Tongues, Signs, and Wonders

Apostolic Credentials in Their Proper Time

Series 1-10

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VerseQuest Ministries




VerseQuest
MINISTRIES

Tongues, Signs, and Wonders

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Scripture and Doctrinal Foundation

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This publication presents a dispensational, King James Bible-based examination of tongues, signs, wonders, apostolic credentials, spiritual gifts, and the historical purposes of miraculous manifestations recorded in the New Testament.

The studies distinguish Israel from the Church, recognize the foundational ministry of the apostles and prophets, and uphold salvation by grace through faith in the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

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The purpose of this publication is to encourage serious, independent examination of the Scriptures concerning the supernatural gifts and apostolic signs recorded in the New Testament.

Every doctrinal conclusion is intended to be measured against the written Word of God, rightly divided, rather than religious tradition, denominational claims, or personal experiences.

Readers are encouraged to examine every passage carefully, compare Scripture with Scripture, and establish their convictions upon the authority of the King James Bible.

"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

— 2 Timothy 2:15, KJV

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Tongues, Signs, and Wonders

Apostolic Credentials in Their Proper Time

Introduction to the Ten-Essay Series

There is a peculiar thing happening throughout modern Christianity, and it has been going on long enough that somebody needs to open a King James Bible, lay the evidence on the table, and find out exactly what God said. Every so often, I receive a message or an email from someone claiming that the apostolic signs are still operating today, that modern preachers possess the same supernatural gifts exercised by Peter and Paul, or that the office of an apostle continues exactly as it did when Jesus Christ established His foundational witnesses. Some of these messages come from believers in South Africa, others from different parts of the world, and the argument is frequently the same. They point to Ephesians 4:11, where Paul wrote, "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers." Then comes the conclusion: Since God gave apostles to the Church, there must still be apostles today. Well, that certainly sounds impressive until somebody bothers to read the rest of Ephesians. **The Bible does not become difficult because God failed to explain Himself. It becomes difficult when a man finds one verse he likes and refuses to read the verses that explain it.**

Ephesians 4:11 is absolutely true. God did give apostles. Nobody needs to deny that, apologize for it, or explain the verse away. The question is not whether God gave apostles, but what those apostles were given to accomplish and whether the office they occupied was intended to be reproduced perpetually. Ephesians 2:20 answers the question concerning their foundational place: "And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone." There is the architectural description supplied by the Holy Ghost. The apostles and prophets occupied a foundational position, with Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone. Now, anybody who has ever watched a building constructed ought to understand that a foundation serves a particular purpose. You lay the foundation, establish the structure upon it, and continue building. You do not pour another foundation every time a new generation of construction workers arrives. **A foundation that must be laid again every twenty years was never treated as a completed foundation in the first place.** Christ remains the chief corner stone, the apostolic foundation has been laid, and the Church continues to be built upon what God established. A man who claims to be laying another apostolic foundation had better explain what was wrong with the first one.

Furthermore, Ephesians 3:5 declares that the mystery concerning Christ was "now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit." These men occupied a remarkable position in the unfolding revelation of God. They were not simply enthusiastic preachers who happened to draw large crowds and possess unusual experiences. They were divinely appointed witnesses through whom God revealed and established foundational truth concerning Jesus Christ and His Church. Paul himself defended his apostleship by asking in 1 Corinthians 9:1, "Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?" First Corinthians 15:8 records the risen Christ appearing to Paul "as of one born out of due time." Acts 1:21–22 established specific historical qualifications when the eleven apostles considered the replacement of Judas, including firsthand witness to the resurrection. Paul's commission was extraordinary, coming directly from the risen Lord. These were not offices filled through self-appointment, religious enthusiasm, or a minister deciding that the title *pastor* no longer sounded impressive enough. **An apostle was not a preacher who promoted himself. He was a man Christ appointed, and God supplied credentials that no religious organization could manufacture.**

That brings us to the next question, and it is just as important. What were those credentials? Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 12:12, "Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds." Read those words carefully. Paul did not say that his apostleship rested upon a certificate from a religious organization, an impressive following, or his personal claim to possess extraordinary authority. He pointed toward signs that God had actually wrought among the Corinthians. Hebrews 2:3–4 explains that the great salvation first spoken by the Lord was confirmed by those who heard Him, God bearing witness "both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will." Mark 16:20 likewise declares that the Lord worked with His messengers, "confirming the word with signs following." The miracles accompanied the message. The signs authenticated the witnesses. The wonders confirmed that God was working through men whom He had appointed. **The apostles were not sent to advertise miracles. The miracles were given to authenticate the apostles and confirm the Word they preached.** Once that order is reversed, religion quickly becomes more interested in the performance than in the truth the performance was supposed to establish.

Consider what actually happened when Peter and John encountered the lame man at the temple in Acts chapter 3. The man had been lame from his mother's womb, and Acts 4:22 establishes that he was above forty years old. Peter commanded him in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth to rise and walk. Immediately, his feet and ankle bones received strength, and the man entered the temple walking, leaping, and praising God. There was no elaborate explanation about an invisible healing that would appear sometime in the distant

future. There was no carefully arranged testimony concerning an unidentified ailment that might or might not have improved. A man who had never walked was suddenly walking in front of people who knew his condition. When the religious authorities confronted the apostles, Acts 4:14 declares that they saw the healed man standing with them and could say nothing against it. **A genuine apostolic miracle did not require the audience to pretend something had happened. The evidence was standing on two legs directly in front of them.** That is the sort of biblical evidence modern claims of identical apostolic credentials must face.

And then we come to tongues, where the confusion becomes even more remarkable. Acts chapter 2 records the disciples speaking with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. But the Holy Ghost did not leave us guessing what those tongues were. Acts 2:6 declares that every man heard them speak in his own language. Verse 8 identifies the languages as the tongues wherein the hearers were born, and verse 11 records the wonderful works of God being proclaimed. These were recognizable languages understood by people from various nations. The miracle involved supernatural communication, not the production of meaningless sounds. First Corinthians 14 later establishes that when a language was unknown to the assembled congregation, interpretation was necessary for the congregation to receive edification. Paul required understanding, limitation, and orderly participation. He declared that he would rather speak five understandable words that taught others than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue. **The Holy Ghost gave tongues so that God's truth could be communicated. Modern religion has managed to turn that miracle of communication into an argument that understanding is unnecessary.** That is quite a remarkable accomplishment, but it is not sound Bible doctrine.

Another important distinction concerns the people to whom these signs were directed. First Corinthians 1:22 declares, "For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom." First Corinthians 14:21–22 connects tongues with Isaiah's prophecy concerning God speaking to unbelieving Israel through men of other tongues and other lips. The signs did not exist in a historical vacuum. They belonged to God's dealings with Israel, the rejection and resurrection of her Messiah, and the apostolic proclamation that salvation through Jesus Christ was extending to the Gentiles. At Pentecost, Jewish witnesses heard supernatural languages. At Cornelius's house, believing Jews were astonished when the Holy Ghost fell upon Gentiles and they spoke with tongues. At Ephesus, approximately twelve men connected with John's earlier baptism received fuller instruction concerning Jesus Christ, followed by extraordinary manifestations through Paul's apostolic ministry. Each event possessed a recognizable historical setting. **God had reasons for giving those signs, and those reasons cannot be discarded simply because a modern religious**

movement would like to reproduce the manifestations. You do not understand a sign by staring at it while ignoring the message written upon it.

Neither does the Book of Acts establish that every saved person must speak with tongues. In Acts chapter 8, the Samaritans received the Holy Ghost through the ministry of Peter and John, yet the passage never explicitly records them speaking with tongues. At Cornelius's house, the Holy Ghost fell before water baptism was administered. At Ephesus, the recorded sequence was different again. The Book of Acts describes significant events during the transitional apostolic period, and those differences must be interpreted according to their circumstances. First Corinthians 12:13 supplies the established doctrine concerning the Body of Christ: "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body." Yet verse 30 asks, "do all speak with tongues?" The answer is no. All believers in Christ share the Spirit's baptism into one body, but Paul never taught that every believer possessed identical spiritual gifts. Ephesians 1:13 declares that believers are sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise after hearing and believing the gospel. **A Christian does not need to manufacture an apostolic sign to prove that God has fulfilled a promise already established in His written Word.** Salvation rests upon Jesus Christ, not upon satisfying somebody's favorite religious test.

Now, none of this means that Almighty God has somehow lost His power to heal the sick, answer prayer, deliver the afflicted, or intervene in the lives of His people. That is another argument frequently raised whenever the cessation of foundational apostolic sign gifts is discussed. Somebody immediately asks, "Are you saying God cannot perform miracles today?" Absolutely not. The God who created all things has not become powerless because the foundational apostolic ministry accomplished its appointed work. But there is an enormous difference between God's sovereign ability to heal somebody and a modern religious personality claiming to possess the same identifying credentials as the apostles. Paul himself endured a thorn in the flesh that the Lord did not remove after repeated prayer. Timothy experienced recurring infirmities. Trophimus was left sick at Miletum, and Epaphroditus nearly died before God showed him mercy. Those passages belong to the same New Testament that records extraordinary apostolic healings. **The Bible does not teach that God must heal everybody, and it certainly does not teach that a Christian who remains sick has somehow failed to produce enough faith to deserve relief.** God's grace remains sufficient even when the affliction remains.

We must also examine the difference between genuine spiritual manifestations and religious counterfeits. Jesus Christ warned in Matthew 7:21–23 that people would claim to have prophesied, cast out devils, and performed wonderful works in His name, yet He would declare to some, "I never knew you." Second Thessalonians 2 warns of future lying

wonders associated with satanic deception during the prophetic events surrounding the man of sin. First John 4:1 commands believers to try the spirits because many false prophets have gone out into the world. These warnings were not placed in Scripture to decorate a sermon about discernment. They establish that religious claims must be tested. Yet we must also be careful not to declare every sincere person mistaken about a spiritual experience to be a deliberate deceiver. Some people genuinely believe what they have been taught. Others repeat practices they have witnessed throughout their lives without ever examining the relevant passages. And some religious performers deliberately exploit the ignorance and trust of others. Those distinctions matter. **A false doctrine can be taught sincerely, but sincerity does not make the doctrine true. A religious performance can be conducted confidently, but confidence does not make the performance divine.** The Bible remains the standard.

This is why the series is being written with particular care. There are people who genuinely want to understand the Scriptures but have been taught that questioning a claimed miracle amounts to questioning God Himself. That is a dangerous arrangement. God has already commanded believers to examine spiritual claims. First Thessalonians 5:21 declares, "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good." Second Timothy 2:15 commands the workman to study and rightly divide the word of truth. A Christian who opens his Bible and asks whether a particular manifestation agrees with Scripture is not rebelling against the Holy Ghost. He is obeying the Holy Ghost's written instructions. Nor should believers be intimidated by titles, impressive crowds, dramatic testimonies, or repeated claims that a particular preacher possesses extraordinary anointing. **A man who genuinely speaks for God ought to welcome the opening of God's Book. It is the fellow who needs the Bible kept closed who has reason to become nervous.** Divine authority does not depend upon protecting religious personalities from biblical examination.

Throughout these ten studies, we will examine the actual events at Pentecost, the relationship between Israel and miraculous signs, the reception of the Holy Ghost among Samaritans and Gentiles, the extraordinary circumstances at Ephesus, the gifts distributed within the Body of Christ, the meaning of tongues of men and angels, the necessity of interpretation, the restrictions governing congregational worship, and the identifying credentials of Christ's apostles. We will distinguish the historical manifestations from the enduring doctrine of salvation by grace through faith. We will consider the difficult passages without avoiding them, including Paul's statement that tongues shall cease and his description of the future perfection when believers shall see face to face. We will also examine the commands modern religious performances frequently ignore, particularly the requirement that spiritual utterances be understandable, interpreted, orderly, and subject to apostolic authority. **The object is not to win a shouting contest with people who**

disagree. The object is to let Scripture establish what God actually did, why He did it, and what He requires of believers today. A Bible that cannot survive honest examination would not be worth defending. The King James Bible has no such problem.

At the heart of this entire discussion stands something far greater than tongues, miracles, healings, or apostolic titles. Jesus Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, was buried, and rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, as Paul declares in 1 Corinthians 15:3–4. Ephesians 2:8–9 establishes that salvation is by grace through faith, not of works. Ephesians 1:13 identifies the Holy Spirit's sealing of those who hear and believe the gospel, while Ephesians 4:30 declares that believers are sealed unto the day of redemption. Those promises are not inferior to miraculous signs. They concern the eternal salvation and spiritual security of everyone who belongs to Jesus Christ. The Christian does not need to chase an extraordinary experience to obtain what God has already given him in His Son. He needs to understand the riches of the grace he has received, grow in the knowledge of the Scriptures, and faithfully serve the Lord who purchased him with His own blood. **A man who possesses eternal life in Jesus Christ has received something infinitely greater than the ability to astonish an audience for a few minutes. Do not trade the certainty of God's promise for the excitement of somebody's performance.**

Finally, let the purpose of these studies be understood. This is not an attack upon believers from South Africa, America, or any other nation, nor is it an attempt to ridicule honest Christians who have received incomplete instruction concerning spiritual gifts. There are sincere people in many congregations who love Jesus Christ and desire to serve Him, yet sincerity must always be brought under the authority of Scripture. Nor will we surrender one word of biblical truth merely to avoid offending a religious system that has built its identity around extraordinary manifestations. The Scriptures will be examined carefully, the dispensational distinctions will be maintained, and the apostolic signs will be studied according to the purposes God assigned them. **God gave apostles, and they laid the foundation. God supplied signs, and those signs confirmed His message. God revealed His Word, and that Word remains the authority. You do not need another foundation when Jesus Christ has already established the Church upon the one He appointed. You do not need another gospel when the blood of Christ has already accomplished redemption. And you do not need another spectacular sign to believe what the living God has already declared in black and white. Let the experiences be examined, let the claims be tested, and let the King James Bible have the final word.**

1 of 10 — Tongues, Signs, and Wonders — Pentecost: When Every Man Heard in His Own Language

Primary Text: Acts 2:1–13; Acts 1:4–8; Genesis 11:1–9

Introduction

There are few passages in the New Testament that have been dragged farther from their original setting, twisted into more religious pretzels, and used to manufacture more spiritual confusion than the opening thirteen verses of Acts chapter 2. A man can read the account of Pentecost in the King James Bible and discover exactly what God recorded, or he can attend a modern religious meeting and be instructed to experience something the passage never describes. Those are two entirely different operations. In Acts 2, the Holy Ghost came upon the disciples, supernatural signs accompanied His arrival, and men from different nations heard the wonderful works of God proclaimed in the languages wherein they were born. Nobody needed to invent a vocabulary, rehearse meaningless syllables, or convince an embarrassed congregation that unintelligible noises were evidence of heavenly power. The miracle was not established by the enthusiasm of the speakers but by the understanding of the hearers. **When God gave tongues at Pentecost, the languages were understood. The confusion began when men started explaining away what God had plainly written.**

The difficulty surrounding Pentecost is not that the Scriptures are insufficiently clear. The difficulty is that religious systems have attached doctrines to Pentecost which the account itself will not support. Acts 2:4 declares, "And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." That is what happened. But the Holy Ghost did not stop writing at verse 4. Two verses later, the Scripture states that "every man heard them speak in his own language" (Acts 2:6). Two verses after that, the astonished multitude asks, "And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?" (Acts 2:8). There is the inspired explanation of the inspired event. The hearers were not trying to interpret religious excitement; they were identifying their native languages. A doctrine that must ignore verses 6 through 11 to survive verse 4 has already demonstrated that it is not interested in the whole passage. The Bible does not need a professional interpreter to explain away its own explanation.

Pentecost must also be understood within the unfolding revelation of God's dealings with Israel and the beginning of the apostolic witness following the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. The men gathered in Jerusalem were not conducting an experimental worship service. They were obeying a specific command from the risen Lord, waiting for a specific promise, at a particular moment in redemptive history. The audience was

overwhelmingly Jewish, gathered in Jerusalem during one of Israel's appointed feasts. The signs were connected with the arrival of the promised Holy Ghost and the testimony that Jesus Christ, whom Israel had crucified, was risen and exalted. Before anyone attempts to turn this historical event into a required experience for every Christian, he must answer the ordinary questions that govern any honest Bible study. Who received the promise? What exactly occurred? Who witnessed the miracle? What did the witnesses understand? And what did God intend to accomplish? **A sign becomes religious superstition the moment its original message is discarded and the performance becomes more important than the truth it was given to confirm.**

1. The Command Before Pentecost: Wait for the Promise of the Father

Before Acts chapter 2 can be understood, Acts chapter 1 must be read. Following His resurrection, Jesus Christ appeared to His apostles and spoke concerning the kingdom of God. Acts 1:3 declares that He showed Himself alive after His passion "by many infallible proofs," being seen of them forty days. This was no gathering of men attempting to generate spiritual power through emotional exertion. They had witnessed the risen Christ and were receiving their final instructions before His ascension. In Acts 1:4, He commanded them "that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father." Notice the command. They were not told to manufacture the promise, imitate its effects, or organize meetings until something unusual happened. They were told to wait. The difference is considerable. Waiting upon a promise from God is faith; attempting to manufacture the appearance of that promise is presumption. The apostles possessed no authority to determine when the Holy Ghost would come, what outward signs would accompany His arrival, or how the events would unfold. God had already settled those matters.

Acts 1:5 identifies the promise more precisely: "For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence." Here the Lord distinguishes John's water baptism from the coming baptism with the Holy Ghost. The reference reaches back to John the Baptist's testimony in Matthew 3:11 and John 1:33, where Christ is identified as the One who baptizes with the Holy Ghost. Water baptism and Spirit baptism are not interchangeable expressions merely because the same word appears in both. One involves an outward ordinance performed with water; the other involves a divine operation beyond the authority of any preacher to perform. Furthermore, Matthew 3:11 must be read with verse 12, where unquenchable fire is associated with judgment upon the chaff. It will not do to borrow the fire of judgment, mix it with the promise of the Spirit, and advertise the result as a desirable religious sensation. Scripture distinguishes what religious enthusiasm frequently combines. **The Holy Ghost is not a commodity that can be distributed by a**

persuasive preacher, and the fire of judgment is not a spiritual achievement to be requested.

The purpose of the coming power is stated in Acts 1:8: "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." Christ did not promise power so that His servants could establish a reputation for extraordinary experiences. He promised power for witnessing concerning Himself. Jerusalem would hear first, followed by Judaea, Samaria, and the regions beyond. The entire Book of Acts develops along that movement, demonstrating how the gospel witness extended outward from Jerusalem. Luke 24:49 likewise records Christ commanding His disciples to tarry in Jerusalem until they were endued with power from on high. The power was connected to testimony, and the testimony was connected to Jesus Christ. That order cannot be reversed without damaging the passage. When religious movements make the manifestation the center of attention and reduce Jesus Christ to a convenient explanation for the excitement, they have placed the sign above the Saviour. The Holy Ghost came to empower Christ's witnesses, not to turn the witnesses into religious celebrities.

2. The Day Fully Come: The Sound, the Fire, and the Filling

Acts 2:1 begins with an important expression: "And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place." Pentecost was not invented by the disciples, nor did it begin with the events recorded in Acts. Its background is found in Israel's appointed feasts, particularly Leviticus 23:15–21 and Deuteronomy 16:9–12. The feast was connected with the counting of fifty days and was associated with Israel's worship before the LORD. Jews gathered in Jerusalem because the day already possessed significance within their national religious calendar. God chose that appointed occasion for the arrival of the Holy Ghost and the public demonstration that would accompany the apostolic witness. This setting matters because the miracle did not occur in an isolated gathering before an audience incapable of verifying anything. Jerusalem contained visitors from numerous regions who possessed different native languages. The appointed feast brought the very witnesses together who could recognize the supernatural character of what followed. God did not need to advertise the miracle. He arranged circumstances in which the miracle could speak for itself.

