

1 CORINTHIANS 13-14 THE LOVE CHAPTER, PART 2; SPEAKING IN “TONGUES”



We continue studying this wonderful “Love Chapter” of 1 Cor. 13 Yet, this was a chapter not given in a cultural vacuum, for there were serious problems in that Church and Paul was giving them the solution they needed—applying *agape love*.

As Wiersbe points out, “Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies [builds up]” (1 Cor. 8:1). The purpose of spiritual gifts is the edification of the Church (1 Cor. 14:3, 26). This means we must not think of ourselves, but of others; and this demands love. The [problem was] Corinthians were *impatient* in the public meetings (1 Cor. 14:29-32), but love would make them *longsuffering*. They were *envying* each other’s gifts, but love would *remove that envy*. They were *puffed up* with pride (1 Cor. 4:6, 18-19), but love would remove and replace it with a desire to promote others. ‘Be *kindly affectionate* one to another with brotherly love, in honor *preferring one another*’ (Rom. 12:10).”

So, Paul teaches them these 16 great attributes of *agape love* for them to apply. He says, “Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things...Love never fails” (1 Cor. 13:4-9).

Let’s examine each one of them. The first characteristic of *agape love* is it “*suffers long*”—from the Gk. *makrothymia*,--the ability of not being offended or retaliating. As David said: “Great peace have they who love Your law, and *nothing shall offend them*” (Ps. 119:165). Next, *agape love* is “*kind*”—from **chrestos**—meaning *not doing harm to others*. It does not “*envy*”—from the term “*zeloi*” (literally, boiling over)--not *seething with envy* over what others have and you don’t. It doesn’t “*parade itself*,” from **perpereuetai**—not singing your own praises. As Pr. 27:2 says: “Let *another man* praise you, and *not your own mouth*.” It is not “*puffed up*”—from “*phusioutai*” (literally, bellows, an air bag), not getting a *swelled* head. It does not “*behave rudely*,” from “*aschemon*,” or not being inconsiderate. It does not “*seek its own [interests]*”—from “*heutes*,” meaning not *insisting on your own rights*. It is not “*easily provoked*”—from “*paroxynetai*”—meaning, not losing your own temper. As Pr. 16:12 points out,

“He who is *slow to anger* is better than the mighty, and he who *rules his spirit* than he who takes a city.”

Next, it “*thinks no evil*”—from “*logizetai*” an *accounting* term—it keeps *no record* of wrongs. Barclay mentions a custom in Polynesia of hanging objects from the ceiling to remember who had offended them. But *agape love* is the exact opposite, it keeps no record of such offenses and learns to forgive and forget. It does not “*rejoice in iniquity [injustice]*”—from “*chairei*”—getting no pleasure in the misfortune of others, not even of adversaries. As Pr. 24:17-18 says: “Do not rejoice when your enemy falls...Lest the Eternal see it, and it displease Him, and He turn away His wrath from him.”

Then, “*But rejoices in the truth*”—“Gk. *aletheia*” delighting in God’s truths and all that is genuine. It “*bears all things*,” from “*stego*,” meaning “*roof*” or “*covering*”—signifying the act of enduring under the weight of slander while protecting the reputations of others by applying the principle: “Love covers a multitude of sins” (1 P. 4:8). As Pr. 19:11 says: “A wise person demonstrates patience, for mercy means *holding your tongue*. When you are insulted, be quick to forgive and forget it, for you are *virtuous* when you overlook an offense” (TPT).

Paul continues, it “*believes all things*”—from “*pistei*”—meaning to believe the best in a person, giving them the benefit of the doubt, but without being naive. It “*hopes all things*”—from “*elpizei*”—meaning not to lose hope, but looking at the positive side of things. It also “*endures all things*”—from “*hupomenei*”—meaning to persevere in the face of trials until overcoming is achieved. “*Love never fails*,” because it is the right thing to do, as Christ showed in His life. As the saying goes, “There is *never* a *wrong* time to do what is *right*.”

He goes on to say, “But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away” (1 Cor. 13:9-10).

