

# Speaking Into the Air

1 Corinthians 12-14

## Chapter 12

### Introduction

We will continue our discussion on modern day miracles with a look at the flagship chapters utilized by Pentecostals to argue for the continuation of miracles—especially revelatory miracles, e.g. tongues, prophecy, word of knowledge. I don't plan on an overly detailed study of these three chapters. That is, I don't intend to define every gift mentioned or to do word studies on Paul's definition of love, etc. I have a two-fold goal in this portion of our study.

First, I would like us to absorb the Apostle Paul's motif throughout these chapters, i.e. the purpose of and disposition we should have toward gifts and orderliness in the church. It is my prayer that we will be greatly ministered to by Paul's encouragements and admonitions contained on these pages. Paul's exhortations to foster unity are unsurpassed in his metaphorical description of the church as a body. His definition of love and gentle rebuke of exercising gifts apart from love should challenge us all. And his call to orderliness in the church will be very illuminating and will undress improper dispositions we have toward approaching God.

Second, I would like to pause and reflect upon certain passages in terms of how they speak to the continuation of sign-gifts. Since it is not the Apostle's purpose to argue for the continuation or cessation of gifts in these chapters what we learn regarding the continuation or cessation of miraculous gifts will be by inference or implication.

For example, Paul lists all sorts of gifts, including miraculous gifts, for what appears to be the common use in the church at Corinth. Does this imply that these gifts are available in their totality to churches today? We will learn that all Christians are baptized in the Holy Spirit. How does this fit with the Pentecostal notion of a subsequent baptism of the Holy Spirit? In short, we will evaluate whether or not these chapters argue more strongly for or against the continuation of sign-gifts.

Without further delay, let us launch into a prayerful and meaningful pursuit of understanding God's word.

### 1 Corinthians 12

#### No Dumb Idols Allowed

**Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant: <sup>2</sup> You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols, however you were led. <sup>3</sup> Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit (12:1-3).**

Paul is about to instruct on spiritual gifts. It is important to him that the Corinthians are not ignorant. Then he mentions their past (formerly carried away to dumb idols). He is not merely trying to be insulting here. It is very likely that he mentions this because of their propensity to fall back into that similar practice. Mystical pagans have a habit of becoming mystical Christians. God calls us to be mature in our understanding (1 Corinthians 14:20). Perhaps the improper use of spiritual gifts had so run amuck

in Corinth that those claiming these spiritual gifts were actually calling Jesus accursed; a caution to us all regarding the general acceptance of those claiming Christian leadership. Paul's desire is to protect the church from its own various impulses.

That this church is receiving a letter from Paul is one of the first arguments for the cessation of sign-gifts. If a twenty-first century church were to run amuck (as some have) with the improper use of sign-gifts (or any error), they should not expect to get a letter from an apostle. Continuous Pauline epistles are not normative for the applied work of redemption. If you disagree with me you must make your argument from the canon of Scripture. You can't write a letter to the apostle Paul and sic him on me.

It would be shortsighted here to think that Paul is addressing mere verbalization—certainly Satan can mouth, "Jesus is Lord." Jesus makes this point quite clear when He says,

**These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me (Matthew 15:8).**

Paul's initial point is the control and power of the Holy Spirit over the theology and faith of men. Implicit in "no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit," is that no one can believe in Jesus as Lord except by the Holy Spirit. This passage, and hundreds like it, obliterate the notion that belief, or faith, originates in man. God is to be praised for the very faith by which man is saved.

### Unity and Mutual Edification

**There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. <sup>5</sup> There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. <sup>6</sup> And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. <sup>7</sup> But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: <sup>8</sup> for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, <sup>9</sup> to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, <sup>10</sup> to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. <sup>11</sup> But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills (12:4-11).**

I will not, at this point, discuss all the details of these above gifts. We stipulate that in the first century church all gifts were in use; it's a given. Paul is emphasizing what we might call the differential distribution of gifts by the Spirit. He has, at least, two reasons for making this point:

First, Paul is emphasizing unity—"Same Lord, Same God, Same Spirit." He will pursue this more fully in the words to follow. Here he teaches that gifts, though diverse, flow from one source, the Spirit of God.