Acts 2:2 states, "And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting." Pay careful attention to the wording. The Scripture identifies a sound "as of" a rushing mighty wind. It does not require us to imagine the disciples being blown across the room by a physical storm. Verse 3 continues, "And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon

each of them." Again, observe the words "like as." The appearance resembled fire; the passage does not identify these visible tongues as literal flames consuming the disciples. The distinction matters because some religious interpretations depend upon treating comparisons as though they were identical substances. The sound was extraordinary, the visible manifestation was extraordinary, and both accompanied a divine event that men had not produced. There was no instruction to repeat these outward appearances whenever Christians assembled. An occurrence recorded in Scripture is not automatically a command for perpetual reproduction. **A man who cannot distinguish something resembling fire from the fire itself should probably postpone instructing the church about supernatural phenomena until he learns to read a comparison.**

Then comes Acts 2:4: "And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." Three facts deserve immediate recognition. First, the filling came from the Holy Ghost, not from the disciples' personal determination to experience something remarkable. Second, the speech was given as the Spirit enabled them; it was not the product of linguistic training or a rehearsed religious exercise. Third, the passage calls the speech "other tongues," and the following verses identify what those tongues were. This is also where careful distinctions become necessary. Acts 1:5 promised baptism with the Holy Ghost, while Acts 2:4 describes the disciples as filled with the Holy Ghost. These expressions should not be flattened into one indiscriminate religious slogan. Acts 11:15–16 later connects the Pentecostal event with the promise of Spirit baptism, while other passages describe subsequent fillings for boldness and service. The Bible uses different expressions for reasons worth examining. God does not confuse His operations; confusion enters when men abandon the words He selected to describe them.

3. Every Man Heard: The Miracle Was Understandable Language

The most decisive explanation of the tongues at Pentecost appears in Acts 2:5–8. Verse 5 identifies the assembled audience: "And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven." These men were connected with Israel, although their homes and native environments extended across many nations. Verse 6 explains their response when the extraordinary events became known: "Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language." There is the central fact. The multitude was confounded not because the speakers were producing meaningless sounds, but because the hearers recognized meaningful speech in languages familiar to them. The miracle astonished people precisely because they understood what ordinarily should not have been understandable from those particular speakers. Language was not abolished.

Communication was accomplished. The foreign words were not valuable because they sounded mysterious, but because they conveyed intelligible truth to people who could recognize them. Pentecost was a miracle of communication, not a festival of confusion.

Acts 2:7 presses the matter further: "And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans?" The hearers recognized a striking difference between the ordinary background of the speakers and the extraordinary languages coming from their mouths. These were not established representatives of the various nations whose languages were being heard. They were recognized as Galilaeans, yet their speech reached people from widely separated regions in languages native to those listeners. Verse 8 removes any possible ambiguity concerning the experience of the audience: "And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?" Notice that the people were not asking how to receive an identical experience. They were asking how these Galilaeans could speak languages associated with the places of their birth. Nobody was counting repeated syllables or declaring that incomprehensible speech must be holy because it sounded unusual. The hearers supplied the verification. **A miracle that communicates in a recognizable language does not become more supernatural when somebody replaces the language with noises nobody can identify.**

The wording of Acts 2 also restrains unnecessary speculation about the exact mechanics of the miracle. The Holy Ghost says that the disciples began speaking with other tongues, and the hearers testify that they heard their own languages. We therefore have inspired testimony concerning both supernatural utterance and intelligible reception. There is no need to invent an elaborate theory about invisible translation occurring between the speakers and listeners, nor is there any biblical authority for reducing the entire event to an ordinary speech accompanied by unusual auditory impressions. The account identifies the speakers as speaking other tongues and the hearers as recognizing their native languages. That is sufficient. The expression "every man" belongs to the assembled multitude and should not be stretched into a claim that every individual on earth heard the apostles that morning. The passage itself supplies its audience and geographical scope. This is how honest exposition operates: the statements are allowed to mean what their surrounding words establish. Scripture should not be enlarged into fantasy or reduced into metaphor simply because the supernatural event exceeds ordinary human ability.

4. The Nations Named: God Supplied the Witnesses and the Evidence

Acts 2:9–11 provides an extraordinary geographical description of the assembled hearers. The passage names Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and inhabitants of Mesopotamia, followed by Judaea, Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, and the parts of Libya about Cyrene. It then mentions strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes, and

Arabians. These were not decorative details added to make Luke's history more interesting. They establish the widespread origins and diverse linguistic backgrounds represented in Jerusalem. Some places named are territories or regions rather than distinct languages, so the list should not be misused as though every geographical designation automatically represented one separate tongue. Nevertheless, the emphasis is unmistakable: people from widely separated places were hearing words they understood. They were qualified to recognize whether the language associated with their homeland was being spoken. The miracle was public, observable, and connected with identifiable testimony. An apostolic sign did not require the hearers to surrender their senses. The supernatural character of the event was demonstrated through what those senses could actually verify.

Verse 11 records the content of the speech: "we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God." This is one of the most neglected statements in the entire discussion. The languages were not merely impressive sounds. They communicated the wonderful works of God. That fact supplies both the substance and direction of the manifestation. God was being magnified through intelligible words, and the hearers understood enough to identify the subject. Compare this with the purpose of the Spirit's ministry in John 16:13–14, where the Lord declares that the Spirit of truth will guide into truth and glorify Christ. The Holy Ghost does not arrive to establish a competition in religious spectacularity. His ministry directs attention toward divine truth and the Lord Jesus Christ. The gift of tongues served that purpose at Pentecost because it enabled witnesses to communicate God's works across linguistic boundaries. **A miracle that magnifies God's works has fulfilled a nobler purpose than a performance that merely persuades an audience to admire the person performing it.**

The crowd's reaction in Acts 2:12–13 reveals two responses to the same extraordinary occurrence. Some were amazed and in doubt, asking, "What meaneth this?" Others mocked, saying, "These men are full of new wine." The presence of mockers does not prove that the languages were meaningless. The earlier verses establish the intelligibility of the speech to those who recognized their own tongues. An audience composed of people from different linguistic backgrounds would naturally contain hearers who understood certain languages and others who did not understand everything being spoken. Mockery does not cancel the testimony of those who understood. When Peter stands to address the multitude in verse 14, he answers the accusation of drunkenness and explains the event from Scripture. The account therefore moves from the visible and audible sign to the authoritative proclamation of God's Word. That movement is important. Religious excitement was not permitted to remain unexplained, and the experience was not established as a substitute for doctrine. Peter opened his mouth and preached. The signs attracted attention; the Scripture supplied the explanation.

5. Babel and Pentecost: The Difference Between Human Pride and Divine Revelation

Genesis 11 provides an illuminating background for the miracle of Pentecost, but the two passages must not be confused. At Babel, mankind possessed one language and one speech, according to Genesis 11:1. The people determined to build a city and a tower, declaring in verse 4, "let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." Their undertaking was driven by collective human determination and a desire to establish their own greatness. God had commanded mankind to multiply and replenish the earth, yet the builders sought a centralized monument to human achievement. Genesis 11:7 records the LORD's declaration: "Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." The immediate consequence was divided communication, frustrated cooperation, and the scattering described in verses 8–9. Language became an instrument of divine judgment upon organized human rebellion. Their great undertaking stopped because people who could previously communicate no longer understood one another. A tower built to advertise human greatness became a monument to human limitation.

At Pentecost, the situation was remarkably different. The diversity of languages already existed, and the miracle did not eliminate that diversity. God did not restore one universal earthly language, nor did He gather mankind into another unified empire. Instead, He enabled His servants to speak in languages recognizable to people from different nations. At Babel, people attempted to make themselves a name; at Pentecost, God's servants declared His wonderful works. At Babel, the Lord confounded the speech of proud men; at Pentecost, the Holy Ghost enabled understandable testimony concerning divine truth. The contrast is striking, but it should not be pushed beyond the biblical record. Pentecost did not reverse every consequence of Babel, remove national distinctions, or fulfill every promise concerning the future restoration of creation. Its immediate setting was Jerusalem, its audience included Jews from many nations, and its apostolic message concerned the risen and exalted Christ. The relationship between the passages is therefore one of instructive contrast rather than complete prophetic identity. **Human pride built a tower and lost its common language; divine grace supplied languages so that men could hear of God's works.**

This comparison also demonstrates why spiritual gifts must remain subordinate to God's revealed purpose. The builders of Babel possessed considerable cooperation, organization, and determination, yet their united effort stood contrary to God's will. Pentecost involved supernatural ability directed toward testimony concerning the Lord. Mere unity is therefore not evidence of divine approval, and extraordinary ability is not valuable apart from obedience to God's Word. A congregation can become impressively

united around a practice that Scripture never authorizes, just as the builders at Babel were thoroughly united around a project God judged. Genesis 11 teaches the danger of organizing human greatness against divine instruction; Acts 2 demonstrates divine power accomplishing what human ability could not accomplish. The moral is not that every language barrier will disappear whenever Christians gather, but that God's purposes do not depend upon man's natural limitations. The Holy Ghost needed no academy of languages to equip the disciples for the testimony given that day. Yet He also did not produce meaningless speech and then demand that ignorance be accepted as spiritual maturity.

6. The Galilaeans, the Apostles, and the Converts: Who Actually Spoke?

An important question concerns the identity and number of those who spoke with other tongues at Pentecost. Acts 1:15 records approximately one hundred and twenty disciples gathered together, while Acts 1:26 concludes with Matthias being numbered with the eleven apostles. Acts 2:1 then states that "they were all with one accord in one place." The immediate historical background includes the larger gathering, and interpreters have differed concerning precisely how many people experienced the manifestations described in Acts 2:1–4. However, several details place the twelve apostles prominently in view. Acts 2:7 identifies the speakers as Galilaeans, and Acts 2:14 specifically records Peter standing up "with the eleven" to address the multitude. The passage therefore plainly establishes apostolic leadership in the event. It does not give permission to insist that every one of the hundred and twenty necessarily spoke in foreign languages. Neither should an interpreter pretend that the presence of the twelve resolves every question concerning the experience of the larger group. What Scripture establishes must be affirmed, and what it does not specify must not be manufactured merely to win an argument.

The same restraint becomes even more important when examining those converted after Peter's preaching. Acts 2:41 declares, "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls." Here is a remarkable record of thousands responding to apostolic preaching. Yet the passage does not record those three thousand converts speaking in tongues. The sign occurred among the witnesses before Peter delivered his sermon, while the converts are described as receiving the Word, being baptized, and being added to the company of believers. If tongues were an absolutely necessary outward evidence accompanying the salvation of every individual, this would be an extraordinary omission in a chapter supposedly establishing that requirement. The Holy Ghost was certainly capable of recording such an event had He intended to establish it. Instead, He records the miracle among the original witnesses and the reception of the Word among those who believed. The absence of a recorded manifestation must not be exaggerated into a claim about everything that could

possibly have happened, but neither may an unrecorded manifestation be imposed upon the text as a doctrinal requirement.

The broader New Testament confirms the need to distinguish the reception of the Spirit from the particular distribution of miraculous gifts. First Corinthians 12:13 declares, "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body," while verse 30 asks, "do all speak with tongues?" The question belongs to Paul's explanation that the members of Christ's Body do not all possess identical gifts. The universal truth of Spirit baptism cannot be reduced to one gift which Paul expressly distinguishes among believers. Ephesians 1:13 likewise declares that believers, after hearing the word of truth and believing, were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. There is no additional requirement in that passage that salvation must be authenticated by speaking a foreign language. Furthermore, Acts 4:31 describes believers being filled with the Holy Ghost and speaking the Word of God with boldness, without recording a repetition of the Pentecostal tongues. The Book of Acts itself refuses to make every filling identical in its outward manifestation. **The Spirit of God is not absent because a believer lacks a particular sign, and a dramatic sign is not permission to abandon the doctrine God has written.**

7. Peter's Explanation: The Sign Pointed to the Risen Christ

The most serious error concerning Pentecost is to make the tongues the principal message while treating Peter's sermon as an afterthought. Acts 2:14 begins with Peter standing with the eleven and directly addressing the assembled Jews. He identifies the hour of the day in verse 15 to answer the accusation of drunkenness, then declares in verse 16, "But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel." The prophecy quoted in Acts 2:17–21 includes the pouring out of God's Spirit, prophecy, visions, dreams, wonders in heaven, signs in the earth, and the coming of the great and notable day of the Lord. The original setting in Joel 2 concerns Israel, the day of the LORD, and God's prophetic dealings with His people. Pentecost displayed the operation of the Holy Ghost which Peter connected with that prophetic revelation, but the entire prophecy was not exhausted on that morning. The sun was not turned into darkness, the moon was not turned into blood, and the great prophetic events associated with the day of the LORD had not all occurred. Peter was not authorizing men to erase the future fulfillment of prophecy merely because a present event corresponded to part of its announcement.

Peter's sermon then moves directly to Jesus Christ. Acts 2:22 addresses "Ye men of Israel" and describes Jesus of Nazareth as a man approved of God among them "by miracles and wonders and signs." The audience, national setting, and divine credentials are plainly identified. Peter proceeds to declare Christ's crucifixion, resurrection, and exaltation, drawing upon the Psalms to demonstrate the scriptural necessity of these events. Acts 2:32

states, "This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses." Verse 33 then provides the explanation connecting the exalted Christ with what the crowd had observed: "Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear." There is the inspired interpretation of Pentecost. The signs testified to the exalted Lord Jesus Christ and the fulfillment of His promise. Peter was not establishing an independent religious fascination with tongues. He was declaring that the crucified Jesus had risen and was seated at God's right hand. **The Holy Ghost did not descend to replace the preaching of Christ with a performance; He descended as testimony to the Christ whom Peter preached.**

Acts 2:36 brings the sermon to its forceful conclusion: "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ." The audience cannot be mistaken. Peter is addressing the house of Israel and confronting that nation with the guilt associated with its rejection of the Messiah. Verse 37 records the hearers being pricked in their hearts, asking Peter and the other apostles what they should do. Their response must be studied in its historical setting rather than mechanically transferred into every later presentation of the gospel. The Book of Acts records a transitional period in which God's dealings with Israel, the apostolic signs, and the progressive revelation concerning the Body of Christ must be distinguished carefully. The present proclamation of salvation by grace through faith is plainly stated in Ephesians 2:8–9 and the gospel of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection is set forth in 1 Corinthians 15:1–4. The truth that salvation rests upon Jesus Christ must never be replaced by a demand for a particular outward manifestation. Peter's central testimony was that Jesus Christ had risen, and the miracles served that testimony. A religion that celebrates tongues while neglecting the crucified and risen Saviour has retained the spectacle and misplaced the substance.

Conclusion

The opening thirteen verses of Acts chapter 2 present a genuine supernatural event, recorded by the Holy Ghost, witnessed by men from numerous regions, and explained through the preaching of the apostle Peter. The sound from heaven, the appearance of cloven tongues like as of fire, the filling of the disciples, and the speaking in other tongues belonged to a particular moment in God's revealed purpose. The speech was not meaningless religious noise. It was recognizable language understood by people who knew what they were hearing. Acts 2:8 remains an unavoidable obstacle to any attempt to redefine Pentecost into an exercise in unintelligible vocal repetition: "And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?" That statement places the

responsibility for explaining the phenomenon directly upon the biblical account rather than upon modern enthusiasm. A claimed supernatural experience does not become equivalent to Pentecost merely because somebody attaches the word *tongues* to it. The characteristics of the original event must govern the comparison. **A biblical label cannot transform an unbiblical practice into an apostolic miracle.**

This does not mean that every person claiming an extraordinary spiritual experience must knowingly be dishonest, nor does it mean that God has somehow surrendered His ability to perform miracles. Scripture establishes the power of God beyond question. The issue is whether a particular experience corresponds to the gift described in the biblical record and whether its doctrinal claims agree with the Word of God. The distinction matters because religious sincerity cannot establish a miracle, and emotional certainty cannot overturn an inspired passage. If a person claims that unintelligible sounds prove the baptism of the Holy Ghost, Acts 2 must be examined. If he insists that every saved individual must speak in tongues, the record of the three thousand converts and the teaching of 1 Corinthians 12 must be examined. If he claims that spiritual power requires the surrender of understanding, the intelligible testimony at Pentecost stands against that conclusion. The Christian's confidence belongs in the Scriptures, not in the ability of a meeting to produce unusual sounds. Faith believes what God recorded; presumption demands that God endorse what men have added.

Pentecost directs our attention beyond the extraordinary languages to the extraordinary Person whom those signs authenticated. Jesus Christ was crucified, buried, raised from the dead, and exalted at the right hand of the Father. The promised Holy Ghost came, the apostolic witnesses proclaimed God's wonderful works, and Peter confronted Israel with the truth concerning her rejected Messiah. The miracle had a message, the message had an Author, and the Author had already explained why His witnesses would receive power. No Christian needs to despise the genuine supernatural works of God to reject an unauthorized imitation of them. On the contrary, reverence for what God actually did demands that His mighty works not be reduced to whatever a religious movement finds impressive. The next time somebody insists that Pentecost proves the necessity of unintelligible speech, open Acts chapter 2 and read verses 6 through 11 aloud. Allow the people who witnessed the event to tell you what they heard. They understood the languages. They recognized the miracle. They heard the wonderful works of God. **At Pentecost, the Holy Ghost gave men tongues so that others could understand the truth. Religion has spent centuries trying to convince people that the absence of understanding is the miracle. God has already settled the matter in black and white.**

2 of 10 — Tongues, Signs, and Wonders — The Jews Require a Sign: Israel, Judgment, and the Purpose of Tongues

Primary Text: 1 Corinthians 1:22; 14:20–22; Isaiah 28:9–13; Deuteronomy 28:49; Acts 2:14–36

Introduction

One of the quickest ways to turn the Bible into a religious circus is to take a sign God gave for a particular purpose, remove the people to whom it was directed, ignore the circumstances under which it appeared, and then sell the performance to somebody else as evidence of superior spirituality. That is precisely what has happened to the biblical gift of tongues. The apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 1:22, "For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom." The statement is not a decorative observation about religious personalities. It identifies a significant historical distinction in the way men responded to divine revelation. Israel possessed a long history of miraculous signs connected with God's messengers, covenant dealings, and prophetic warnings. The Greeks were characteristically occupied with human wisdom. Yet Paul did not offer either group whatever appealed to its natural appetite. The next verse declares, "But we preach Christ crucified." There is the dividing line. **God gave signs to establish His testimony; religion eventually turned the signs into attractions and forgot the testimony altogether.**

The gift of tongues belongs within that history of divine revelation, particularly the prophetic relationship between Israel, foreign languages, and national unbelief. First Corinthians 14:21 records Paul's remarkable quotation: "In the law it is written, With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that will they not hear me, saith the Lord." Paul then announces in verse 22, "Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not." Those words destroy the notion that tongues were principally bestowed as a spiritual trophy for believers who had reached some extraordinary level of religious achievement. The apostle connects the gift with unbelief and supports that connection from an Old Testament prophecy involving Israel's refusal to hear God. The historical foundation is not a modern prayer meeting, an emotional altar service, or somebody repeating unfamiliar syllables until a preacher congratulates him. The foundation is the Word of God addressing a disobedient nation through a language that testifies against its unbelief.

