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**Spiritual Gifts and the Pursuit of Love:
An Exegetical Study of Select Verses of 1 Corinthians 14**

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We have a *gracious* God. While there are several adjectives that Christians can appropriately use to describe our God, it's not uncommon to keep returning to the fact that he is gracious. And what is more—we have a gracious God whose good pleasure is to *graciously grant gifts* to his people. I do not believe that this reality is something unknown to you. I do, however, mention it because I think the gracious reality of our God inevitably is taken for granted as we journey through our daily lives. When we stop and consider all the gifts of grace—undeserved and freely bestowed—that we have and continue to receive, it truly boggles the mind.

One way to pause and ponder the broad ways that God graciously grants gifts to his people is to work through Luther's well-known explanation to the Apostles' Creed.¹ In doing so, God's gracious nature jumps off the page. As we confess the First Article, we marvel at a God who has powerfully created an expansive and diverse world and gifted each of us with life and breath, "body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members," etc. And we recognize that God not only gifted us with creation but also continues to preserve us by daily providing "clothing and shoes, food and drink, property and home, spouse and children," as well as regularly protecting us from danger and evil. Moving into the Second Article, we stand in humble awe as we confess the undeniably gracious gift of redemption—a redemption gained for those who are "lost and condemned" in sin. It is here where we recognize the gracious gift of God giving his Son to be our Savior by redeeming us "not with gold or silver but with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death." And last, but certainly not least, we confess the Third Article and revel in the gift of saving faith that is ours as the Holy Spirit calls us by the gracious gospel message into the Christian church where we "daily and fully" receive forgiveness of sins and confidence in our future resurrection and eternal life. We do, indeed, have a gracious God!

As if this was not enough, our gracious God gives even more! As we read through the pages of Scripture, the inspired authors make it clear that God grants believers special gifts of grace or *χαρίσματα* (sg. *χάρisma*). Although this word is occasionally used in a broad sense,² *χάρisma* is notably used in those chapters of Scripture that describe the special gifts of grace

¹ *Luther's Catechism: The Small Catechism of Dr. Martin Luther*, ed. Stephen Geiger, et al. (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 2019), 130, 148, 183.

² For example, *χάρisma* is used in Romans 5:15–16 as shorthand for the gift of redemption. So also, Paul uses *χάρisma* in Romans 6:23 to refer to the gift of eternal life that belongs to believers in Christ Jesus.

that the Holy Spirit freely pours out on believers.³ While the lists of χαρίσματα found in the New Testament are not intended to be comprehensive, they are illustrative of the wide variety of gifts that the Holy Spirit is pleased to grant to believers. It should be noted, however, that these χαρίσματα are specifically given for the common good of the church (1 Corinthians 12:7) and according to the Spirit's will "just as he determines" (1 Corinthians 12:11).⁴ We do, indeed, have a gracious God!

As children of a gift-giving God, we can certainly affirm that in a very real way all Christians can be rightfully labeled as "charismatics." In doing so, we would be acknowledging that we are recipients of God-given gifts both in a general sense, but also with regard to the special spiritual gifts—the χαρίσματα—that Christians possess. My guess, however, is that we are uncomfortable with such a designation. And rightfully so. As you know, terms start to lose their benefit when they begin to be associated with movements or belief systems that no longer reflect the doctrinal foundation upon which we wish to stand. Such is the case with the word "charismatic"—a term that is widely used to describe the influence of the Pentecostal overemphasis on direct divine revelation and specific spiritual gifts (such as tongue-speaking, prophecy, healing) into mainline Christian denominations.⁵ Although definitions can vary, the online Merriam-Webster dictionary offers the following standardized definition of a *charismatic*: "a member of a religious group or movement that stresses the seeking of direct divine inspiration and charisms (such as glossolalia or healing)."⁶

While it is not the purpose or scope of this essay to offer a historical survey of the ebbs and flows of the charismatic movement over the years, it is a movement that continues to influence Christianity throughout the world. As a result, the theological conversations over the definition and understanding of spiritual gifts, in general, and specific gifts such as the ability to speak in tongues, are certainly not new. They have even been discussed by the CELC in the past, and Scripture, as is proper, served as the guide.⁷ That, however, does not mean that it has become a moot point. Rather, as both Pentecostalism and the charismatic movement continue to gain ground globally, there is good reason to return *ad fontes* and allow the light of Scripture to illuminate our understanding and give us confidence in speaking truthfully on the matter. This exegetical essay on portions of 1 Corinthians 14 is one attempt to do just that.

On a personal note, composing this essay was an enjoyable, but challenging assignment. The assignment was to offer an exegesis on select verses of 1 Corinthians 14. In reviewing the entirety of Paul's words, the thought of providing an exegetical treatment on

³ Of the three sections in the NT that most directly deal with these spiritual gifts (Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and 1 Peter 4), χάρισμα is used in connection with such gifts. Of those three sections, χάρισμα is used the most (5x) in 1 Corinthians 12, the most extensive chapter on spiritual gifts in the Bible.

⁴ See John F. Vogt, *Holy Spirit: The Giver of Life* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1997), 91, where he offers this helpful definition: "Spiritual gifts are endowments of special abilities bestowed by the grace of God on individual Christians for the good of the church."

⁵ Arthur J. Clement, *The Pentecostals and Charismatics: A Confessional Lutheran Evaluation* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1998), 39–59. Clement entitles his third chapter, "Pentecostalism's New Force: The Charismatic Movement."

⁶ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/charismatic>

⁷ One notes that the CELC convention of 1999 heard essays prepared on the topic of the Holy Spirit and his work. One of the essays was on the specific topic of "The Holy Spirit Gives Spiritual Gifts to His Church." <https://celc.info/triennial-conventions/convention-essays/>

the entire chapter was appealing, but obviously beyond the scope of what a single essay could offer. The challenge, therefore, was determining an approach to selectively handle portions of 1 Corinthians 14. In the end, I decided that working carefully through 14:1–5 and using that as a foundation to address other select verses within the chapter seemed to be the best path forward. As you will see, navigating the Greek of these opening verses is not particularly challenging. The topics addressed, however, can be. In 1 Corinthians 14 we are peering into the social and religious context of the young Christian church in Corinth. While there is much more we would like to know, we remain cheerfully content with what the Lord has given to us. With humility we devote ourselves to the study of God’s Word and remain confident that “all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). This was true for the Corinthians, and it remains true for us today. May the Lord bless our study of his Word!

