**The Gift of Tongues, No. 4 – BD30-01**

Shall we bow in prayer please? Oh mighty God, we are grateful to thee that we have the written Word of God; that thou hast given us this revelation through holy men of God who were led by the Holy Spirit of God to record for us that which we need for now and for all eternity. We thank thee that we have a completed canon of Scripture, that the right books are in that Bible, and that thou hast brought us into a knowledge of the truth through this Word. We pray now as we spend these moments together searching the Word of God that it may be fruitful. We pray that thou will give us physical capacities, spiritual insight, and the ability to concentrate so that thy Son would be glorified in that which we share of this thy Word upon which we must live moment. For we pray in Christ’s name. Amen.

The gift of tongues. This is the fourth increment in this series. I had a remark recorded to me this week made by a man who said that lately tongues, as satanic today, is blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. And he was very serious and very ominous as he said it. Now of course the only way to decide whether this is true is on the basis of what Bible doctrine teaches, what the Word of God teaches, concerning tongues, as to whether tongues labeled as a satanic enterprise is blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. Obviously the opinion from the experience from some doctrinally disoriented ding-a-ling doesn’t decide anything. You needn’t be impressed by dramatic remarks such as that.

Another man told me about a report from one of his relatives of a tongues meeting in a church where the power really broke out. It broke out so dramatically in this church in Dallas this past week that all the women fell over in the aisles and lay on the floor all over the auditorium. It was so dramatic that they had to run out and get towels because the short skirts made everything look so immodest, while they were desperately trying to cover up what the Holy Spirit was doing.

This was the kind of delusion, and in this church this lady said, “We’ve had ladies once in a while fall over. We didn’t have the whole group.” I don’t know—maybe they had pre-meeting refreshments and they ate something. Nevertheless they’ve got a problem, but it’s not a problem from God the Holy Spirit.

Now the old line denominations, of course, who have gotten into tongues are trying to dignify this. They are trying to put it in a very orderly fashion. You can attend a church here in Dallas where they know something about doctrine where they practice tongues, and where they are very careful to obey everything that 1 Corinthians 14 lays out as the ground rules for speaking in tongues. Only three people at the most can speak. They do it one-at-a-time, very orderly. And all of this is kind of a cover-up to show, “You see. We can do this the way the bible says.” Well, that’s true. You can do this the way the Bible says you should, except this is something that God is no longer doing.

So we have studied tongues in Acts. Now we are beginning to examine the three main chapters in the book of 1 Corinthians. 1 Corinthians is the only other New Testament book of the 21 New Testament epistles which refers to the practice of tongues. So speaking in tongues obviously did not have a very prominent place in the New Testament church. It is very prominent in the Pentecostal movement today but it was not prominent in the New Testament church. We have references in Acts, four at the most, and then you have the reference in 1 Corinthians, and that’s it. There is (also) a questionable reference in the book of Mark.

Paul gives these three chapters 1 Corinthians because of the abuse of tongues in the Corinthian church, and because the abuse of this gift was a serious offense. There were three main errors in Corinth relative to tongues. First of all, they gave the gift a prominent place. Paul, when he lists the value of the various gifts, we have seen, places tongues at the end of the list. In 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 and verse 28-29 tongues always comes at the end. In the list of spiritual gifts which are given in Ephesians 4, 1 Peter 4, and Romans 12, tongues doesn’t even get into the running of the list at all.

The second thing they did wrong in Corinth was that they gave prophecy, exposition—revelations from God, a minor place. 1 Corinthians 12:31 urges the Corinthians to seek the best spiritual gifts. 1 Corinthians 14:1, 5 urge desire for prophecy which is one of the best of the spiritual gifts because it gives information and understanding from God. It was a source of Bible doctrine. Unless someone is present to interpret a tongue in the New Testament church, it wasn’t of any value whatsoever. It was useless because the message was lost. If tongues is interpreted, then it is a source of edification just like prophecy or any other gift.