The subject therefore requires more than asking whether miraculous tongues once existed. They did. Acts chapter 2 establishes that beyond dispute. The serious questions concern why God gave them, what they communicated, whom they confronted, and whether their original purpose authorizes modern attempts to reproduce them as an ordinary

requirement for Christian experience. We must trace the biblical evidence from Moses and the signs authenticating his commission, through the miracles of Jesus Christ, into Isaiah's warning concerning foreign speech, and finally to the apostolic ministry recorded in Acts and explained in Corinthians. Throughout the examination, Israel must remain Israel, the Church must remain the Church, and the gospel of grace must not be buried beneath religious demonstrations. God has never needed a counterfeit miracle to authenticate a genuine Bible. And a man who refuses to examine the purpose of a sign has no business claiming that he possesses it. **Before asking whether the sign is operating today, find out why God put it there in the first place.**

1. Moses and the Beginning of Israel's Sign Testimony

When God commissioned Moses to deliver Israel from Egyptian bondage, the question of miraculous signs arose immediately. Exodus 4:1 records Moses asking, "But, behold, they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice: for they will say, The LORD hath not appeared unto thee." Notice the problem. Moses was claiming divine authority to speak and act on God's behalf, and the people would need reason to recognize that authority. The LORD responded by providing specific miraculous demonstrations. Moses' rod became a serpent, his hand became leprous and was restored, and the water taken from the river would become blood upon dry land. These were not entertainments designed to improve attendance at religious gatherings. They accompanied a divine commission and served as credentials identifying the messenger whom God had sent. Exodus 4:5 gives the stated purpose: "That they may believe that the LORD God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath appeared unto thee." God identified Himself through the covenants associated with Israel's fathers. The signs were attached to that revelation.

Exodus 4:8–9 shows that the signs themselves did not guarantee faith. God told Moses that if the people would not believe the voice of the first sign, they might believe the second; and if they refused both, another demonstration would follow. This establishes an important principle frequently ignored in modern discussions of miracles. A supernatural sign may provide genuine evidence without producing obedience in the person who witnesses it. Pharaoh would eventually observe extraordinary judgments and repeatedly harden his heart against the LORD. Exodus 7:3 records God's intention to multiply His signs and wonders in Egypt, while Exodus 7:5 explains that the Egyptians would know that He was the LORD. The miracles authenticated divine authority and demonstrated judgment upon a rebellious kingdom. They were not permission for Moses to establish an independent miracle ministry and charge admission at the palace gates. **The rod was never the message; the God who commanded Moses was the message.** Anyone who

makes the instrument more important than the divine revelation has already misunderstood the purpose of the sign.

The same Old Testament Scriptures warn against assuming that a remarkable supernatural event automatically establishes the truthfulness of its performer. Deuteronomy 13:1–3 describes a prophet or dreamer who gives a sign or wonder that comes to pass, yet attempts to draw Israel after other gods. God commanded His people not to hearken unto that false messenger. That is an astonishing safeguard against religious deception. Even when something extraordinary occurs, its appearance cannot overturn previously revealed truth. Deuteronomy 13:4 requires Israel to walk after the LORD, fear Him, keep His commandments, and obey His voice. Miraculous evidence was never permitted to replace doctrinal obedience. The God who authenticated Moses through signs also warned Israel that signs could be associated with false religious claims. Consequently, the mere assertion that something supernatural happened does not settle whether the event came from God. **A miracle cannot make a lie true, and a religious performance cannot repeal a verse of Scripture.** The Word of God remains the standard by which the claim must be examined.

2. The Messiah and the Miracles Israel Was Supposed to Recognize

When Jesus Christ appeared in Israel, His miracles were not disconnected exhibitions of supernatural ability. They identified Him as the promised Messiah and bore testimony to His divine authority. John 2:11 states concerning the changing of water into wine at Cana, "This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him." The miracle manifested His glory and supported faith in His Person. John 20:30–31 later explains that Jesus performed many signs in the presence of His disciples, and that the recorded testimony was written so readers might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. The purpose was not to persuade the audience that extraordinary phenomena were desirable experiences in themselves. The purpose was to establish the identity of the Lord Jesus Christ. Isaiah 35:5–6 had already described miraculous healings associated with divine deliverance, and Matthew 11:4–5 records Christ directing John's disciples to consider the works being accomplished. The miracles testified concerning the One whom Israel was supposed to receive.

Yet Israel's appetite for signs frequently revealed unbelief rather than faith. In John 4:48, Jesus declared, "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe." The statement confronted dependence upon visible demonstrations instead of confidence in His Word. The nobleman whose son was sick nevertheless received Christ's declaration, "Go thy way; thy son liveth," and John 4:50 records that the man believed the word Jesus had spoken. John 6 presents an even sharper rebuke. After the miraculous feeding, crowds sought

Christ, but He exposed their motive in verse 26: they followed because they had eaten the loaves and were filled. They wanted the benefits of divine power without submitting to the claims of the divine Person. There is a religious crowd in every generation that would gladly accept another miraculous supper while complaining if the preacher spent the afternoon explaining sound doctrine. **The flesh will applaud a miracle that fills its stomach while rejecting the Saviour who demands its faith.**

Matthew 12:38–40 records certain scribes and Pharisees demanding a sign from Christ, despite the evidence already presented throughout His ministry. The Lord answered by identifying the sign of the prophet Jonas, directing attention toward His coming death, burial, and resurrection. Their demand did not arise from an innocent absence of evidence. They had witnessed enough to be responsible for their unbelief. John 12:37 declares, "But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him." The problem was therefore not a shortage of supernatural demonstrations. It was the refusal to receive the testimony those demonstrations confirmed. This background is essential when Paul declares that the Jews require a sign. The statement identifies a historical characteristic; it does not commend the endless demand for miraculous proof. First Corinthians 1:23 immediately places the crucified Christ before both Jews and Greeks. To the unbelieving Jew, He was a stumblingblock; to the Greek, foolishness. God did not promise to satisfy every religious appetite. He commanded men to believe the truth concerning His Son.

3. Isaiah's Warning: When Foreign Languages Became a Testimony of Judgment

The decisive Old Testament background for understanding tongues appears in Isaiah 28. The chapter begins by exposing pride, drunkenness, and corruption among those who should have responded to God's instruction. Isaiah 28:7 declares that priests and prophets had erred through wine and strong drink, staggering in judgment and stumbling in vision. The spiritual leadership was thoroughly compromised. Verse 9 asks, "Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine?" Verse 10 continues with the familiar expression, "For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little." The surrounding passage reveals the scornful atmosphere in which God's instruction was being treated with contempt. Verse 14 specifically addresses the scornful men ruling in Jerusalem. These were not innocent people being denied an opportunity to understand revelation. They were leaders who had become contemptuous of divine correction. When men entrusted with God's Word begin mocking its instruction, judgment is not far behind. **A nation that laughs at God's warnings should not be surprised when the next message arrives through the language of its conquerors.**

Isaiah 28:11 declares, "For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people." Verse 12 explains that God had offered rest and refreshing, "yet they would not hear." Verse 13 then describes the consequence: the Word of the LORD would be unto them in repeated precepts and lines, "that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken." Observe the movement from rejected instruction to judicial consequence. The foreign tongue is not introduced as a delightful spiritual sensation for those seeking a higher religious experience. It appears within a warning against unbelief. The people had refused the clear instruction already available to them, and the testimony associated with unfamiliar speech would expose their condition. Paul later quotes this passage because the prophetic principle explains the sign function of tongues. The issue is not merely whether foreign words can sound impressive. The issue is what those words signify when God employs them as testimony against people refusing to hear Him.

Deuteronomy 28:49 strengthens this connection between foreign languages and national judgment. Moses warned Israel that covenant disobedience would bring a nation against them from far away, "a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand." The following verses describe military invasion, siege, suffering, and devastating judgment. Jeremiah 5:15 likewise warns the house of Israel concerning a mighty nation "whose language thou knowest not, neither understandest what they say." These passages establish a serious pattern. Israel's exposure to foreign speech could accompany the arrival of enemies raised up as instruments of divine chastisement. This does not mean that every foreign language was a judgment or that communication across national boundaries was inherently evil. It means that God had specifically connected unintelligible foreign speech with certain covenant warnings. Isaiah 28 must be read within that history. The people who would not hear God's understandable Word would encounter the consequences of their refusal. **When a people reject the language of divine instruction, they may eventually hear the language of divine judgment.**

4. Paul's Explanation: Tongues Are a Sign to Unbelievers

First Corinthians 14:20 begins with a rebuke that deserves more attention than it ordinarily receives: "Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men." Paul is correcting immature thinking within a congregation already troubled by pride, division, and disorder. He does not praise the Corinthians for their fascination with impressive manifestations. He commands them to grow up in their understanding. Then, in verse 21, he introduces Isaiah's warning: "In the law it is written, With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that will they not hear me, saith the Lord." Although the quotation comes from Isaiah, Paul employs the expression "in the law" in the broader scriptural sense. The identity of "this

people" comes from the Old Testament setting, where Israel's rejection of God's revelation is under examination. Paul is not quoting a passage about religious entertainment. He is quoting a passage about unbelief and the divine testimony accompanying judgment.

The conclusion appears in verse 22: "Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not: but prophesying serveth not for them that believe not, but for them which believe." The word "wherefore" connects Paul's conclusion directly with the Old Testament passage. Tongues possess a sign function associated with unbelief. This does not require every unbeliever who hears tongues to be Jewish, nor does it mean that no Gentile ever witnessed an apostolic sign. Corinth itself contained Jewish and Gentile hearers, and the wider apostolic ministry extended beyond Israel. Nevertheless, Paul's choice of Isaiah demonstrates that the prophetic background concerning Israel is indispensable to understanding the gift. The historical sign must be distinguished from the broader usefulness of gifts within the assembly. Tongues could serve a sign function without becoming a necessary mark of salvation in every Christian. **The Holy Ghost called tongues a sign to unbelievers; religious ambition turned them into a medal for believers to display.**

Some object that verses 23–25 appear to contradict verse 22 because Paul says that an unbeliever entering an assembly where everybody speaks with tongues will conclude that the congregation is mad. There is no contradiction. Paul is distinguishing the appointed sign function from the consequences of disorderly and unintelligible public exercise. Verse 23 describes everyone speaking with tongues in such a manner that an uninstructed visitor cannot follow what is being communicated. The result is confusion rather than conviction. By contrast, verses 24–25 describe prophecy making divine truth understandable, exposing the secrets of the heart, and producing acknowledgment that God is among them. The passage demonstrates that the possession of a genuine gift does not authorize its misuse. A sign directed toward unbelief is not guaranteed to produce faith when employed contrary to apostolic instructions. Paul is correcting the very assumption that spectacular activity must necessarily accomplish spiritual good. The Corinthians wanted manifestations; Paul demanded edification, understanding, and order. A church may possess extraordinary claims and still behave foolishly if it refuses the governing Word of God.

5. Pentecost: Israel Heard the Languages and Rejected Messiah Confronted Them

Acts chapter 2 provides the great historical demonstration of tongues operating within the Jewish setting Paul later addresses. Jerusalem was filled with devout Jews from numerous nations, gathered during an appointed feast. Acts 2:6 records that every man heard the disciples speak in his own language, and verse 8 identifies those languages as the tongues wherein the hearers were born. The miracle was recognizable communication. The crowd

did not need to accept the private assertion of a speaker that meaningless noises represented divine revelation. People familiar with the languages could identify what was being said. Acts 2:11 records their testimony: "we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God." This was supernatural speech directed toward an audience whose religious history had already established the importance of miraculous signs. Isaiah's warning concerned foreign languages in connection with unbelief; Pentecost presented genuine foreign languages while Israel confronted the testimony of her rejected Messiah. The setting was neither accidental nor spiritually insignificant.

Peter's explanation confirms the audience and the message. In Acts 2:14, he addresses "Ye men of Judaea," and in verse 22, "Ye men of Israel." He declares that Jesus of Nazareth had been approved of God among them "by miracles and wonders and signs," which God did by Him in their midst. The same nation that had witnessed Christ's miraculous credentials had participated in His rejection. Peter then announces His death, resurrection, and exaltation, demonstrating from Scripture that Jesus Christ was the promised Messiah. Acts 2:32 declares, "This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses." Verse 33 identifies the exalted Christ as the One who shed forth what the assembled multitude could see and hear. The sign therefore authenticated a message concerning Jesus Christ. It was not an independent spiritual attraction designed to establish a new religious hobby. **God did not give Israel a spectacular language lesson so that men could admire the speakers; He gave unmistakable testimony concerning the Saviour the nation had crucified.**

Acts 2:36 brings the sermon to its point: "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ." Notice that Peter's conclusion is not an invitation to imitate the miraculous languages. It is a declaration concerning the identity of Jesus Christ and Israel's responsibility before God. The audience was confronted with the terrible contrast between the nation's rejection of her Messiah and God's exaltation of that same Messiah. The prophetic signs accompanying Pentecost must be understood within that setting. Peter also quotes Joel's prophecy concerning the Spirit and the coming day of the LORD, but the entire prophetic program described in Joel was not exhausted that morning. The future judgments and visible signs associated with the day of the LORD must remain in their proper place. Likewise, the later destruction of Jerusalem demonstrates the seriousness of Israel's national rejection, although Isaiah 28 must not be reduced to a prediction of one later historical event alone. Pentecost was a remarkable testimony of divine mercy offered in the midst of solemn national responsibility.

6. From Jerusalem to the Gentiles: Signs During the Apostolic Transition

The Book of Acts records the gospel witness moving from Jerusalem into Judaea, Samaria, and the Gentile world, exactly as Christ announced in Acts 1:8. This historical development explains why miraculous signs appear at significant moments in the apostolic ministry. In Acts 8, the Samaritans received the Word of God, and Peter and John came from Jerusalem in connection with their reception of the Holy Ghost. Yet the passage does not explicitly record the Samaritans speaking with tongues. In Acts 10, the circumstances surrounding Cornelius were different. While Peter preached, the Holy Ghost fell upon the Gentiles hearing the Word. Acts 10:45 records that the Jewish believers accompanying Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Ghost had been poured out upon the Gentiles also. Verse 46 explains that they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. The sign supplied recognizable testimony that believing Gentiles had received the Holy Ghost. The Jewish witnesses were not instructed to establish a new ceremony; they were witnessing God's acceptance of Gentiles through faith.

Acts 11:15–18 supplies Peter's own explanation of the Cornelius event. He declared that the Holy Ghost fell upon those Gentiles "as on us at the beginning," recalling the promise of baptism with the Holy Ghost. When the Jewish believers heard Peter's testimony, they glorified God and acknowledged that He had granted repentance unto life to the Gentiles. The miracle therefore served an identifiable purpose during the transition from the initial Jewish-centered witness to the inclusion of believing Gentiles. Acts 15:8–9 later records Peter declaring that God gave the Gentiles the Holy Ghost and purified their hearts by faith. The doctrinal point is not that Gentiles needed to imitate Jewish religious practices before salvation could become effective. God testified that salvation extended to them through faith. Acts 19:1–7 records another unusual event involving approximately twelve disciples connected with John's baptism who subsequently received the Holy Ghost and spoke with tongues and prophesied. These events possess distinct historical circumstances. Treating every case as an identical pattern requires ignoring the very differences Scripture records.

The apostolic period also involved signs confirming the authority of those commissioned to establish and proclaim the revealed message. Acts 14:3 describes the Lord granting signs and wonders to be done by the hands of Paul and Barnabas, bearing witness to the word of His grace. Hebrews 2:3–4 speaks of salvation first spoken by the Lord and confirmed by those who heard Him, God bearing witness "both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will." Second Corinthians 12:12 identifies signs, wonders, and mighty deeds among the credentials associated with Paul's apostleship. The signs accompanied divine revelation and authenticated the appointed witnesses. Ephesians 2:20 describes the Church as built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone. Foundations are laid for a purpose; they are not endlessly relaid whenever somebody wishes to advertise

himself as another apostle. **A man does not inherit apostolic credentials merely by borrowing apostolic vocabulary. The title is cheap; the divine commission and evidence are another matter.**

7. The Enduring Gospel and the Error of Demanding Apostolic Signs Today

The doctrinal distinction between salvation and spiritual gifts becomes unavoidable when Paul addresses the Body of Christ. First Corinthians 12:13 declares, "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body," including Jews and Gentiles, bond and free. The word "all" establishes the universal position of believers in Christ's Body. Yet in verse 30, Paul asks, "do all speak with tongues?" The question belongs to a sequence demonstrating that all members do not possess identical gifts. A universal spiritual operation cannot honestly be made dependent upon a particular gift which Paul does not attribute to every believer. Ephesians 1:13 further explains that those who heard the word of truth and believed were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. Salvation is not made secure by producing a miraculous sound, nor is the believer's position in Christ established by the testimony of an excited congregation. Romans 8:9 declares that those belonging to Christ possess His Spirit. The Christian does not need to chase apostolic manifestations to obtain what God has already given through faith in His Son.

First Corinthians 14 also establishes that even when the gift of tongues was operating, its exercise remained under strict regulation. Verse 19 records Paul's preference for speaking five words with his understanding, so that he might teach others, rather than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue. Verses 27–28 require limited participation, orderly speaking, and interpretation, with silence commanded when no interpreter is present. Verse 33 declares that God is not the author of confusion, and verse 40 requires everything to be done decently and in order. Modern practices must be examined against those standards rather than excused by appealing to the intensity of an experience. The historical cessation of apostolic sign gifts follows the distinction between their foundational purpose and the continuing ministries established through the completed apostolic witness. Scripture does not provide a calendar date announcing the final occurrence of every miraculous gift, and 1 Corinthians 13:10 should not be casually turned into a statement that the completion of the biblical canon is itself the meaning of "that which is perfect." A sound doctrinal conclusion must rest upon sound exposition, not a convenient shortcut.

Finally, rejecting modern claims to possess apostolic sign gifts does not require denying God's ability to perform miracles. God remains omnipotent. He answers prayer, governs His creation, intervenes according to His will, and possesses authority over sickness, life, and death. The question is whether a man today possesses the same identifying credentials bestowed upon the foundational apostles, not whether the Almighty has

somehow lost His power. Scripture also warns that extraordinary signs cannot automatically establish doctrinal truth. Matthew 24:24 describes future false Christs and false prophets showing great signs and wonders, while 2 Thessalonians 2:9–12 concerns satanic deception associated with the coming of the lawless one. Those prophetic passages must not be carelessly transferred to every disputed religious meeting today, but they establish the danger of trusting manifestations without testing their source and message. First John 4:1 commands believers to try the spirits. **The Christian who believes every supernatural claim is not demonstrating exceptional faith. He is disregarding the inspired warnings God gave to protect him from deception.**

Conclusion

The biblical purpose of tongues cannot be understood apart from Israel's history, Israel's response to divine revelation, and Israel's prophetic warnings concerning unbelief and judgment. Moses received signs authenticating his commission before the children of Israel. Jesus Christ performed miracles demonstrating His identity as the promised Messiah. Isaiah warned that God would speak to a stubborn people through unfamiliar lips after they had rejected His instruction. Deuteronomy identified foreign speech among the terrible consequences of national covenant disobedience. Paul then quoted Isaiah to establish that tongues possessed a sign function directed toward unbelief. At Pentecost, men from numerous nations understood languages supernaturally spoken by Christ's witnesses, and Peter proclaimed the resurrection and exaltation of the Messiah whom Israel had rejected. The biblical evidence moves consistently toward divine testimony, not religious exhibition. **The sign was not given to make the messenger famous; it was given to make the message unmistakable.** When the purpose is forgotten, even an accurate description of the original miracle can become the foundation for an inaccurate doctrine.

