

***Pastor Jeremy M. Thomas***  
***Fredericksburg Bible Church***

*107 East Austin*

*Fredericksburg, Texas 78624*

*830-997-8834    [jthomas@fbgbible.org](mailto:jthomas@fbgbible.org)*

**A1247 – November 18, 2012 – 1 Corinthians 12:27-31**  
**A More Excellent Way**

Last time we almost finished 1 Corinthians 12 but we have a few more things to polish off. Recall that 1 Corinthians 12-14 is a section concerning tongues speakers. Most people think the section is about spiritual gifts because in 12:1 the translators took the liberty of adding the word “gifts” which is not in the original. Actually it simply says, “Now concerning the spiritual...” The “spiritual” was a code word for a tongues speaker and it doubled in its significance in the case at Corinth because they also thought that the exercise of this gift or its counterfeit ecstatic utterances, was what made one spiritual. But that is nonsense. What makes one spiritual is if he is a mature believer who has a balanced understanding of the spiritual gifts which is Paul’s correction.

There are a variety of gifts of the Spirit, there are a variety of opportunities given by the Lord and there are a variety of effects worked by the Father. So rather than just narrowly focusing on the one gift of tongues the Corinthian’s horizon ought to broaden to make account for other gifts, opportunities and effects. Verses 8-10 gives a list of nine gifts of the Spirit and places tongues and interpretation of tongues last to de-emphasize their importance. Verses 28-30 list eight gifts and again places tongues last so as to de-emphasize this gift. Truly tongues is one of the least important gifts the Spirit has given the church. That is not to say it is unimportant, only that in the scheme of things it is not one of the more important gifts. Paul says in verse 28 there are degrees of importance; **first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administration and lastly various kinds of tongues.**

Now we’ve been studying each of these as we come across them in detail.

**Apostles and prophets** we said were *foundational gifts* given in the infancy

of the Church. They have ceased to be given. **Miracles, gifts of healings and various kinds of tongues** we said were *sign gifts* also given during the infancy of the Church to indicate certain things. They have also ceased. People in charismatic circles get upset when you say tongues have ceased because they had an experience and they've attributed that experience to the Holy Spirit. So what right do you have to come along and say it's not genuine? Well, we have Scriptural authority to say it's not genuine. Now, I'm not here to condemn you and run you down. I genuinely love and care for these people. I simply want them and challenge them to study the Scriptures on this matter. I've shown you many of the Scriptures. 1 Cor 13:8 says tongues will cease of themselves. Heb 2:3-4 indicates that the miraculous sign gifts were no longer abiding as of AD67. 1 Cor 14:21-22 says tongues were a sign to unbelieving Jews to repent because of coming judgment; a judgment that came in AD70. And 1 Cor 12:2-3 indicates there is such a thing as ecstatic utterances that are often confused with tongues and while you may have practiced that I think that is one of the things Paul is warning against in these chapters. Further, there are many rules that must be followed in 1 Cor 14 to properly exercise tongues and I think it is a rare occasion indeed that these rules are followed, if ever. And finally, I'd simply say that church history is not in your favor, there are very few and isolated claims to tongues speaking and the claims you find are highly questionable from the accounts we have available. So I sympathize with you and the experience you had but I simply challenge you to study the Scriptures and see whether it's not so that the foundational gifts and sign gifts were given in the 1<sup>st</sup> century church and have since ceased. And in all of this, put on love which is far higher than any of the gifts. Then we have the gifts of **teachers, helps** and **administration** listed, they are all *building gifts* given for the duration of the Church. There are others and they are very important. All of them are more important than tongues incidentally. But you'd think you said a curse word if you said that to a charismatic. But it's a fact. All the building gifts rank higher than tongues and so they are very important. None of them has ceased to be given and none of them will cease to be given until Jesus Christ comes at the rapture for His church. So their purpose remains, namely, to build up the church until the day of Christ Jesus.

Now last time we met **apostles, teachers** and **helps**. Briefly, **apostle** is the number one gift, and the reason is because these men gave us the NT. Without them there would be no NT period. The apostle, we said, was a