An Overview of 1 Corinthians

It is the assumption that those present for this essay already have more than a general familiarity with Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians. Even so, there is always value in reviewing key concepts, themes, and the progression of thought found in Paul’s letters. As we consider the content of 1 Corinthians 14 and the discussion of prophecy and speaking in tongues, the setting of the context becomes key as Paul addresses overarching points. With this in mind, we turn our attention to a brief overview of 1 Corinthians.

The biblical account of the beginning of gospel outreach in Corinth is recorded in Acts 18:1–17. There we hear that Paul arrived in Corinth in what would be his last major stop on his second missionary journey. While we hear that Paul’s work in Corinth was initially met with opposition from the Jews, the Lord blessed Paul’s proclamation to the Gentiles and many were brought to faith (18:8, 10). Paul ended up spending a year and half in Corinth and benefited from the friendship of Aquila and Priscilla (18:2) and the faithful assistance of Silas and Timothy (18:5). By the time Paul left Corinth, a Christian community centered on the gospel of Christ had been founded. In the years that followed, however, it becomes evident that serious issues had become prevalent among the Corinthian believers—issues that apparently a subsequent visit by Paul (2 Corinthians 12:14; 13:1) and letter from Paul (1 Corinthians 5:9–11) were unable to solve. As a result of these ongoing challenges, Paul, likely in Ephesus during his third missionary journey, writes the letter we refer to as 1 Corinthians in 55 or 56 AD. In it, we see Paul’s pastoral heart as he firmly preaches law and lovingly proclaims gospel to a congregation whose selfish behavior was splitting it apart.⁸

To say that the Corinthian congregation simply had problems would be an understatement. Because of the relative length of 1 Corinthians, we are offered a substantial window into the very severe spiritual issues that were affecting the group of believers in Corinth. As one reads Paul’s words to the Corinthians, one comes face to face with the battle that Christians regularly fight as the misguided priorities of this world and the selfishness of the sinful flesh wage war on the incomparable blessings that exist in Christ. In the opening chapter, Paul highlights the divisions that selfishness and a worldly mindset can cause in the

⁸ For a more detailed background to 1 Corinthians, I recommend Gregory Lockwood, *1 Corinthians* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2000), 1–20; David Garland, *1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 1–23; Paul Gardner, *1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 17–38.

Christian community (1:10–17). All of this stands in contrast to the unity that is found in knowing and proclaiming the “foolishness” of the cross and Christ crucified (1:18–31). Such knowledge is true wisdom—and it is a wisdom that comes from God as it is revealed through the Holy Spirit (2:1–16). In chapter 3, Paul returns to the unfortunate reality of divisions that had developed among the Corinthian church. These divisions were caused by seeking allegiances based on human spiritual leaders rather than on the foundation of Christ himself (3:1–23). Paul continues on in chapter 4 to encourage the Corinthians to have a healthy respect for spiritual leaders that are humble servants of Christ and not motivated by selfish or worldly gain (4:1–21).

In 1 Corinthians 5–7, Paul addresses some specific situations unfolding among the Corinthians that display their arrogance and lack of spiritual maturity. Chapter 5 highlights a well-known, incestuous relationship occurring within the Christian community that was being tolerated, if not even promoted (5:1–13). The first half of chapter 6 mentions that believers were turning to lawsuits against one another to solve disputes (6:1–11), and the latter half of the chapter reveals the rampant sexual immorality that had gained prominence in the congregation (6:12–20). In all three situations, Paul is quick to powerfully condemn the sinful activity and the selfishness behind it, while also letting the truth of the gospel shine forth.⁹ Paul transitions from his writings on sexual immorality to a lengthy chapter addressing specific questions on God’s gift of marriage in different stages of life and the importance of honoring God whether as a married or single person (7:1–40).

As Paul moves into the subject matter of 1 Corinthians 8–10, the broad topics of a Christian’s freedom in the gospel and the proper use of that freedom increasingly become the focus. Chapter 8 addresses the topic of a Christian’s approach to consuming food that had previously been sacrificed to false idols. Here Paul masterfully lays out the interconnecting roles of knowledge, freedom, and love for others in guiding the Corinthians to make God-pleasing decisions depending on individual circumstances (8:1–13). With the topic of Christian freedom in mind, Paul uses chapter 9 to describe how he, confident in the gospel and in his apostleship, lovingly uses the freedom in Christ that he has for selfless service to others—all for the sake of sharing the gospel with as many as possible (9:1–27). With chapter 10, Paul uses examples from Old Testament Israel to warn against spiritual selfishness and complacency (10:1–13) and a renewed, proper understanding of the Lord’s Supper (10:14–22). At the end of 1 Corinthians 10, Paul offers summarizing comments on Christian freedom and the Christian’s desire to honor God and love his neighbor with every decision that is made.

Immediate Context of 1 Corinthians 14

With the general flow of 1 Corinthians 1–10 sketched out above, we now move into the immediate context of 1 Corinthians 14. It is important to view chapters 11–14 as unit or block of thought. While there will be individual matters addressed, the overarching topic revolves around the Corinthians’ conduct during public worship.¹⁰ Chapter 11 begins with instruction

⁹ For beautiful gospel proclamations interspersed with Paul’s stern preaching of the law, consider 1 Corinthians 5:7; 6:11; and 6:19.

¹⁰ See Lockwood, *1 Corinthians*, 357. Recognizing this, Lockwood organizes his commentary on 1 Corinthians 11:2–14:40 under the heading “The Word of the Cross is the Basis for the Church’s Worship.”

on the cultural application of lovingly wearing proper head coverings in worship, while also emphasizing the timeless principle of male headship that was established with the order of creation (11:2–16). The second half of the chapter then returns to the topic of the Lord’s Supper, previously brought up toward the end of 1 Corinthians 10. In these verses, Paul rebukes the Corinthians for turning the Lord’s Supper into a self-promoting meal that generated congregational division, and he reminds them of the true value of the unifying and forgiving sacrament (11:17–34).

With chapter 12, Paul dives into the topic of spiritual gifts and presents information that will be foundational for understanding the content of 1 Corinthians 13–14. As you will recall, Paul’s previous comments on decorum and the Lord’s Supper are best understood when remembering the broader topic of conduct during public worship. The same is true with the new topic addressed by Paul: the many and varied ways that a Christian can be gifted by the Holy Spirit. His comments on the different kinds of gifts (12:1–11) are immediately followed up by a powerful illustration—that of one body with many parts (12:12–31)—to emphasize the use of *χαρίσματα* for the common good of the church, especially in worship.