He explains these traits of *agape love* are *eternal*, for they *originate* from God the Father and the Word before the creation of all things. That is why “God is love” (1 John 4:8). These are the qualities He

desires to instill in His children so one day they may live in His kingdom happily ever after.

Paul then notes, "When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now, we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known. And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love" (1 Cor. 13:11-13).

Paul explains he no longer thought in a childish or immature way. He concerned himself with truly important matters now: how to successfully run the race of faith by applying the fruits of *agape love* daily in his life and by grace, inherit God's Kingdom.

Paul's humility allowed him to acknowledge his limitations, recognizing that despite his vast knowledge and his status as an apostle of God, he still only "knew in part." Indeed, Jesus Himself told us that God's Spirit would "*guide you into all truth*" (John 16:13). This means the Church is continually growing in grace and knowledge, though it has not yet attained *the fullness of God's truths*. Therefore, a measure of humility and modesty is required.

Mirrors in Paul's Day

Paul compares his biblical understanding to looking into a mirror and still seeing his image "dimly." This is because mirrors in those days were primarily made of *polished bronze* and reflected a *blurred image*. Incidentally, the Corinthians were renowned for their great bronze mirror industry.

Paul concludes by emphasizing that if we are cultivating the characteristics of *agape love*, we are fulfilling the most essential aspects of being a true Christian. Prophecies have their place, yet we must not become obsessed with them, for no one can understand them with full precision until their fulfillment draws near. Acts of charity also have their place, but they cannot serve as a substitute for first obeying God's commandments. That is why *agape love* is the greatest attribute we can develop.

Chapter 14 – The "Tongues Chapter"

As we have seen in chaps. 12-13, the Corinthian brethren were in danger of having these special gifts, especially speaking in a foreign language, taken away because it was leading to boasting and envy. Instead of drawing closer together, it was dividing the Church. For this reason, Paul had to move quickly to rectify these things.

So, he tells them: "Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially *the gift of speaking what God has revealed*. When a person speaks in another language, he doesn't speak to people but to God. No one understands him. His spirit is speaking mysteries" (1 Cor. 14:1, GW).

Note the gift of speaking a foreign language had already been prophesied by Christ, so it shouldn't come as a surprise. In Mt. 16:17 He had said, "These are the *miraculous signs* that will accompany believers...*They will speak new languages* (Gk. *kainos glossa*)." As Wierbe says, "It is *unfortunate* that our translators *inserted 'unknown'* in 1 Cor. 14:2, because the New Testament *knows nothing of an 'unknown tongue.'*" From the very beginning of the Church, [such as at Pentecost], tongues were *known languages, recognized by the listeners* (Acts 2:4, 6, 8, 11). The tongue [or language] would be unknown to the speaker and listeners, *but it was not unknown in the world* (1 Cor. 14:10-11, 21)."

Paul uses the same term that Luke used in Acts to refer to "tongues" (*glossa* in Gk.). It simply means "an understandable language." All of this is similar to what occurred later in Corinth. As one authority notes: "The *attempt* to make a *difference* between the tongues of Corinthians and those of Acts is *wholly artificial*" (E. J. Titterington, "The Gift of Tongues," *Faith and Thought*, 1958, Vol. 90, pp. 65).

Barclay says about the word, *prophecy*, "In this instance, and in its general usage, the Gk. term '*propheteuo*' [prophecy] has *nothing to do with foretelling the future*, but with *communicating the will and message of God*. The word that comes closest to its true meaning is '*preaching*.'"

Apparently, at Corinth there wasn't a minister and those preaching needed more order. He had said, "And how shall they hear without a preacher? As it is written: 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, of those who bring glad tidings of good things!'" (Rom. 10:14-15).

