

## **Languages Without Love**

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 13:1

Code: 1862

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **A. The Chapter of Love**

The thirteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians, without me needing to say anything to you, is probably one that you recognize. In fact, if you've been a Christian for any length of time, you probably have a great deal of affection and love for this chapter because of the tremendous impact that it has on the greatest thing in all the world--the subject of love.

Some people have said that this chapter is the greatest, strongest, and deepest thing that the Apostle Paul ever penned. It has been called "The Hymn of Love," "a lyrical interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount," and "the Beatitudes set to music." It is a dramatic chapter. Studying it is almost like taking apart a flower. When the flower is apart, it's not as beautiful as it was before dissection; but it must be done to see the intricacy of God's design. So, let's become spiritual botanists for awhile and dissect 1 Corinthians 13. Then we will be able to understand the beauties that are hidden beneath its surface.

#### **1. Its Characteristic Style**

What's exciting about this chapter is that it is a breath of fresh air in the middle of such a problem-oriented book. First Corinthians is negative in many ways, as Paul attacks the Corinthian assembly for all of their misconduct and immorality, and their failure to acquiesce to those principles which God had given for their blessing. But all of these issues are set aside in chapter 13, as Paul flies on wings, as it were, interpreting and sharing his Holy Spirit-given inspiration on love.

I can imagine that Paul's amanuensis (or secretary) must have done a double take and looked into his face as he began to dictate chapter 13 because of its dramatic change. It's lyrical and rhetorical--which is totally different from the rest of the book. He has been plodding through problem after problem with deep reasoning and carefully worded arguments, explanations, and warnings. But all of a sudden, he hits the rhythm of chapter 13 and his words begin to sing. It's like a beautiful gem in a setting. The setting may be attractive, but the gem is what makes the setting. So it is with the thirteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians. It is a gem in the setting of the whole letter.

## 2. Its Context

This particular chapter has been treated with a sense of uniqueness--and rightly so. It's been pulled out, isolated, and preached on as if it were an entity in itself--dropped out of heaven without any connection to anything else. However, the real power of this chapter is found when you study it in its context. This chapter wouldn't mean as much to you if I just pulled it out of its context and taught it. Of course, I feel that way about every chapter in the Bible. However, I particularly feel it applies to this chapter, because I think it gets abused along that line so very frequently. People just pull it out and teach it. Unfortunately, they miss its power, which only comes when it's tied together with the rest of the book...particularly chapters 12 and 14.

First Corinthians 13 is in the middle of a section on spiritual gifts. In chapter 12 Paul discussed the endowments of the gifts--the receiving of the gifts and the way God has put them together in the church so that it can function. Chapter 14 is the proper exercise of the gifts--how to do it and how not to do it. And right in the middle is the proper energy...the proper motive...the proper power...the proper atmosphere...the proper environment in which the gifts operate--love. It's part of the more excellent way.

## 3. Its Content

In chapter 12, Paul gave the Corinthians all the basics about spiritual gifts. He told them that since God put the gifts in the church, they were to be content and not to feel inadequate, jealous, and envious if they didn't have a showy gift. And on the other hand, if they did have a showy gift, they were not to be proud, selfish, self-seeking, and boastful.

The Greek rendering of verse 31 says, "Instead of accepting what God has given, you are coveting the showy gifts." It's in the indicative case, not in the imperative. Paul said, "You are continuing to covet the showy gifts. But I show unto you a more excellent way." In other words, a more excellent way than coveting the showy gift is to be content with the one you have. A more excellent way than lording it over somebody or being proud because you happen to have the gift of speaking, or teaching, or languages is to be loving. That's what he talks about in chapter 13 as he describes, in beautiful language, the more excellent way of love. The Corinthian church had the gifts, as well as a lot of activity. But without love it wasn't excellent. Rather, it was counterfeit. They were selfish and self-seeking, and operating in the flesh.

Chapter 13, then, sums up the more excellent way. Neither conflict, nor struggle, nor self-seeking, nor pride, nor envy, nor jealousy have a place in the body of Christ--only love.

## B. The Fruit of Love

As we talk about love, we're getting into the very heart of Paul's view of spiritual life. Love is basic. We could spend weeks and weeks and weeks on that subject alone. However, what Paul is saying here is this: The truly spiritual life is the only life in which spiritual gifts can truly operate. And the truly spiritual life is not controlled by the gifts of the Spirit, it is controlled by the fruit of the Spirit. Do you understand that? The Corinthians had all the gifts of the Spirit but none of the fruit of the Spirit.