The third mistake they made in Corinth was that they exercised the gift of tongues in the wrong way. They were allowing people to speak in the auditorium without anybody being there to interpret and to confirm what the speaker said. It wasn’t enough for him to get up and say, “Now this is what I have said.” Someone else who knew that foreign language had to stand up and say, “This is what this brother has said.”

They were also allowing women to use tongues in the church services, and I doubt that the women ever had the gift of tongues, so what they were practicing was in the tradition of the fake tongues that we have today. Paul condemned that. Women are not to stand up and deliver messages from God within a worship service. Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 14 to give instruction in how to handle tongues—the technique and the procedures. Of course, that was only applicable to the New Testament church where tongues were a bonafide gift.

The principle of interpretation that we’re following is this: The book of Acts clearly defines tongues as known foreign languages that existed in the world at that time. When we get to the book of 1 Corinthians, we bring this gift over with that understanding as the same gift. The apostle Paul never indicates that he’s talking about any kind of a different kind of tongues gift when he gets to 1 Corinthians.

Now the Pentecostalist will tell you, “Yes, in Acts they spoke in foreign languages, but in Corinthians they were speaking in ecstatic happy-talk utterances and it was a different kind of tongues. This is false. The very same words were used in the Greek. There is no indication that the apostle Paul is referring to anything other than what has always been the case in the New Testament relative to tongues.

So the abuse of this gift in the Corinthians church which was particularly rich in spiritual gifts was the result of their extremely carnal nature of life. This was a carnal church. This was a congregation that was way out in disorientation relative to the Word of God. Therefore, tongues was an easy element to creep in and to be distorted among them. This is the same thing that happens today. Wherever you find tongues being practiced with zeal and zest, you will almost inevitably find people that are out of the running when it comes to doctrinal understanding. They’re just out of it. They don’t know up from down. They are ignorant when it comes to the Word of God.

Now the Corinthian church had a large Jewish population. They were in contact with the commercial center of Corinth. Many Jews from all parts of the Roman Empire would come there to do business, so it was natural that the tongues gift should be active (exercised) in the Corinthian church because, as you remember, it was a sign particularly to unbelieving Jews. They proclaimed the gospel in native dialect to these Jewish merchants. In time, the tongue speakers, because of their carnality, began to degenerate to positions of pride in the local church. They viewed their spectacular gift as a sign that they were a special breed of spiritual people, which they were not. Your spiritual gift indicates nothing about your spirituality. You can be the biggest clod when it comes to spirituality and have the most magnificent spiritual gift. Now you won’t exercise that gift. It will not produce divine good. It will not be fruitful of eternal reward for you, but you will have the gift without being spiritual.

So tongues practiced in the church service at Corinth had turned the services into bedlam. There were people speaking at the same time and they gave no heed to the requirement that there be someone to interpret. Some perhaps were standing there like the women imitating in ecstatic gibberish just like the heathen priests were used to doing under satanic control. Paul writes 1 Corinthians 12 through 14 to correct this condition.

1 Corinthians 12:11 tells us, “but all these (gifts) worketh that one in the very same Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.” It is God the Holy Spirit who decides sovereignly who gets what gift, so it’s no honor to the recipient and no sign of merit within him.

Then in 1 Corinthians 12:12-26, we found that Paul compares the body of Christ, the church, to the human body, with all of its many parts which affect each other, and the need of all the parts for one another, just like the need of the parts of the human body for one another. The spiritual gifts, he points out, are given for the edification and the uniting of this body of Christ.

Some gifts were temporary. They were to be in effect in the infancy stage of the church, until the New Testament canon of Scriptures were complete, and until they were established, then they phased out and passed off the scene. Tongues is a sign to the unbelieving Jews confirming that God was now working in Christianity instead of Judaism, and it had served its purpose in 70 A.D. when Jerusalem, and that part of the purpose of the sign gift was over.

What revelations came from God directly through tongue speakers have been completed because these have now been recorded in the Scriptures. Revelation 22:18-19 indicates that nothing more is to be added to that book, and that same principle applies to all New Testament scriptures. It is closed. The canon is closed. There are no other books to be written. There is nothing to be added. The revelations that used to come through tongues are now finished and recorded, so there’s no point for that gift in that respect.