The argument also exposes the danger of demanding that every believer reproduce the extraordinary manifestations associated with the apostolic period. Paul did not teach that all Christians possess the gift of tongues. He explicitly distinguished its distribution among members of the Body of Christ while affirming the common Spirit baptism of all believers. The Book of Acts records genuine conversions and fillings of the Holy Ghost without identifying tongues as the required outward evidence in every instance. The foundational apostles possessed credentials connected with their divine commission, and those credentials cannot be manufactured by repetition, emotional excitement, persuasive preaching, or religious tradition. Furthermore, the prophetic relationship between tongues and Israel's unbelief prevents the gift from being reduced to a private badge of spiritual superiority. The genuine gift had purposes established by God, and those purposes must determine how the historical record is understood. **A sign without its biblical purpose is**

like a warning trumpet blown after the army has forgotten the battle. It makes noise, but the people no longer know what the signal means.

The final issue is the authority of the Word of God over the claims of human experience. The gospel committed to the Church announces that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, was buried, and rose again the third day according to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:3–4). Salvation is received by grace through faith, not through ceremonial performance, miraculous display, or the ability to speak an unfamiliar language. The believer is sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise and called to grow through sound doctrine, obedience, charity, and faithful service. There is no need to imitate Pentecost, borrow Isaiah's judgment language, or parade apostolic credentials that God has not granted. Every legitimate biblical sign points beyond itself to the truth God intended to establish. When a religious system makes the sign indispensable while treating the revealed message as secondary, it has reversed the divine order. **Israel was given signs and still rejected the Saviour. The Church has the revealed testimony of that Saviour and must not repeat Israel's unbelief by demanding spectacles in place of Scripture. The power was God's, the signs served His purpose, and the final authority remains His written Word.**

3 of 10 — Tongues, Signs, and Wonders — Cornelius and the Gentile Door: Why Tongues Appeared Again

Primary Text: Acts 8:5–25; 10:1–48; 11:1–18; 15:7–11

Introduction

There is a remarkable difference between reading the Book of Acts as the inspired record of what God actually accomplished and treating it like a religious hardware store where every denomination selects the parts necessary to assemble its favorite doctrine. One group reaches into Acts chapter 2 and pulls out water baptism. Another reaches into Acts chapter 8 and retrieves the laying on of hands. Another arrives at Acts chapter 10, discovers tongues accompanying the reception of the Holy Ghost, and promptly announces that every Christian must repeat the experience. By the time the religious mechanics finish their work, salvation has acquired so many additional requirements that the finished product scarcely resembles the gospel of the grace of God. Yet the Holy Ghost recorded these events for a reason, and that reason becomes unmistakable when the historical circumstances are examined. The conversion of Cornelius was not an ordinary religious meeting with an extraordinary conclusion. It was a decisive demonstration that

God had opened the door of salvation to believing Gentiles without requiring them to become Jews first. **The miracle was not given to manufacture a new condition for salvation, but to destroy a religious barrier men were determined to preserve.**

Acts 10:44–46 records the extraordinary event: "While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word." The Jewish believers accompanying Peter were astonished because the gift of the Holy Ghost had been poured out upon Gentiles also, and the passage explains, "For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God." There is the historical occurrence. But why were the Jewish witnesses astonished? Why did the Holy Ghost fall before anyone administered water baptism? Why did Peter later defend the event before Jewish believers in Jerusalem? Why did he describe it as resembling what happened "at the beginning" rather than something occurring every time a sinner was converted? Those questions cannot be dismissed without dismissing the explanation God provided. The supernatural tongues were genuine, but their significance rested upon something considerably greater than the unusual speech itself. God was testifying that Gentiles who believed on Jesus Christ had received the same Holy Ghost given to Jewish believers. The sign was unmistakable evidence concerning divine acceptance.

The careful reader must also compare Cornelius with the Samaritans in Acts 8 and Peter's testimony before the Jerusalem assembly in Acts 15. These passages reveal an unfolding transition in the apostolic ministry, not a mechanical sequence that every Christian must reenact. In Samaria, believers were baptized in water before receiving the Holy Ghost through the ministry of the apostles. In Cornelius's house, the Holy Ghost fell upon believing Gentiles before water baptism. At Pentecost, extraordinary languages accompanied the Spirit's arrival; in Samaria, the inspired record does not identify tongues as accompanying the reception of the Spirit. If somebody intends to construct one universal ceremony from these accounts, he had better explain why the Holy Ghost recorded different circumstances and different sequences. **God did not contradict Himself in Acts; He recorded different events during an unfolding revelation. The contradiction appears when religion demands that every event follow its preferred denominational formula.** The distinction between historical description and established Church Age doctrine is indispensable to understanding the Gentile door.

1. Samaria: Believers, Water Baptism, and the Apostles from Jerusalem

Acts 8 begins against the background of persecution following the death of Stephen. Acts 8:1 declares that a great persecution arose against the church at Jerusalem, scattering believers throughout Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles. What the enemies of Christ intended to suppress became the occasion for the gospel witness to spread beyond

Jerusalem. Verse 5 records, "Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them." Philip's message was not a collection of religious experiences, nor was the central attraction a promise that the hearers could produce supernatural sounds. He preached Christ. The people gave heed to the things Philip spoke, and the passage records miraculous works accompanying his ministry, including deliverance from unclean spirits and the healing of those afflicted with palsies and lameness. Verse 8 declares that there was great joy in that city. Here the gospel was reaching a population with a long history of hostility toward the Jews, as John 4:9 plainly establishes. The movement into Samaria was a significant development in Christ's command that His witnesses proceed beyond Jerusalem.

Acts 8:12 provides the next important statement: "But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women." The order deserves attention. They believed the preaching, and they were baptized. Yet verses 14–16 record that when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the Word of God, they sent Peter and John, who prayed for the believers to receive the Holy Ghost. Verse 16 specifically states that the Holy Ghost had not yet fallen upon any of them, although they had been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Verse 17 then declares that Peter and John laid their hands upon them, and they received the Holy Ghost. This event must not be converted into a universal requirement that Christians need apostolic hands placed upon them after believing. The passage describes the historical incorporation of Samaritans into the expanding apostolic witness. Their reception of the Holy Ghost occurred in a manner that connected this development directly with the apostles at Jerusalem.

Now examine what Acts 8 does not say. The passage records the Samaritans receiving the Holy Ghost, but it never explicitly states that they spoke with tongues. Simon observed that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, according to verse 18, but the Holy Ghost does not identify the precise manifestation Simon observed. To insist that tongues must have occurred is to insert a detail the passage does not provide. To insist that no outward manifestation whatsoever occurred would likewise exceed the record, because Simon evidently witnessed something. The correct conclusion is that the Scripture records the reception of the Holy Ghost without specifically identifying tongues as its evidence. This becomes important when someone declares that every believer must speak in tongues to demonstrate Spirit baptism. **A doctrine advertised as absolutely necessary ought not depend upon inventing an event the Holy Ghost neglected to record.** The Bible is not improved by supplying missing details from somebody's favorite religious experience.

2. Simon's Money and Cornelius's Prayers: Two Very Different Encounters

Before proceeding to Cornelius, the account of Simon in Acts 8 exposes a dangerous misunderstanding concerning spiritual power. Simon had previously practiced sorcery in Samaria and astonished the people, claiming to be some great one. After Philip's preaching, verse 13 records that Simon himself believed and was baptized, yet his subsequent conduct reveals a seriously corrupt understanding of God's gift. When he witnessed the Holy Ghost being given through the apostles' hands, he offered them money, requesting the ability to confer that power upon others. Peter answered in Acts 8:20, "Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money." Peter further exposed the condition of Simon's heart and commanded repentance. This passage does not authorize purchasing spiritual credentials, commercializing supernatural power, or establishing a religious business around miraculous manifestations. Whatever conclusion one reaches concerning Simon's personal spiritual condition, his attempt to buy divine authority receives an unmistakable apostolic rebuke. **The Holy Ghost is not merchandise, and the power of God has never been available through a preacher's financial arrangements.**

Acts 10 introduces Cornelius, a Roman centurion stationed at Caesarea, described as "a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house." He gave generously to the people and prayed to God continually. He was not introduced as an enemy of Israel attempting to destroy the Jewish faith, but as a Gentile who feared God and sought Him. Yet his devotion and charitable works did not eliminate his need to hear the saving message concerning Jesus Christ. Acts 11:14 later explains that Peter would speak words to Cornelius "whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved." That statement must govern the interpretation of his earlier religious activities. Prayer, generosity, reverence, and moral conduct did not constitute an alternative gospel. God acknowledged his seeking and sent him the message he needed. In Acts 10:4, the angel told Cornelius that his prayers and alms had come up for a memorial before God. Nevertheless, the angel did not announce that works had replaced faith or that devotion had accomplished what only Christ could accomplish.

Cornelius was instructed to send men to Joppa and summon Simon Peter, who was lodging with Simon a tanner. The precision of the instructions demonstrates that the meeting was divinely arranged rather than a religious experiment produced by human initiative. Notice also that the angel did not preach the gospel in Peter's place. Cornelius was directed to the man appointed to declare the message. Romans 10:17 later states, "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." God's purpose was not merely to reward Cornelius for being a respectable religious man. It was to bring him to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ and establish a testimony concerning Gentile acceptance before Jewish

witnesses. Many religious people make the same mistake today by confusing devotion with regeneration. A man may pray frequently, distribute money generously, behave honorably, and still need the gospel. **Good works may demonstrate that a man is seeking God, but they cannot substitute for the Saviour whom God commands him to believe.**

3. Peter's Vision: God Was Opening a Door Religious Prejudice Had Closed

While Cornelius's messengers traveled toward Joppa, Peter received a remarkable vision. Acts 10:11–12 describes heaven opened and a vessel resembling a great sheet descending, containing various fourfooted beasts, wild beasts, creeping things, and fowls. A voice instructed Peter, "Rise, Peter; kill, and eat." Peter objected in verse 14: "Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean." His response reflected the dietary distinctions familiar to Israel under the law of Moses. Leviticus 11 had established specific regulations separating clean and unclean animals, and Peter had lived within that religious framework. The voice answered, "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common." The vision occurred three times before the vessel was received into heaven. This was not a random interruption in Peter's afternoon. God was preparing him to confront a distinction that had become a serious obstacle to the reception of Gentile believers. The issue would soon involve people rather than merely animals.

Peter initially doubted within himself what the vision meant, according to Acts 10:17. That detail is important because the correct interpretation was not established by Peter's immediate imagination. The messengers from Cornelius arrived, and the Spirit directed Peter to accompany them. Acts 10:20 records the instruction to go with the men, doubting nothing, because the Spirit had sent them. When Peter eventually entered Cornelius's house, he explained the significance in verse 28: "God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean." There is the inspired application. The vision did not exist merely to provide a convenient discussion concerning dinner. It corrected Peter's understanding of how God intended him to approach Gentiles. Under the law, Israel had received distinctive national ordinances, but those ordinances were never permission to reject God's unfolding revelation concerning salvation through Christ. **When God opens a door, a servant has no authority to nail an old religious sign across the entrance and announce that heaven has made a mistake.**

Acts 10:23 records that certain brethren from Joppa accompanied Peter, and Acts 11:12 later identifies six brethren traveling with him. Their presence was providentially important. Peter would not be the only Jewish believer witnessing what occurred in Cornelius's house. When they arrived, Cornelius had gathered his relatives and close friends. Peter refused Cornelius's attempt to worship him, declaring in Acts 10:26, "Stand up; I myself also am a man." That rebuke deserves attention in an age when religious personalities encourage

treatment scarcely distinguishable from worship. Peter would not accept the reverence due to God. Cornelius then explained the angelic instruction and declared that they were assembled to hear everything God had commanded Peter to speak. The setting was prepared: a Gentile household eager to hear divine revelation, Jewish witnesses present, and an apostle commissioned to preach. The central question was whether these Gentiles would be accepted through faith in Jesus Christ without first entering Israel's national covenant arrangements.

4. The Sermon Interrupted: The Holy Ghost Fell Before the Water Arrived

Peter began his sermon with a declaration that represented a significant development in his understanding: "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons" (Acts 10:34). Verse 35 speaks of those in every nation who fear God and work righteousness being accepted with Him. That statement must not be isolated from the gospel Peter proceeds to announce, nor twisted into salvation by moral performance. The same sermon climaxes in verse 43 with remission of sins through believing in Jesus Christ. Peter rehearsed the ministry of Jesus, His anointing with the Holy Ghost and power, His mighty works, His crucifixion, and His resurrection on the third day. He declared that the apostles were witnesses of these things and that Christ had been ordained by God to judge the quick and the dead. The sermon was not a lesson in producing supernatural speech. It was a proclamation concerning the crucified and risen Son of God. **The Holy Ghost did not fall upon Cornelius while Peter explained how to speak in tongues. He fell while Peter preached Jesus Christ.**

The decisive statement appears in Acts 10:43: "To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins." Notice the word "whosoever." The saving promise is attached to believing in Christ, not to becoming a Jew, submitting to circumcision, or demonstrating an extraordinary spiritual performance. Acts 10:44 immediately continues, "While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word." Peter had not issued an invitation to purchase spiritual power. He had not instructed the household to repeat unfamiliar syllables, and he had not administered water baptism. God acted while the gospel was being proclaimed. The sequence is unmistakable. Peter preached the message concerning Christ, the hearers received it, and the Holy Ghost fell upon them before the administration of any outward ordinance. Whatever additional arguments men construct around the narrative, this fact remains standing in the middle of Acts chapter 10 like a stone pillar that refuses to move.

The events immediately astonished the Jewish believers accompanying Peter. Acts 10:45 declares that "they of the circumcision which believed were astonished" because the gift of the Holy Ghost had been poured out upon the Gentiles also. Verse 46 explains, "For they

heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God." The tongues provided audible evidence that the same divine Spirit had been given to Gentiles. The precise foreign languages are not identified in this account, and the passage should not be made to say more about their individual characteristics than it records. But the witnesses recognized the manifestation as tongues, and they heard God being magnified. The significance was not that Cornelius had discovered a superior method of Christian worship. It was that Gentiles had received the Holy Ghost without entering through the national religious requirements associated with Judaism. **The Jewish witnesses were astonished because God had accepted the Gentiles, not because somebody had discovered a new way to make noise in a religious meeting.** The sign established a divine verdict that human prejudice was reluctant to accept.

5. The Water Came Afterwards: God's Order Exposed the False Doctrine

Peter's response in Acts 10:47 supplies one of the strongest biblical objections to the doctrine that water baptism is necessary before a person can receive the Holy Ghost. He asked, "Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?" Read the sequence carefully. The Gentiles had already received the Holy Ghost, and Peter recognized that fact before commanding their water baptism. The gift of God was not awaiting the arrival of a baptistry. Their acceptance did not depend upon a preacher completing a ceremony. Acts 10:48 then records Peter commanding them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Water baptism followed the divine reception already demonstrated. The outward testimony had its proper place, but it was not the instrument that caused the Holy Ghost to descend. **When God gave Cornelius the Holy Ghost before he touched the water, He settled an argument that religious systems have spent centuries trying to reopen.**

Now compare this event with Acts 8. The Samaritans had received water baptism before the apostles came and laid hands upon them, after which they received the Holy Ghost. At Cornelius's house, the Holy Ghost came before water baptism, and the narrative records no laying on of apostolic hands as the means of reception. The distinction is not an embarrassment to Scripture. It is evidence that Acts records significant events during a period in which the gospel witness was moving into new populations and the apostolic ministry was confirming their reception. One account cannot be selected as the exclusive pattern while the other is ignored. Anyone demanding that a believer must follow the Samaritan sequence must explain Cornelius. Anyone insisting that tongues must accompany every reception of the Spirit must explain the absence of an explicit tongues record in Samaria. **If a religious formula collapses when two inspired chapters are placed beside each other, the problem is not with the chapters. It is with the formula.**

This comparison must also be handled without confusing historical circumstances with the established doctrine of salvation under grace. Ephesians 2:8–9 declares that salvation is by grace through faith, not of works. Ephesians 1:13 identifies believers as sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise after hearing and believing the gospel. First Corinthians 12:13 states that all members of the Body of Christ have been baptized by one Spirit into one body. These passages provide direct doctrinal instruction concerning the believer's position in Christ. The transitional events in Acts explain how God's purpose unfolded historically; they do not authorize the invention of additional conditions contrary to the doctrinal teaching given to the Church. Neither Peter's presence nor the extraordinary manifestation at Cornelius's house becomes a requirement that every future believer must duplicate. The essential truth is that God received Gentiles through faith in Jesus Christ and supplied unmistakable evidence to witnesses who needed to recognize His decision.

6. Peter Before Jerusalem: The Sign Became Evidence Against Religious Opposition

Acts chapter 11 reveals exactly why the events at Cornelius's house mattered beyond the conversion of one Gentile family. When the apostles and brethren in Judaea heard that Gentiles had received the Word of God, Peter returned to Jerusalem and faced criticism from those of the circumcision. Acts 11:3 records their accusation: "Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them." Notice what disturbed them. Their immediate complaint concerned Peter's association and table fellowship with uncircumcised Gentiles. The controversy exposed how firmly old national distinctions remained embedded in their thinking. Peter did not answer by announcing that Jewish believers should abandon the Scriptures. He carefully rehearsed the events, beginning with his vision and continuing through the arrival of Cornelius's messengers. The Holy Ghost had directed him to go, and six brethren had accompanied him as witnesses. His defense rested upon what God had actually done, not upon a private religious impression that nobody else could examine.

Acts 11:15 records Peter's decisive testimony: "And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning." The comparison is deliberate. Peter does not say that the event was identical to every conversion occurring throughout the Christian ministry. He reaches backward to the beginning, when the Holy Ghost came upon the original disciples at Pentecost. Verse 16 continues with his remembrance of the Lord's promise concerning baptism with the Holy Ghost. Peter recognized the event as a divine action corresponding to that earlier manifestation. The apostles had not engineered it, and Peter possessed no authority to deny what God had plainly accomplished. Verse 17 provides his conclusion: "Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?" There is the explanation of the sign.

God had given the like gift to believing Gentiles. **The tongues were evidence in God's case against religious exclusion, and Peter knew better than to argue against the Judge who supplied the evidence.**

The result appears in Acts 11:18: "When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life." That declaration reveals the doctrinal importance of the entire event. The Jerusalem believers did not conclude that every convert must immediately begin speaking in tongues. They recognized that God had granted repentance unto life to Gentiles. The sign had accomplished its immediate purpose: it confirmed a divine work that Jewish believers had been reluctant to acknowledge. Nor did this mean that Israel ceased to exist as a nation or that the Church inherited every national promise God had given Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Romans 11 later establishes that God has not cast away His people and that Israel's future remains within His prophetic purpose. What occurred at Cornelius's house concerned the acceptance of believing Gentiles through Jesus Christ. The national promises to Israel and the spiritual blessings of believers in Christ must remain rightly divided.

7. The Jerusalem Council: Peter Settled the Question by Grace Through Faith

Years later, the question of Gentile acceptance became a major controversy recorded in Acts chapter 15. Certain men taught that Gentiles could not be saved unless they were circumcised after the manner of Moses. Verse 5 further records believing Pharisees insisting that Gentile converts should be circumcised and commanded to keep the law of Moses. The issue was no longer simply whether Peter should eat with uncircumcised men. It was whether submission to Jewish covenant requirements was necessary for salvation. Peter answered by returning to the events surrounding Cornelius. Acts 15:7 declares that God had chosen him so that Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe. Verse 8 continues, "And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us." The extraordinary manifestation at Cornelius's house had become authoritative evidence within a serious doctrinal dispute. God had already answered the question through His actions.