According to Galatians 5:22-23, the fruit of the Spirit is "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control." If you don't have the fruit of the Spirit, then, the gifts of the Spirit are functioning in the flesh. It's a simple process. When the believer walks in the Spirit, the fruit of the Spirit is produced. Out of the fruit of the Spirit come the gifts of the Spirit operating in the power of the Spirit.

Now it's possible that love is the fruit of the Spirit and the rest of those words just describe love in all its dimensions. Love is certainly the greatest, according to 1 Corinthians 13:13, where Paul says, "...the greatest of these is love." If there's no love, then what is being done is being done without the fruit of the Spirit. And if it's being done without the fruit of the Spirit, it's being done without the Spirit. It's in the flesh-- fleshly...carnal...counterfeit. Even though the Corinthians had all the gifts of the Spirit, they were exercising their gifts in the flesh without the fruit of the Spirit. So Paul says, "When it all gets done, you won't have anything."

Look at the first three verses of chapter 13, and change the word "though" to if. The Greek word *ean* is better translated if. It reads like this: "[If] I speak with the [languages] of men and of angels, and have not love, I am become as sounding bronze, or a tinkling cymbal. And [if] I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and [if] I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing. And [if] I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and [if] I give my body to be burned, and have not love, it profiteth me nothing." In other words, Paul says, "All of the gifts of the Spirit and all of the activities mean nothing without the fruit of the Spirit...love." Love has to be the driving force and the motive for everything in the life of the believer. You see, it's possible to have the gifts of the Spirit without spirituality. Just having a spiritual gift doesn't make you spiritual. You can either function in the energy of your flesh as you counterfeit the gifts, or you can function in the power of the Spirit. But without the fruit of the Spirit, your work is in the flesh.

The Corinthians, then, were prophesying, speaking in languages, and supposedly healing people. However, their lack of love gave evidence that their flesh was operating instead of the Spirit. Consequently, their works were counterfeit. I think it's tremendously important for us to understand that God doesn't want us doing our own thing in our own power--a principle which is unfolded in this chapter.

## C. The Definition of Love

Love is the more excellent way. However, in talking about the word love, I think we'd better define it, since our world doesn't have the foggiest idea what it means. The word in the Greek is agape, which is the most grandiose concept of love. Agape is the highest level of love--the love that is associated with God. Agape is the term used in 1 Corinthians 13. So the question is: What does it mean? Well, first let me tell you what it doesn't mean.

### 1. Agape Is Not:

#### a. Romantic or Sexual Love

The word love, as it appears in the Word of God, never means romantic or sexual love. The Greeks had a word for that (eros), but it never appears in the New Testament. For example, when it says in Ephesians 5, "Husbands, love your wives..."(v.25a), it isn't talking about romance. Yet how many sermons have you heard, or how many books have you read where someone says, "Husbands, love your wives," and then gives illustrations about opening the car door, buying flowers, and feeling romantic? That isn't what it's talking about.

So, agape never refers to romance or sex. Secondly, biblical love never means...

#### b. Emotional Love

Paul's not talking about a tingly sensation or sentimentalism. He's not saying, "The greatest of these is sentimentality." That, too, is not scriptural love.

Thirdly, the word love, as it appears in the Bible, never means...

#### c. Ecumenical Love

Biblical love is never a friendly spirit of tolerance and brotherhood toward others, without any thought of convictions. In other words, when people say, "Well, it doesn't matter what anybody believes, as long as there's some kind of common ground. We just have to love them all," they don't understand the biblical meaning of love.

Recently, there was a prayer meeting where both Christian and non-Christian people were in attendance. When the director of this meeting, who happened to be a Christian, was asked on what basis they got together, he said, "Oh, on the basis of love." "Well, they don't even believe the truth of the gospel!" the inquirer replied. "No, we don't agree on that, but we do agree on prayer. We all pray...that's our common ground. Even if we don't pray to the same person, I guess it's okay." But you

see, that kind of friendly spirit of tolerance and brotherhood, without any thought of conviction or doctrine, isn't what the Bible's talking about.

Further, biblical love cannot be defined as...

#### d. Charity

Unfortunately, the King James translators used the word "charity" instead of the word "love" in 1 Corinthians 13.

But that is too narrow a definition. Paul is not talking about giving your nickel to the United Fund. That isn't the basic thrust of the chapter or of the term.