1 Corinthians 12, beginning at verse 27, states the team principle as it applies to the body of Christ: “Now ye are the body of Christ and members in particular.” “Ye are” in the Greek is plural, meaning all Christians as a whole. None are left out. “members in particular” means literally members individually: each of you with a specific function in the body of Christ; and, each of you placed in a certain local church for exercising your specific function through your specific gift within that local group as a part of the body of Christ. You can’t just join any local church. God has a local church for you. Now if you phase out of the local church that God has for you, you are guilty of sin, and you have a sin to confess, and then God has to pick up your life and try to re-do it and try to re-make it and try to re-weave it into something significant, which he does by grace, because you’re now in the wrong local church, and you take a second-class position relative to your Christian experience and to your rewards because you have phased out of the local church that God said, “Here is where I want you.” When people phase out of a local church, they had better have a good reason for doing it because they have a great deal at stake. God the Holy Spirit places us into the body of Christ. That expression of our gift is through one local assembly. So, you are members individually. The spiritual gifts are given to meet your particular function within the body of Christ.

In verse 28 you have the principle applied: “And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healing, helps, governments, and diversity of tongues.” Here it is God the Holy Spirit that is referred to. “Hath set” is the Greek word “tithemi.” “Tithemi” is a word which means “to place,” or maybe “to appoint” sometime. “To appoint,” or “to place,” or “to set,” and God has done this in a certain order. This is in the aorist tense which means it was at a certain point in your experience when you were set with that gift, and that is, of course, at the point of salvation. It is in the middle voice which means that you yourself are benefitted as a result of having been given this gift at your salvation. It’s in the indicative mood which is the mood of reality declaring that these gifts are for real. You actually have them and you can use them.

Then Paul goes on and he lists those in order of their value: first, second, third, etc.—the gifts in order of their merit in the New Testament church. Now why does Paul do this? I want you to remember what you are talking about. The minute he took up his pen and began writing 1 Corinthians chapter 12, he took up the subject of tongues. He’s trying to straighten out the abuse of tongues. When you get to chapter 13, what is he talking about? Well, you’re going to say “love.” That’s OK if you know what that means. But he’s still talking about tongues in chapter 13. When he gets to chapter 14, he’s still talking about tongues. So why here in chapter 12 should he bring this in—the order of the value of the gifts?

Well, obviously he puts tongues at the bottom of the pile, and he’s trying to point out to these people, “You people are majoring in the most minor gift of all—the one that brings the lease edification, and, the one that is the least value to the local assembly. And you’re ignoring gifts like prophecy and like teaching which are the most valuable of the gifts to your personal edification and to your eternal future and blessing and reward. So the reason he brings this up is to show the relative merits of the gifts that they’re seeking. It’s of value to unbelieving Jews, but it is of very little value within the local church service.

In verses 29 and 30, he points out that every believer does not possess every spiritual gift. Why does he do that? I remind you that when he asks these questions (like, are all apostles?), that the Greek indicates that the answer is “no.” The Greek asks a question in such a way that it tells you what the answer should be. And here it asks it in such a way, “Are all apostles?” And the answer is “no.” We would say in English, “Everybody is not an apostle, is he?” No. “Everyone is not a prophet, is he? And so on. And of course this applies to the public assembly, and of course it applies to everybody privately as well.

So why does he do this? Again to point out that everybody in the local church is not going to be speaking in tongues. And that’s what he gets down to: “Do all speak in tongues?” And the answer is “no.” Now today Pentecostalism says, “Yes. Everybody should speak in tongues because it’s the sign that you’ve been baptized with the Holy Spirit, and God want’s everybody to be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” Well, the mistake there begins with the fact that every Christian is baptized into the body of Christ at the point of salvation (1 Corinthians 12:13). So everybody is baptized by God the Holy Spirit. It’s not a separate work. Tongues has nothing to do with being an evidence of that placing into the body of Christ. There are gifts which some of the Christians have and some of the Christians do not have. Tongues is not a universal gift among believers and it was never intended to be. Some of these gifts are leadership gifts. Obviously the chiefs are going to possess the leadership gifts—not the Indians. Some of these gifts were more spectacular, such as tongues and healing and miracles and interpretation, but these were temporary gifts.

