

Text: 1 Cor 12.1-3

As we move through Corinthians, we will keep our place by developing the broad outline we started with.

I. Introduction (1.1-9)**II. Conditions reported to Paul (1.10-6.20)****III. Questions asked of Paul (7.1-16.4)**

1 Cor 7.1 ¶ Now concerning the things about which you wrote...

“The remainder of the body of this epistle deals with questions that the Corinthians had asked Paul in a letter. Paul introduced each of these with the phrase *peri de* (‘now concerning,’ 7:1, 25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1, 12).”¹

- A. Questions about marriage (7.1-40)
- B. Questions about things sacrificed to idols (8.1-11.1)
- C. Questions about worship services
 1. Head coverings (11.2-16)
 2. Communion practices (11.17-34)

3. Spiritual Gifts (12-14)

We now come to the Spiritual Gifts. This topic is one that created division between churches and within churches as Christians disagreed with one another over “the spirituals,” as Paul calls them.

Since the topic is so important in contemporary Christian culture, I plan to slow down my pace considerably. I will rely heavily on notes from my 1998 series on this topic, as well as study in other resources I’ve gotten since then.

Lesson One: Introducing the topic (12.1-3)

The need for instruction: “I do not want you to be **unaware** (KJV: ignorant)”

What is the subject of ignorance? (1) **spirituals** (“*spiritual gifts*”) Note italics.

Compare 1 Co 14.1-3, 37 as well as the subject of 12.3.

What kind of spiritual gift is the main concern for the whole passage? **the gift of tongues**

¹ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), 1 Co 7.1.

A technical term the Corinthians themselves used to refer to the ones speaking in tongues or to the speaking in tongues itself.

“Paul uses their language, as in 7:1, but he does not necessarily give it the same meaning as they do.”²

Compare 1 Co 2.15, 3.1 (note... typo in handout, not 2.1)

Who does Paul refer to in these verses? (same term) **spiritual people**

“In light of the larger discussion of chaps. 12–14, it does not appear that the Corinthians posed a general question about ‘spiritual gifts’ per se but rather that the issue had more to do with manifestations of inspired speech by local prophets or those deemed ‘spiritual persons.’ ... In other words, in these chapters the primary concern is what it means to be ‘spiritual’ in the context of public worship.”³

How are they ignorant or unaware of spiritual gifts? They are obviously quite enthusiastic about spiritual gifts with an emphasis on the gift of tongues. So what is the nature of their ignorance?

Essentially, they are ignorant of the nature, purpose, and use of tongues, though they think they are well-informed about them.

Why are tongues the Corinthian focus? What key distinction makes tongues more attractive than, say, prophecy or healing?

Tongues are connected to “ecstatic” experiences, and can be “faked” — with prophecy, you must speak truth (intelligibly); with healing, you must heal.

What is the Corinthian spiritual background? (2) **paganism**

Their previous experience gave them no background to distinguish the true from the false:

“‘The mystery-cults of the empire were designed to induce both higher and lower forms of ecstatic feeling.’ The expression of the ecstatic state took various forms, such as gashing one’s flesh,

² Mark Edward Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, vol. 28, The New American Commentary (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman & Holman, 2014), 283.

³ Taylor, 28:279–80.

dancing nude in a frenzy, and speaking in ecstatic utterance. The latter was the means whereby the devotees sought to have communion with the saving deity. Here the significance of the term 'glossolalia,' or 'speaking in tongues,' comes to the fore. 'The gift of tongues and of their interpretation was not peculiar to the Christian Church, but was a repetition in it of a phrase common in ancient religions. The very phrase glossais lalein, 'to speak with tongues,' was not invented by the New Testament writers, but borrowed from ordinary speech.'"⁴

"With the ecstasism of Dionysianism and the emphasis on tongues-speaking and oracles in the religion of Apollo, it is not surprising that some of the Corinthians carried these pagan ideas in the church at Corinth, especially the practice of glossolalia for which both of these religions are known (though the Dionysian cult did not include interpretation of the glossolalia as did that of Apollo)."⁵

In their previous experience, which way were they led spiritually? **astray, like wandering sheep**

"Led astray" has the connotation of being led away by force, as if against one's will, to a bad place you didn't want to be (like your execution, Ac 12.19)

The filling of the Spirit is not the same as pagan ecstasy. The Spirit fills but does not "carry away" or "lead astray."

What is the test of discernment? (3) **proper confessions of faith**

Compare 1 John 4.1

What if a prophet has a sensational gift, but doesn't make the proper confessions? **he is still false**

"About all such things there are two possibilities which must put us on our guard: (1) they may be unreal; either the delusions of fanatical enthusiasts, or the lies of deliberate impostors; (2) even if real, they

⁴ H. Wayne House, "Tongues and the Mystery Religions of Corinth," *Bibliotheca Sacra: Dallas Theological Seminary* 140, no. 558 (1983): 139.

⁵ House, 138.

need not be of God. Miraculous powers are no absolute guarantee of the possession of truth.”⁶

What does Paul mean by offering these competing confessions? Does he suggest that the Corinthians themselves are offering such statements (possibly in their ecstatic utterances)? How many Corinthian Christians would affirm, “Jesus is Lord”?

all of them would presumably affirm Jesus is Lord

If all the Corinthian believers affirmed Jesus as Lord, and that meant they were all filled with the Spirit, would they gain any spiritual distinction by experiencing “ecstatic speech”? **no, they are all spiritual**

Regardless, their emphasis and practice put them in spiritual danger. They were vulnerable to false prophets who might have sensational gifts, and they were open to conflict and pride in thinking some were more spiritual than others.

⁶ A. Plummer, *The Epistles of S. John*, Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges (1883; reprint, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938), p. 141, quoted in D. Edmond Hiebert, “An Exposition of 1 John 4:1–6,” *Bibliotheca Sacra: Dallas Theological Seminary* 146, no. 584 (1989): 422.