So, if love isn't romantic or sexual or emotional or the friendly spirit of ecumenical tolerance or charity, what in the world is it? What is love? Well, I'll show you what it is biblically.

### 2. Agape Is:

#### a. John 3:16

Now see if any of the previous definitions fit this verse: "For God so loved the world...that He felt romantic about it...that He got a tingly sensation down His spine...that He had a friendly spirit of tolerance and brotherhood no matter what they believed...that He gave to the United Fund." Do any of those definitions of love fit? No! What does the verse say? "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son...." What is love, then? Love is an act of self-sacrifice, not a feeling. Biblically, this is seen again and again. Love is an act of self-sacrifice. There's no such thing as agape without action. There's no such thing as the feeling, or the emotion, or the sensation of agape. It is an action. Now the sensation may or may not be there, but the action is always there.

#### b. John 13:1, 4-5, 34

In John 13:1, Jesus was meeting with His disciples for the last time. At the end of the verse, John says of Jesus, "...having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them unto the end." The Greek literally says, "He loved them to perfection." In other words, He loved them to the limits of love. He loved them as far as love could go. In verses 4-5, we see the extent of Jesus' love for the disciples: "He riseth from supper, and laid aside His garments, and took a towel, and girded Himself. After that He poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded." He loved them, and His love took action. What kind of action? He washed their dirty feet while they sat around and argued about who was going to be the greatest in the Kingdom, and about who was going to sit next to Jesus in the Millennium. They weren't about to wash each other's feet, so Jesus stooped and did it. Why? Because He loved them.

At the end of this same chapter, this concept really comes home hard. In verse 34 He says, "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another...." How? "...as I have loved you...." How had He just loved them? By washing their feet. You see, it's the same thing that He's asking of us. Love is an act of self-sacrifice. It is an act of sacrificial giving. It's washing feet. It's God giving His Son.

c. John 15:9-10a, 13

In John 15:9, Jesus said, "As the Father hath loved Me, so have I loved you; continue ye in My love." How had He loved them? By coming into the world and dying for them. Now look at verse 10a: "If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love...." In other words, love toward God is the act of sacrificing my will to do His will. That's it. Love is an act of self-sacrifice.

Verse 13 gives us the supreme example: "Greater love hath no man than this...." In other words, here is the greatest definition of love that has ever been given: "...that a man lay down his life for his friends." The greatest definition of love is an act of supreme self-sacrifice. That's the way it always appears in Scripture.

d. John 21:15-19

Basically, Jesus told Peter, "If you love Me, then follow Me. But it will cost you your life." Love is self-sacrifice.

e. 1 John 4:9-11

"In this was manifested the love of God toward us, that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another." In other words, God's love is demonstrated in an act of self-sacrifice--and so is ours.

Now, when we talk about love, that's what we're talking about. It is an act of self-sacrifice. It is humility. It is meeting needs and doing what God wants us to do. There's no self-seeking, pride, selfishness, self-glory, or vanity in love.

### **The Only Legitimate Reason to Exercise Your Spiritual Gifts**

Did you know that we can minister our gifts in pride? I can preach for fame, or success, or glory, or prestige. I can even preach to be accepted. You can minister your gift for the same reasons, too. You can minister your gift because of peer pressure, or to get out from under a divine obligation that's bugging you, or to have somebody pat you on your spiritual back and tell you how great you are. So can I.

There are a myriad of other reasons or motives that we could have for ministering our spiritual gifts, but there's only one that's legitimate: the sacrifice of ourselves to the will of God and the sacrifice of our lives to the needs of our brothers and sisters. That's the only legitimate reason. Nothing else matters. Any other reason adds up to zero. Without sacrificial service, you are nothing but noise--a banging gong and a clanging cymbal.

Now let's go back to 1 Corinthians 13. Paul is calling on these people to love, and saying, "Forget yourself." After he told the Philippians to have the same love for one another (2:2), he went on to define that love: "...let each esteem others better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God...and, being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross"(2:3b-6,8). Now that's love--an act of humble service and self-sacrifice. And this is exactly what the Corinthian church needed.

The Corinthians didn't have a doctrinal problem. Do you realize that Paul doesn't even mention any significant doctrine until he gets to the fifteenth chapter, when he talks about resurrection? Up until that point, he didn't have to straighten out their doctrine as he did with the Colossians, the Galatians, and others. The Corinthians knew their doctrine, they just didn't have love.