Such a concept—one that prioritizes the community over the individual; one that embodies selflessness as opposed to selfishness—is, however, impossible to practice without an essential ingredient: Christian love. And with that truth in mind, Paul then launches into the beautiful exposition of love that is contained in 1 Corinthians 13. In function, chapter 13 not only serves as the “heart” of Paul’s words on spiritual gifts, but also as a “hinge” chapter that looks both backward and forward. With respect to chapter 12, 1 Corinthians 13 serves as a general exposition on the importance of Christian love when considering the use of any of the spiritual gifts that one might receive. With respect to chapter 14, 1 Corinthians 13 serves as pointed encouragement for the Corinthians as they now are asked to wrestle with the proper use of two particular spiritual gifts: speaking in tongues and prophecy.¹¹ Garland captures this sentiment well: “After laying the groundwork for his argument in chapters 12–13, his [Paul’s] purpose, to temper their [the Corinthians’] uninhibited zest for tongues in the assembly, becomes more explicit. Prophecy is to predominate in the worship.”¹² And with that, we turn our attention to 1 Corinthians 14.

Exegesis of 1 Corinthians 14:1–5

1 Διώκετε τὴν ἀγάπην, ζηλοῦτε δὲ τὰ πνευματικά, μᾶλλον δὲ ἵνα προφητεύητε. **2** ὁ γὰρ λαλῶν γλώσση οὐκ ἀνθρώποις λαλεῖ ἀλλὰ θεῷ· οὐδεὶς γὰρ ἀκούει, πνεύματι δὲ λαλεῖ μυστήρια· **3** ὁ δὲ προφητεύων ἀνθρώποις λαλεῖ οἰκοδομὴν καὶ παράκλησιν καὶ παραμυθίαν. **4** ὁ λαλῶν γλώσση ἑαυτὸν οἰκοδομεῖ· ὁ δὲ προφητεύων ἐκκλησίαν οἰκοδομεῖ. **5** θέλω δὲ πάντας ὑμᾶς λαλεῖν γλώσσαις, μᾶλλον δὲ ἵνα προφητεύητε· μέζων δὲ ὁ προφητεύων ἢ ὁ λαλῶν γλώσσαις ἐκτὸς εἰ μὴ διερμηνεύῃ, ἵνα ἡ ἐκκλησία οἰκοδομὴν λάβῃ.

14:1 – Διώκετε τὴν ἀγάπην, ζηλοῦτε δὲ τὰ πνευματικά, μᾶλλον δὲ ἵνα προφητεύητε.

¹¹ Lockwood, *1 Corinthians*, 473. When commenting on the conclusion of chapter 13, Lockwood writes: “Clearly Paul is also praising love because of its inestimable value to the church. ... Nowhere was a church in greater need of this highest of virtues than the strife-torn congregation in Corinth.”

¹² Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 632.

Translation: “*Actively pursue this love; keep striving for spiritual gifts, but especially that you might prophesy.*”

In these opening words, Paul shifts from his exposition on love in the previous chapter to pastoral encouragement for such love to be displayed among his Corinthian brothers and sisters—especially as they once again consider the variety of spiritual gifts that our gracious God entrusts to his people. Paul’s shift to exhortation is signaled by his use of two present imperatives: διώκετε and ζηλοῦτε. By form, both verbs could either be present, active, indicative or imperative. In such cases, it is the context that helps make the verbal mood clear. In this verse, there is little doubt that Paul is employing the present imperative. Building off his declarative statement about love in 13:13, Paul urges the Corinthians to action in this opening sentence.

The two verbs that Paul uses, διώκω and ζηλόω, can both be used in a positive and negative sense. Frequently διώκω is best translated in New Testament writings as “persecute” or “harass.”¹³ In such cases, the idea of “pursuing” with evil and destructive intentions is evident. It can, however, also be used as a powerful image of pursuing or striving after something positive.¹⁴ That certainly is the case in 14:1. Paul wants the Corinthians to actively pursue Christian love—the very love beautifully described in the previous chapters—in their daily lives! The same is true with the verb ζηλόω. The “zeal” indicated by the verb can depict sinful envy or jealousy in certain contexts.¹⁵ Here, however, the positive sense of “zealously or eagerly striving” is evident. Paul encourages the Corinthians to strive after τὰ πνευματικά, a neuter, plural substantive adjective that on a most basic level can be rendered “spiritual things.” In context, however, this term is best translated not as spiritual *things*, but as spiritual *gifts* as it draws from Paul’s earlier usage of the word. In 12:1, Paul begins his treatment of spiritual gifts (χαρίσματα, specifically mentioned in 12:4) with the opening phrase: Περὶ δὲ τῶν πνευματικῶν.¹⁶ Now in chapter 14, Paul returns to the topic of spiritual gifts, in general, and two specific gifts, in particular.

With the phrase μᾶλλον δὲ ἵνα προφητεύητε, Paul calls attention to one of the specific spiritual gifts that because a focal point: the gift of being able to prophesy or, put more simply, the gift of prophecy. As the Corinthians demonstrate a healthy zeal for receiving and utilizing spiritual gifts, Paul highlights the importance of prophecy. By qualifying τὰ πνευματικά with μᾶλλον δὲ, Paul gives prophecy a preferred status. With this, we are introduced to one of the key concepts of chapter 14: the superiority of the spiritual gift of prophecy. The verb προφητεύω, intimately linked to the substantives προφήτης and προφητεία, becomes a popular word employed by Paul in 1 Corinthians. Of the 28 times that the verb is used in the New Testament, Paul uses it 11 times in 1 Corinthians, with 8 of those instances coming in 1 Corinthians 14. A consistent base meaning for προφητεύω would be “to communicate a personally received divine revelation” with the result that a divine

¹³ See 1 Corinthians 4:12 as an example of such a use within Paul’s same letter. A sampling of multiple other instances includes Matthew 5:11, 10:13; John 5:16, 15:20; Acts 9:4; Galatians 1:13, 1:23; 4:29, etc.

¹⁴ See BDAG, “διώκω,” 254.

¹⁵ Consider, for example, how Paul uses the same verb (ζηλοῖ) in 1 Corinthians 13:4, but in a negative way. In that verse, Paul is emphasizing that Christian love is kind and not driven by jealousy.

