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**Chapter 12.10**

**Was the Gift of Tongues Meant to  
be Self-Edifying?**

*Understanding 1 Corinthians 14:4*

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### **Primary Points**

- Unless one wishes to claim the Apostle was contradicting himself, his commands regarding love leave no room for the one who “**edifies himself**” to be interpreted as doing something that pleases God.
- The Apostle’s statement that “**he who speaks in a tongue edifies himself,**” is a rebuke of the Corinthians’ selfishness, and a reference to what was happening in the temple worship of Greek mystery religions, not the introduction of a spiritual gift for the sole purpose of self-edification.
- We should notice that in this very epistle, the Apostle uses *oikodomei* “edify” in a negative sense.
- A private, self-centered “super prayer language” is a popular pagan practice, but it is not an authentic Holy Spirit-empowered spiritual gift.
- There is no such thing as an empowerment or gift of the Holy Spirit that is exclusively for the good of self, or to be used “alone with God,” like ancient pagan and modern versions of “praying in a tongue” operate.
- There is no evidence whatsoever that praying in a tongue *spiritually* edifies someone, for practitioners are no more spiritual than others.
- Never in Church history, did any orthodox branch of Christianity ever claim that spiritual edification could occur apart from our mental understanding, until modern *glossaism*.
- Pagans believe that having bodily sensations and feelings aroused results in spiritual edification, but there’s no such thing in authentic Christianity.
- J. I. Packer: “[The truth] that edification presupposes [requires] understanding is hard, biblically, to get round [or deny]; accepting it, however, would seem to entail the conclusion that glossolalia as practiced today cannot edify, which is a most unfashionable view to hold.”
- If in fact praying in an incoherent tongue is so spiritually edifying, why are its practitioners no more spiritually encouraged or empowered than those who do not?
- If the gift had such wonderful self-edifying spiritual affects for Christians, why wouldn’t God grant it to all His children, because the Apostle clearly said He would not.

## A) The Charge of Self-edification Was a Rebuke to the Selfish Corinthians

In 1 Corinthians 14:4 the Apostle says, "**One who speaks in** [an "unknown"] **tongue** [*glosse*] **edifies himself.**" Wayne Grudem reflects the typical *glossaist* interpretation of this statement when he writes:

[W]e would certainly expect that edification would follow [speaking in a tongue], even though the speaker's mind does not understand what is being said. . . . Just as prayer and worship [which engages the mind] in general edify us as we engage in them, so this kind of prayer and worship [that disengages the mind] edifies us too, according to the Apostle.  
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First, such an interpretation ignores the moral context of the Apostle's statement which makes it very unlikely that he is advocating a self-centered practice to the selfish Corinthians. As demonstrated in section 12.6.C, in all the NT, you will not find a more detailed description of, and a more challenging call to, a selfless love than in the verses immediately preceding the one in question.

In that description the Corinthians had been told that any kind of utterance without love is simply noise (cf. 13:1), which is why the Apostle instructed would-be tongue speakers who were not going to love others by edifying them, to "**keep quiet**" (14:28). They had been told that others-oriented love is the necessary attribute of anything claiming to be a work of the Holy Spirit or being valuable at all (cf. 13:1-3). This is precisely why the Apostle says that the "**one who speaks in a tongue**" does so in "**his spirit**," not the Holy Spirit (14:2), and that to speak unintelligible words which no one understands is uselessly "**speaking into the air**" (14:9), and to "**pray in a tongue**" is to leave the "**mind**" barren (14:14).

If the Corinthians doubted that Christian love is *only* others-oriented, the Apostle clearly stated that it is "**not self-seeking**" (13:5). Accordingly, you will find in 1 Corinthians the most consistent, unrelenting verbal attack on selfishness (cf. 1:10, 3:1, 3; 4:7, 16, 18; 5:6; 8:9; 9:19; 10:23-24, 31, 33; 11:1, 12:7, 12-27, 31, 14:1, 16:13-14), including the clear commands: "**Let no one seek his own good**" (10:24) and "**Do everything in love**" (16:13-14).

Unless one wishes to claim the Apostle was contradicting himself, such commands leave no room for the one who "**edifies himself**" to be interpreted as doing something that pleases God.