Love is such a desperately needed thing. Even Karl Menninger of the Menninger Clinic, one of the leading figures in American psychiatry, says, "Love is the medicine for our sick old world. If people can learn to give and receive love, they will usually recover from their physical or mental illness." The problem is, people can't learn to receive or give love because they don't even know how to define it. They think it's nothing more than a warm feeling.

Now, as we look at this chapter on love, we're going to see some very poignant things. This chapter falls into four parts: The Prominence of Love (vv. 1-3), The Properties of Love (vv. 4-7), The Permanence of Love (vv. 8-12), and The Preeminence of Love (v. 13).

## **I. THE PROMINENCE OF LOVE (vv. 1-3)**

Paul starts out this chapter by trying to show the Corinthians how important love is and how they were wasting their time. Remember what John said to the church at Ephesus in Revelation 2? "You have this and you have that, and you do this and you do that." Then in verse 4, he says, "Nevertheless, I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." They had all the activity without any love, so it was all meaningless. Consequently, the church at Ephesus was removed from the face of the earth--never to be replaced again. The candlestick was taken away.

Now keep in mind, as we study these three verses, that Paul is using hyperbole to make his point. He exaggerates and pushes everything to its ultimate limit. For example, in verse 1 he says, "If I could talk angel talk, it wouldn't matter without love." Then in verses 2- 3 he says, "If I knew all mysteries and all knowledge, and had all faith, and bestowed all my goods to feed the poor, and gave my body to be burned, without love it wouldn't matter." In other words, Paul gave the extremes and pushed everything to its limits to make his point that it doesn't matter what you do, what you know, or how far you go unless love is the motive. Without love, it's all nothing.

## **A. Languages Without Love Are Nothing (v. 1)**

"[If] I speak with the [languages] of men and of angels, and have not love, I am become as sounding bronze, or a tinkling cymbal."

Notice that Paul is talking in the first person. That's a good thing to do when you're teaching, so that you identify yourself as one who is also a sinner saved by grace, and able to fall into any sin that anybody else could fall into. Paul says, "I could use my gift of languages without love, just like you." Incidentally, Paul did have that gift. In 14:18, he said, "I thank my God, I speak with [languages] more than ye all." So, he said, "I could have the languages of men, and even talk angel talk. But if I didn't have love, I would become as sounding bronze and a tinkling cymbal."

### 1. The Definition of Tongues

Notice the phrase "speak with the tongues of men and of angels." In the first place, I like to translate the word there "languages," not "tongues," because that gives some confusion that can be eliminated very quickly. The word "tongues" is the word for languages, so we can translate it that way. The gift of languages, then, is the same as what people today call the gift of tongues.

#### a. The Tongues of Men

What does it mean to speak with the languages of men? What is the gift of languages? The New Testament is exceedingly clear on what this gift was. There isn't any doubt about it. And as you study the Word of God, you'll find that it's relatively simple to ascertain its definition. Let me take you to its first occurrence in Acts chapter 2, to see what it is and to get a basic definition.

#### 1) The First Occurrence of Tongues

In Acts 2:1, we find that the Day of Pentecost had arrived--a great feast time following the Passover, when Jerusalem was loaded with people who had come on a pilgrimage to the festivals: "And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place." One hundred and twenty disciples were gathered (Ac. 1:15), waiting for the promised Holy Spirit to come. The church



was about to be born. In verses 2-4 we read: "And suddenly there came a sound from heaven like a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues [lit. languages], as the Spirit gave them utterance." The Holy Spirit descended, baptized the believers into the body, moved into their lives, and filled them. And to give evidence of that, a marvelous miracle took place, as they began to speak in other languages under the uttering of the Holy Spirit.

The word translated "tongues" is the Greek word *glossa*--the normal Greek word for language. In other words, they spoke with other languages. Now there are some people today who say that the gift of tongues is ecstatic babble--a prayer language. I've heard many who say that the gift of tongues is their own private language. But let's look into this and see if that is, in fact, true or not true. When they began to speak with other tongues (or languages) in verse 4, was it babble or not?

Well, that's an easy question to answer if you just continue reading this passage. Let's start at verse 5: "And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because every man heard them speak in his own language." There's no question about the fact that the tongues of verse 4 were languages. They had to be. Why? Because "every man heard them speak in his own language."

Further, verse 7 tells us that "they were all amazed and marveled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these who speak Galileans?" Now the Galileans were considered to be the hayseeds, or the hicks of that time. They weren't connected to the highfalutin, educated people of Jerusalem. So the people must have thought, "How could these Galileans be linguists? They don't even have schools up there to teach this stuff." Consequently, they were amazed to hear their own particular tongue, or language, being spoken (v. 8).

