of tongues was to be a sign to unbelieving Israelites. What were the Corinthians doing? That is unclear; but they defiantly were not using that gift as God had intended. Though we may not understand what is going on today either, the solutions to the misuse of tongues as laid out in chapter 14 will bring those claiming to have to gift to a screeching halt.

Though not directly addressed in these chapters, we believe that all of the sign gifts, like miracles and healings, ceased once the Canon reached maturity. All of these gifts gave witness to the divine origin of the message and testified to the authenticity of the messenger. The special gifts that brought a special revelation from God to the people ceased, like prophecy, visions, tongues, etc. Once the Canon was fully formed, it became the sole source of divine revelation. We believe that today ***the Bible is our only rule for faith and practice.***

The Lord is sovereign. By showing from the Scriptures that the sign gifts have ceased, we are not saying, "God can't." We are saying, "God can do as He pleases, but He is not bestowing those sign gifts today." The Scriptures say they have "ceased."