There are two relationships for the Christian that I hope you have straight in your mind. One is a positional relationship. This is positional truth. Every believer is baptized into the body of Christ by the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Therefore you are your own priest. At the point of salvation, you became chief of your own soul relative to your spiritual development. Every one of you as a chief and a priest of God is in full-time Christian service. You are His ambassador. But there is local church order and truth also. Here we have lines of authority. We have pastor-teacher, we have elder boards, we have service boards, and we have administrators, and so on. And boards can cause an awful lot of trouble in a congregation if they ignore the chain of command or they try to act as administrators.

This is one thing at the Christian School Administrator’s conference that was stressed very very strongly. Our school board must never try to act as administrators. If you are in a school, they said, where the board insists on hiring the teachers, spending the money, and running the school, get out of it. You have a disorderly arrangement and it will never work. This is true in the local church as well. Boards approve policy that administrators recommend. Boards supervise, but boards do not administer.

Some men who are fine (men) in the pews become a terror of devastation to a congregation when they get upon the board if they don’t understand the relationship of boards to the lines of authority within the local church. This is true of church members too who can make havoc if they decide they’re going to play chiefs instead of Indians within the local church. Now you are a chief relative to your own personal priesthood, but you have lines of authority that God and the congregation through the leading of the Holy Spirit appoint you to within that congregation. And that is to be respected.

So verse 31 brings us to a more excellent way. After having said all this, and bringing all this background, the apostle Paul comes to verse 31 in 1 Corinthians 12 and says, “But covet earnestly the best gifts.” The Greek word here is “zeloo.” “Zeloo” means to desire or to strive for with great energy. It is something that you are to pursue. What are you to pursue? Well, you are to pursue what he calls the best or the most valuable gifts as per this list that he gave you in verse 28.

Now this might seem to contradict what he says in verse 11 where it says that God the Holy Spirit gives the gifts. He’s the one who decides. But I remind you again that the word “covet” is also second person plural and it means “you all,” as a church body, covet for your local congregation these specific gifts that will bring maximum edification to the believers. It is right for the church to pray for that kind of gift—that God would send in people with the specific gifts for edifying and for administering and for carrying on the work of that local church.

So it is wrong to seek a particular spiritual gift for yourself personally, but it is right to do so in behalf of your congregation. This is in the present tense which means you are constantly, and we are constantly through the church age, to be seeking the most valuable gifts. Of course in our day the most valuable gift is the pastor-teacher gift because this is the source of maximum edification to the saints. If that gift breaks down, or if you lack that gift along with teachers in the assembly, you’re in a heap of trouble from the word “go.” It is active which means that the congregation as a group should make it its business to be praying for those gifts, and it’s imperative. It’s a command—not optional. Any time you look around this assembly, as we are looking now in order to appoint Sunday School teachers, it is right that we should pray and say, “God, send us people who can teach.” We have all kinds of positions at this time of the year to be realigning the work for teachers and leaders to be coming in. Now it is right to ask God to send us people that have those gifts to perform those functions. It is not only right, but it we’re commanded to do so.

Now Paul’s point is that the seeking of the tongues gift and desiring what is of the lowest value to the congregation has led to carnality, or perhaps it was because of carnality. These people were slim on Bible doctrine. They were short on doctrine and they were long on carnality. Then he goes on and says, “But zealously covet the best of the gifts,” and yet he says, “show I unto you a more excellent way.” This is the Greek word “deiknumi.” “Deiknumi” is a Greek word that means you’re going to be shown something as a result of information that you get. You’re going to be shown something by being told something, by being informed.

So the apostle Paul says, “Now I’m going to show you a better way of living, a better way of Christian life than the carnality and the raging of tongues and the disorder that you’ve been carrying on within the Corinthian church. I’m going to show you where the real action is, where the real values lie. You people think that it lies in your spectacular gifts, your tongue-speaking and your healing and your miracle working and your interpreting. You’re wrong. There is something that is crucially of value to you but it is not those gifts.” Then he picks up the fact that he’s going to inform them. He’s going to show them through doctrinal information something about tongues. He says, “to you.” This in the Greek is a dative of advantage. It’s going to be of advantage to them.