What languages did they speak? They're listed in verses 9-11. First he starts in the east with the "Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia." Then he goes west to "Judea," north to "Cappadocia...Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia in Egypt," and south to "the parts of Libya about Cyrene." Then he gets very general by mentioning the "sojourners of Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians." And according to the end of verse 11, they all heard, in their own languages, "the wonderful works of God."

Let me ask you this: How would they have known the disciples were proclaiming the wonderful works of God if it wasn't being done in a known language--particularly their own language? Well, the fact that they knew what the disciples were saying, and that they recognized their own languages, proves that the disciples were speaking in known languages--not babble or ecstatic speech. The gift of tongues was not a private gift that they exercised in their closet all by themselves. It referred to the

use of bona fide human languages.

## 2) The Reasons Known Languages Are in View

Now, I want to show you that according to the Bible, the gift of languages was always languages and never anything else. This is an important point for you to understand.

a) The Greek word glossa primarily means "human language" when used in Scripture.

The word glossa, from which we get glossolalia, is a word that found its way into our English language without being translated. It means "tongue." Biblically, however, glossa always means "human language" in the New Testament. And of the thirty times it appears in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint), its meaning is "normal, bona fide, human language" in all but two cases: Isaiah 29:24 and Isaiah 32:4. And in those verses, it doesn't refer to ecstatic speech or pagan babble; it simply means "a stammering" or "a stuttering." So the normative usage of glossa in Scripture is to refer to intelligent, normal, human language. That's the way it appears in Acts 2, because that's its normal meaning.

b) The Greek word dialektos, from which we get the English word dialect, is used in Acts 2:6 and 8.

Some of the people in the crowd at Pentecost heard God's message proclaimed in their own language, and some of them heard it in their own dialect (which is a subgroup of a language). The disciples were speaking in languages and dialects. That's very clear, according to Acts 2. Now those classifications would never be used to describe babble or ecstatic speech, only of normal languages and dialects known to the people who heard.

c) The gift of tongues in Acts 2 is the same throughout the book of Acts.

People say, "Yes, we agree that languages are mentioned in Acts 2. But the meaning changes later on in Acts." Well, that's not true. It doesn't change. Look at Acts 10:44-46a: "While Peter yet spoke these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all them who heard the word. And they of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Spirit. For they heard them speak with tongues [languages]...." Now, you can't say, "Well by now, glossa means babble." No. It means languages. It's the same word.

Further, look at Acts 11:15-17a. Peter, reporting back to Jerusalem of the incident that occurred in Acts 10, says, "And as I began to speak [in Cornelius's house], the Holy Spirit fell on them, as on us at the beginning. Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how He said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit. Forasmuch, then, as God gave them the same gift as He did unto us...." In other words, Peter said, "They received the same thing we received at

Pentecost." What did they receive? Languages. It had to be the same thing that they experienced in Acts 2.

In Acts 19:6 we find a similar situation: "And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke with tongues [Gk. glossa='languages']...." The same term means the same thing in the same book. There's no reason to think it means babble.

So, throughout the book of Acts, glossa consistently refers to normal human language. And the point is this: Once it happened in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost, the Jews said, "We received the Holy Spirit in this marvelous way." But God responded, later on in the book of Acts, by showing the Jews that the Gentiles received the same Holy Spirit and the same corresponding gift of languages. That's how God put the church together. Furthermore, in Acts 19, the disciples of John the Baptist experienced the exact same thing. The Lord gave all the groups the same experience, to weld the whole church into one unit. Therefore, glossa must be translated the same way throughout the book of Acts.

d) The word "interpretation" [Gk. hermeneuo] in 1 Corinthians 12:10, is the normative word for translating languages.

The Greek word hermeneuo can't be referring to the interpretation of babble because babble is not a language. What people today have done is to say that the purpose of the gift of interpretation is to translate someone's babble. But the Greek word refers to taking something in one language and putting it into its equivalent in another known language. And you can't translate babble. So, the very word that is used demands that a known language be in view.

e) The word "unknown" in the phrase "unknown tongues" throughout 1 Corinthians 14, was added by the King James translators and is not in the original.

f) First Corinthians 12:10 mentions different "kinds" of tongues.