¹⁶ See Gardner, *1 Corinthians*, 526–27 for an alternate translation of 12:1. Gardner takes πνευματικῶν as referring to people and translates the phrase “concerning spiritual people.”

message is heard and understood by its recipients.¹⁷ Paul first brings up prophecy anecdotally in 11:4–5. In his list of spiritual gifts found in 12:10, however, Paul specifically draws more attention to prophecy as a gift. In chapter 13, Paul once again brings up prophecy as an example of an amazing gift, but one that must be employed with love, in order to be truly beneficial. But what is it about prophecy that causes Paul to highlight it even more as he moves into 1 Corinthians 14? This will become clear as we consider the following verses.

14:2 – ὁ γὰρ λαλῶν γλῶσση οὐκ ἀνθρώποις λαλεῖ ἀλλὰ θεῷ· οὐδεὶς γὰρ ἀκούει, πνεύματι δὲ λαλεῖ μυστήρια·

Translation: “For the one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to people, but to God. For no one understands (him); but he speaks mysteries by the Spirit.”

Having highlighted the gift of prophecy as particularly beneficial, Paul spends the next two verses comparing the spiritual gift of speaking in tongues with that of prophecy. In chapter 12 Paul has already introduced speaking in tongues as one of the many potential gifts that can be given by the Spirit (12:10, 28). So also, in chapter 13, Paul specifically mentions tongues (alongside prophecy) as an example of a spiritual gift that must be used in contexts that show Christian love. But what does it mean to have the gift of tongues? The use of the substantival participle, ὁ λαλῶν, along with the present, active, indicative λαλεῖ (twice) underscores the oral nature of the gift. Beyond that, however, we have difficulty in determining exactly what is conveyed by the term γλῶσσα, tongue, when used in the inventory of spiritual gifts.

It appears, however, that there are three main possibilities that continue to be discussed and debated among leading commentators.¹⁸ One understanding of the gift of tongues is a Spirit-given ability, at particular times, to speak in foreign human languages normally unknown to the speaker, but intelligible to those fluent in that particular language. This understanding of the gift of tongues would be synonymous with the special outpouring of the Holy Spirit given to the disciples on Pentecost when they were enabled “to speak in other tongues” (λαλεῖν ἑτέραις γλώσσαις) (Acts 2:4). In Luke’s account of Pentecost in Acts 2, it is clear that the disciples were gifted with the ability to speak for a period of time in human languages that were previously unknown to them so that ethnic visitors to Jerusalem could hear “their own language being spoken” (Acts 2:6). The fact that the same term, γλῶσσα, is used in both accounts in the context of a special outpouring of the Spirit, leads some to understand the phenomenon described by Paul in Corinth to be a continued outpouring of the spiritual gift highlighted on Pentecost.¹⁹

A second way that speaking in tongues, or “glossolalia,” is understood in 1 Corinthians 14 is the ability to speak in a language of angels. Such an understanding would broaden the understanding of glossolalia to potentially include not only the gift of speaking in a foreign *human* language, but also the ability to speak in a foreign *non-human* language. The primary impetus for those advocating such a view is found in 1 Corinthians 13:1 where Paul

¹⁷ See Moisés Silva, “προφήτης,” *NIDNTE*, 4:161–74, for a useful presentation of the diachronic and synchronic uses and meanings of “prophet,” “prophecy,” and “to prophesy” (among other related terms).

¹⁸ Gardner, *1 Corinthians*, 593–600; Lockwood, *1 Corinthians*, 433–40; and Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 583–87 offer useful treatments on the various views of understanding the gift of tongues.

¹⁹ See Lockwood, *1 Corinthians*, 437 for a helpful qualification that such an understanding goes well beyond a speaker who possesses a *natural* facility in languages. Rather, the gift of tongues is a *supernatural* gift.

writes: “If I speak in the tongues of men *or of angels* [emphasis added], but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.”²⁰ The thought, then, would be that the idea of angelic speech surfaced in 13:1 is now amplified in chapter 14. While there have been some who have attempted to connect the topic of angelic speech to extra-biblical apocalyptic writing and a different understanding of Paul’s use of τὰ πνευματικά (14:1), the sum total of clear, biblical attestation of angelic speech is lacking.²¹ As you will recall, the topic of spiritual gifts in Corinth is first addressed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12. There the gift of tongues, along with multiple other Spirit-given gifts, is surfaced by Paul as he encourages the Corinthian congregation towards unity in the same way that a unified body has many distinctive parts that serve for the benefit of the whole. It is after this presentation on spiritual gifts that Paul offers his excursus on the role of Christian love in properly utilizing spiritual gifts for the good not of the individual, but of the body. With this in mind, it is perhaps best to take Paul’s mention of “tongues of angels” in 13:1 as a statement of hyperbole offered for the sake of making clear his overarching point on the incomparable value of love.

There is also a third way in which the nature of the tongues mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12–14 is understood. As opposed to a language—human or angelic—that is definable by some form of linguistic system, some advocate for understanding the gift of tongues as one that expresses itself in audible utterances or verbal manifestations that lack generally understood characteristics of language or assumed speech patterns. This understanding is frequently categorized under the label of “ecstatic” speech or utterance. It should be noted, however, there is a lack of consistency in terminology. For some, the definition of “ecstatic” speech is wide enough to include all the options for speaking in tongues that have been discussed. In general, however, a common distinction is that those who might be speaking ecstatically have less cognitive awareness of what they are uttering—or that they are even uttering—than those who understand speaking in tongues as referring to a more rigid system of language—human or otherwise.²²

While all three options for understanding Paul’s use of γλῶσσα in 1 Corinthians find advocates among various commentators, it is important to address the rest of the verse before making some concluding remarks on the nature of glossolalia. Paul writes that the one given the gift of tongues does not speak “ἀνθρώποις ... ἀλλὰ θεῷ.” Most translations will take these two datives as indirect objects indicating that the one speaking in tongues is not speaking “to men/people” but “to God.” Another possibility for understanding the use of the datives would be to view them as communicating advantage or benefit. Such a translation would further strengthen Paul’s words and communicate that the one speaking in tongues does not speak “for the benefit” of people around him, but for the benefit of God. In either case, Paul’s overarching point is clear: the gift of tongues centers on personal communication between the individual and God and not corporate communication between the individual and those around him. To emphasize this lack of corporate communication, Paul concludes this

²⁰ 1 Corinthians 13:1: Ἐὰν ταῖς γλώσσαις τῶν ἀνθρώπων λαλῶ καὶ τῶν ἀγγέλων, ἀγάπην δὲ μὴ ἔχω, γέγονα χαλκὸς ἢ ἥχων ἢ κύμβαλον ἀλαλάζον.