Then he says what he’s going to show them is going to be “huperbole,” from which we get the word “hyperbole” in English. It means “superior” or supreme. It means way out beyond. Paul says, “I’m going to tell you something that is really way out there. The greatest thing—par excellence—that’s the word for it. Literally the word means “throwing beyond.” Beyond anything with any comparison whatsoever. What’s he going to do? Paul is going to show the Corinthians a way of living that is exceedingly better than their carnality, something that will avoid the abuses that they have entered relative to tongues.

Now this way is beyond comparison for the Christian life. This superior that he speaks of is made known to us in chapter 13. Actually at least the last part of verse 31 should have been put with chapter 13. It’s the first introductory remark to chapter 13 and it is the key to chapter 13. What he is going to tell them as the par excellence way is being filled with the spirit. That’s what 1 Corinthians 13 is all about. If you want to give a title to 1 Corinthians 13, call it the chapter on spirituality on spirituality or the great Bible chapter on being filled with the spirit. That’s what 1 Corinthians 13 is all about. While Christians do not possess every spiritual gift, he is going to show them something that they all can and should possess, and that is to be filled with the spirit. This constitutes spirituality in the church age. A spiritual Christian will not seek for himself nor about the tongues gift. He will produce edification for the church with his gift.

That was the problem. Paul put his finger right on the issue. He says, “I know what the trouble is in Corinth. I know why you people are abusing this gift and maybe some of the other gifts. It’s because you don’t’ understand what spirituality is all about. Some of you kooks have taken off with your emotionalism and you’re all out of touch with what God is thinking and what God feels and what God’s choices are, and you’re operating on the emptiness of your emotions. You’re trying to think with your emotions. Now,” Paul says, “I’m going to make something known to you through information to get that straightened out.”

What is the nature of spirituality? I think you all know that at the point of your salvation every Christian is regenerated. He is given a living human spirit. He is indwelt. God the Holy Spirit takes up residence in your body. He is baptized by the Holy Spirit into union with Jesus Christ from which he can never depart. He is sealed. He gets the Holy Spirit’s stamp upon him that he is destined for heaven. The seal can never be broken. He is given spiritual gifts for service. All of this happens at the point of salvation. Now no Christian is ever commanded to seek these things. You will never find in the Bible where you are ever told to seek to be indwelt, to seek to be baptized, to seek to be sealed, or to seek for spiritual gifts. While you may be admonished to call upon the Lord, and in that way to seek regeneration, we also know that God calls us even to that.

But not every Christian is filled with the spirit, and we are called to seek this. We are told constantly to be seeking to be filled with the spirit of God. This is what constitutes spirituality. To be filled with the spirit means to be spiritual. And you are filled with the spirit by confessing all known sins to the Father. If you are not filled with the spirit, you as a Christian are controlled by your old sin nature and the Bible declares you to be carnal. Now that constitutes spirituality. Every Christian can do this, and every Christian can be filled with the spirit so that he is controlled by God the Holy Spirit. Then he will imitate God. When he is controlled by the old sin nature, he imitates Satan. A Christian at any moment therefore is either spiritual or carnal. He’s either in, he’s with it, or he’s out.

Now a spiritual Christian will imitate God as Ephesians 5:1 says. He will glorify Jesus Christ (John 16:14). And he will fulfill the Mosaic Law (Romans 8:3-4). Now let’s get something straight about the law. The Christian is not under the Mosaic Law, but through the Holy Spirit he is able to fulfill the standards of the Mosaic Law. A Christian who is subject to Jesus Christ finds that the character of Christ is produced in him as a result of his being filled with the spirit.