Second, Paul gives the reason for the manifestation or gift. The manifestation "is given to each for the profit of all" (verse 7). This must be highlighted in our minds. The mutual edification of the church is the purpose of Spiritual gifts. This will run head on with the proposition of the gift of a private prayer language (more on that later).

### All Had Been Spirit-Baptized

**For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. <sup>13</sup> For by one**

**Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.**

**<sup>14</sup> For in fact the body is not one member but many (12:13, 14).**

Paul now begins his “body” illustration, but not until he makes a critical point—that by one Spirit all the members of the church have been baptized into one body. To suggest that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is a subsequent experience is to tear Paul’s unity argument asunder. There is no notion allowed in Paul’s argument that some had received the baptism of the Holy Spirit and others hadn’t. The glue for Paul’s argument is the assertion that **“by one Spirit (they) were all baptized into one body.”** And, as verse thirty will indicate, not all spoke in tongues but more on that later.

It would be best to understand the baptism of the Holy Spirit as something poured out on the church as an organism—a body. And when we, by the grace of God, become part of that organism we are made to drink into that one Spirit. So it is not me, on an island (or tarrying in prayer) waiting to be baptized by the Holy Spirit. When God grants me faith and I am brought into the church of Christ—the body of Christ—I become part of a baptized body.

This may be illustrated by thinking of people in a pool (the church) and others outside the pool (the unconverted). The pool is the baptized organism. The people outside the pool don’t make their own pools or seek to splash water on themselves. When, by the grace of God, they enter the pool they enter a baptized body enjoying all its graces.

#### **All Have, and Should Exercise, Gifts**

**If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body,” is it therefore not of the body? <sup>16</sup>And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body,” is it therefore not of the body? <sup>17</sup>If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? <sup>18</sup> But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. <sup>19</sup> And if they were all one member, where would the body be? <sup>20</sup> But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. <sup>21</sup> And the eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you”; nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” <sup>22</sup> No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. <sup>23</sup> And those *members* of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable *parts* have greater modesty, <sup>24</sup> but our presentable *parts* have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that *part* which lacks it, <sup>25</sup> that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. <sup>26</sup> And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it (12:15-26).**

Paul now fully expresses the “body” illustration. Again, let us not miss these ministering words of Paul. We are all part of one body and we are in need of one another. Church members who live their lives detached from the body are remiss in two ways: they are not availing themselves of God’s provision for themselves and they are failing to aid those in need. They are a finger, as it were, detached from the hand, arm, and body and therefore extremely limited regarding any genuine profitable contribution to God’s kingdom. In addition to this they are the missing finger in God’s

church which leaves a deed undone. The body and the finger both suffer (verse 26). We should be so attached to the local church that its suffering is ours and *vice versa*. If such is not the case with you, you are overly disenfranchised.

I might point out that since the lists of gifts vary in letters to different churches these lists are not meant to be exhaustive. Hence I don't think it is even necessary to classify your gift which is so popular today. The fact is you have something to offer God's people and should have your eyes, ears, and heart open to being a participating member in Christ's local church. This may be formal or descript, such as a deacon, elder, worship leader, Sunday School teacher, etc., or it may be very informal or nondescript such as the offering of kind words, prayer, inviting someone to dinner, helping when a need arises, and so on.

If too much time goes by and you find that you have contributed nothing and have received nothing from your church, look first to whether or not you have estranged yourself from the body of Christ.

Paul also makes the point that those with the, seemingly, more impressive gifts should not belittle those with the seemingly less impressive or *vice versa*. Suffering and honor should be viewed as belonging to the entire body. An overly developed sense of self-honor or prestige has always plagued Christ's church.