messenger sent in the authority of the sender. Since the sender was Jesus Christ then the apostle had the authority of Jesus Christ. And accompanying him as signs that verified his apostleship were the gifts of healings and miracles. There were two categories of apostle; the twelve who were with Jesus from his baptism by John until the resurrection and the others who merely saw Jesus in His resurrection body. These apostles are said to be the foundation of the church along with the prophets and Christ Jesus the cornerstone. **Teacher** we said is the third most important gift, but since it's the only one in the top three still being given it is the most important gift being given today. Without these men there would be no one to study and teach the Bible, nobody gifted to do so at least. The teacher does not reveal new things, he expounds things already revealed. He digs into the original languages and history in order to cast light on the text by drawing it out and giving it a full and thorough explanation. That's the responsibility of a teacher. The teacher is not the same as the pastor in that you can have the gift of teacher and not pastor. But if you have the gift of pastor you have the gift of teacher. So pastor is a subset of teacher. All pastors are teachers, but not all teachers are pastors. Then we looked at **helps** - it's number six in the list but since four of those have ceased to be given then this gift is the second most important gift the Holy Spirit is giving Christ's church today. Christians underestimate the gift of helps and think it's something every Christian kind of has but they don't, and it's not unimportant. It's second only to teacher when it comes to gifts still being given. I think the way to think about helps is something like this analogy. If the teacher is the physical heart which pumps the blood to all the other members of the body then the gift of helps is the blood itself since it is vital to all the members of the body including the heart. Just as no member of the physical body can survive without the blood so no member of the spiritual body of Christ can function well without those who have the gift of helps. So they are critical for everyone in helping us function more effectively. I think of those who help my teaching ministry expand beyond these walls by assisting in the recording and duplication of the teaching or the editing of written lessons. Without them it would be a very small ministry indeed, but with them it spans all over the world and touches peoples lives who knows where. So those with the gift of helps help others maximize their potential. And so if you have this gift don't ever think that you are unimportant. You are the second most important gift still being given to the church today, you are very important.

Alright, we'll start with the gift of **administrations**. When you hear the word **administrations** I'm not sure what comes to mind. If you are a businessman certain things may come to mind, if you are an engineer something else may come to mind and if you are a homemaker something else may come to mind. Whatever idea comes to mind, this is the third most important gift still being given to the church today! So let's find the idea that should come to mind, the idea from the original Greek. The word is the feminine noun *kubernesis* but the difficulty here is this word is used only one time in the NT and so we don't have a lot of NT usage to help with the meaning. However, from other Greek sources we do have usage and we find the word is related to the verb *kubernao* and refers to "one who steers or pilots a vessel." The masculine noun is *kubernetes* and refers to "a shipmaster." Now this gives us something to work with because it gives us the imagery of one who guides a vessel to its proper destination. And you may even translate this word as "shipmaster" or "helmsman," instead of administration. He is the one who is responsible for guiding the ship to the proper port. Now if you are in this position you have a very important position. You have a crew working for you, you have the seas to navigate and the crew to instruct, and you have to keep order and many other things. So the administrator must be a leader and he must give clear direction and guidance for safe travel.

If you are a sailor then you know about something about sailing. For one you know that the seas can be a wonderful place, they can be very relaxing. However they may also become very dangerous very quickly. They can easily be stirred up by the winds of a storm. And you know that it is in times like that that you really appreciate the shipmaster. See, many people forget about the shipmaster while everything is just fine, but when a storm comes everyone turns to him and listens because they know their life is on the line. So he is the one that is going to direct everyone so that the ship can be saved and the men can survive. And this is what the administrator does for the church. He may be forgotten when the church seems to be sailing along just fine. But when the church enters treacherous times then suddenly everyone is looking for an administrator, someone who can guide them through the treacherous times, someone to calm their fears and bring order to the situation and keep everyone's eyes focused on Jesus Christ and not the problem. That's why these people are so important. Because every church is

going to have rough seas at times and it's at these times that the administrator is most seen.

Now this analogy I've drawn from the shipmaster sailing the seas was seen by early authors in the Church and they started referring to the Church as a ship. And pastors would call upon the administrators to rise up in times of trouble and to pilot the church through the trouble.

In all honesty he may or may not be the pastor-teacher. If he is that's wonderful. If he's not that's wonderful too. There should be no problem here and I would hope that no one here would have a problem with someone here at the church having this gift other than me and being able to carefully steer the ship of our local church through stormy waters. And I think some of you have this capability. In addition these people may or may not be serving as elders or deacons. Just because you have the gift of shipmaster does not mean you must serve in one of those offices. You may, you may not. But one thing is certain, these people are able to organize; it may be with respect to laying down procedures, it may be with respect to the financial matters of the church, it may be helping with staff relations, it may be with distribution of funds, it may be managing the church website or keeping the library in order. But whatever it is they have the ability to make the church run smoothly and they are particularly sought after when the church is going through troubled times.

Now some people think this is a gift the pastor-teacher ought to have. But I can tell you that it is very nice to have these people around because they free me up to prayer and study of the word. So it's not necessary for a pastor-teacher to also have the gift of administration. And I'm pointing out these relationships because I think the body of Christ is a lively organism. At least it should be. Every part should be actively engaged in exercising their spiritual gift to the benefit of others. We are an organism that needs to function in harmony and reciprocity if we are to maintain good health. This is why if we emphasize teaching, which we do, but at the expense of helps and administrations, then we will be unhealthy. Many Bible church people think that as long as the teaching is good everything will work itself out. Well, that is like saying that as long as the heart is healthy every other part of the body will work fine. Yet what if there is not enough blood to pump or there is a clot in the blood? I think we have to come to the grips that we are all important

members of the body and yet also recognize that there are degrees of importance. That, at least, is what Paul is saying and I've been trying to get across.