**Morality**

What is the place of spirituality in God’s plan? It is for believers only. It is not possible to be spiritual without regeneration. So don’t try to impose your Christian standards on unsaved people. Spirituality is not the same as morality. A Christian is not spiritual because he’s moral, because he keeps the Ten Commandments. It is possible for a Christian to keep The Ten Commandments and to be very moral, and be the most unspiritual person you can imagine. Spirituality will include morality, but it’s not the same thing. It goes beyond it. Christianity is not a matter of being moral. It’s a matter of a relationship to Jesus Christ. Morality is a byproduct of the relationship but it’s not spirituality. There’s no power in morality for right living. You can be a very moral person and have very little power for spiritual expression. The power of Christianity is found in the filling of the Holy Spirit.

Now morality is necessary for the orderly function of society and for the preservation of humanity, so morality applies to unbelievers as well as believers. These rules of conduct apply to unbelievers relative to murder and theft and so on. But spirituality is only for Christians, not for the unbeliever. The morality of an unbeliever comes from the strong side of his hold sin nature. A Christian has this old sin nature, so he can produce the same morality from his strong side. Spirituality is much more than morality.

Remember that Paul said he was a very moral person (Philippians 3:4-6). At the same time he was the chief of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15). Paul had self-righteousness. But a Christian who is filled with the spirit does not pursue a self-righteousness. Spirituality cleanses the soul but morality does nothing.

Now, in the plan of God the relationship is the key. Salvation is being rightly related to Jesus Christ as per John 3:16. Spirituality is being rightly related to the Holy Spirit (1 John 1:9). The good works of the old sin nature have no place either in salvation or in spirituality. So when we get to the end of 1 Corinthians 12, and he says, “I’m going to show you a more excellent way,” this is what he is talking about—this more excellent way of spirituality, over against the carnality that has characterized the Corinthian Christians. The way of life of being filled with the spirit as over against their being under the control of the old sin nature.

**1 Corinthians 13**

So we begin 1 Corinthians 13: “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels.” Now this word “though” is the word “if.” “If I speak with the tongues of men and angels.” And as we have learned, there are certain classes of “if” in the Greek. This is the third class condition and it means, “Maybe I will and maybe I won’t.” What Paul is saying is, “Not that there is a tongue that angels speak that people can speak.” Now angels probably have some language. But he is not saying that he speaks in an angel language. He says, “Just suppose that I could.” These people were crazy for talking in tongues. He says, “OK, suppose that I can talk in all the foreign languages on the earth. Suppose that I can go even better than that—I can speak languages that are not on earth, like angels talk. He’s not saying he does. It’s a “suppose so” condition—third class. If you could do this, Paul’s point is, “So what? What then?” These people would consider it very great in Corinth if they could speak in angel talk.

Now it is this verse into which the Pentecostalists today read the justification for their gibberish. When they come to 1 Corinthians, they say, “You see? Here in 13:1 it’s not foreign languages. It’s heavenly talk. It is ecstatic utterances. It’s angel talk that Paul is talking about. So there are two kinds. This talk they justify for their private devotion and utterances. But Paul uses the same word here (“glossa”) that he used in Acts. In the New Testament the word “glossa” always means foreign languages. In Greek literature it could have meant ecstatic utterances, but never in the New Testament usage. And Paul just carries right over from the experience in Acts as if everybody understood what the word meant, and there is no indication that it is anything other than human foreign languages, something that someone can understand. He’s using the same word. We have no indication that this is anything different than what we found in Acts. As a matter of fact, in 14:21, where he refers to the sign, the purpose, of the gift of tongues, he clearly declares that it is tongues and other lips. He clearly declares that it is known languages that he is referring to in this whole context.

**Love**

So he says, “If I should speak with the languages of men and of angels, and have not love.” “Have not” is present, meaning habitually I do not have. And the word that he uses now in Greek is our old friend “agape.” “Agape” love has no emotional content whatsoever. “Agape” love is the love that God gives us. It’s God’s divine love. This is the love in John 3:16 that the Father has for the unsaved. It’s a mental attitude free of ill will. It is the love of John 50:9 of the Father for the Son. It is the love in Romans 5:5 of God’s divine love which it says he has placed in our hearts, meaning our mentality, by the Holy Spirit. It is a mental attitude love—not an emotional love.