Acts 15:9 supplies the explanation that every defender of salvation by grace ought to underline: "And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith." Not by circumcision, not by keeping the ceremonial law, not by receiving a religious performance, and not by producing tongues as an additional condition. By faith. Peter then asks in verse 10 why they would tempt God by placing a yoke upon the Gentile disciples that neither their fathers nor they had been able to bear. His conclusion in verse 11 is especially striking: "But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall

be saved, even as they." Peter did not declare that Gentiles must be saved by becoming Jews. He affirmed that Jewish believers themselves were saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, just as the Gentiles. **The council did not discover a Jewish road to heaven and a Gentile road to heaven. It acknowledged the grace of one Saviour who receives believing sinners without selling them admission through Moses.**

Acts 15 then records Paul and Barnabas declaring the miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles, followed by James's appeal to the prophetic Scriptures. James acknowledged God's visitation of the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name, while quoting Amos concerning the future restoration of David's fallen tabernacle. The prophetic distinction remains important. Gentile salvation in the present does not erase Israel's national future, nor does the promised restoration of David's house mean every believer must adopt the Mosaic law. The Jerusalem assembly recognized God's work among Gentiles without imposing circumcision as a condition of salvation. The same principle destroys the attempt to impose tongues as an additional condition for receiving the Holy Ghost. First Corinthians 12:30 asks, "do all speak with tongues?" The implied answer is no. First Corinthians 12:13 nevertheless affirms that all believers have been baptized by one Spirit into one body. The gift was not universal, but the believer's position in Christ is. **God opened the Gentile door through faith, and no religious committee possesses the authority to install another lock.**

Conclusion

The conversion of Cornelius demonstrates the extraordinary wisdom of God in providing an unmistakable testimony at a decisive moment in the unfolding apostolic ministry. The Gentiles heard the gospel concerning Jesus Christ, believed, and received the Holy Ghost before water baptism was administered. The Jewish believers accompanying Peter heard them speak with tongues and magnify God, recognizing that God had bestowed upon Gentiles the gift previously associated with the Jewish disciples at Pentecost. When Peter later faced opposition in Jerusalem, he pointed to that manifestation as evidence that God had accepted believing Gentiles. At the Jerusalem council, he returned to the same event and declared that God purified their hearts by faith. The sign possessed a definite historical purpose, and Scripture repeatedly explains that purpose. **The tongues at Cornelius's house were not God's invitation to establish a new religious spectacle. They were God's announcement that believing Gentiles had received the Holy Ghost without becoming Jews.**

The comparison with Samaria exposes the danger of constructing universal religious requirements from selected historical events. Acts 8 records believers receiving water baptism before the Holy Ghost came upon them through the ministry of Peter and John.

Acts 10 records the Holy Ghost falling upon Gentiles before water baptism and without the same laying on of hands. Tongues are expressly recorded at Cornelius's house but are not expressly recorded among the Samaritans. The differences belong to the inspired account and must not be concealed. Sound doctrine does not require every event in Acts to unfold according to an identical sequence. It requires recognizing the historical circumstances, the progressive extension of the gospel witness, and the direct instruction later given concerning salvation and the Body of Christ. The believer today is not required to find another Peter, locate another Caesarea, or reproduce the audible signs that authenticated God's reception of Cornelius. Christ has already accomplished salvation, and the gospel clearly declares how sinners receive it.

The final verdict rests upon the Word of God rather than religious enthusiasm. Acts 15:9 declares that hearts were purified by faith. Acts 15:11 declares salvation through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Ephesians 1:13 identifies believers as sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise after hearing and believing the gospel. First Corinthians 12 establishes that the members of Christ's Body do not all possess identical gifts, even though they share the same Spirit. The apostolic testimony is sufficient to establish the significance of the Gentile door without requiring every generation to manufacture another Pentecost. God did not leave the Church dependent upon extraordinary performances to determine whether His salvation is genuine. He supplied the written testimony of His Son, His apostles, and His revealed gospel. **Cornelius did not receive the Holy Ghost because he mastered the gift of tongues. He spoke with tongues because God had already given him the Holy Ghost. The sign followed the gift; it did not purchase it. And the Gentile door that God opened through grace cannot be closed by a preacher demanding evidence that God never required of every believer.**

4 of 10 — Tongues, Signs, and Wonders — Twelve Men at Ephesus: John’s Baptism and the Last Recorded Tongues in Acts

Primary Text: Acts 18:24–28; 19:1–7; Matthew 3:1–12; 1 Corinthians 14:22

Introduction

There are certain intersections in the King James Bible where a man had better know which road he is traveling before he starts giving directions to everybody else. Acts chapter 19 is one of them. Here we encounter approximately twelve men at Ephesus, an apostle asking an unusual question about the Holy Ghost, disciples whose knowledge stopped at John's baptism, another baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus, the laying on of apostolic hands,

and the final explicit occurrence of speaking in tongues recorded in the historical narrative of Acts. Every detail is important. Every detail belongs to its setting. Yet this little passage has been treated like a religious department store where anybody can walk in, select whichever experience suits his doctrine, and leave the remaining verses on the shelf. One preacher uses verse 2 to teach that a saved Christian must obtain the Holy Ghost sometime after believing. Another uses verse 5 to manufacture a second baptismal requirement. Another grabs verse 6 and declares that speaking in tongues is the necessary evidence of salvation. **When men insist upon turning an exceptional historical event into a universal religious command, they usually leave the context lying in the ditch.**

Acts 19:2 records Paul's question: "Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?" The answer was astonishing: "We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost." Paul immediately asked, "Unto what then were ye baptized?" They answered, "Unto John's baptism." There is the historical problem, stated directly by the Holy Ghost. These were not ordinary members of a fully instructed New Testament congregation who had simply forgotten to pursue an additional spiritual blessing. Their knowledge was connected with a ministry that had announced the coming Messiah before the completion of His earthly work. John the Baptist had preached repentance and pointed Israel toward the One who would come after him. But by the time Paul reached Ephesus, Jesus Christ had already been crucified, buried, raised from the dead, and exalted. The Holy Ghost had already descended at Pentecost, and the gospel had already been preached among believing Gentiles. These men were standing at an intersection between an earlier proclamation and its accomplished fulfillment. **Their difficulty was not that they needed more religious excitement. They needed the fuller revelation of Jesus Christ.**

The passage cannot be understood without first examining Apollos in Acts 18, the original ministry of John the Baptist in Matthew 3, and the extraordinary transitional character of the Book of Acts. It must also be compared with the reception of the Holy Ghost among the Jews at Pentecost, the Samaritans in Acts 8, and the Gentiles at Cornelius's house in Acts 10. Only then can the events at Ephesus be placed in their proper biblical setting. The essential distinction concerns historical description and established doctrine. The Holy Ghost records what happened to these men, but that does not mean every Christian must reproduce their exact circumstances. Romans 8:9, 1 Corinthians 12:13, and Ephesians 1:13 establish the believer's position in Christ through the saving operation of the Spirit. Those doctrinal statements cannot be discarded because an extraordinary event occurred during the apostolic transition. God did not inspire contradictions between Acts and Paul's epistles. **The confusion begins when somebody attempts to make an exception govern the rule instead of allowing the rule to explain the exception.**

1. Apollos at Ephesus: A Mighty Preacher with an Incomplete Message

Acts 18:24 introduces an extraordinary individual: "And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus." Notice the description. Apollos was a Jew, he possessed eloquence, and he was mighty in the Scriptures. Those are considerable qualifications. The man was not introduced as an ignorant religious troublemaker who had never opened the Word of God. Verse 25 adds that he was instructed in the way of the Lord, fervent in spirit, and taught diligently the things of the Lord. Yet the same verse concludes with a limitation: "knowing only the baptism of John." That final expression explains why Apollos belongs immediately before the account of the twelve men. He possessed considerable knowledge, but his instruction had not fully caught up with what God had revealed and accomplished through Jesus Christ. **A man can possess extraordinary eloquence, considerable biblical knowledge, and remarkable sincerity while still needing correction concerning something God has already made plain.**

Acts 18:26 records that Apollos began speaking boldly in the synagogue. Aquila and Priscilla heard him, took him unto them, and "expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly." Their conduct provides an excellent example of scriptural correction. They did not dismiss everything Apollos knew because his instruction was incomplete. Neither did they applaud his eloquence and allow the deficiency to continue uncorrected. They supplied what was lacking. The expression "more perfectly" demonstrates that there was additional truth he needed to understand. Apollos possessed the Scriptures that testified concerning the promised Messiah, but he needed fuller instruction concerning the revelation now available. Eloquence cannot replace understanding, and zeal does not excuse a teacher from receiving further biblical instruction. Some men would rather defend an incomplete doctrine for forty years than admit that another believer helped them understand one additional verse. That is not faithfulness to Scripture. It is pride dressed in a respectable religious suit.

The result appears in Acts 18:27–28. Apollos traveled into Achaia, helped those who had believed through grace, and "mightily convinced the Jews, and that publickly, shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ." The correction strengthened his ministry rather than destroying it. His preaching became a powerful testimony concerning the identity of Jesus Christ. First Corinthians 3:5–6 later places Apollos alongside Paul as a minister through whom others believed, with Paul planting, Apollos watering, and God giving the increase. This demonstrates the importance of the historical sequence. Apollos began with incomplete instruction, received further teaching, and served effectively afterward. Acts does not explicitly identify him as the personal instructor of the twelve men in chapter 19,

and that relationship should not be invented. Nevertheless, the adjacent accounts reveal the same problem: people connected with John's earlier proclamation needed to understand its fulfillment. **John pointed forward to Christ. A preacher who never moves beyond John's announcement leaves his hearers waiting for a Messiah who has already come.**

2. John's Baptism: A Jewish Ministry Pointing Toward a Coming Messiah

To understand the twelve men, we must return to Matthew chapter 3 and identify exactly what John the Baptist was commissioned to preach. Matthew 3:1–2 records John appearing in the wilderness of Judaea, declaring, "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Verse 3 identifies him as the voice spoken of by Isaiah, preparing the way of the Lord. His audience was connected with Israel, and his ministry belonged to the prophetic preparation for the appearance of the nation's Messiah. Matthew 3:5–6 describes people from Jerusalem, Judaea, and the region surrounding Jordan coming to him and being baptized in Jordan, confessing their sins. John's baptism was not introduced as a Christian ordinance administered after the full revelation of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. It was a baptism associated with repentance and preparation for the One who was coming. **A signpost pointing toward an approaching King serves its purpose admirably until the King arrives. After His arrival, a man who refuses to acknowledge Him has mistaken the signpost for the destination.**

John himself distinguished his ministry from that of Jesus Christ. Matthew 3:11 declares, "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire." There are distinctions here that must not be erased. John administered water baptism. Christ possessed authority to baptize with the Holy Ghost. The reference to fire must also be examined alongside verse 12, where the chaff is burned with unquenchable fire. That judgment cannot simply be transformed into a pleasurable religious sensation because somebody enjoys dramatic terminology. John was announcing a greater Person and a greater divine operation than anything he could perform with water. Mark 1:4 calls his ministry "the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins," while John 1:29 identifies Christ as "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." The message pointed toward the Saviour, not toward a permanent religious institution centered upon John's ceremony.

John's ministry also belonged to a specific point in God's unfolding revelation. Luke 16:16 declares, "The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it." John stood at the threshold of a tremendous historical development. He announced the Messiah before the crucifixion and resurrection

had occurred. When Jesus submitted to John's baptism in Matthew 3:13–17, the event fulfilled righteousness and included the Father's testimony concerning His beloved Son. But John did not preach the completed Pauline revelation of the Church as the Body of Christ, sealed by the Holy Ghost following faith in the finished gospel. That revelation belongs to the subsequent unfolding of the New Testament. It is therefore a serious error to take the baptism administered during John's preparatory ministry and treat it as though it already contained every doctrinal truth later revealed through the apostles. **The Bible progresses through divine revelation; it does not authorize men to drag an earlier command forward while pretending nothing important happened at Calvary.**

3. Paul's Question: What Had These Disciples Actually Believed?

Acts 19:1 provides the immediate historical setting: "And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples." Ephesus was a major center in Asia Minor, and Paul's arrival brought him into contact with men whose religious knowledge was incomplete. The word "disciples" must be examined according to its context rather than automatically treated as proof that these men already possessed every spiritual blessing belonging to a saved member of Christ's Body. A disciple is a learner or follower, and the passage immediately investigates what these particular men had learned and believed. Their subsequent answers reveal that their instruction was associated with John's baptism. One cannot merely underline the word "disciples," ignore verses 2–5, and announce that Paul had encountered twelve fully instructed Church Age believers who lacked only a second spiritual experience. **A doctrinal conclusion that requires the reader to stop halfway through the sentence is usually not improved by reading the rest of the chapter.**

Paul asked, "Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?" The King James Bible says "since ye believed," and the question should be allowed to stand exactly as written. But the wording does not establish that every Christian must experience a period of salvation without the Holy Ghost. Paul was questioning these particular men, and their response revealed why such an inquiry was necessary. They answered, "We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost." The statement is remarkable because John himself had preached concerning the coming baptism with the Holy Ghost. Their answer therefore demonstrates a serious gap in their understanding of the revelation and events associated with Christ. It should not be exaggerated into a claim that they had never encountered any Old Testament reference to God's Spirit, since the Scriptures already contained such references. The immediate issue concerned their knowledge of the Holy Ghost's promised coming and reception. Paul's question uncovered incomplete instruction rather than establishing a permanent second blessing for saved Christians.

Paul immediately proceeded to the question that exposed the historical source of their difficulty: "Unto what then were ye baptized?" They replied, "Unto John's baptism" (Acts 19:3). There is the answer that explains the preceding conversation. Their religious experience belonged to a proclamation anticipating the Messiah, while Paul was preaching the Messiah who had already come, died, risen, and been exalted. The question was not whether they had attended enough emotional meetings to obtain another spiritual experience. The issue was the content and object of their faith. Acts 19:4 records Paul explaining that John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people "that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus." Paul brought them directly to the Person whom John's ministry had announced. The narrative does not disclose every detail of their earlier understanding or the exact history of their instruction, but it plainly identifies the deficiency Paul addressed. **They did not need somebody to improve John's message. They needed to recognize that John's message had reached its fulfillment in Jesus Christ.**

4. The Baptism at Ephesus: Water, Apostolic Hands, and the Holy Ghost

Acts 19:5 states, "When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus." The word "this" directs attention to Paul's preceding explanation concerning Christ Jesus. The passage records their response to the fuller revelation and distinguishes their subsequent baptism from their earlier association with John's baptism. Whatever controversies religious systems construct concerning baptismal formulas, the historical distinction remains unmistakable. Their first baptism was connected with John's preparatory ministry; the baptism recorded in verse 5 followed Paul's proclamation of Jesus Christ. The passage does not authorize baptism as a substitute for personal faith, nor does it teach that water possesses power to regenerate a sinner independently of Christ. Paul's explanation places the emphasis upon believing the One whom John announced. The water follows the proclamation of Christ. **A man who is more interested in defending his baptismal ceremony than identifying the Saviour to whom that ceremony points has managed to make the river more important than the Redeemer.**

Verse 6 continues, "And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied." Here the extraordinary manifestation occurs. Notice the actual sequence. Paul instructed them concerning Christ, they were baptized in His name, Paul laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. This order is recorded as a historical fact, but Scripture does not command every future believer to repeat it. The significance of Paul's participation must also be recognized. He was not an ordinary religious instructor claiming supernatural authority on the strength of his own testimony. He was an appointed apostle

of Jesus Christ. Second Corinthians 12:12 identifies signs, wonders, and mighty deeds among the credentials associated with his apostleship. The laying on of his hands at Ephesus therefore belongs within the apostolic ministry and the extraordinary circumstances surrounding these disciples. There is no authority here for converting every preacher's hands into a permanent instrument for distributing the Holy Ghost.

The account concludes in Acts 19:7: "And all the men were about twelve." Notice the word "about." The Holy Ghost does not even require us to insist upon an exact numerical correspondence with the twelve apostles. These were approximately twelve men, not a newly appointed apostolic college, and the text does not say they were all personally instructed by Apollos. Their association with John's baptism establishes a connection with Israel's preparatory proclamation, but the narrative does not explicitly supply the nationality of every individual. The passage should not be enlarged with invented details merely because those details make an interpretation appear more dramatic. What is unmistakable is that they encountered the fuller testimony concerning Christ through Paul and experienced an extraordinary apostolic manifestation afterward. Tongues and prophecy accompanied this significant transition in their understanding and reception of the Holy Ghost. **The miracle was real, the circumstances were unusual, and the Scripture recorded them accurately. The mistake comes when somebody turns twelve men in ancient Ephesus into a compulsory spiritual blueprint for millions of Christians who were never in their historical position.**

5. Tongues and Prophecy: Two Gifts, Two Functions, One Apostolic Setting

Acts 19:6 records two distinct manifestations: "they spake with tongues, and prophesied." Those words must not be melted together as though they described one vague religious excitement. Tongues and prophecy are distinguished throughout Paul's teaching concerning spiritual gifts. First Corinthians 12:10 lists divers kinds of tongues, interpretation of tongues, and prophecy among different operations of the Spirit. First Corinthians 14:2–5 explains the relationship between tongues, interpretation, prophecy, and the edification of the congregation. Prophecy communicates divine revelation in an understandable manner, while tongues require understanding or interpretation if their content is to edify those who do not know the language. Acts 19 records both gifts occurring, but it does not preserve the words of the prophecies or identify the particular languages spoken. We therefore know that genuine manifestations occurred without possessing authority to invent their precise contents. **The Holy Ghost distinguishes gifts because their functions are distinguishable. Religious excitement may throw everything into one basket, but Scripture does not confuse speaking another language with proclaiming an intelligible prophetic message.**

First Corinthians 14:22 supplies the broader sign principle: "Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not." Paul reaches this conclusion after quoting Isaiah 28 concerning God speaking to Israel through men of other tongues and other lips. The historical relationship between foreign languages, Israel's unbelief, and divine testimony provides an important background for the signs appearing during the apostolic transition. Yet the immediate account in Acts 19 does not identify a particular crowd of unbelieving Jews who heard these twelve men speaking. It would be improper to manufacture such an audience. The next portion of Acts 19 records Paul entering the synagogue and disputing for three months concerning the kingdom of God, demonstrating that Jewish hearers remained an important part of his ministry at Ephesus. The extraordinary manifestation and Paul's continuing witness must be understood within that broader setting. The sign's biblical purpose cannot be reduced to an assumption that every manifestation had precisely the same immediate witnesses.

Acts 19 also marks the final explicit historical occurrence of tongues recorded in the Book of Acts. That observation deserves precision. It does not mean that Acts 19:6 was necessarily the last occasion on which anyone exercised a genuine gift of tongues. Paul's instructions in 1 Corinthians 12–14 demonstrate that tongues were being addressed within the apostolic churches, and the historical record does not claim to list every occurrence. Nevertheless, the inspired narrative of Acts records no subsequent event explicitly describing people speaking with tongues after Ephesus. The observation is significant when examining the concentrated appearances of these manifestations at important stages in the apostolic witness. Pentecost, Cornelius's household, and these disciples at Ephesus possess recognizable historical settings. **A final recorded occurrence is not the same thing as a dated announcement that a gift has ceased, but neither is a historical manifestation permission to claim perpetual possession of it.** Scripture must establish both the gift and the authority for any doctrine built upon it.