Love is the essential ingredient of anything truly from the Holy Spirit, and one thing is for sure, praying in an obscure, meaningless tongue has nothing to do with love. *Glossaists* can continue to presume it builds themselves up in some way, but they cannot claim with the slightest sincerity that such a practice has anything to do with Christian love.

Finally, not more than three sentences before the Apostle says, "**he who speaks in a tongue edifies himself**," the Corinthians had read the Apostle's summary statement on this whole issue: "**Follow the way of love**," which is *always* others-oriented, as you "**eagerly desire spiritual gifts**" (14:1). Why do *glossaists* seem unable to see how incompatible such a statement is with their interpretation of this passage and their practice of a tongue? The Apostle is essentially saying in 14:1 and 4: "*Pursue spiritual manifestations that are loving, like prophecy. Uttering something in an unknown tongue is a spiritual manifestation that is not loving because it is self-centered.*"

With all that said, it would seem presumption to assume that the Apostle thinks that when one "**edifies [oikodomei] himself**" that this is a good thing. Accordingly, we should notice that *in this very epistle, the Apostle uses oikodomei "edify" in a negative sense.* NT scholar Thomas Edgar writes:

There are two possible basic meanings for the expression "he that speaks in a tongue edifies himself." The verb "edify," *oikodomeo*, means "to build up." Although this verb normally has a beneficial meaning, in I Corinthians 8:10 the Apostle uses the same verb to refer to a negative aspect of building up. He refers to a strong brother who may lead the weaker brother to an action which violates his conscience. This building up of the weak brother's conscience is not positive edification but a negative building up or hardening that results in sin.

The direction of the edification, positive or negative, must be derived from the context. There are several indications that to "edify oneself" in I Corinthians 14:4 may have the negative connotation to build oneself up in the eyes of others. One of the basic problems the Apostle addresses in the letter to the Corinthians is the exaltation or building up of self. There were divisions apparently based on pride and self-glory (1:26-29; 3:3-7, 18, 21). Statements such as I Corinthians 4:6-7 make it probable that some were puffed up in regard to their gifts, particularly the gift of tongues. Thus, a negative self-exaltation was one of the problems at Corinth.<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, in the same context as 8:10 where *oikodomeo* is used in a negative way, the Apostle likewise tells the Corinthians, **“Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up”** (8:1). They obviously did have a problem with wanting to puff themselves up, which the Apostle states here is absolutely opposed to **“love”** which **“builds up”** others. And so is someone who **“speaks in a tongue [and merely] edifies himself.”** Both a person who **“puffs up”** themselves and one who **“edifies himself”** are violating the essence of Christian love, and therefore, we would suggest that the “edification” that the Apostle speaks of in 14:2 is synonymous with the selfish, arrogant, empty puffing up he speaks of in 8:1 and that the Corinthians were obviously grossly guilty of.

Accordingly, immediately after, and in the context of these instructions about love, it is obvious that when the Apostle says **“One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself”** that this is a *rebuke*, and only the self-centered Christianity that is so prevalent today would even allow it to be interpreted otherwise. It is a fact that our Christian ancestors for over 1900 years of Church history understood the Apostle’s words as a rebuke of a selfish spiritual practice, and our generation should be ashamed for not insisting the same. Instead, unlike millennia of Christian forefathers, we have allowed, and even promoted this rebuke of a self-centered practice as an apostolic encouragement to hotly pursue such a thing.

In fact, we would suggest that the difficulty of interpreting this text was an intentional sovereign act on the part of God to test His people. Would we let the devil twist this passage in our minds to claim a gift we do not have and puff ourselves up over our brethren who do not have it? Would we seek some sort of self-esteem in an experience we ourselves create, desperately wanting to believe it is God? Would we let a deception divide us from our Christian brothers? Perhaps we will know one Day that the *interpretation* of some Scriptures were a test of our true spirituality.

Interpreting **“He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself”** as a rebuke not only reflects the contexts (selfishness and pagan worship practices), but also a style of rebuke that the Apostle has already used in this letter. In 11:21 he tells the Corinthians **“When you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else.”** Imagine then, that we would interpret this as a good thing that we should seek more of. This description of what they were doing is not intended to be a commendation of a selfish practice, but rather a condemnation of it and 14:4 is likewise.