The word "kinds" is the Greek word genos, from which we get our English word genus. It means "a family, group, race, or nation." You can't say there are kinds and races and classes and groups and families of babble or ecstatic speech. Why? Because there aren't any. However, there are language families, aren't there? Any linguist is familiar with the phrase "language families." There are national languages and there are racial languages. So, the term "kinds" fits languages, not babble.

g) First Corinthians 14:21 indicates that tongues were a foreign language given as a sign to unbelieving Israel.

Paul referred to Isaiah 28:11-12 when he said, "In the law it is written, With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that will they not hear Me, saith the Lord." Isaiah predicted that men of other languages would speak to Israel. Do you know who fulfilled that? The Assyrians. Do you know what they spoke? Assyrian. So the prophecy had reference to a known language--Assyrian spoken by Assyrians. That is the normative standard. Paul, then, goes on to say, in verse 22, that tongues are for a sign--not to believers, but to unbelieving Israel. And since the tongues spoken of in Isaiah 28 is a legitimate language, the tongues in 1 Corinthians 14 must be the same.

h) According to 1 Corinthians 14:7-8, tongues had to have grammatical structure.

In 14:7-8 Paul said, "And even things without life, giving sound, whether flute or harp, except they give a distinction in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped? For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?" Can you imagine what would have happened when the US Cavalry went out to fight the Indians, if the bugler blew just any tune he wanted to? The men wouldn't know what to do. The bugler had to blow a specific series of notes to communicate specific instructions, such as "Hit the horses, guys" or "It's time to get up." The soldiers had to know what each series of notes meant. It had to have structure and distinction. And that's the point Paul is trying to make. Language has to have structural distinction to make sense. It can't just be pagan babble.

i) The effectiveness of the sign of the gift of languages depended upon its difference from the ecstatic babble of pagan worship.

The Corinthians had allowed babble and strange ecstatic languages into their church--counterfeiting the true gift of languages. In fact, their ecstasy was turning their worship service into an orgy. Look at 1 Corinthians 14:23: "If, therefore, the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues [or `languages'], and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad?" In other words, Paul says, "If you have all of this wild hysteria going on, with everybody up doing their own thing, you're going to have problems, because unbelieving people are going to think you're nuts. It's not going to have any effect on them." Why? Because the amazement element, for non-Christian Jews attending their services, depended upon the fact that real languages were spoken and then translated miraculously. That would obviously be seen as a sign from God. In other words, the effectiveness of the sign of the gift of languages, depended upon its difference from the ecstatic babble that they were so used to in the pagan worship of Corinth. So, in the Corinthian assembly, the genuine gift of languages was a true language with a true translation. That was the miracle. If all an unbeliever heard was babble, he wouldn't be able to say anything except, "This is just the same old pagan hysteria."

So, in terms of a definition, the gift of tongues is a Spirit-given ability to speak a foreign language.

### **Are the tongues of today the same as the New Testament gift of tongues?**

When you compare the proper definition of the gift of tongues with what is going on today, there are some definite problems. I've read books that tell you how to get your own prayer language--one that's like nobody else's. Or, if you want, you can share somebody else's prayer language when you're first learning, until you develop your own. And on and on it goes. Modern tongues are nothing more than ecstatic babble without structure or grammar. And they definitely cannot be considered as actual languages. They just don't fit the New Testament definition of the gift of tongues.

William Samarin, Ph.D. in linguistics and professor of linguistics at the University of Toronto, says this: "Over a period of five years I have taken part in meetings in Italy, Holland, Jamaica, Canada and the United States. I have observed old-fashioned Pentecostals and neo-Pentecostals. I have been in small meetings in private homes as well as in mammoth public meetings. I have seen such different cultural settings as are found among Puerto Ricans of the Bronx, the snake handlers of the Appalachians and the Russian Molakans of Los Angeles...I have interviewed tongue speakers, and tape recorded and analyzed countless samples of Tongues. In every case, glossolalia turns out to be linguistic nonsense. In spite of superficial similarities, glossolalia is fundamentally not language." (See William Samarin, *Tongues of Men and Angels* [New York: Macmillan Co., 1972], pp. 103-128, for further expansion of that claim.)

If a man with a Ph.D. in linguistics does a study of modern tongues and determines that what we're hearing today is not language, then it's not what the Bible says the gift is. And I would also hasten to add, that even if a real language is spoken occasionally, you'd better be careful. Why? Because demons are multi-lingual and there are many counterfeits.