How does this passage address the topic at hand (sign gifts)? It must be stated that even when the sign (or miraculous) gifts were clearly present in the church there was no indication of a sub-section of *unbaptized-by-the-Spirit* Christians. What part of the body would they be? At very best they would be paralyzed limbs. Paul's description allows for no such thinking.

### **Not All Speak in Tongues/There Are No More Apostles**

**Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.<sup>28</sup> And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues.<sup>29</sup> Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles?<sup>30</sup> Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?<sup>31</sup> But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way (12:27-31).**

Though we are part of a body, we do maintain our individuality (verse 1). Paul then lists some gifts of a more spectacular nature. His point being that even during the apostolic era not everyone had, nor should they have expected to have, these gifts. The implied answers to these rhetorical questions are, "no." This is to say that not all Spirit-baptized Christians (verse 13) spoke in tongues (verse 30). There is a stark contrast between Paul's teaching and the articles of faith taught by the General Council of the Assemblies of God which states,

**Tongues is the same evidence today when believers are baptized in the Spirit. All believers, when they are baptized in the Spirit, will speak in tongues.**

**There are those who give testimony to a dynamic and life-changing encounter with the Holy Spirit who have never spoken in tongues. Nevertheless it cannot be said that they are filled with the Spirit in the New Testament sense of the term. There is an essential link between that experience and speaking in other tongues...**

Yet another argument for cessation comes when we notice that Paul has *apostles* on his list (verse 28). Unless we are going to reduce the term apostle to level of comparative meaninglessness, we must understand it in its unique sense.<sup>1</sup> Paul opens every epistle (except 1 & 2 Thessalonians) by announcing his God-given office of apostle. It is his declaration of this office that demands the recipients of the letters respect his writings as the word of God. Unless we are going to argue for the continuation of this office (an argument very few are willing to even attempt) we must acknowledge a precedent for cessation.

Though we will stop here, it is readily apparent that this entire chapter is preparatory for chapter thirteen, the love chapter—the “**more excellent way.**”

Before we pursue chapter thirteen, let us recognize that a misunderstanding and improper use of spiritual gifts, as with all doctrines that go astray, impugn the character of God. God is the one who grants faith (1 Corinthians 12:3); true saving faith produces unity and mutual edification (1 Corinthians 12:4-11); unity and mutual edification flows from a baptized church which is the very body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13, 14); a body of which we are all integral members (1 Corinthians 12:15-26).

If we, as Christ's body, are to suitably extol our Creator and Redeemer, we must seek to properly acknowledge what He has already accomplished in our lives (He has baptized us by/in His Spirit and granted with that baptism all its attending graces and gifts). We must also appropriate that which He has provided (i.e., operate as a gifted member). This brings benefit to God's people and glory to His Name. This will be more fully pursued as we study the next chapter.

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<sup>1</sup> Meeting the requirements pronounced by Peter when Judas was replaced by Matthias: “Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection” (Acts 1:21, 22).

## Questions for Study

1. Why would Paul remind them of their past concerning following dumb idols (page 2)?
2. How does the fact that Corinth received a letter from the apostle Paul contribute to the argument of cessation (page 2)?
3. From where does man's faith and theology come (page 2)?
4. Give two reasons why Paul mentions the differential distribution of gifts by the Spirit (pages 2, 3).
5. If some Christians are not baptized by the Spirit, what does this do to Paul's unity argument (page 3)?
6. Discuss ways to understand the baptism of the Holy Spirit (page 3).
7. Of what are Christians remiss when they detach themselves from the local body (page 4)?
8. How do you know what your gift is (page 4)?
9. If there are Christians who are not baptized by the Holy Spirit, what are the implications in Paul's body metaphor (page 4)?
10. Did all Spirit-baptized Christians speak in tongues? How does this comport with the statement of the Assemblies of God (page 5)?
11. How does Paul's inclusion of apostles on his list in 1 Corinthians 12:28 contribute to the argument of cessation (page 5)?
12. What is at stake when we misuse or misunderstand the Bible's teaching regarding the Holy Spirit (pages 5, 6)?