²¹ One strong advocate for understanding the gift of tongues as a specific form of angelic speech both in 13:1 as well as in chapter 14 can be found in Earle E. Ellis, *Prophecy & Hermeneutic in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 23–44; 63–71.

²² Gardner, *1 Corinthians*, 593–600. See also D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12–14* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 83–84.

verse with a final clause: “no one understands [ἀκούω]²³ him, but he speaks mysteries by the Spirit [πνεύματι].” Translations have differed on how best to render πνεύματι in this sentence. Some will capitalize the word and take it as a direct reference to the Holy Spirit. This option seems to be the most likely to me as it recognizes and reinforces the divine source of the gift of tongues. Other translations understand the term as a reference to the individual’s internal being or “spirit.”²⁴ Such an understanding would highlight the private, personal nature of tongue-speaking and may give additional support for those who view the glossolalia being discussed as naturally unintelligible ecstatic speech.

So, what exactly is the gift of speaking in tongues that Paul refers to in 1 Corinthians? While it is fascinating to consider the various possibilities, we ultimately are left with some level of speculation. We are also confronted with the very real possibility that the gift of tongues could be poured out in a variety of different forms. In this sense, it may be beneficial to consider tongue speaking as a broader category that could theoretically encompass a wider range of manifestations. Thinking in such terms may better allow for us to understand Paul’s mention of “classes” or “kinds” of tongues in his listing of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12.²⁵ In the end, however, I don’t think that pinpointing the exact definition and parameters of tongue-speaking is necessary for understanding Paul’s overarching and significant point. In all cases, it becomes clear that tongue-speaking is viewed as a gift best celebrated privately—between the individual and God—and not corporately, because glossolalia does not necessarily provide a message that can be understood by others. Paul continues to build on this key concept in the verses that follow.

14:3 – ὁ δὲ προφητεύων ἀνθρώποις λαλεῖ οἰκοδομὴν καὶ παράκλησιν καὶ παραμυθίαν.

Translation: “*But the one who prophesies speaks to people edification and encouragement and consolation.*”

While the previous verse does not portray the gift of tongues in a negative way, it does specify that the benefit of such a gift is primarily personal; it is for the one speaking in tongues. In contrast to this, however, is the gift of prophecy. Whereas the one speaking in tongues does not speak “to/for the benefit of people” (14:2), Paul explicitly states in this verse that the one who prophesies—the substantivized present active participle emphasizes the action—is speaking ἀνθρώποις (dative, plural): “to/for the benefit of people.” In other words, the one gifted with prophecy is delivering a divine message that has not only personal, but communal value.

The value of the message that ὁ προφητεύων communicates is found in the direct objects: οἰκοδομὴν καὶ παράκλησιν καὶ παραμυθίαν. While this list of three nouns should not be understood as all-inclusive or the only values found in a prophet’s message, the significance of these three nouns should not be minimized. The first noun, οἰκοδομὴν, has a

²³ See BDAG, “ἀκούω,” 38, which demonstrates that ἀκούω is frequently used not only to denote “hearing,” but also to communicate “understanding.”

²⁴ One notes that the popular New International Version has changed its translation from “he utters mysteries with his spirit” (NIV84) to “he speaks mysteries in the Spirit” (NIV2011).

²⁵ 1 Corinthians 12:10 states: “to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues [γένη γλωσσῶν].” If this is understood in a narrow sense, however, it is possible, that γένη γλωσσῶν does not refer to classes/kinds of tongue-speaking on a macro level, but simply refers to different languages that could be spoken.

semantic range that includes the concepts of “building” and “construction” both in physical and metaphorical senses. The common translation “edification” captures the meaning well as it communicates something that “builds up.” This word concept has already played an important role in Paul’s letter to the Corinthians. In 3:10, Paul uses the verb *ἐποικοδομέω* to introduce the image of the Christian church being built upon the foundation of Jesus Christ. Later, Paul employs *οικοδομέω* as he identifies love as what truly “builds up” the Christian church (8:1).²⁶ In addition, Paul’s famous words on Christian freedom in 10:23 instructed the Corinthians that even though the Christian might have the right to do many things, a reminder is given that such things may not necessarily “edify” their fellow brothers and sisters.²⁷ This word also plays a significant role in this chapter as it appears in 14:3, 5, 12, and 26. So predominant is Paul’s conceptual use of edification, it has rightfully been recognized as the *Leitmotif*, or theme, of the chapter!²⁸ For Paul, the spiritual gift of prophecy is highlighted as particularly beneficial—especially when contrasted with the gift of tongues—specifically because it allows for the edification of the community of faith.

In addition to “edification,” Paul mentions two other specific blessings that result from the gift of prophecy: *παράκλησιν καὶ παραμυθίαν*. The word *παράκλησις* and its cognates are frequently found throughout the New Testament. Although it can convey a few different meanings, context and common usage make it clear that “encouragement” or “exhortation” is the intended sense here.²⁹ In contrast to *παράκλησιν*, the word *παραμυθία* is only found here in the New Testament, although cognates including *παραμύθιον* (Philippians 2:1) and *παραμυθέομαι* (John 11:19, 31; 1 Thessalonians 2:12; 5:14) also are used. Despite the relatively scant use in the New Testament, the idea of “comfort” or “consolation” is well attested. Taken collectively, these three words—edification, encouragement, comfort—provide a powerful rationale for the communal value of the gift of prophecy.

14:4 – ὁ λαλῶν γλῶσση ἑαυτὸν οἰκοδομεῖ· ὁ δὲ προφητεύων ἐκκλησίαν οἰκοδομεῖ.

Translation: “The one who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; but the one who prophesies edifies the church.”

Having spent considerable time on the key words and content of 14:1–3, the reader will quickly note the similarities in vocabulary that are found in 14:4. In fact, verse 4 provides a straightforward and helpful summary of what has preceded and gives additional insight into the distinction that Paul desires to make between the gift of prophecy and the gift of tongues. The only word that has not appeared in the previous verses is *ἐκκλησίαν*, the well-known term for “church” or “assembly.” In context, the use of *ἐκκλησίαν* offers additional information on the *ἄνθρωποις* mentioned in 14:2–3. The “people” who are not edified by an individual speaking in tongues, but who are edified by the one prophesying, are the people who compose the church. As Garland succinctly states: “The use of the word ‘church’ ... refers to the context—the gathering of the church community. Since worship is a corporate

²⁶ 1 Corinthians 8:1: ἡ δὲ ἀγάπη *οἰκοδομεῖ*. Additional uses of this verb are found in 14:4 and 14:7.