#### **b. The Tongues of Angels**

Many people will admit that 1 Corinthians 13:1 refers to legitimate languages of men, but they claim that "the tongues of...angels" refers to an angelic, private, devotional language that is beyond the human. However, there are some problems with that definition of angel talk. For example:

##### **1) No Mention Elsewhere in Scripture**

If you're going to make the angel talk of 1 Corinthians 13:1 normative for the gift of tongues, you're going to have to force it into this verse, because it's nowhere else in the entire Bible. There is no precedent anywhere. In fact, anytime an angel ever communicated with a man, he communicated in normal human language.

The only kind of language we know about, apart from human language, is the language between the Holy Spirit and the Father recorded in Romans 8. However, that language is made up of "groanings which cannot be uttered"(v. 26b). It is a silent language. You say, "Do you think the angels speak a silent language?" Well, angels are ministering spirits (Heb. 1:7), and spirits don't have mouths or vocal chords. You say, "Well, how do they communicate?" I don't know how they communicate, but there is no mention anywhere else in the Bible of an angel language.

## 2) Paul's Hyperbolic Usage

"What is Paul saying?" you ask. Well, he's not stating a factual reality. He is using hyperbole--exaggeration to make a point. This is part of his push- to-the-limits argument that appears throughout verses 2 and 3 with his use of subjunctive verb--verbs which indicate a hypothetical situation.

For example, in verse 2 Paul says, "And [if] I...understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and [if] I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains...." Now, is all of that possible? Is it possible for Paul to understand all that's ever been revealed by God? No. Is it possible for him to have the knowledge of every single fact in the universe? That's absurd. And if Paul had the kind of faith that could remove mountains, he wouldn't have gotten sick climbing the mountains from Pamphylia to Phrygia, believe me. He would have just said, "Be removed," and they would have disappeared. He didn't have all faith, all knowledge, or all mysteries. And, beloved, if he didn't have it, I'm a long way from having it.

Do you see what Paul is doing? He's talking in limits and giving hypothetical situations. He is not saying that we can speak the language of angels, any more than we can understand all mysteries or all knowledge, or have all faith. We can't! It is beyond our limits. "But," says Paul, "even if we could, it wouldn't matter without love. It wouldn't mean a thing." Paul's point, then, is this: The gift of tongues, if used without love, is nothing more than noise.

We've seen the definition of tongues; so let's look, now, at...

## 2. The Primary Purpose of Tongues

You say, "John, what was the primary purpose of tongues?" It was a sign to Israel. The only time it ever had any meaning to a Christian at all was when it was translated. That's the only time. I don't know how people can go into a corner and speak babble, and then think they have the gift of tongues. That's not the gift! And furthermore, if the languages aren't interpreted, edification isn't possible. Yet people do just that, and claim that it builds them up and strengthens them. In fact, people even claim that their ecstatic babble is their devotional language. However, the Bible doesn't define the gift of tongues that way.

The gift of tongues isn't for personal edification or devotion--it's a sign to Israel of God turning away from them to the church...the Gentiles. And it wouldn't even matter if you had the gift of tongues if you didn't have love. Even if you could talk angel talk, if you didn't have love, you would be like "sounding bronze, or a tinkling cymbal."

### **Sounding Bronze or a Tinkling Cymbal**

I did some reading to find out what was going on in the pagan worship of Paul's day, and I discovered something very fascinating. In the worship of Cybele and Dionysus, two pagan false gods, there was speaking in ecstatic languages accompanied by "clanging cymbals, smashing gongs, and blaring trumpets" (William Barclay, *The Letters to the Corinthians* [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956], p. 131). Isn't that amazing? In other words, he is saying to them, "When you go about trying to operate your spiritual gifts in the flesh--no matter how good you are at it, or no matter how far it goes--if love isn't the motive, it's no different than a pagan rite. It's just paganism...pure and simple.

Unless gifts are ministered out of the power of the Spirit, through the fruit of the Spirit, in the energy of the Spirit, and in accordance with the Word of God written by the Spirit, it's just pagan racket--banging gongs, clanging cymbals, and blaring trumpets. It's just paganism within the walls of the church.

Let me carry all of this to its logical end. The best speech on earth from the most gifted orator is nothing but racket, if it's delivered without love. And we may minister our spiritual gifts in the flesh, apart from the Spirit and the love that the Spirit generates. But if we do, it means absolutely nothing. In fact, it's just paganism with Christian terminology. Now, we can't sit in condemnation of people in a movement we disagree with and say that they're the ones that are pagan. Why? Because we're just as pagan when we operate our gifts in the flesh. God help us not to do that. Remember: As we walk in the Spirit, He produces the fruit. And out of that fruit comes the ministry of the gifts with the blessing of God.