If our generation does not understand this as a rebuke, it is clear that the Corinthians were to understand that authentic spiritual gifts granted by the Holy Spirit were inseparable from love

for others, and diametrically opposed to self-centered edification. Modern readers may interpret the Apostle as saying that there is a legitimate and valuable spiritual gift that works privately to edify only the self, but it is absolutely certain that the Corinthians were not to understand the Apostle that way when this letter was first read to them in their congregation. One can easily imagine, in fact, that many of them no longer even dared to claim such a "gift" afterwards, for fear of embarrassment.

A private, self-centered "super prayer language" is a *popular pagan and modern practice*, but it is not an *authentic Holy Spirit-empowered spiritual gift*. The Holy Spirit gives gifts for public use, not private, and for the edification of others, not the self.

Accordingly, John MacArthur suggests that the Apostle is being "sarcastic" when he charges the tongue speaker with self-centered edification:

His sarcasm can also be seen in [1 Cor.] 4:8-10, and reaches its height in 14:16, "was it from you that the word of God first went forth?" . . . The Apostle here [in 14:4] is referring to the *supposed* value the Corinthians placed on their self-styled tongues-speaking. The satisfaction many of the believers experienced in their abuse of tongues was *self-satisfaction*, which comes from pride-induced emotion, not from spiritual edification. It is an illegitimate self-building, often building up nothing more than spiritual pride.<sup>3</sup>

### **Pastoral Practices**

- It is rather easy to critique modern *glossaists* for their selfish tongues habit, but have we monitored all that occurs in our own life and church to ensure that we "**Do everything in love**" (1 Cor 16:13). Even legitimate ministries and practices in the Church can be done for selfish reasons, and we should learn from the rebuke the Apostle gives to modern *glossaists*.

## **B) Real Spiritual Gifts are for the Edification of Others**

Perhaps the clearest biblical contradiction to the *glossaist* claim that they possess a Christian spiritual gift for the exclusive purpose of edifying themselves is the Apostle's clear claim that, "**to each one the manifestation of the [Holy] Spirit is given for the common<sup>4</sup> good**" (1 Cor 12:7). Simply put, there is no such thing as an empowerment or gift of the Holy Spirit that is exclusively for

the good of self, like ancient pagan and modern versions of “praying in a tongue” operate. As NT scholar Leon Morris puts it: “Spiritual gifts are incompatible with spiritual selfishness.”<sup>5</sup> Likewise, Frederick Dale Bruner has written, “In the Apostle’s understanding, it appears, you cannot take a gift home with you.”<sup>6</sup>

In this very section concerning the nature and purpose of authentic gifts from the Holy Spirit, the Apostle gave his analogy of the mutually dependent and perfectly united “**body of Christ**” (12:12-26) which was to leave no room in the Corinthian’s mind for a self-centered spiritual gift given only for *private* use. Likewise, since all spiritual gifts are given by God for the benefit of others, the Apostle had told them, “**since you are zealous of spiritual [pneumatikos: things], seek to abound for the edification of the church**” (14:12 NASB). Clearly then, when a person “**speaks in a tongue** [and merely] **edifies himself,**” it is not a good spiritual thing to seek.

Therefore, there is no such thing as a Christian spiritual gift that is to be used “alone with God.” That’s not what they are for and the Apostle never taught such a thing. This is, of course, true for all the other descriptions of spiritual gifts in the NT as well.<sup>7</sup> The Apostle prefaces his description of spiritual gifts in Romans by again alluding to the interdependent body analogy he uses in 1 Corinthians and reminds the Roman Christians in regards to spiritual gifts that, “**each member** [of the body] **belongs to all the others**” (12:5). In Ephesians, the Apostle explains that the gifts are given, “**for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ**” (Eph 4:12), not the self. The Apostle Peter says, “**As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another**” (1 Pet 4:10), not the self.