Now then verse 29 begins to bring it all together. **All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they? 30 All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they?** Now obviously the answer to every one of these questions is an emphatic no! Not all believers have any one gift. And yet that is what many charismatic groups say. They say that tongues is an evidence of Spirit baptism and therefore necessary to prove you are a genuine believer. They base this kind of thing on the event in Acts 10 where the Gentile Cornelius and his household believed, received the Spirit and spoke in tongues. Therefore they say that everyone who believes and receives Spirit must speak in tongues as evidence. The problem with that is this verse says all do not speak in tongues, do they? And the answer of course is, no. Tongues is a sign gift given during the transition period of the Book of Acts. The kingdom offer to Israel was fading out and the church was fading in. Since transitions by nature are not normal then speaking in tongues is not normal. Not all believers speak in tongues. And we would say the same with all the gifts. What would the church look like if all of us were prophets or all of us were teachers or all of us were tongues speakers? We would look like a body that was all an eye or a foot or an arm. It's a ridiculous sight.

The point is, just like a body has many parts so does the body of Christ. And just like each body part has its particular function so does each part of the body of Christ. These are not competing against one another but they are working together in a reciprocal relationship. The apostles gave us the Scriptures. The prophets were the mouthpiece of God. The teachers explain what the Scriptures mean. The workers of miracles and healers gave evidence that the kingdom was near. The tongues speakers warned unbelieving Jews of coming judgment. The interpreters explained this to others so it made sense. All are necessary either to found the Church, to give signs of the transition to the Church or to build the Church.

**But**, verse 31, **earnestly desire the greater gifts.** Now, what does that mean? After Paul has said in verse 4 that the gifts are of the Spirit and in

verse 11 that they are sovereignly bestowed and in verse 28 that God apportions them, how is it that we who already have our gift or gifts could desire to have the greater gifts? Well, Paul's point is not that we personally have an earnest desire to possess the greater gifts but that we earnestly desire the greater gifts to be exercised among us more frequently in the church. See, the Corinthians wanted tongues exercised; they thought they were very important and a big sign of spirituality. They weren't and they never will be! They were one of the lesser gifts. First on the list was **apostles**, second **prophets**, third **teachers**, these are the **greater gifts** Paul says you should **earnestly desire**, not to personally have, but to have exercised more among us. His point is a corrective one aimed at the local church at Corinth. So rather than having tongues exercised so frequently at Corinth they should earnestly desire the gift of apostles, prophets and teachers be exercised. Since some of these gifts have ceased we'd say today that we'd want teacher, helps and administrations to be exercised more commonly than lesser gifts.

**And yet still** says Paul in verse 31, **I show you a more excellent way** or "path." What is the more excelling way? It is the way of love. Now I don't want to start into it this week because it's such a great chapter. Harnack said 1 Cor 13 is "The greatest, strongest, deepest thing Paul ever wrote" (Harnack).<sup>i</sup> Jamieson-Faucet and Brown said it is "The New Testament psalm of love, as the forty-fifth Psalm." Another author says, "It is a glorious hymn...in honour of Christian love, in which St. Paul rises on the wings of inspiration to the most sunlit heights of Christian eloquence."<sup>ii</sup> Without doubt it is a work of supreme beauty. And thus on one hand we run the risk of over-analyzing each part thereby missing the beauty of the whole and yet on the other of going too quickly and missing the richness of the parts. So today I will merely read the chapter explaining the more excellent way of love and leave you to deeply consider it yourself as the pre-eminent way of living the Christian life. Verse 1, **Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.** <sup>2</sup>**And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.** <sup>3</sup>**And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.** <sup>4</sup>**Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up;** <sup>5</sup>**does not behave rudely, does not**

seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; <sup>6</sup>does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; <sup>7</sup>bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. <sup>8</sup>Love never fails. But whether *there are* prophecies, they will fail; whether *there are* tongues, they will cease; whether *there is* knowledge, it will vanish away. <sup>9</sup>For we know in part and we prophesy in part. <sup>10</sup>But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away. <sup>11</sup>When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. <sup>12</sup>For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known. <sup>13</sup>And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these *is* love. John agreed saying “God is love...and love is from God...and in this is love...that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” And “See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we would be called children of God.” “We love because God first loved us.” And “Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins.” Thou shalt “love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind” and “love your neighbor as yourself.” “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. <sup>35</sup>By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” There is nothing greater than love and we will be looking at love in the coming weeks. But I leave you with that high note of love which we’ll develop in the future. But go and consider your love for your fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. Where are you with that?

---

<sup>i</sup> Robertson, A. (1933). *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (1 Co 13:1). Nashville, TN: Broadman Press.

<sup>ii</sup> *1 Corinthians*. 1909 (H. D. M. Spence-Jones, Ed.). The Pulpit Commentary (422). London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company.

[Back To The Top](#)

Copyright (c) Fredericksburg Bible Church 2012