### **Focusing on the Facts**

1. How is chapter 13 different from the rest of 1 Corinthians?
2. Why is it so important that 1 Corinthians 13 be taught in its immediate context?
3. First Corinthians 13 is preceded by and followed by a discussion of what important subject?
4. What is the "more excellent way" that is mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:31?

5. The truly spiritual life is not controlled by the gifts of the Spirit, it is controlled by the \_\_\_\_\_ of the Spirit.
6. Can spiritual gifts be exercised in the flesh? Explain.
7. What is the key in knowing whether or not you are operating in the flesh or in the Spirit?
8. What is the Greek word for the highest level of love? What Greek word is used in 1 Corinthians 13 for love?
9. Biblical love cannot be defined as \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_ love, \_\_\_\_\_ love, \_\_\_\_\_ love, or \_\_\_\_\_.
10. How is biblical love defined? Give two scriptural references to support this definition.
11. What are some of the illegitimate reasons for exercising your spiritual gift? What is the only legitimate reason?
12. Did Paul have to write the Corinthians to clear up major doctrinal problems? Explain.
13. The gift of tongues can also be referred to as the gift of \_\_\_\_\_. Why is this helpful to do?
14. Where is the first occurrence of the gift of languages in the New Testament? Describe the circumstances.
15. What Greek word is translated "tongues"? What is a better translation of this word?
16. Why must the "tongues" of Acts 2:4 be legitimate languages, according to Acts 2:5-11?
17. Why were the people who were present at Pentecost so amazed that the disciples were speaking so many foreign languages?
18. Why is the latter part of Acts 2:11 so important in determining whether or not the disciples were speaking legitimate languages or ecstatic babble?
19. What is the primary meaning of the Greek word glossa in Scripture? Does it ever refer to ecstatic speech or pagan babble?
20. What common English word comes from the Greek word dialektos? Why does the use of this word in Acts 2:6 and 8 support the view that tongues are normal languages?



21. Is the gift of tongues in Acts 2 the same as the gift of tongues mentioned throughout the book of Acts?
22. What is the significance of Paul's use of the word "interpretation" in 1 Corinthians 12:10?
23. Why doesn't the phrase "unknown tongues," as it is used in 1 Corinthians 14, support the definition of tongues as babble?
24. Why does the phrase "kinds of tongues" in 1 Corinthians 12:10 support the view that tongues were languages and not babble?
25. What does 1 Corinthians 14:21-22 indicate about tongues?
26. What verses in 1 Corinthians 14 show that tongues had to have a grammatical structure?
27. What happens to the effectiveness of the purpose of the gift of tongues if real languages are not spoken and translated?
28. Give a simple biblical definition of the gift of tongues. How does this compare with the speaking in tongues that is going on today?
29. Why can't 1 Corinthians 13:1 be used to support the belief that "the tongues...of angels" refers to an angelic, private devotional language that Christians are to engage in?
30. In 1 Corinthians 13:1-3, is Paul stating a factual reality or a hypothetical situation? Support your answer.
31. What is the overall point Paul is trying to make in 1 Corinthians 13:1?
32. What was the primary purpose of the gift of tongues? When was the only time it ever had an edifying effect on a Christian?
33. What is significant about Paul's use of the phrase, "sounding bronze, or a tinkling cymbal"?

### **Pondering the Principles**

1. Take a moment to evaluate whether or not you are exercising your spiritual gift in the power of the Spirit with the motive of love, or if you are selfishly exercising your gift without love in the energy of the flesh. Spend some time in prayer and ask God to make you sensitive to the times when you are attempting to exercise your gift without love.

2. Biblically, love is not an emotion; it is an act...an act of self- sacrifice. Write down some specific ways that you can show love to those in your family and to Christians in your local fellowship. Then ask God to give you opportunities to express that love.

3. The issue of speaking in tongues has been a volatile and divisive issue in the church in recent years. If you believe that speaking in tongues is still for today, carefully consider the reasons why the New Testament gift of tongues had to be legitimate languages (see pp. x-xx), and then ask yourself if that is what is going on today. If you are already convinced that the gift of speaking in tongues was a temporary sign gift which passed away with the apostolic era, consider the following: How should you respond to those who feel you must speak in tongues to be "spiritual"? Are you prepared to show them, biblically, why you believe what you believe? Does loving them mean that you are to overlook their doctrinal error, or does love seek to teach them the truth? Just remember this: The Bible isn't interpreted by experience; experience is interpreted by the Bible.

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