Although it is true that the use of one’s gift will edify them in the process, this is merely a by-product of serving God and others. There simply is no room in the NT for claiming that the sole purpose of any legitimate gift of the Holy Spirit is to edify yourself. Does the Evangelist evangelize for himself? Does the Teacher teach for himself? Does the person with the gift of serving serve for their own personal edification? If they do, their gift certainly is not motivated by love, making its use meaningless (cf. 1 Cor 13:1-3). To claim that there is a legitimate spiritual gift given *only* for the edification of self is absurd and unbiblical.<sup>8</sup>

Accordingly, John Calvin correctly comments in reference to 1 Corinthians 14:4, and expresses the universal belief of the Christian church for over 1900 years when he writes:

He [the Apostle] accordingly shows, from principles already assumed, how perverse a thing this is, inasmuch as it does not

at all contribute to the edifying of the Church. . . . The Apostle does, in effect, order away from the common society of believers those men of mere show, who look only to themselves.<sup>9</sup>

Likewise, commenting on spiritual gifts in the analogy of the body as the Apostle taught, the *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology (NIDNTT)* states the obvious:

1 Cor. 12 teaches that the church is the body of Christ in both reality and function. It is made a reality by the presence of the Holy Spirit whose gifts are enjoyed and practiced by numerous individuals. But taken by themselves in isolation they [spiritual gifts] are without significance. They have significance only in relation to the whole fellowship. "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good".

. . . .  
These manifestations of the Spirit are marked out for the Apostle as given (not achieved by man), as expressions of divine energy (not human potential), as acts of service which promote the common good (not for personal edification or aggrandizement).<sup>10</sup>

Even the Pentecostal seminary professor R. E. Cottle, states the obvious, but contradicts his own *glossaist* position<sup>11</sup> in his entry under "Gifts of Healing" in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*:

The charismata of 1 Cor. 12 are literally benefits or graces conferred upon certain individual members of the body of Christ for the use and benefit of the worshiping Church (v. 7). They are not the personal possession of the members who exercise them within the church community. They are, rather, manifestations of the Spirit through Christians who are serving the spiritual edification of the Church as a whole (vv. 8-11).<sup>12</sup>

Yet the modern version of the gift of tongues supported by Dr. Cottle does not match his own description of a genuine gift of the Holy Spirit.

Finally, in addition to the moral context of selfishness, and the biblical view of spiritual gifts, we can apply what we have learned from the Apostle's alternating use of *glosse* and *glossais* and notice that the Apostle again uses *glosse* here in 14:4 to refer simply to the incoherent utterances being spoken in the Corinthian church, not necessarily the authentic gift of tongues.

The usually astute D. A. Carson, however, would seem to completely ignore both the moral context and the Greek text (if not common sense) when he says:

Some commentators find the notion of self-edification so difficult that they interpret this [such that] the Apostle is actually rebuking the tongues-speaker for edifying himself. But this scarcely fits the context, when the Apostle goes on to encourage tongues-speaking (v. 5), which here must be tongues-speaking *without* interpretation, and therefore in private and for self-edification.<sup>13</sup>

First of all, "the context" is not "to encourage . . . tongues-speaking without interpretation, and therefore in private and for self-edification" as Dr. Carson remarkably claims. The context is a diplomatic *rebuke*, promoting the public, others-oriented, and only-authentic gifts of the Holy Spirit, *to* the self-centered, contentious, puffed up Corinthians, *in a city* where "tongues-speaking without interpretation, and therefore in private and for self-edification" is a hotly pursued habit in the local temples of the Greek mystery religions.<sup>14</sup>

Secondly, Dr. Carson ignores the conspicuous switch from the *glosse* in verse 4 that is the common, incoherent, self-edifying, and possibly pagan tongue practice the Apostle wants to curb; to the *glossais* in verse 5 that is the miraculous and potentially others-edifying gift of speaking in foreign languages which the Apostle (hypothetically) wishes all the self-centered Corinthians *would* do.

It was demonstrated in a previous chapter that not all of the Apostle's references to the tongues phenomenon in Corinth refer to the authentic gift of speaking in tongues, and that this is the greatest mistake that Evangelicals and *glossaists* alike make when interpreting 1 Corinthians 14.<sup>15</sup> And again, none of them seriously consider or discuss the ramifications of claiming that these verses teach that God is granting only *some* Christians a unique and more intimate method of fellowship with Him.

Finally, Dr. Carson claims that real spiritual edification could occur even though the *glossaist* would not understand what they are praying. This ignores the fact that God does not beneficially edify us apart from our mind, which is precisely why the Apostle insists throughout this passage that the utterances be interpreted so that there can be edification.