6. Four Different Accounts: Why Acts Refuses to Supply One Universal Formula

Place Acts chapters 2, 8, 10, and 19 beside one another, and the argument for one mandatory sequence begins to unravel. At Pentecost, the Holy Ghost came upon the disciples and they spoke with other tongues understood by Jews from numerous nations. In Samaria, Acts 8 records believers receiving water baptism before Peter and John came, laid hands upon them, and they received the Holy Ghost. The account does not expressly record tongues among those Samaritans. At Cornelius's house in Acts 10, the Holy Ghost fell upon believing Gentiles while Peter preached, and they spoke with tongues before receiving water baptism. At Ephesus, Acts 19 records disciples associated with John's baptism hearing Paul's fuller explanation, being baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, and

receiving the Holy Ghost after Paul laid hands upon them, with tongues and prophecy following. Four historical settings, different circumstances, and different recorded sequences. **Anybody who can turn those four accounts into one identical ceremony possesses an imagination considerably more flexible than the printed words of the King James Bible.**

The differences are not defects in the biblical record. They reveal the historical transition taking place as the apostolic witness moved from Jerusalem to Samaria, into the Gentile world, and through the ministry of Paul. Christ had commanded His apostles in Acts 1:8 to bear witness in Jerusalem, Judaea, Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. Acts records the unfolding fulfillment of that commission. At Cornelius's house, the Jewish witnesses needed undeniable evidence that believing Gentiles had received the Holy Ghost. At Ephesus, men associated with John's earlier proclamation needed to receive the fulfilled revelation concerning Jesus Christ. These events cannot be understood properly when separated from their historical circumstances. Acts is not a disorderly collection of religious experiences from which competing denominations may select their preferred initiation ceremonies. It is the inspired account of God's work during a remarkable period of apostolic ministry. **The Lord was not experimenting with salvation. He was demonstrating the unfolding reach of His gospel through circumstances that exposed the limitations of men's previous understanding.**

The Book of Acts must therefore be read with attention to audience, timing, revelation, and doctrinal development. Acts 15:11 records Peter acknowledging salvation through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, while verse 9 declares that God purified believing Gentiles' hearts by faith. Acts 13:38–39 records Paul's proclamation that forgiveness and justification through Christ were available to believers apart from what the law of Moses could accomplish. These statements establish the saving significance of faith in Christ rather than making outward manifestations conditions of acceptance. The extraordinary events recorded elsewhere in Acts must be understood consistently with that testimony. Historical circumstances explain why manifestations differed; they do not authorize several competing gospels. The Church does not possess one salvation for Jews, another for Gentiles, and a third for disciples who happen to encounter an apostle in Ephesus. The transitional record shows God's revelation being unfolded and His witnesses being authenticated. The completed gospel announces salvation through the finished work of Jesus Christ.

7. The Believer's Position in Christ: Sealed by the Spirit, Not Waiting for a Second Experience

Romans 8:9 establishes a decisive doctrinal truth concerning the believer's relationship to the Holy Ghost: "Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." The statement leaves no room for a permanent class of genuinely saved members of Christ who nevertheless possess no Spirit of Christ. Paul is not dividing the Church into ordinary Christians without the Spirit and superior Christians who later obtain Him through additional ceremonies. He identifies possession of the Spirit as belonging to those who are Christ's. This truth must govern the interpretation of Acts 19. The twelve men were situated within a particular historical circumstance involving incomplete revelation and John's preparatory baptism. They cannot be transformed into proof that a man saved through the fully proclaimed gospel must afterward seek another experience before receiving the Holy Ghost. **If a man belongs to Christ, the Spirit belongs to his spiritual position. A preacher who tells him otherwise had better produce something stronger than a misplaced verse from a transitional narrative.**

First Corinthians 12:13 supplies another necessary distinction: "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." Notice the repeated universality. All believers share this Spirit baptism into one body. Yet Paul later asks in verse 30, "do all speak with tongues?" His question belongs to a series demonstrating that different members possess different gifts. Consequently, the universal operation of Spirit baptism cannot be made dependent upon the possession of a particular gift that Paul does not attribute to every Christian. The baptism performed by the Spirit and the miraculous gift of tongues must remain distinct. Furthermore, 1 Corinthians 1:17 records Paul declaring that Christ sent him primarily to preach the gospel, not to baptize. He did administer water baptism in particular circumstances, but water was not the central saving commission entrusted to him. **The gospel establishes a believer in Christ; a miraculous gift does not create the salvation that Christ already purchased with His blood.**

Ephesians 1:13–14 brings the matter to its clearest expression, particularly appropriate because Paul later addressed these doctrinal truths to believers at Ephesus. The passage declares, "In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise." The sequence concerns hearing the gospel, believing, and being sealed by the Holy Spirit. Verse 14 identifies the Spirit as the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession. No apostolic hands are required in that doctrinal statement. No miraculous tongues are demanded as an additional condition. No waiting period is prescribed during which a genuinely saved member of Christ must remain without the Holy Ghost. Ephesians 4:30 further commands believers not to grieve the Holy Spirit of God, "whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption." The believer's security rests upon

God's sealing operation, not his ability to reproduce an extraordinary manifestation. **A Christian does not need to manufacture an apostolic sign to prove that God has kept a promise already established in His written Word.**

Conclusion

Acts 19:1–7 records a genuine apostolic event involving approximately twelve disciples whose understanding was connected with the earlier ministry of John the Baptist. Paul discovered their incomplete knowledge, questioned them concerning the Holy Ghost, and explained that John's baptism had directed people toward faith in the One who would come after him, Jesus Christ. When they heard Paul's fuller testimony, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Paul laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. Every one of those facts belongs to the inspired historical record. None should be denied, altered, or explained away merely because an interpreter finds the passage inconvenient. Yet the same obligation to believe Scripture requires that these facts remain attached to their circumstances. **John's baptism belonged to a ministry announcing the coming Christ. Paul's message proclaimed the Christ who had already come. The difference was not a minor adjustment in religious procedure; it concerned the fulfillment of God's revelation in His Son.**

The extraordinary manifestation at Ephesus belongs beside the other significant receptions of the Holy Ghost recorded during the apostolic transition. Pentecost demonstrated the coming of the promised Holy Ghost upon Christ's witnesses. Samaria revealed an important development in the gospel's extension beyond Jerusalem. Cornelius's household provided testimony that believing Gentiles had received the same Holy Ghost. Ephesus brought men instructed in John's earlier baptism into the fuller revelation proclaimed through Paul. The differences in these accounts must not be flattened into a mandatory sequence imposed upon every Christian. Scripture never commands the Church to assemble approximately twelve people, baptize them after a course in John's ministry, obtain apostolic hands, and require tongues and prophecy before their salvation can be acknowledged. That would be historical imitation masquerading as doctrinal obedience. **The events were recorded to teach what God accomplished, not to provide religious entrepreneurs with a collection of supernatural tricks to advertise as evidence of apostolic authority.**

The final authority belongs to the revealed gospel and the doctrinal teaching concerning the believer's position in Jesus Christ. Salvation is by grace through faith, as Ephesians 2:8–9 declares. The believer is baptized by one Spirit into the Body of Christ, according to 1 Corinthians 12:13. He possesses the Spirit of Christ, as Romans 8:9 establishes, and is sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise after believing the gospel, according to Ephesians

1:13. No extraordinary performance can improve upon that divine position. The genuine tongues at Ephesus were real, but their reality does not authorize modern claims that every believer must reproduce them. Their appearance belongs to a recognizable apostolic setting, and their absence from later historical accounts in Acts must not be replaced by inventions. The Christian does not need to return to John's baptism, stand among the twelve men at Ephesus, or search for another apostle to place hands upon his head. He needs to believe the finished gospel of Jesus Christ and understand the spiritual blessings God has already given him. **Those twelve men needed to move forward from John's announcement to Christ's fulfillment. The tragedy today is that religious systems take Christians who possess the completed gospel and attempt to drag them backward into an unfinished historical transition. God has already opened the door. The gospel has already been proclaimed. The believer has already been sealed. Stop searching for yesterday's sign when God's Word has already declared today's salvation.**

5 of 10 — Tongues, Signs, and Wonders — The Gifts of the Spirit: Why Every Believer Did Not Speak in Tongues

Primary Text: 1 Corinthians 12:1–31; Romans 12:3–8; Ephesians 4:7–16; Galatians 5:22–23

Introduction

There is a peculiar kind of religious arithmetic that has been circulating through churches for generations. According to this calculation, the more spectacular a man's spiritual performance, the more spiritual the man must be. If he speaks in an unknown tongue, he has supposedly climbed another rung on the ladder of holiness. If he claims to heal the sick, he has reached a higher platform. If he announces that the Holy Ghost speaks through him in extraordinary manifestations, ordinary Christians are expected to stand back and admire the spiritual heavyweight. Unfortunately for this religious mathematics, the Corinthians received remarkable spiritual gifts while demonstrating enough carnality to keep an apostle busy correcting them through several chapters of inspired Scripture. **The church that possessed extraordinary gifts also possessed extraordinary problems.** They had divisions, pride, lawsuits, immorality, disorder at the Lord's table, and confusion over the very gifts they were so eager to exercise. The Holy Ghost did not confuse possession of a gift with maturity of character. Modern religion has been confusing the two ever since.

First Corinthians 12:1 opens with Paul's declaration, "Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant." That statement should settle the attitude with which the subject is approached. God did not intend Christians to remain ignorant concerning spiritual gifts, and He certainly did not intend them to substitute emotional excitement for biblical understanding. Paul proceeds to explain their divine source, their distribution, their distinct operations, and their purpose within the Body of Christ. His argument is not that every believer must perform the same miraculous operation. It is precisely the opposite. The Holy Ghost distributes different gifts to different members according to His own will, and the entire body benefits when each member performs its appointed function. A foot is not required to become a hand, and an ear is not defective because it cannot see. Yet certain religious systems have managed to persuade Christians that unless everybody speaks in tongues, something essential is missing. **Paul described a body containing different members. Religion attempted to turn the entire body into one enormous mouth.**

The doctrinal center of the discussion appears in two statements separated by seventeen verses. First Corinthians 12:13 declares, "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body." First Corinthians 12:30 asks, "do all speak with tongues?" The first statement describes a universal spiritual operation belonging to every member of Christ's Body. The second identifies tongues as a particular gift that was not distributed to every believer. Those two declarations cannot be honestly reconciled with the claim that every saved individual must speak in tongues as the necessary evidence of receiving the Holy Ghost. The question is not whether tongues operated during the apostolic period. Scripture says they did. The question is whether God ever established them as an indispensable requirement for every Christian. Romans 12, Ephesians 4, and Galatians 5 reinforce the distinction between spiritual service, spiritual maturity, and spiritual fruit. **The Holy Ghost never instructed every believer to possess the same gift, but He certainly instructed every believer to walk in the Spirit.** That difference is where the confusion must end.

1. The Corinthian Contradiction: Gifted Believers Living Carnal Lives

Before examining the gifts in chapter 12, consider the spiritual condition of the congregation receiving Paul's instructions. First Corinthians 1:7 declares that the Corinthians came "behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." They were not a congregation entirely unfamiliar with spiritual manifestations. Gifts operated among them, and Paul recognized their possession. Yet in 1 Corinthians 3:1, the same apostle declares, "I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ." There is the contradiction that should overthrow the doctrine of spiritual superiority through spectacular gifts. These believers possessed gifts

while remaining spiritually immature. Paul did not praise them as an elite congregation because extraordinary manifestations occurred among them. He rebuked them as babes. **A church can possess impressive gifts and still need somebody to teach its members how to behave like Christians.** Spiritual power does not automatically produce spiritual maturity, and an extraordinary manifestation is no substitute for obedience to the Word of God.

The evidence of their carnality extends throughout the epistle. First Corinthians 1:10–13 exposes divisions surrounding preferred ministers. Chapter 5 confronts gross immorality being tolerated within the congregation. Chapter 6 rebukes believers for carrying disputes before unbelieving judges. Chapter 11 exposes disgraceful conduct surrounding the Lord's supper, including selfishness and drunkenness. By the time Paul reaches chapters 12–14, the church's handling of spiritual gifts has become another subject requiring apostolic correction. These were not minor matters caused by unfortunate misunderstandings. The Corinthian congregation had allowed fleshly attitudes to contaminate its fellowship and worship. Nevertheless, the possession of spiritual gifts had not prevented those conditions. That fact demands a distinction between the Spirit's distribution of gifts and the believer's responsibility to walk obediently. **The same congregation that could boast of supernatural manifestations could not consistently manage ordinary Christian conduct. A spiritual gift does not turn a carnal man into a mature saint merely because the congregation applauds him.**

Paul identifies the condition plainly in 1 Corinthians 3:3: "For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?" Notice what he uses to measure their condition. He examines their envy, strife, divisions, and behavior. He does not ask how many extraordinary gifts they possess before deciding whether they are spiritual. Their conduct reveals their immaturity despite their gifts. This distinction becomes even clearer when compared with Galatians 5:19–23, where the works of the flesh are contrasted with the fruit of the Spirit. The Holy Ghost is not impressed by a religious performance that coexists with persistent disobedience. The believer must not mistake a manifestation for the character of Christ. **A man can make a tremendous noise about spiritual power while his conduct announces that the flesh is running the meeting.** The test of maturity is not how remarkable an experience sounds, but whether the life is governed by the revealed Word of God.

2. One Holy Ghost, Different Gifts: The Spirit Determines the Distribution

First Corinthians 12:4–6 establishes the divine order: "Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all." Paul repeats

the contrast deliberately. There are differences in the gifts, administrations, and operations, but their divine source is not divided. The unity of the Spirit does not produce uniformity of function. That is an important distinction because some religious movements treat the diversity of gifts as though it were evidence of spiritual inequality. Paul teaches the opposite. God determines the distribution, and the different operations belong to His purpose for the body. Verse 7 identifies their intended benefit: "But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal." The purpose is not personal advertisement. The gift is intended to benefit others. **When a man turns a gift intended for the profit of the body into an advertisement for his own importance, he has managed to misuse the very thing he claims proves his spirituality.**

Verses 8–10 identify different manifestations, including the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, working of miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, divers kinds of tongues, and interpretation of tongues. These are distinct operations, not interchangeable expressions for one universal experience. Wisdom and knowledge are distinguished. Faith appears as a particular manifestation, which must be distinguished from the saving faith through which every Christian receives Christ. Healing and miracles are listed separately. Prophecy possesses a different function from tongues, and interpretation accompanies tongues as another identifiable operation. The list reflects extraordinary gifts operating during the apostolic period, including manifestations associated with God's confirmation of His messengers. Their presence in Corinth demonstrates that genuine gifts were being exercised, but it does not establish that every believer possessed them all. In fact, the very distinction between the gifts argues against that assumption. **If every Christian were required to perform the same operation, the Holy Ghost would have had little reason to spend an entire chapter explaining their differences.**

Verse 11 settles the question of distribution: "But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will." Pay attention to the final four words: "as he will." The Holy Ghost distributes the gifts according to His will, not according to a preacher's instructions, a congregation's expectations, or an individual's determination to obtain a particular manifestation. The word "severally" reinforces the individual distribution of distinct operations. Nothing in this verse authorizes a universal demand that all believers must speak in tongues. If the Spirit distributes different gifts according to His will, no human being possesses authority to turn one selected gift into a compulsory certificate of salvation. The believer may desire to serve God faithfully, but he cannot command the Holy Ghost to abandon His own distribution. **A preacher who insists that everybody must possess one particular gift is attempting to overrule the very**

Spirit whose authority he claims to represent. The Holy Ghost does not need a denominational committee to correct His arrangements.

3. One Body, Many Members: The Illustration Religion Keeps Ignoring

Paul introduces the human body in 1 Corinthians 12:12 to illustrate the relationship between unity and diversity: "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ." The illustration is simple enough that a child can understand it, which makes its persistent misuse all the more remarkable. A human body possesses numerous members with different functions. The hand does not accomplish everything the foot accomplishes. The ear does not perform the operation of the eye. The unity of the body does not depend upon every member becoming identical. On the contrary, the body's effective operation depends upon its members performing their respective functions. This is not a loose comparison offered for entertainment. Paul uses it to explain how believers belong to Christ while possessing different responsibilities and abilities. **God did not design a body full of identical organs, and He did not design the Church as an assembly of identical spiritual performances.**

First Corinthians 12:15–17 develops the argument through vivid questions. The foot cannot declare that it is not part of the body merely because it is not the hand. The ear cannot abandon its membership because it is not the eye. Paul then asks, "If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling?" The absurdity exposes the error of demanding one uniform function. A body consisting entirely of eyes would not be a healthy body. It would be an anatomical disaster. Likewise, a congregation in which every believer were required to exercise one particular gift would contradict the very design Paul describes. Some members possessed one gift, some another, and others performed functions less impressive to human observers. Yet each belonged to the same body. **An eye that despises the foot may enjoy looking important, but it will discover the value of the foot when the body needs to move.** God values functions that religious pride often overlooks.

Verses 18–26 explain that God has set the members in the body "every one of them, as it hath pleased him." The divine arrangement is not accidental, and no member possesses authority to declare another unnecessary. Paul specifically states in verse 21 that the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of thee." He then explains that members appearing weaker are necessary and that God has tempered the body together so there should be no schism. When one member suffers, the members suffer together; when one is honoured, the others rejoice. This is the very opposite of a competitive spiritual hierarchy. The gift was never intended to furnish a platform from which one believer could look down upon another. **The member who measures everybody else by his own gift has forgotten that**

the Head of the body is Jesus Christ, not the most spectacular person in the congregation. Christ supplies the unity, and God appoints the members' functions.

4. All Baptized by One Spirit, but Not All Speaking with Tongues

First Corinthians 12:13 provides the doctrinal foundation for the believer's position in Christ: "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." The word "all" appears twice, and both occurrences matter. Paul is discussing an operation shared by every member of Christ's Body. Jew and Gentile are brought into the same spiritual body, and social distinctions do not establish separate methods of entrance. This is the baptism performed by the Spirit, not a declaration that every believer must be immersed in water by a particular religious organization. Nor does the verse suggest that saved Christians must wait for an additional ceremony before becoming members of Christ's Body. The Spirit performs the operation, and the resulting membership belongs to those who are Christ's. **The Holy Ghost does not offer partial membership in Christ to ordinary believers and full membership to those who produce a particular manifestation.**

Now proceed to verses 28–30. Paul identifies different appointments within the Church, including apostles, prophets, teachers, miracles, gifts of healings, helps, governments, and diversities of tongues. Then he asks a series of questions: "Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles?" The questions continue: "Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret?" The expected answer is unmistakably negative. Not every believer occupies the same office or possesses the same gift. The question concerning tongues stands in the same grammatical and doctrinal sequence as the others. Nobody reasonably argues that every Christian must be an apostle, every Christian must perform miracles, or every Christian must possess gifts of healing. Yet some insist that every Christian must speak in tongues. **That interpretation requires the word "all" to mean everybody in verse 13, but somehow requires everybody to possess a gift Paul denies to everybody in verse 30.** The contradiction belongs to the interpretation, not to Scripture.