Now this love can only be possessed under a certain condition. A Christian possesses this love. Galatians 5:22 gives the fruit of the spirit. This is point number one, the first segment. Love is the summary of the fruit of the spirit which constitutes the character of Christ. You cannot have the character of Christ, you cannot have this type of love unless you are in the condition of being filled with the Holy Spirit. Under the filling of the Holy Spirit you have this love.

So therefore what Paul is talking about is the same thing when he speaks of this “agape” love, he’s talking about spirituality or about being filled with the spirit. Everywhere through here you could substitute the concept of being filled with the spirit for the word “love.” Now that is very important that you should understand this. There are a lot of stupid things said about this chapter because people don’t understand the context of what Paul is talking about. He is trying to hit the tongues abuse. He is trying to explain that being filled with the spirit is the crucial thing—not pursuing some spectacular gift. He’s going to go on to point out that no gift is worth anything unless you have this condition of being filled with the spirit.

So love refers here to something produced by the filling of the spirit. It’s part of the fruit. It’s the first segment. Paul says morality produces human emotional love that has no spiritual impact. Because “agape” love comes through the Holy Spirit it has great impact on the outside. So 1 Corinthians 13 is dealing with spirituality, the filling of the Spirit. And it says that exercising any spiritual gift apart from the spirit is worthless.

He says, “I am become.” This is the Greek word “ginomai,” and it means to become something you are not. Now what had they become? They had become carnal instead of spiritual. It’s in the perfect tense which indicates that they continue in this condition from the past. At salvation they began being filled with the spirit. They began spiritual; they sinned; they went carnal; and, they continued in that. “I have become something I was not.” I have become carnal which I was not before when I was spiritual. It’s the active voice meaning that they do something themselves to lose their spiritual status. Sin—unconfessed sin—loses spiritual. This is indicative, the mood of reality.

Then he says, “I have become as sounding brass.” This means the banging of metal that was used in the market in order to get attention for the peddler for his wares. The carnal Christian practicing tongues in the service in Corinth was just getting attention to himself like somebody clanging two pieces of metal together. Then he compares it to a tinkling cymbal which is not the musical instrument in our splendid Berean Boys Band in the percussion section. It is rather a metal basin. When you strike two of them together it gets a screechy kind of sound like when somebody rubs his fingernails on a chalkboard. This word “tinkling” is “alalazo.” “Alalazo” is a word which is used of what the professional mourners did when somebody died. They would call them in to screech and to howl and to moan.

Now what Paul is saying is, “I don’t care if I’m not spiritual. I’m like somebody banging some metal together. I’m like somebody scratching his fingernails on a chalkboard and making a screeching sound, and I am absolutely nothing.” The tongues gift is not the big thing. Being filled with the spirit is the thing. This is the more excellent way relative to spiritual things. Apart from the filling of the spirit, tongues is just noise. Any eloquence of any speech of any kind is worthless.

Now the nothingness is pointed out in verse 2. “And though I have the gift of prophecy.” Again “if” is third class—“Suppose I do.” “Prophecy” means bringing direct revelation from God. I understand mystery. I know the values of various doctrines. I have all knowledge. I’m able to classify doctrines. I have all faith so that I can move mountains. Again, “If I have,” not that I do remove mountains. Every now and then we have some idiot who’s trying to get some faith to remove a mountain instead of getting himself a bulldozer. God is not saying He’s going to remove mountains through your faith. He says, “Suppose so.” This is a “suppose so” case. “If I had that much faith that I could just believe. “Oh, if I just believe that mountain is going to move it’s just going to get up and start trucking out of there all by itself. I could just believe.” How many times have you been told just to believe, man? That’s what you need. Just believe. Have faith.

Well, Paul says there were idiots in the Corinthian church who were doing that too. He says, ‘’Suppose I had that kind of faith but I don’t have the filling of the spirit, (then) I am nothing.” This is the Greek word “eimi.” This is the verb for status quo. It’s a being in a state of carnality. You notice in verse 1 he became nothing. In verse 2 he stays nothing, in his carnality. (There are) no lasting eternal effects produced by his carnal exercise of his gifts. And he mentions all of these various kinds of gifts—communicating gifts—prophecy. It’s nothing. Information gifts—mysteries and knowledge. They’re nothing. Operation gifts—faith. They’re nothing.