## C) Edification Requires Understanding

If some deny that the Apostle is rebuking the self-centered Corinthian *glossaists* for edifying themselves, we would ask, how *could* meaningless utterances be spiritually edifying anyway? Dr. Fee attempts to answer when he writes:

The edifying of oneself is not self-centeredness, but the personal edifying of the believer that comes through [unintelligible] private prayer and praise [they do not understand]. Although one may wonder how "mysteries" that are not understood even by the speaker can edify, the answer lies in vv. 14-15 [where the Apostle says praying in a tongue leaves the mind barren]. Contrary to the opinion of many, spiritual edification can take place in ways other than through the cortex of the brain.<sup>16</sup>

While Dr. Fee offers references to psychological studies that claim beneficial psychological effects for those who "pray in a tongue," he does not answer the question how such a person can experience spiritual edification from the Holy Spirit without understanding, when the Apostle insists throughout 1 Corinthians 14 that nobody else can. While *glossaists* can claim some sort of positive psychological or emotional effect from uttering sounds they don't understand, the Apostle emphatically insisted that no spiritual edification could take place unless the utterances in a tongue were interpreted and therefore *understood* (cf. 1 Cor 14:5-17). Accordingly, never in Church history, did any orthodox branch of Christianity ever claim that spiritual edification could occur apart from our mental understanding, until modern *glossaism*.

Edification simply doesn't happen in a human apart from our understanding. Emotions and feelings will, but not real spiritual edification. Pagans believe that having bodily sensations and feelings aroused results in spiritual edification, but there's no such thing in authentic Christianity. Christian edification is *whole-hearted* involving the understanding, not the *half-hearted* stimulation that pagans settle for, as we thoroughly discuss elsewhere as well.<sup>17</sup> That is what the Apostle believed, and that is why he insisted that no real spiritual edification could take place unless the utterances in a tongue were interpreted and therefore *understood* (cf. 1 Cor 14:5-17, 26-28).

Speaking considerably more reasonably, biblically, and humbly than practitioners of "praying in a tongue" often do, J. I. Packer states the obvious when he writes:

It is hard to believe that in [1 Cor 14:4] Paul can mean that glossolalists [tongue speakers] *who do not know what they*

*are saying* will edify themselves, when in [the very next] verse 5 [and throughout the whole chapter!] he denies that the listening church can be edified unless it knows what they are saying . . . [The truth] that edification presupposes [requires] understanding is hard, biblically, to get round [or deny]; accepting it, however, would seem to entail the conclusion that glossolalia as practiced today cannot edify, which is a most unfashionable view to hold.<sup>18</sup>

But, we believe, a true view nonetheless. As we have demonstrated elsewhere, God does nothing to or through us except through our mind. That is how He created us.<sup>19</sup> God did not create us to be spiritually edified apart from our reason, because all spiritual edification comes from an understanding and belief of the *truth*. Which is why the Apostle is so repetitive and insistent on the need for teaching in the Church throughout the Pastoral Epistles. It is because *truth* alone edifies Christians, that the King Himself taught the truth, and that the Apostle says the edification of the Church comes through truth-giving gifts (cf. Eph 4:11-15).

Not only should we understand from Scripture that spiritual edification requires mental understanding, we can know this from experience. Once again, if in fact praying in an incoherent tongue is so spiritually edifying, why are its practitioners no more spiritually encouraged or empowered than those who do not? They may be more emotional, but everyone knows it would not only be unhistorical and inaccurate for tongue practitioners to claim any kind of practical spiritual superiority, but grossly arrogant as well. If praying in a tongue does what *glossaists* claim it does, than it would show in lasting, obvious ways. But it does not.

Unfortunately, the anti-Christian and pagan idea that anything meaningful can occur without the mind is fashionable in our day. Accordingly, the very popular NIV *Study Bible* is unfortunately typical when commenting on 14:4:

This edification does not involve the mind since the speaker does not understand what he has said. It is a personal edification in the area of the emotions, of deepening conviction, of fuller commitment and greater love.<sup>20</sup>

This all seems to be a great deal of presumption. First, it can be immediately asked that if the gift had such wonderful self-edifying spiritual affects for Christians, why wouldn't God grant it to all His children, because the Apostle clearly said He would not (cf. 1 Cor 12:30)? Do those who "pray in a tongue" have an avenue of intimate intercourse with our Father that He denies the rest of us?