²⁷ 1 Corinthians 10:23–24: Πάντα ἔξεστιν ἄλλ’ οὐ πάντα συμφέρει· πάντα ἔξεστιν ἄλλ’ οὐ πάντα *οἰκοδομεῖ*. μηδεὶς τὸ ἑαυτοῦ ζητεῖτω ἀλλὰ τὸ τοῦ ἐτέρου.

²⁸ Lockwood, *1 Corinthians*, 476–77.

²⁹ See BDAG, “παράκλησις,” 766.

experience, Paul promotes what strengthens the entire group. Prophecy, he insists, serves all who gather.”³⁰

14:5 – θέλω δὲ πάντας ὑμᾶς λαλεῖν γλώσσαις, μᾶλλον δὲ ἵνα προφητεύητε· μείζων δὲ ὁ προφητεύων ἢ ὁ λαλῶν γλώσσαις ἐκτὸς εἰ μὴ διερμηνεύῃ, ἵνα ἡ ἐκκλησία οἰκοδομῇν λάβῃ.

Translation: “Now I want all of you to speak in tongues, but especially that you would prophesy and the one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church might receive edification.”

Paul begins this verse with a verb of wishing (θέλω) that is followed by two complementary constructions. The first construction is formed with the use of a complementary infinitive (λαλεῖν) that is governed by the accusatives πάντας ὑμᾶς. The dative γλώσσαις is best rendered adverbially as showing means or manner: “by or in tongues.” The second construction consists of a ἵνα clause that functionally serves the same role as complementing the main verb.³¹ Looking beyond the grammar, however, it is clear that Paul is writing with rhetorical intention as he returns to the same ἵνα clause that he introduced in 14:1. Between the gift of tongues and the gift of prophecy, Paul is lifting the eyes of the Corinthians to more clearly see the value of prophecy.

This thought becomes crystal clear with the comparative adjective μείζων at the beginning of the second clause. Paul makes it clear that prophecy is *greater* than speaking in tongues. There is, however, a qualification. The adverbial conjunction ἐκτὸς εἰ μὴ and present, active, subjunctive διερμηνεύῃ allow for a scenario where the gift of tongues takes on the same congregational value as prophecy: if the message offered in tongues could be correctly translated/interpreted for the sake of the community. In such a case, the personal gift of tongues would also become a corporate gift as the entire group would be on the receiving end of a divine message. In the end, the final phrase of verse 5 spells out the key consideration. When evaluating spiritual gifts in a congregational setting, those gifts that allow for the entire church to receive edification (ἡ ἐκκλησία οἰκοδομῇν λάβῃ) hold a greater value than those that only edify the individual.

A Summary of 1 Corinthians 14:1–5

With the first five verses of 1 Corinthians 14, Paul redirects the Corinthians toward a healthier perspective on two particular spiritual gifts: speaking in tongues and prophecy. From context, it appears evident that the Corinthians were overemphasizing the gift of tongues and, in doing so, failing to demonstrate love for the Christian community, the body of Christ. After refocusing the Corinthians on the necessity of Christian love in the preceding chapter, Paul applies this truth in the verses we have considered. He makes it clear that the

³⁰ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 634.

³¹ See Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 476. Wallace lists this as an example of the “Complementary ἵνα.” On this particular verse he comments: “Note the parallel between the first half of the verse, which uses a complementary infinitive, and the second half, which uses a complementary ἵνα clause.”

gift of prophecy should be prioritized in public worship because it lovingly edifies as it strengthens, encourages, and comforts with the Word of God.

Paul knows that Holy Spirit is the gracious giver of all spiritual gifts. This he has made abundantly clear (1 Corinthians 12:1–11). In the greater context of worship, however, those gifts that can edify others are rightly understood as “better.” With the opening words of verse 5, Paul makes it clear that he is not speaking against the gift of tongues in and of itself. He does, however, recognize that the primary value of glossolalia is personal, not corporate. In the context of the church, the more beneficial gift is that which allows for the communication of God’s revealed will to those who have gathered together for worship. Stating Paul’s point another way, he urges the Corinthians to consider spiritual gifts in light of their vertical and horizontal aspects. The gift of tongues is still just that, a gift. It is, however, a gift that focuses primarily on the vertical relationship between the tongue-speaker and God. The gift of prophecy, however, is highlighted primarily because it is not only vertical (the one prophesying has received a message from God), but also horizontal. When comparing a gift that edifies only one with a gift that edifies many, the way of love is clear!

Comments on Additional Select Verses from 1 Corinthians 14

Although a detailed exegesis for the entirety of 1 Corinthians 14 is not possible at this time, the foundation provided by 14:1–5 does allow us to *briefly* consider some of the other noteworthy verses found in the chapter.

14:14 – ἐὰν [γὰρ] προσεύχωμαι γλώσση, τὸ πνεῦμά μου προσεύχεται, ὁ δὲ νοῦς μου ἄκαρπός ἐστιν.

Translation: “For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful.”

While the Greek text of this verse is not particularly complex, the exact meaning of Paul’s words here presents us with some challenges. What is the distinction between “spirit” (τὸ πνεῦμά) and “mind” (ὁ νοῦς) that Paul is making? And, to what extent is the mind of one speaking in tongues “unfruitful” (ἄκαρπός)? As always, we gain some help from the context. In verse 13, Paul states that “anyone who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret.” Paul’s overarching point about the personal as opposed to congregational edification of glossolalia continues to be developed. If one has the gift of speaking in tongues, the *horizontal* edification is lacking, unless there is an interpreter. Paul’s words in verse 14 explain why tongue speaking is not edifying by emphasizing that even the one gifted with tongues may not cognitively be aware of what he is saying. If even the mind of the one speaking is unaware of the message that he is proclaiming, how much more would others who are listening be unaware?! In this sense, the gift of tongues is once again presented as a blessing on a deeply personal, “spiritual” level, but ultimately “unfruitful” or unproductive both for the cognitive mind of the one speaking, as well as for any other who would hear what would seemingly be equivalent to random sounds.³²

³² For a more detailed conversation on this verse, see Gardner, *1 Corinthians*, 605–8. One particularly helpful insight found in his commentary: “For Paul the whole person, both mind and spirit, receives things of the Spirit. This is obvious even in this passage in the contrast between tongues and prophecy. However, it is possible in

14:18–19 – εὐχαριστῶ τῷ θεῷ, πάντων ὑμῶν μᾶλλον γλώσσαις λαλῶ· 19 ἀλλ’ ἐν ἐκκλησίᾳ θέλω πέντε λόγους τῷ νοῦ μου λαλῆσαι, ἵνα καὶ ἄλλους κατηχήσω, ἢ μυρίους λόγους ἐν γλώσσῃ.