In the book of Acts, there are three instances of speaking in languages: Acts 2:4-13, 10:44-46, and 19:1-6. We can better understand what speaking in tongues entails by reading Acts 2:6-13, "Each person was startled to recognize *his own dialect* when the disciples spoke. Stunned and amazed, the people in the crowd said, 'All of these men who are speaking are Galileans. Why do we hear them *speaking in our native dialects*? We're Parthians,

Medes, and Elamites...We hear these men *in our own languages* as they tell about the miracles that God has done.' All of these devout men were stunned and puzzled. They asked each other, 'What can this mean?' Others said jokingly, 'They're drunk on sweet wine'" (GW). So, some definitely thought they were speaking gibberish, but they were not.

Remember, Corinth was one of the most cosmopolitan cities in the Roman Empire, where many different languages were spoken. Thus, when the Church gathered, there were some who could not understand other believers who spoke another language. For this reason, God bestowed on them the gift of languages so they could communicate with one another, for no multilingual dictionaries existed at that time. Nor could Paul speak to the Gentiles in many of their own dialects without this gift. Hence, he too received the gift of speaking in different languages. He said in 1 Cor. 14:18, "I thank God that I speak in other languages more than any of you" (GW). The difference between Paul and the Corinthians was that he knew how to remain humble, whereas many of them had become vain.

Paul continues, "[Brethren], it wouldn't do you any good if I came to you speaking in other languages, unless I explained revelation, knowledge, prophecy, or doctrine to you. Musical instruments like the flute or harp produce sounds. If there is no difference in the notes, how can a person tell what tune is being played? For example, if the trumpet doesn't sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle? In the same way, if you don't speak in a way that can be understood, how will anyone know what you're saying? You will be talking into thin air. No matter how many different languages there are in the world, not one of them is without meaning. If I don't know what a language means, I will be a foreigner to the person who speaks it and that person will be a foreigner to me. In the same way, since you're eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in them so that you help the church grow. So, the person who speaks in another language should pray for an interpretation of what he says" (1 Cor. 14:6-13, GW).

Paul provides the following instructions for the proper use of the gift of tongues: (1). It is intended to be a sign to unbelievers, not members (vs. 22). (2). Use it only when there is someone present who can interpret the language being used (vv. 27, 28).

(3). The speaker must control what he is saying, for "the spirits of the prophets *are subject to the prophets*; for God is not a God of confusion, but of peace...Let all things be done decently and in order" (vv. 32-33, 40). He concludes: "Yet, in order to teach others in church, I would rather say five words that can be understood than ten thousand words in another language" (1 Cor.14:19, GW).

What about the Pentecostal and Charismatic groups that claim to "speak in strange tongues"?

An article published by the Church in 1975, titled, "What the New Testament Teaches About 'Tongues,'" says: "Professional linguists have investigated *modern glossolalia* [the phenomenon of speaking incoherently] yet have found no evidence whatsoever that it ever consists of *actual speech*...and they are unanimous in their finding *no human language* among the massive and growing library of recorded 'tongue speech'...

"If you will carefully compare this list of essentials with the present day *glossolalia* services, you will find major lacks. Most such services just do not meet the requirements of God's own Word. As we have shown, there has been no proof of a real language being used, despite the claims to the contrary...Satan has his ministers and even appears as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:13-15). He also has his counterfeits for the gifts of God's Spirit. Because of this, God's Word plainly tells us: 'believe not every spirit, but try the spirits, whether they are of God' (1 John 4:1). How many of those participating in glossolalia have been told to *try the spirits*? How many are really determining whether the spirit is from God or Satan before allowing it in? Dr. John Kildahl, who recently completed a study on glossolalia...warned of the 'complete turning of oneself over to a leader' required to speak in tongues. According to one researcher, glossolalists actually go into a '*trance*' state very similar to *hypnosis*. This appears to be a universal trait, even though experienced glossolalists may not show it...As Dr. Kildahl points out, 'The follower feels at peace because he has abandoned himself to the control of *somebody else*'" (Lester Grabbe, *Good News* magazine, Feb. 1975, pp. 11-15).

Therefore, brethren, it is *very dangerous* to give oneself over to this phenomenon. I can personally attest to dealing with several who had "spoken in tongues" and had been possessed by evil spirits.