That is the unavoidable conclusion of *glossaism*, and it is not only unbiblical, but arrogant and offensive.

Secondly, how can something that “does not involve the mind” result in a “deepening conviction,” “fuller commitment,” or “greater love” of anything? Do *glossaists* exhibit a superiority in these things? Obviously not. Accordingly, Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) stated the obvious:

There is no other way by which any means of grace whatsoever can be of any benefit, but by knowledge. . . . Men . . . receive nothing, when they understand nothing; and are not at all edified, unless some knowledge be conveyed.<sup>21</sup>

Edification simply doesn't happen in a human apart from our understanding. Emotions and feelings will, but not edification.

Of course the practice of praying in a tongue can affect the emotions and ego of the user, just as it has for Eskimo witch doctors, Haitian voodooists, Amazonian Indians, and Corinthian-like pagans who have practiced the same thing the world over for centuries.<sup>22</sup> It becomes obvious then that just because a practice may give us good *feelings*, it in no way proves that it builds us in a spiritual manner, and it cannot because the mind is not engaged.

Along these lines, surely the words of D. M. Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981) need to be heeded:

Do not be swayed even by the fact that something . . . makes you feel wonderful. You may say, 'Well now surely anything that makes me feel greater love to God must be right.' Robert Baxter, to whom I have already referred in connection with the Irvingite movement [an early *glossaist* movement in England], used to say that he had never felt so much love, the love of God in his heart, or so much love in himself to God as he did at this period. He was ready to leave his wife and family for God's sake. He was filled with a sense of the love of God, he said, that he had never known before, but he came to see that it had all been misleading him.

So we must not judge even in terms of such feelings. You may say, 'I have never known such love, I have never known such peace, I have never known such joy.' The people who belong to the cults will often tell you exactly the same thing. So we must not rely upon our own subjective feelings. Do not dismiss them or discount them, but do not rely upon them. Do not say, 'I feel this is right, everything in me says this is right, all my Christian spirit.' It is not enough. The devil is as subtle as that. Remember our Lord's word—'If it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.'<sup>23</sup>

And indeed, some of “the very elect” have been deceived when it comes to the real meaning of the biblical gift of tongues.<sup>24</sup>

### **Pastoral Practices**

- The fact that any real spiritual edification requires truth to be understood with the mind, should affect our ministry. Ensure that the worship music is full of truth, not just emotion. Appeal to the mind in your teaching for the Apostle said we can “**be transformed by the renewing of [our] mind**” (Rom 12:2).

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## **Extras & Endnotes**

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### **A Devotion to Dad**

*Our Father in Heaven, thank you for the gift of prayer. What an amazing privilege to talk to God. Help us to take better advantage of it, to cast our cares on You, and wait on You to work in and around us in answer to our prayers.*

### **Gauging Your Grasp**

- 1) What is the “moral context” of 1 Corinthians 14:4? How do we claim this should affect our interpretation of this statement? Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 2) What is the meaning of *oikodomei* “edify” and how do we claim this should affect our interpretation of 1 Corinthians 14:4? Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 3) What are the reasons we give that a private, self-centered “super prayer language” is not an authentic Holy Spirit-empowered spiritual gift? Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 4) We claim that there is no evidence whatsoever that praying in a tongue *spiritually* edifies someone, for practitioners are no more spiritual than others. Do you agree or disagree and why?

- 5) What is the significance of the fact that never in Church history, did any orthodox branch of Christianity ever claim that spiritual edification could occur apart from our mental understanding, until modern *glossaism*.
- 6) What is a pagan understanding of "spiritual edification"? How does this differ from a Christian one?
- 7) We ask, "If the gift had such wonderful self-edifying spiritual affects for Christians, why wouldn't God grant it to all His children, because the Apostle clearly said He would not?" How would you answer this question?

### **Publications & Particulars**

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<sup>1</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Zondervan, 1994), 1076.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Edgar, *Satisfied by the Promise of the Spirit* (Kregel, 1996), 170.

<sup>3</sup> John MacArthur, *1 Corinthians* in *MacArthur's New Testament Commentary*, Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM (Parsons Technology, 1997), 372-373.