So the Corinthian Christians using their tongues apart from the filling of the Holy Spirit under a status of spirituality have produced exactly nothing—no divine good, just human good. When we’re carnal, we bat zero. When we’re spiritual we can bat 1000.

Then he goes on to verse 3—the nothingness of the production. “And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor.” Again, “though” is “if,” suppose so. Feeding the poor is the right thing but it’s done in the wrong way when it’s done in the motivation of carnality—a sacrifice done in the wrong way. “And though I give my body to be burned.” This is martyrdom—very dramatic, a sacrifice. Again “though” indicates not that you should give your body to burn—suppose I do. It’s an “if” suppose-so case. Here’s an illustration of extreme sacrifice that most people would admire. People admire giving material things and martyrdom—highly commendable. God says they’re absolutely worthless. It profiteth me nothing if I am not under the status quo of being filled with the spirit.

The heathen will give himself in such sacrifices. Now and then we her of some Buddhist in Vietnam immolates himself—burns himself alive, to make a point. Worth nothing. Carnal Christians are merely competing with unbelievers on their human-good ground and they probably can’t do as well. So if I have not love, I have not the filling of the spirit, it propheteth me nothing—no divine good. Notice verse 1: “I have become nothing.” Verse 2: “Because I am not filled with the spirit, I am nothing.” Verse 3: Because I am not filled with the spirit, I am profited nothing by what I do. Everything I do is useless and pointless.” The tongues devotees in Corinth were out of line in their general living because they were operating on the old sin nature.

Now look at the expression of the characteristics of being filled with the spirit—these descriptive phrases in just these next few verse 4 through 7, and apply these to tongues. It says, “Love (being filled with the spirit) suffereth long.” That means it waits its turn to speak in tongues rather than barging in any time. That’s what they were not doing in Corinth. It says, “It’s kind.” The tongue speaker does not say things deliberately to hurt the believers, but to edify them. It says, “It envieth not.” It doesn’t covet the tongues gift because somebody else has it. He isn’t jealous of that other person. “He has that tongues gift. I want that spectacular gift.” It says, “It doesn’t vaunt itself.” It doesn’t put its nose up in the air and go around saying, “I’m spiritual,” and have a look on its face like it’s smelling a bad odor. And you have a feeling that you’re it because you’re unspiritual. You don’t talk in tongues. “Nor does it puff itself up.” The tongue recipient is not proud of having the idea that there is some personal merit in him. “It does not behave itself unseemly.” Tongues were done decently and in order. It has no such things as women falling on the floor all over the congregations so they have to rush out to get towels to cover up their immodesties. “It seeketh not its own.” It is never for self-edification and private use. Have you gotten that straight? Tongues is never for private use. You never use tongues in the closet. You never use tongues in prayer. You never use tongues privately by yourself to pray. We’re going to see a little more about that. Tongues always had to be used in the open assembly. So it is not for itself. “It is not easily provoked.” Tongues is not angered by resistance that may come to the message that the tongue speaker brought. “It thinketh no evil.” Tongues message is from divine good expressions and for godly actions. “It rejoiceth not in iniquity.” It is delighted in the godliness that the spirit of God produces. It is grieved by evil. Its message reflects this. And then it says, “It rejoiceth in truth.” It welcomes divine revelation. It’s positive toward the Word of God. And finally, “It doeth, it believeth, it hopeth, and it endureth all things.” Now this is the exercise of the gift of tongues under the status of spirituality.

That’s what the opening verses of 1 Corinthians 13 are all about. The more excellent way is to be filled with the spirit. And when these Corinthian Christians are filled with the spirit, they will not be carrying on the abuses that verses 4 through 7 spell out that they were guilty of relative to tongues. Now these abuses would apply to other gifts just as well. When you’re filled with the spirit, you bat 1000.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1971