Translation: “I give thanks to God (that) I speak in tongues more than all of you. But in the church, I wish to speak five words with my mind so that I might also instruct others, rather than ten thousand words in a tongue.”

Perhaps the most significant information in these verses is the fact that Paul openly admits to having received the gift of tongues—perhaps even frequently! After going to great lengths to explain why prophecy is greater than speaking in tongues, Paul may be concerned that his words would be understood to portray speaking in tongues as something inherently negative, possibly not even a spiritual gift at all. With his words of verse 18, however, he mentions the gift of tongues as something for which he thanks God. That being said, Paul is quick to return to his overarching point: although tongue speaking is a gift, the more beneficial gift in the congregational setting involves teaching others the Word of God that they might edified. The use of the phrase τῷ νοῦ μου (“with/in my mind”) also serves to give insight into his use of νοῦς in verse 14. The idea is that speaking rationally and cognitively is a blessing for others because the important message of God’s revealed truth is presented in an intelligible way.

14:22 – ὥστε αἱ γλῶσσαι εἰς σημεῖον εἰσιν οὐ τοῖς πιστεύουσιν ἀλλὰ τοῖς ἀπίστοις, ἡ δὲ προφητεία οὐ τοῖς ἀπίστοις ἀλλὰ τοῖς πιστεύουσιν.

Translation: “So then, tongues are for a sign—not to believers, but to unbelievers. But prophecy is not for unbelievers, but for believers.”

This verse, along with the surrounding verses, may be seen as confusing if treated in isolation. When viewed as a part of Paul’s overarching presentation on tongues and prophecy, the meaning becomes clear. In verse 20, Paul urges the Corinthians to “not be children with regard to their thinking” (μὴ παιδία γίνεσθε ταῖς φρεσίν). He then proceeds to paraphrase Isaiah 28:11–12 in order to bring up the key concept that judgment can come upon those who hear God’s Word but don’t understand it because it is spoken ἐν ἑτερογλώσσοις (“in foreign tongues”). With this reference, Paul now makes a direct application to the Corinthians as they wrestle with the proper use of tongue-speaking. For Paul, a childish way of thinking would be to selfishly prioritize tongue-speaking in corporate worship because “he is concerned about the effect of speaking in tongues on the church’s missionary witness on unbelievers.”³³

Viewing Paul’s words in 14:22 through this lens allows for his concern to be made clear. For those who are unbelievers, entering into a Christian worship setting that is filled with unintelligible languages becomes a sign of judgment because they may be hearing God’s Word but not understanding it and, therefore, not learning from it in that setting.³⁴ The

some circumstances for the ‘mind’ not to interact with what is going on, in which case the gift that has been received bears no fruit within the congregation” (606–7).

³³ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 649.

³⁴ On a higher level, Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 14:20–25 are urging the Corinthians who are reveling in rampant tongue-speaking to consider the effect of such speaking on those outside the church. A paraphrase of Paul’s message might be: “Do you want to exult in bringing judgment on those who can’t understand you? Or do you want to lovingly utilize the spiritual gift (prophecy) that can bring a blessing both to those already in the church as well as those who might be brought into the church?”

potential result of hearing prophecy, however, is far different. Prophecy—God’s Word proclaimed in an intelligible language—is for believers, both those who already believe and are strengthened as well as those who come to faith through the proclaimed message.³⁵ Garland summarizes Paul’s thought well: “The upshot ... is that prophecy is superior to tongues because it bears fruit in producing illumination, conviction, confession, and worship. Glossolalia does not do this and must be restricted in public worship.”³⁶

14:33a – οὐ γάρ ἐστιν ἀκαταστασίας ὁ θεὸς ἀλλ’ εἰρήνης.

Translation: “*For God is not of disorder, but of peace.*”

Perhaps little needs to be said about this final verse that we are considering. The Greek is straightforward and the concept is not hard to grasp. In simplicity, however, something profound is presented. With these words, Paul contrasts “disorder” (ἀκαταστασίας) with “peace” (εἰρήνης). He makes it clear that our gracious God does not desire chaos and confusion among his people, but peace. When this principle is applied to the arena of public worship, Paul’s words offer an appropriate reminder for those looking to make use of their spiritual gifts in public worship. A similar sentiment will be offered by Paul in the final verse of the chapter: “But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way” (14:40). Although Paul does not speak of “love” and “edification” in these verses, it is clear that those key concepts continue to stand behind these final exhortations. Worship that lovingly seeks to honor God will be structured in a way that avoids disorder and allows for the edification of his people.

Final Applications

Through the words of 1 Corinthians 14, we have the opportunity to watch as Paul lovingly instructs and guides the Corinthians who were dealing with specific issues related to the use of spiritual gifts and edifying worship in their first-century context. In reading God’s Word, however, we receive so much more than a historical document. Although it is clear that Paul is writing to specific people at a specific time in a specific context with specific issues and concerns, we know that the truths of God’s Word are eternal and meaningful to us today. As we carefully and prayerfully read Scripture, we do so in a way that recognizes the difference between timeless principles that are set forth for all people and specific applications that may be limited in time and audience. To put it in another way, we always wrestle with what parts of God’s Word are *descriptive* and what parts are *prescriptive*. Inevitably, a study of 1 Corinthians 14, which finds important contextual information in 1 Corinthians 12 and 13, leads to questions about the existence of spiritual gifts today. Does prophecy still exist today? What about speaking in tongues? If tongue-speaking exists, should it be encouraged or discouraged?

³⁵ Note how Paul elaborates on this point in the following verses (23–25): “So if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and inquirers or unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind? ²⁴ But if an unbeliever or an inquirer comes in while everyone is prophesying, they are convicted of sin and are brought under judgment by all, ²⁵ as the secrets of their hearts are laid bare. So they will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, ‘God is really among you!’”