Romans 8:9 further declares, "Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." Ephesians 1:13 identifies believers as sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise after hearing and believing the gospel of salvation. These doctrinal statements must govern the interpretation of historical manifestations in Acts. The fact that tongues occurred at Pentecost, in Cornelius's household, and among approximately twelve disciples at Ephesus does not transform the gift into a universal requirement. Those events possessed significant apostolic and transitional settings. Paul's teaching to the Church establishes that all believers share the Spirit's baptism into Christ's Body while gifts are distributed

differently. The distinction is not difficult unless a religious system has already decided that its preferred experience must be compulsory. **The Bible says every believer in Christ possesses the Spirit. The Bible also says not every believer speaks with tongues. Any doctrine that cannot accept both statements is not correctly handling the Bible.**

5. Romans 12: The Gifts That Do Not Attract the Religious Spotlight

Romans 12:3–8 presents another important discussion of spiritual gifts, but the emphasis differs considerably from the spectacular manifestations associated with Corinth. Paul begins by instructing every believer not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly according to the measure of faith God has dealt. That introductory command is significant. Spiritual service begins with humility rather than personal exhibition. Verses 4–5 again employ the illustration of the human body, identifying many members with different offices while emphasizing their unity in Christ. Paul then discusses differing gifts according to grace, including prophecy, ministry, teaching, exhortation, giving, ruling, and showing mercy. Not every function involves a spectacular public manifestation. Some involve instruction, faithful service, generosity, leadership, and compassionate treatment of others. **A man may spend years trying to demonstrate a spectacular gift while neglecting the ordinary service God has already placed directly in front of him.** Religious ambition frequently searches the heavens for a platform while stepping over the work lying at its feet.

Romans 12:7–8 calls for diligence in the exercise of assigned responsibilities. The person engaged in teaching should attend to teaching. The one exhorting should attend to exhortation. Giving is to be performed with simplicity, ruling with diligence, and showing mercy with cheerfulness. These instructions reveal the practical purpose of spiritual service. A teacher should faithfully communicate God's truth, not merely impress people with his vocabulary. A giver should support genuine needs without turning generosity into a public monument to himself. A leader should exercise diligence rather than collecting titles and expecting admiration. The one showing mercy should serve willingly rather than complaining that compassionate work receives less attention than public ministry. Even where the particular manifestations of the apostolic period must be distinguished from continuing Christian service, the principle remains unmistakable. **God measures faithfulness in an assigned duty differently from the way men measure applause. Heaven has never required a trumpet solo before a Christian can perform an act of obedience.**

The surrounding verses in Romans 12 deepen the contrast between service and spiritual pride. Verse 9 commands love without dissimulation and abhorrence of evil. Verse 10 requires kindly affection and brotherly love, with believers preferring one another in honour.

Verse 11 commands diligence and fervency in serving the Lord, while verses 12–13 emphasize patience, prayer, hospitality, and the needs of saints. These duties do not provide the kind of spectacle that draws a crowd seeking extraordinary experiences, but they reveal what Christian service actually requires. A congregation faithfully teaching Scripture, caring for needy believers, maintaining doctrinal purity, and serving one another may accomplish more lasting spiritual good than an assembly occupied with impressive but unverifiable manifestations. **The man who cannot be trusted to serve his brethren faithfully has little reason to advertise himself as the possessor of extraordinary spiritual power.** Before demanding a platform for spectacular gifts, learn to perform the responsibilities Scripture has already commanded.

6. Ephesians 4: Gifts for Building the Church, Not Building Religious Celebrities

Ephesians 4:7 declares, "But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ." Paul then describes the ascended Lord providing gifts connected with the ministry and development of His Church. Verse 11 identifies apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. These ministries are not presented as a collection of impressive titles for ambitious men to claim. Verse 12 states their purpose: "For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." The emphasis is upon the spiritual development of believers. The historical offices of apostles and prophets must also be understood in relation to Ephesians 2:20, where the household of God is described as built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone. A foundation has a particular function in a building. It establishes the structure upon which subsequent construction proceeds. **A man who insists upon repeatedly laying the foundation may enjoy calling himself an architect, but he is not accomplishing the work of building the house.**

Ephesians 4:13–14 describes the desired result of these ministries: unity of the faith, knowledge of the Son of God, spiritual maturity, and stability against false teaching. Paul specifically warns against believers remaining children, "tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine." There is the standard by which a ministry should be examined. Does it establish believers in the truth concerning Jesus Christ? Does it produce sound understanding of Scripture? Does it equip saints to recognize error and resist deceptive teaching? Or does it produce dependence upon a religious personality who claims extraordinary authority while discouraging examination of his doctrine? The latter arrangement contradicts the purpose stated in Ephesians. **A genuine teacher directs believers toward the authority of Scripture. A religious showman directs the audience toward himself and then wonders why nobody can distinguish his opinion from the**

Word of God. Spiritual maturity requires doctrinal understanding, not permanent dependence upon spectacular experiences.

Verses 15–16 continue by describing believers speaking the truth in love and growing up into Christ, who is the Head. The whole body is joined together, with each part contributing to its increase and edification. This is the same essential principle developed in 1 Corinthians 12: unity in Christ with different members performing appointed functions. The goal is the healthy growth of the entire body, not the personal enlargement of one celebrated member. Ephesians 4:30 further identifies believers as sealed by the Holy Spirit of God unto the day of redemption. That spiritual security does not depend upon reproducing the signs associated with foundational apostolic ministry. The Lord has supplied the Church with His revealed truth, and believers are responsible to receive, understand, and obey it. **A church filled with sound doctrine, faithful teaching, genuine love, and obedient service is not spiritually impoverished because it refuses to manufacture apostolic credentials. It is impoverished when it possesses a Bible and refuses to believe what the Bible says.**

7. Gifts Versus Fruit: Why Charity Outweighs the Spectacular

The closing verse of 1 Corinthians 12 provides the transition into one of the strongest rebukes of spiritual pride in the New Testament. Paul declares, "But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way." Chapter 13 immediately explains that even extraordinary abilities become worthless when exercised without charity. Verse 1 declares, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal." Paul is constructing a powerful argument through hypothetical examples, not establishing that every believer possesses an angelic prayer language. Even if a man possessed remarkable speech, prophetic knowledge, extraordinary faith, or sacrificial dedication, the absence of charity would expose the emptiness of his conduct. The Corinthian fascination with gifts needed correction through something more fundamental. **A man can produce sounds that impress a congregation and still resemble a noisy piece of metal in God's assessment. Volume is not virtue, and spectacle is not spirituality.**

Galatians 5:22–23 identifies the fruit of the Spirit: "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance." Notice the difference between the fruit of the Spirit and the distribution of spiritual gifts. First Corinthians 12 explains that different members receive different gifts according to the Spirit's will. Galatians 5 presents the character produced through walking in the Spirit rather than fulfilling the lust of the flesh. No Christian is excused from longsuffering because he claims the gift of tongues. No preacher receives permission to abandon gentleness because he announces a miraculous

healing ministry. No teacher is exempt from temperance because his knowledge exceeds that of his congregation. These virtues belong to the Spirit-governed Christian life. The gifts in Corinthians demonstrate different functions, but the fruit in Galatians exposes the quality of the walk. **A man may claim to speak with the tongues of angels, but if he cannot control the tongue he uses when addressing his family, his spiritual reputation deserves some serious examination.**

First Corinthians 13:8 declares that prophecies shall fail, tongues shall cease, and knowledge shall vanish away, establishing that particular manifestations were not presented as eternally operating in their existing form. The interpretation of "that which is perfect" in verse 10 requires attention to the chapter's references to partial knowledge, seeing face to face, and future completeness; it must not simply be assumed to mean the completion of the biblical canon. The historical argument concerning the cessation of apostolic sign gifts rests upon their purposes, their connection with foundational revelation, and the distinction between those credentials and the continuing spiritual life of the Church. Meanwhile, Paul's immediate concern remains unmistakable: charity surpasses impressive abilities. First Corinthians 14:19 reinforces the priority of understanding when Paul declares that he would rather speak five intelligible words that teach others than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue. **Five words that communicate God's truth accomplish more than ten thousand that leave the congregation impressed, bewildered, and uninstructed.** The Holy Ghost values edification above exhibition.

Conclusion

The doctrine of spiritual gifts becomes remarkably clear when the inspired distinctions are preserved. The Corinthian believers possessed genuine gifts while demonstrating serious carnality, proving that extraordinary manifestations did not automatically establish spiritual maturity. The Holy Ghost distributed different gifts according to His own will, and Paul repeatedly compared those differing operations to the different members of a human body. First Corinthians 12:13 identifies the universal baptism of believers by one Spirit into one body, while verse 30 explicitly distinguishes those who speak with tongues from those who do not. Romans 12 emphasizes humble and faithful service, Ephesians 4 identifies ministries intended to build believers toward doctrinal maturity, and Galatians 5 describes the fruit produced through walking in the Spirit. The passages agree when allowed to speak in their proper settings. **God never required every Christian to possess the same gift, but He never excused any Christian from obeying His Word.** A believer's standing in Christ is not measured by a supernatural performance but established through the saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The spiritual danger comes when men take a particular gift associated with apostolic ministry and elevate it into a necessary condition of salvation, Spirit baptism, or Christian superiority. Such teaching contradicts the distribution explained in 1 Corinthians 12 and confuses the extraordinary manifestations recorded during the apostolic transition with the universal blessings belonging to every saved member of Christ's Body. Scripture never commands believers to manufacture tongues in order to prove the presence of the Holy Ghost. Nor does rejecting unsupported modern claims require denying God's sovereign power to intervene miraculously according to His will. The question concerns the possession and purpose of particular spiritual gifts, not whether Almighty God remains Almighty. **A Christian who knows his Bible, believes the gospel, serves faithfully, walks in charity, and obeys the Word of God is not a second-class believer because he cannot reproduce an apostolic sign.** His spiritual position depends upon Christ's finished work, not upon satisfying somebody's preferred religious test.

The final verdict belongs to the Holy Ghost's own words. "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body" (1 Corinthians 12:13). "Do all speak with tongues?" (1 Corinthians 12:30). Those statements stand together without apology, and no religious tradition possesses authority to separate them. Every saved person belongs to Christ through the operation of the Spirit, but not every believer received the gift of tongues. The Christian's responsibility is to believe what God has revealed, recognize his place in Christ's Body, and faithfully perform the service God has appointed. Charity, sound doctrine, obedience, holiness, and genuine spiritual fruit cannot be replaced by spectacular demonstrations. The Corinthians possessed gifts and still needed correction; the modern Church possesses the written testimony of their correction and has no excuse for repeating their confusion. **A spiritual gift was never intended to become a badge worn above another believer's head. The Holy Ghost distributes the gifts, Jesus Christ governs the Body, and the Word of God establishes the standard. If a man must make everybody speak in tongues to prove his doctrine, he has already lost his argument with the apostle Paul.**

6 of 10 — Tongues, Signs, and Wonders — Tongues of Men and Angels: Charity, Partial Gifts, and What Shall Cease

Primary Text: 1 Corinthians 13:1–13; 12:31; 14:1; 2 Corinthians 12:1–4

Introduction

There is something almost comical about watching religious people take a chapter written to rebuke spiritual pride and turn it into a certificate of spiritual superiority. First

Corinthians 13 has been quoted at weddings, embroidered on pillows, printed on greeting cards, and recited by people who have never bothered to examine why the apostle Paul placed it between two chapters dealing with spiritual gifts. It is not merely a collection of pleasant observations about getting along with your neighbors. It is a devastating correction directed toward a congregation that possessed remarkable gifts while demonstrating remarkable carnality. The Corinthians were fascinated with spiritual manifestations, particularly those that attracted attention, and Paul was about to demonstrate that a man could possess extraordinary abilities and still amount to absolutely nothing in the sight of God without charity. **A spiritual gift may demonstrate what God enabled a man to do; charity reveals what governs the man while he is doing it.** The Corinthians needed that distinction, and modern Christianity has hardly outgrown the necessity.

The opening statement of the chapter has become one of the most abused expressions in the entire discussion of tongues: "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal" (1 Corinthians 13:1). From those words, entire religious systems have constructed the doctrine of a heavenly prayer language, a special form of communication supposedly superior to ordinary human speech and frequently presented as evidence of an advanced relationship with the Holy Ghost. The difficulty is that Paul never establishes such a practice in the verse. He begins a series of extraordinary hypothetical statements designed to emphasize the absolute necessity of charity. The same passage speaks of understanding all mysteries, possessing all knowledge, exercising all faith sufficient to remove mountains, distributing all possessions to the poor, and surrendering one's body to be burned. If the opening expression must establish a universal prayer language, consistency would require the remaining expressions to establish equally universal abilities. **A doctrine that requires a man to ignore the argument surrounding his favorite phrase is usually a doctrine built upon the phrase rather than the Bible.**

The chapter also presents a second major controversy concerning the cessation of spiritual gifts. Paul declares that prophecies shall fail, tongues shall cease, and knowledge shall vanish away, followed by the statement that when "that which is perfect" comes, the partial shall be done away. Some have attempted to identify that perfection directly with the completion of the New Testament Scriptures, thereby establishing the cessation of miraculous gifts through a single convenient interpretation. But the passage continues into the language of maturity, seeing face to face, and knowing even as one is known. Those expressions demand careful examination. The historical cessation of apostolic sign gifts must not be confused with the ultimate perfection awaiting believers at the coming of Jesus Christ. Both subjects deserve proper treatment without forcing one to accomplish

the work of the other. **The Bible does not need a crooked interpretation to defend a correct doctrine. If the truth requires twisting a verse, somebody has mistaken his argument for the truth.**

1. The More Excellent Way: Why Charity Interrupts the Discussion of Gifts

The placement of 1 Corinthians 13 is essential to its interpretation. Chapter 12 begins with Paul's declaration, "Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant." He then explains the diversity of gifts, the unity of the Spirit, and the different functions assigned to members of Christ's Body. The chapter concludes in verse 31 with the remarkable statement, "But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way." That final expression introduces the subject of chapter 13. Paul is not abandoning his previous discussion to deliver a sentimental speech about human affection. He is establishing something more essential than the extraordinary abilities the Corinthians had been discussing. The expression "more excellent way" exposes the danger of possessing gifts without the character necessary to exercise them properly. The Corinthians had become occupied with what they could display, while Paul directed their attention toward what should govern their conduct. **A man may have the finest tools in the workshop, but if he possesses neither wisdom nor honesty, the tools merely make him a more efficient troublemaker.**

First Corinthians 14:1 confirms the connection by commanding, "Follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy." Notice the order. Charity comes first, and the discussion of spiritual gifts continues afterward. Chapters 12, 13, and 14 therefore form a connected treatment of the subject. Chapter 12 identifies the gifts and their distribution, chapter 13 establishes the indispensable superiority of charity, and chapter 14 regulates the exercise of gifts within the assembly. Separating chapter 13 from its surroundings is like removing the judge from the courtroom and using his instructions as decorations for the hallway. The words remain attractive, but their authority and purpose have been neglected. Paul is correcting a congregation that had allowed spiritual manifestations to become occasions for competition, confusion, and personal importance. The answer was not to increase the excitement. It was to bring the believers under the authority of God's revealed order.

The Corinthian problem becomes clearer when 1 Corinthians 3:1–3 is remembered. Paul had already addressed these believers as carnal, even as babes in Christ, because envy, strife, and divisions were operating among them. Yet 1 Corinthians 1:7 declared that they came behind in no gift. Their spiritual gifts had not prevented their spiritual immaturity. That fact destroys the assumption that spectacular ability automatically demonstrates spiritual maturity. The gifts were real, but the flesh was also active. Charity was therefore not an

optional decoration added to an already successful ministry. It was the indispensable governing virtue without which even impressive service could become spiritually worthless. A preacher may speak forcefully, a teacher may possess considerable knowledge, and a congregation may demonstrate unusual abilities, but none of those things excuses pride, envy, or contempt for other believers. **The Holy Ghost never intended His gifts to become a competition in which the loudest participant receives the largest spiritual trophy.**

2. Tongues of Men and Angels: What Paul Actually Said

First Corinthians 13:1 begins with the word "Though." That word introduces the extraordinary comparison Paul is developing, and the same construction continues through the following verses. "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels," he says, the absence of charity would reduce his speech to sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. Paul is deliberately taking the most remarkable imaginable abilities and demonstrating their worthlessness without charity. He does not begin by declaring, "Every Christian possesses the language of angels." Neither does he command believers to seek angelic speech as a private devotional exercise. The Corinthians already needed correction concerning their fascination with tongues, and Paul selects the highest conceivable example of speech to emphasize his argument. Even speech surpassing ordinary human ability would provide no spiritual advantage if charity were absent. **A man can claim to possess the vocabulary of heaven and still conduct himself like he has never learned the first lesson of Christian charity.** That is Paul's rebuke, not an invitation to manufacture a heavenly language.

The Bible certainly records angels communicating with human beings, but those accounts do not establish a special unintelligible prayer language for Christians. In Genesis 19, angels spoke to Lot, and he understood their warnings. In Daniel 9:21–23, Gabriel communicated divine understanding to Daniel. In Luke 1:11–20, Gabriel spoke to Zacharias concerning the birth of John the Baptist. In Revelation 22:8–9, an angel corrected John when the apostle fell before him in worship. In each case, meaningful communication occurred. The passages do not reveal whether angels possess a distinct language among themselves, and no honest interpreter should pretend that they do. Scripture establishes that angels can communicate intelligibly with men. First Corinthians 13:1 may contemplate speech beyond ordinary human ability, but contemplating such speech does not authorize the invention of an additional spiritual gift. **The fact that angels speak does not prove that a Christian babbling unintelligible syllables has learned their vocabulary. The distance between those two statements is considerably greater than religious enthusiasm cares to admit.**

Furthermore, the use of the expression "tongues of men and of angels" must be examined alongside Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 14. The genuine biblical gift of tongues involved meaningful speech, and where a congregation did not understand the language, interpretation was necessary for edification. First Corinthians 14:13 commands the person speaking in an unknown tongue to pray that he may interpret. Verse 19 declares Paul's preference for five understandable words that teach others rather than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue. Verse 27 requires orderly exercise and interpretation, while verse 28 commands silence in the assembly when no interpreter is present. Nothing in those instructions establishes a permanent class of unintelligible heavenly utterances beyond meaningful communication. The word "unknown" describes a language unknown to the hearers, not permission to substitute meaningless sounds for speech. Paul does not turn away from understanding in chapter 13 and then spend chapter 14 demanding it. **A supernatural language is not made more supernatural by becoming less meaningful. God's gift did not require God's people to celebrate ignorance.**

3. Prophecy, Knowledge, Mountain-Moving Faith, and Sacrifice Without Charity

Paul intensifies the argument in 1 Corinthians 13:2: "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, and have not charity, I am nothing." The progression is deliberate. He moves beyond extraordinary speech into prophecy, complete understanding of mysteries, all knowledge, and faith capable of moving mountains. These are astonishing expressions, and their comprehensiveness demonstrates the force of the argument. Paul is not announcing that he personally possesses unlimited knowledge or divine omniscience. The surrounding construction presents an extraordinary hypothetical condition. Even if he possessed abilities surpassing ordinary human limitations, the absence of charity would render him nothing in the moral and spiritual assessment being made. The emphasis falls not upon establishing each hypothetical ability as an ordinary Christian experience but upon demonstrating the incomparable necessity of charity. **A man who possesses enough knowledge to explain every mystery but not enough charity to treat his brethren properly has learned everything except how to behave.**

The reference to mountain-moving faith requires the same care. Jesus Christ spoke of faith moving mountains in Matthew 17:20 and Mark 11:23, demonstrating the extraordinary possibilities associated with God's power. But Paul does not teach that possessing remarkable faith automatically produces holy character. The Corinthians needed to understand that even extraordinary dependence upon divine power could not substitute for charity. First Corinthians 12:9 had already identified faith among particular spiritual gifts, while saving faith is required of every person who receives Jesus Christ. These distinctions

must remain intact. A specific manifestation of faith associated with extraordinary service is not identical in function to the faith through which a sinner believes the gospel. Nor does the possession of impressive ability establish that a man's motives are righteous. Religious pride can take credit for what God accomplished and then use the accomplishment to elevate the servant above his brethren. **The man who boasts that he can move mountains should first demonstrate that he can move his own pride out of the way.**

Verse 3 carries the argument into sacrificial conduct: "And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing." Here Paul removes the possibility of defining charity merely by impressive outward action. A man might distribute everything he owns and still act from motives inconsistent with genuine charity. He might endure extraordinary suffering and yet receive no spiritual profit from the sacrifice described. The passage does not condemn generosity or faithful suffering. It condemns the notion that the outward magnitude of an action automatically establishes its inward righteousness. Matthew 6:1–4 similarly warns against performing charitable deeds for public admiration. God examines what men frequently overlook. **A large donation can conceal a small heart, and a spectacular sacrifice can advertise a man who has never learned humility.** The Corinthians were being shown that spiritual value cannot be measured merely by public appearance, extraordinary performance, or personal cost.