<sup>4</sup> "Common" is added to the English text of 12:7, as it does not appear in the Greek. However, the addition is understandable considering the nature of spiritual gifts in general, and the immediate context of the church as an interdependent body. Not even Dr. Fee questions this interpretation. (cf. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT [Eerdmans, 1987], 584, 589).

<sup>5</sup> Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians*, (TNTC) (Eerdmans, 1985), 187.

<sup>6</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Eerdmans, 1970), 290.

<sup>7</sup> Some have found support for the notion that there are gifts *not* designed for public edification at 14:12 where the NIV has the Apostle saying, "**Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts [pneumatōn], try to excel in gifts that build up the church.**" Such a translation gives the impression that there could be authentic spiritual gifts that *do not* edify the Church.

Unfortunately, this is an example of the error pointed out in a previous chapter concerning those who automatically translate *pneumatikon* (spiritual things) as authentic spiritual gifts (*charismata*). (see sec. 12.8.A) Unfortunately, the NIV inserts the word "**gifts**" twice, even though the Greek word for "gifts," *charisma*, does not occur here.

The RSV is the most helpful translation here rendering the Greek: "**since you are eager for manifestations [not necessarily gifts] of the Spirit [pneumatōn], strive to excel in building up the church.**" So,

essentially what the Apostle is simply saying to the Corinthians is that "Since you are so eager for spiritual manifestations, pursue the spiritual manifestations that edify the church (like prophecy) instead of the ones that puff yourselves up (like the pagan practice of praying in a tongue)." Again, the Apostle cannot conceive of an authentic spiritual gift that *does not* serve to build up others, like speaking in an incoherent "tongue."

<sup>8</sup> We might question how the authentic gift of speaking in real human foreign languages was edifying to the early Church. It has already been pointed out that it authenticated divine revelation and could even contain it when interpreted (cf. 1 Cor 14:5). Dillow adds also that "tongues edified the early church by preventing the future establishment of a Jewish church versus a Samaritan church versus a Gentile church." (*Speaking in Tongues* [Zondervan, 1975], 35).

The giving of the gift to the Jews in Acts 2, to the Samaritans in Acts 8, to the Gentiles in Acts 10, and to followers of John the Baptist in Acts 19, all served to unify these groups and underscore the fact that God was dealing with all peoples in one way so that now "Salvation is found in no one else (but Jesus Christ), for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

<sup>9</sup> John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*, 1 Cor. 14:4; online at [www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org).

<sup>10</sup> Reference unavailable.

<sup>11</sup> However, it is not only *glossaist* teachers who contradict themselves on the nature of spiritual gifts. For example, the respected NT scholar C. K. Barrett recognizes that in 1 Corinthians 12 the Apostle clearly teaches that: "No member has his gift for his own private use; all are intended for the common good." (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (BNTC) [Hendrickson, 2000], 284). Unfortunately, however, Dr. Barrett apparently contradicts himself, as do many commentators today, when he says concerning 1 Corinthians 14:4-5: "speaking with tongues is . . . a gift from God by which you may . . . be individually built up" (Ibid., 316).

The venerable G. Campbell Morgan (1863-1945) would seem to make the same mistake. Commenting on 1 Corinthians 12:7 he says:

[T]he gift is bestowed upon the individual, not for the perfecting of his own life, but to profit withal [others]; the great fellowship is there seen. Whatever gift is bestowed upon me, upon you, it is bestowed upon us personally and individually in order that in its use we may profit withal [others]. (*The Corinthian Letters of The Apostle* [Revell, 1946], *in loc.*)

However, he later seems to contradict himself when he writes:

If used in public the gift of tongues demands interpretation. . . . [I]f interpretation is not there, the gift is not to be exercised in the presence of others, but is to be exercised when the recipient is alone with God [making it impossible to be edifying to others]. (Ibid., 112)

The same contradiction can be found more recently in Anthony Thiselton, who at one point accepts the idea of a spiritual gift for self-centered "private prayer language" but at 1 Cor 12:7 writes:

To the primary criterion of pointing to the Lordship of Christ or Christlikeness (12:3) as a mark of being authentically activated by the Spirit, Paul now adds a second criterion: the Spirit is at work where the public manifestation serves the common advantage of others, and not merely self-affirmation, self-fulfillment, or individual status. The Spirit produces visible effects for the profit of all, not for self-glorification. If the latter is prominent, suspicion is invited. (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians* [Eerdmans, 2000], 936).