³⁶ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 654.

One of the key truths that we affirm is that the same Holy Spirit who poured out *χαρίσματα* upon the Corinthians—as well as upon *all* believers in the first century—continues to pour out spiritual gifts to believers today as well. There is nothing in Scripture that would give us the idea that the Holy Spirit’s desire to grant spiritual gifts to each believer has expired in any way. In fact, to look at the Christian church today is to recognize the ongoing existence of spiritual gifts in an amazing way. As we consider those sections of God’s Word that speak most directly of spiritual gifts (Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4, 1 Peter 4), we can’t help but notice gifts of the Spirit like faith, wisdom, knowledge, service, encouragement, generous giving, leadership, mercy, etc., that are regularly found in our midst today. In recognizing this, we also are quick to note that the sections on spiritual gifts were not intended to be exhaustive, complete lists, but rather illustrative of the many kinds of *χαρίσματα* that a gracious God can give to his people.

So then, what of gifts such as prophecy and speaking in tongues, along with other gifts like healing that are frequently given emphasis among charismatics? Do such gifts still exist? Should we be expecting them? One way that such questions have been answered in the past is by compartmentalizing the various spiritual gifts mentioned in the Bible into different categories such as “Foundational” (prophecy, apostleship, discernment), “Confirmatory” (miracles, healing, speaking in tongues and interpretation) and “Continuing,” frequently subdivided into “Speaking (pastoring, teaching, encouraging, etc.) and “Serving” (giving, leadership, charity, etc.).³⁷

Such categories can be helpful in considering and understanding the vast scope of *χαρίσματα* that the Holy Spirit can impart. Thinking in terms of “Foundational” and “Confirmatory” categories, in particular, can also serve to remind us of a key difference between the time in which Paul wrote 1 Corinthians and our world today. In the first century AD, it is reasonable that God chose to communicate his will directly to his people using “foundational” gifts, including prophecy. It is also reasonable that God chose to employ “confirmatory” gifts to call attention to the message of Christ in the early years of the New Testament church. Once the inspired text of the New Testament was received, recognized, and disseminated, however, it also seems reasonable to affirm there was no longer need for such gifts. God’s all sufficient and edifying Word had been placed among us. This, then, might offer a plausible explanation as to why certain spiritual gifts—such as prophecy and tongue-speaking—no longer seem to be seen among us. That being said, we should be careful to acknowledge that such conclusions are based on historical judgment and not biblical decree.³⁸

So, what can we say with certainty, especially if there are those in our ministry context who are claiming spiritual gifts such as modern-day glossolalia? What remains central to any conversation on spiritual gifts are the principles that Paul laid out both for the Corinthians and for us today. These key principles include:

³⁷ See Vogt, *Holy Spirit*, 89–116, for one example of an author who categorizes spiritual gifts in this way.

³⁸ Although some have understood Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 13:8–10 as biblical affirmation that certain spiritual gifts such as prophecy and tongues definitively ceased in the apostolic era, such an interpretation is exegetically unlikely and may miss Paul’s broader point. Gardner, *1 Corinthians*, 576, summarizes Paul’s thought in these verses well: “He is simply saying here that on that future day of the Lord’s coming in glory when all things are made new, all such ‘speech’ (1:5), whether prophecy, knowledge, or tongues, will become redundant as all God’s people come ‘to know’ even as God has fully ‘known’ them (v.12).” See also Lockwood, *1 Corinthians*, 470–73; Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 620–25.

1. The Holy Spirit graciously gives a variety of gifts (χαρίσματα) to Christians according to his gracious will, not ours. To put it succinctly, I do not get to choose the gift(s) I will receive.³⁹
2. Christian love—both for God and for neighbor—must drive the proper use of such gifts. There is no room for selfishness and pride.
3. The primary purpose of spiritual gifts is for the good of the body of Christ, the church. This is especially true with regard to gifts that are used in corporate worship. “Greater” gifts are those that edify the many.
4. The use of gifts in a corporate setting should be done in a way that reflects order and peace as opposed to chaos and confusion. This principle, when applied to the specific χάρισμα of tongue-speaking in congregational worship, would indicate the accompanying need for an interpreter.
5. In addition to these principles, it is also proper to affirm the broader truth that in the books of both the Old and New Testament, the Christian church has the firm and reliable Word of God. In addition to revealing the truth, it also can serve in exposing error.

While we may not be able to state dogmatically that certain gifts like tongue-speaking cannot occur in our modern context, we also note that many such claims of modern-day glossolalia are exposed as misguided or fraudulent when critically examined in the light of these key principles. In short, the principles that Paul laid out for the Corinthians continue to offer an appropriate framework for evaluating claims and navigating discussions on spiritual gifts today. In doing so, we give honor to God.

Conclusion

We have a *gracious* God. The gift of Christ as our Savior from sin provides all the evidence we need of God’s gracious nature. But he gives us so much more! We have a gracious God whose good pleasure is to *graciously grant gifts* to his people—to you and me! As we consider the χαρίσματα mentioned in the New Testament, we humbly and thankfully recognize that the spiritual gifts that come through the Holy Spirit are truly that—gifts. And we are blessed to trust the One who gives each gift, according to his will. In our study of 1 Corinthians 14 and the surrounding context, we are reminded not only of the existence of spiritual gifts, but also the importance of making use of them properly. May we always follow the way of love. And may our eager desire for spiritual gifts be centered in our desire to honor God and edify our neighbor.

³⁹ This principle is based on the clear teaching of 1 Corinthians 12:11. At the end of the chapter, in 12:31, Paul also writes to the Corinthians: ζηλοῦτε δὲ τὰ χαρίσματα τὰ μείζονα. These particular words—and the meaning that Paul intended—have received significant attention over the years. Just as in 14:1, ζηλοῦτε can reflect either the indicative or imperative mood. If an imperative (“Now eagerly seek the greater gifts.”), as most translations reflect, Paul may be leading into the content of 1 Corinthians 13 by telling the Corinthians to use their zeal for specific spiritual gifts in a way that would allow them to see the importance of love in their utilization. If ζηλοῦτε is understood as an indicative (“but you are eagerly desiring the greater gifts”), Paul may be summarizing the Corinthian problem of selfishly ranking spiritual gifts in preparation for his exposition on love in 1 Corinthians 13. In either case, the words of 1 Corinthians 12:11 and 12:31 should not be viewed as contradictory.

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