- <sup>12</sup> R. E. Cottle, "Gifts of Healing" in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (ISBE)*, Geoffrey W. Bromiley ed., 4 vols., (Eerdmans, 1988), 2: 647. At the time of writing (copyright 1982), Cottle was the Executive Vice President of the Assemblies of God Graduate School in Springfield, MO.
- <sup>13</sup> D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14* (Baker Book, 1987), 102, n. 89. (underlining added for emphasis, italics in the original).
- <sup>14</sup> For evidence that the modern version of tongues mimics the worship practice of the first century Greek mystery religions see section 12.7.A.
- <sup>15</sup> For further discussion of the critical fact that not all references to the tongues phenomena in 1 Corinthians 14 refer to the real gift see section 12.8.B.
- <sup>16</sup> Gordon Fee, *God's Empowering Presence* [Hendrickson, 1994], 65.
- <sup>17</sup> For further discussion of the mindless *half-hearted worship* practiced in paganism and "Christian" *emotionalism* today see chapter 4.11.
- <sup>18</sup> J. I. Packer, *Keep in Step With the Spirit* (Revell, 1984), 209, 280, n. 18.
- <sup>19</sup> For further discussion of the importance of our mind in a relationship with God see especially chapters 2.4 and 4.8.
- <sup>20</sup> *The NIV Study Bible*, Kenneth Barker, ed., (Zondervan, 1985), 1753, n. 14:4.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, I:223.
- <sup>22</sup> For further discussion of alarming environments in which the modern version of tongues is practiced see chapter 12.14.
- <sup>23</sup> D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *The Sovereign Spirit: Discerning the Gifts* (Harold Shaw, 1985), 68.
- <sup>24</sup> The Apostle's reference to "**the peace of God which transcends all understanding,**" (Phil 4:7) could be taken as a rebuke of the peace that comes from proper moral and logical reasoning. On the contrary, we believe Peter O'Brien is correct to understand the Apostle as referring to how wonderful this peace is, not its suprarationality:  
 Paul describes God's peace by means of a participial expression that is capable of being understood in two ways: (1) his peace accomplishes more than any human forethought or scheming can

achieve, and so is far more effective in removing anxiety than any reasoning power (NEBmg); or (2) the peace of God is completely beyond all power of human comprehension (cf. RSV, GNB, JB, NIV, Moffatt, and Phillips [PME]).

The Greek may be interpreted either way, and although both renderings make good sense, it has been argued that (1) is more in harmony with the context. Human reasoning results in continued doubt and anxiety; it cannot find a way out of the dilemma (cf. v. 6). God's peace, by contrast, is effective in removing all disquietude. If, however, in explaining the nature of God's peace Paul is focusing on its uniqueness rather than its relative superiority to human ingenuity, then (2) is the correct interpretation.

The participle [*uperechousa*], with the rendering 'be far beyond, excel', supports this. Further, [*panta noun*], which means 'all understanding' (or possibly 'every thought') rather than 'all planning' or 'all cleverness, inventiveness' leads to the same conclusion. Accordingly, Paul is telling his readers that God's peace or salvation that stands guard over them is more wonderful than they can imagine. (Cf. Eph. 3:20, where God is invoked as the one who can do 'immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine'.)

Although [*uperechō*] is on occasion used in polemical contexts (2:3; 3:8?), there is no such polemic here—either against Paul's enemies who had an inflated view of their own knowledge or by way of subtle rebuke to those Philippians who are thought to have wanted to surpass their fellow Christians. His point in using [*uperechō*] at v. 7 is quite different as he seeks to encourage his Christian friends about the wonder of God's peace that guards their lives. (*The Epistle to the Philippians*, (NIGTC) [Eerdmans, 1991], 496-7)

In addition, any suggestion that peace could come apart from an understanding of truth ignores the biblical concept of faith. For further discussion of faith and its relationship to reason see chapters 6.12-14 and for further commentary on Philippians 4:7 see section 14.14.E.4.