4. Charity Never Faileth: The Character That Outlasts the Spectacle

First Corinthians 13:4–7 provides the substance of the charity Paul has been defending. "Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up." These are not vague religious compliments. They directly confront the envy, strife, boasting, and arrogance already exposed within the Corinthian congregation. Charity suffers long rather than demanding immediate retaliation. It demonstrates kindness rather than cruelty. It refuses envy and does not parade its own greatness. Verse 5 continues by describing conduct that is not unseemly, selfish, easily provoked, or occupied with evil. These are practical corrections for people who had been competing over spiritual importance. A man claiming extraordinary gifts while constantly advertising his superiority contradicts the very charity Paul commands. **Charity does not climb onto the pulpit, announce its own greatness, and demand applause for being humble. The moment humility becomes a performance, pride has already collected the offering.**

Verse 6 declares that charity "Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth." This statement eliminates the popular mistake of treating charity as unconditional approval of whatever someone happens to believe or practice. Biblical charity does not celebrate false doctrine, excuse wickedness, or surrender the truth to avoid offending religious

sensibilities. It rejoices in the truth. Verse 7 adds that charity bears, believes, hopes, and endures all things. These expressions describe steadfast Christian love within the boundaries established by God's revelation; they do not command gullibility toward every miraculous claim. First John 4:1 commands believers to try the spirits, and 1 Thessalonians 5:21 commands them to prove all things and hold fast that which is good. Charity and discernment are not enemies. **A Christian who refuses to examine false teaching is not demonstrating superior love. He may simply be demonstrating that he has confused biblical charity with religious carelessness.**

Then comes the declaration that governs the remainder of the chapter: "Charity never faileth" (1 Corinthians 13:8). Paul immediately contrasts its enduring character with particular spiritual manifestations that would not continue indefinitely in their present operation. The distinction is fundamental. The Corinthians had elevated gifts that were temporary in function while neglecting charity, which possesses enduring value. They were fascinated with what could be displayed before an audience and insufficiently concerned with what should characterize every believer. Galatians 5:22 identifies love among the fruit of the Spirit, while Romans 13:10 declares that love worketh no ill to his neighbour. These truths govern Christian conduct beyond the extraordinary circumstances of the apostolic period. **The gift that astonishes a crowd may accomplish its appointed purpose and pass away, but charity does not expire when the audience goes home.** Spiritual maturity cannot be established by a performance that lasts an hour while character fails the remaining twenty-three.

5. That Which Is Perfect: The Partial, the Complete, and the Face-to-Face Future

First Corinthians 13:8–10 must be read with careful attention to its actual wording: "Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away." Paul continues, "For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away." The contrast concerns what is partial and what is complete. Present knowledge is partial, and prophetic understanding during the period Paul describes is partial. The coming perfection removes that limitation. Notice also that the text uses different expressions concerning prophecies, tongues, and knowledge. Tongues shall cease; prophecies shall fail; knowledge shall vanish away. Those statements should not be flattened into one mechanical formula without considering the following verses. **The apostle is explaining the superiority of lasting perfection over partial gifts, not supplying permission to cut the passage apart and attach whatever date happens to suit a doctrinal system.**

Verse 11 introduces the illustration of childhood and maturity. Paul declares that as a child he spoke, understood, and thought as a child, but upon becoming a man he put away childish things. The illustration emphasizes the relationship between an incomplete condition and a more mature condition. Verse 12 carries the argument to its decisive point: "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known." The present condition is characterized by limited understanding; the future condition is described through face-to-face knowledge. Identifying "that which is perfect" merely with the completion of the biblical canon fails to account adequately for this language. Believers possessing the completed Scriptures do not thereby know everything about themselves as God knows them, nor have they entered the final face-to-face condition Paul describes. **The completed Bible is perfect revelation, but possessing perfect revelation does not mean the believer has already entered the perfect condition awaiting him. A man can hold an infallible Book in his hands while still possessing a very fallible understanding in his head.**

The connection with Christ's future appearing provides the proper direction for understanding this perfection. First John 3:2 declares, "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." Philippians 3:20–21 likewise identifies the Saviour's coming and the transformation of the believer's vile body to be fashioned like His glorious body. First Corinthians 15:51–53 describes the change associated with the resurrection and the putting on of incorruption and immortality. The Church awaits Christ's coming for His saints, while the public Second Advent belongs to the further prophetic program and must not be confused with the Rapture. The great prophetic consummation centers upon the returning Lord Jesus Christ, not a printing milestone. The expression "face to face" directs the reader toward personal encounter and perfected fellowship. Even then, the redeemed do not become omniscient gods; their present imperfect condition gives way to the completeness God has appointed. **When perfection arrives, the believer will not merely possess more information. He will behold the Saviour whose glory makes present understanding appear like looking through a darkened glass.**

6. Paul's Third Heaven: Unspeakable Words Are Not an Angelic Prayer Manual

Second Corinthians 12:1–4 introduces an extraordinary experience that must be distinguished from the ordinary Christian life. Paul speaks of visions and revelations of the Lord, then describes a man in Christ caught up to the third heaven. The passage carefully acknowledges that Paul did not know whether the experience occurred in the body or out of the body; God knew. Verse 4 describes the man being caught up into paradise, where he "heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter." The context makes

clear that Paul is describing an extraordinary heavenly revelation associated with his own apostolic experience. The passage does not establish a practice for Christian congregations to reproduce, nor does it instruct believers to seek entrance into the same experience. In fact, Paul's purpose in the surrounding chapter is the opposite of self-exaltation. **The man who actually received extraordinary revelations was reluctant to boast about them; modern religious performers frequently advertise revelations they cannot establish and expect everybody else to be impressed.**

The expression "unspeakable words" deserves particular attention. Paul does not say that he heard meaningless noises, unintelligible syllables, or a collection of sounds without content. He heard words. The further explanation is that those words were "not lawful for a man to utter." Their restriction is explicitly stated. Consequently, this heavenly experience cannot be converted into permission for Christians to claim that unintelligible vocalizations constitute the language Paul heard. The passage does not tell us precisely what those words were, and no interpreter possesses authority to supply what God withheld. Neither does the passage declare that every angel uses an entirely separate language inaccessible to ordinary human understanding. It reveals that Paul heard words in paradise which he was not permitted to repeat. **When God says certain words were not lawful to utter, it takes a remarkably inventive religious system to turn that statement into a command for everybody to begin uttering them.** The restriction belongs to the text whether or not it suits somebody's preferred experience.

The remainder of 2 Corinthians 12 further exposes the danger of making extraordinary manifestations the measure of spiritual greatness. Paul explains that because of the abundance of revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given lest he be exalted above measure. He besought the Lord three times concerning its removal, but Christ answered, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9). Paul therefore learned to glory in his infirmities so that the power of Christ might rest upon him. The apostle who experienced heavenly revelations was not instructed to develop a superior prayer language as the solution to his suffering. He was taught the sufficiency of divine grace. This sharply contrasts with teachings that associate spectacular manifestations with guaranteed freedom from weakness, sickness, or hardship. **The apostle who heard unspeakable words still needed grace sufficient for ordinary suffering. That ought to silence a few religious salesmen who promise supernatural superiority while explaining away every unanswered prayer.**

7. What Shall Cease: Apostolic Signs and the Enduring Authority of Scripture

The cessation of apostolic sign gifts must be established through the whole biblical record rather than by forcing 1 Corinthians 13:10 to refer exclusively to the completion of the New

Testament. First Corinthians 1:22 states that the Jews require a sign, while 1 Corinthians 14:21–22 connects tongues with Isaiah's warning concerning unbelieving Israel. Hebrews 2:3–4 describes God confirming the apostolic testimony with signs, wonders, divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost according to His will. Second Corinthians 12:12 identifies signs, wonders, and mighty deeds as credentials associated with Paul's apostleship. Ephesians 2:20 describes the Church as built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone. These passages establish recognizable historical purposes for extraordinary manifestations during the founding apostolic ministry. **A foundation has an appointed place in a building. Men who spend the rest of their lives attempting to lay it again are not strengthening the structure; they are refusing to acknowledge that the foundation has already been laid.**

This distinction also prevents two opposite errors. One error insists that because 1 Corinthians 13 associates the removal of partial things with future perfection, every miraculous gift must continue operating throughout every generation until Christ returns. That conclusion overlooks the different purposes and historical settings of the gifts involved. The opposite error insists that because apostolic sign gifts fulfilled their foundational purposes, "that which is perfect" must refer to the completed Bible regardless of the chapter's face-to-face language. That conclusion forces the future perfection of verse 12 into an earlier historical event. Both errors allow a doctrinal preference to control the passage. The historical cessation of the apostolic sign gifts and the ultimate completion of the believer's condition are related subjects, but they are not identical events. **The truth does not require choosing between denying apostolic cessation and misidentifying future perfection. Scripture supplies enough evidence to distinguish the two without sacrificing either.**

Nor should 1 Corinthians 14:39 be ignored: "Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues." Paul was addressing a congregation in which genuine spiritual gifts operated during the apostolic period. He regulated their exercise rather than commanding the Corinthians to suppress gifts God had actually bestowed. That historical instruction does not prove that every modern claim to tongues represents the same supernatural operation. First Corinthians 14 requires interpretation, understanding, edification, and order, while 1 Corinthians 12 denies that every believer possesses identical gifts. The present believer must distinguish God's ability to work miraculously from an individual's claim to possess continuing apostolic credentials. Almighty God has not lost His power, and the Christian should never deny His sovereign ability to intervene. Nevertheless, divine power is not established by unverifiable claims or religious excitement. **The question is not whether God can perform a miracle. The question is**

whether God performed the particular miracle somebody is claiming, and whether that claim agrees with His written Word.

Conclusion

First Corinthians 13 stands as one of the strongest biblical corrections to the misuse of spiritual gifts because it identifies something far more important than the extraordinary abilities that fascinated the Corinthians. Paul demonstrates that remarkable speech, prophetic knowledge, extraordinary faith, costly generosity, and even personal sacrifice possess no spiritual profit without charity. The reference to tongues of men and angels belongs to that argument, not to an independent command establishing a heavenly prayer language. The passage does not authorize meaningless speech, nor does 2 Corinthians 12 reveal a vocabulary Christians are instructed to reproduce. Paul heard extraordinary words in paradise which he was not permitted to utter, and he subsequently learned that the Lord's grace was sufficient for his weakness. **The apostle's heavenly experience did not lead him to advertise supernatural superiority. It led him to magnify the sufficiency of Jesus Christ.** That is a considerable difference from much of the religious boasting associated with extraordinary manifestations.

The future perfection of 1 Corinthians 13 must likewise remain in its proper biblical setting. The completed Scriptures provide the believer with God's authoritative revelation, but the Christian still sees through a glass darkly and awaits the transformation associated with Christ's coming. The words "face to face" and "then shall I know even as also I am known" direct attention beyond the present condition of incomplete understanding. The coming fullness is connected with the Lord Jesus Christ and the perfected condition awaiting His redeemed people. Meanwhile, the distinct historical purposes of apostolic signs can be understood through their relationship to Israel, the confirmation of divine revelation, and the foundational ministry of the apostles. There is no necessity to convert the completion of the biblical canon into the direct meaning of "that which is perfect" in order to recognize those historical distinctions. **A correct doctrine does not become stronger when a man props it up with an incorrect interpretation. It becomes vulnerable precisely where he has departed from the words God actually wrote.**

Paul concludes in 1 Corinthians 13:13, "And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity." That is the final verdict upon the Corinthians' fascination with spiritual manifestations. Faith, hope, and charity possess enduring importance in the believer's present walk, while charity holds the place of greatest prominence in the comparison Paul makes. The Christian is called to believe God's Word, hope in His promises, and walk in charity toward others. He is not commanded to manufacture extraordinary speech, boast of heavenly revelations, or establish spiritual

superiority through experiences the Scriptures do not require. The apostolic gifts served their appointed purposes, the written Word continues to govern the Church, and the redeemed await the perfection associated with the appearing of their Saviour. **A man may claim the tongues of angels and still lack the charity of Christ. He may boast of visions and still fail to understand the Bible in his hands. He may chase temporary manifestations while neglecting the enduring truth. But the Christian who believes the Word, follows the Saviour, and walks in charity has discovered the more excellent way. When the spectacle has ended, when the boasting has ceased, and when the crowd has gone home, charity remains.**

7 of 10 — Tongues, Signs, and Wonders — The Unknown Tongue: Languages, Interpretation, and Corinthian Confusion

Primary Text: 1 Corinthians 14:1–25; Acts 2:4–11; Isaiah 28:11–12

Introduction

There is something remarkably convenient about a religious doctrine that becomes more difficult to examine the less anyone understands it. Most people spend their lives learning how to communicate clearly, but certain religious movements have managed to convince their congregations that unintelligible speech is evidence of superior spiritual communication. If nobody understands what is being said, that supposedly proves the Holy Ghost is operating. If somebody asks what the words mean, he is warned against questioning the Spirit. If the utterance bears no resemblance to an identifiable language, the explanation is that the speaker has entered a heavenly realm beyond ordinary understanding. It is a remarkable arrangement. The less evidence available, the greater the alleged miracle. Unfortunately for that arrangement, the apostle Paul wrote an entire chapter correcting the misuse of tongues, and his repeated emphasis falls upon **understanding, interpretation, edification, and order**. First Corinthians 14 was not written to provide religious confusion with an apostolic endorsement. It was written to bring confusion under the authority of the Holy Ghost's instructions. **When God gives a commandment requiring understanding, ignorance does not become holiness merely because somebody attaches a religious label to it.**

The expression "unknown tongue" appears repeatedly in 1 Corinthians 14, and those two words have become the foundation of countless claims concerning private prayer languages, heavenly communication, and supposed evidence of Spirit baptism. Yet Acts chapter 2 has already established what the biblical gift of tongues looked like when the

Holy Ghost first manifested it. The disciples spoke with other tongues, and the assembled Jews from numerous nations heard them speaking in the languages wherein they were born. Acts 2:8 records their question: "And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?" The miracle involved recognizable languages carrying meaningful communication. First Corinthians 14 does not suddenly transform that gift into an operation where language ceases to possess meaning. Paul's entire discussion assumes that speech has significance and that its meaning must become available to the congregation before the congregation can benefit from it. The problem at Corinth was not that understanding had become unnecessary. The problem was that believers were exercising gifts without sufficient concern for whether anyone else understood what they were saying.

The historical setting must also be preserved. Paul was writing to an actual congregation during the apostolic period, when genuine spiritual gifts were operating and when the Church was receiving foundational revelation through Christ's appointed messengers. He was not addressing a modern gathering where every claimed manifestation may be accepted merely because somebody insists that it came from God. Nor was he declaring that the miraculous gift of tongues never existed. The gift was real. Its operation was supernatural. Its exercise, however, was subject to the commandments of the Lord. Paul did not excuse disorder because the Corinthians claimed spiritual authority. He corrected the disorder precisely because spiritual activity must remain obedient to divine revelation. This distinction governs the entire chapter. **A genuine gift exercised contrary to God's instructions does not become acceptable because the gift is genuine, and a counterfeit gift does not become genuine because somebody exercises it enthusiastically.** The Word of God must judge both the claim and the conduct.

1. The Unknown Tongue: What Scripture Says About the Language

The proper starting point is Acts 2:4, where the disciples "began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." The following verses explain the extraordinary nature of the event. Acts 2:6 declares that every man heard them speak in his own language, and verse 11 identifies the content as "the wonderful works of God." The hearers recognized their native languages and understood the subject being proclaimed. The languages were unknown to the Galilaean speakers through ordinary human learning, but they were not unknowable languages without meaning. That distinction is essential. A language can be unknown to one person while remaining perfectly understandable to another. A man speaking a foreign language before an English-speaking congregation may communicate nothing to most listeners, even though every sentence is meaningful to someone who knows that language. **The inability of one audience to understand a**

language does not prove that the language has no meaning. It proves that the audience needs someone who understands it. That ordinary distinction is fundamental to Paul's argument.

First Corinthians 14:2 states, "For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries." The expression must be read within Paul's discussion of a particular congregation. The absence of understanding describes the difficulty confronting those who hear the utterance. It does not establish that the speaker has ceased using meaningful language. In fact, verse 10 later declares that the various voices in the world are not without signification. Paul is dealing with the problem of meaningful speech that does not communicate its meaning to the assembled hearers. God understands what human listeners do not, but that fact does not make the listeners' ignorance spiritually profitable. A preacher delivering an entire sermon in a language nobody present understands may possess excellent doctrine, but the congregation will depart without receiving the instruction. **The sermon has not become heavenly because the people cannot understand it. It has become useless to the people until somebody supplies the meaning.**

The word "mysteries" in verse 2 also requires attention. Paul does not define a mystery as a meaningless collection of sounds. Romans 16:25–26 speaks of a mystery previously kept secret but now made manifest through divine revelation. Ephesians 3:3–6 describes a mystery concerning Jews and Gentiles being fellowheirs in one body through the gospel. First Corinthians 15:51 introduces the revelation concerning the transformation of living believers with the declaration, "Behold, I shew you a mystery." In these passages, a mystery involves divine truth requiring revelation, not language stripped of intelligible content. Likewise, in 1 Corinthians 14, speech may communicate things unknown to its hearers, but that does not mean the utterance itself lacks meaning. Paul's concern is that the truth must become understandable before it can profit the congregation. **God reveals mysteries so that His servants may understand His truth. Religion has no authority to turn mystery into a permanent excuse for refusing understanding.**

2. Speaking Unto God: The Verse Used to Invent a Private Prayer Language

The statement that the speaker in an unknown tongue "speaketh not unto men, but unto God" has frequently been separated from its immediate explanation and converted into a doctrine of private supernatural communication. The argument usually proceeds as follows: because no man understands the utterance, the language must be intended exclusively for God; because God understands it, the speaker need not know what he says; and because the speech is incomprehensible, its incomprehensibility supposedly

establishes that it is supernatural. There is a serious problem with that reasoning. Paul does not praise the lack of understanding as the purpose of the gift. He identifies it as the condition preventing the congregation from receiving instruction. The following verses repeatedly insist that understanding must be supplied. To isolate verse 2 while neglecting the remainder of the chapter is to turn Paul's description of a problem into permission to preserve the problem. **A verse explaining why a congregation is not being edified cannot honestly be made into proof that edification is unnecessary.**

First Corinthians 14:4 continues, "He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church." This verse establishes a contrast between the benefit associated with the individual speaker and the benefit supplied to the congregation through understandable prophecy. Paul is not declaring that private spiritual benefit is inherently wicked. He is explaining why prophecy is superior for the assembled church when tongues remain uninterpreted. Verse 5 makes the distinction unmistakable: "for greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying." Interpretation changes the usefulness of the utterance because it communicates meaning to the congregation. Without interpretation, the benefit remains restricted; with interpretation, others may be instructed. That is the controlling issue. **A church service is not designed to become a private exhibition where one individual enjoys an experience while everybody else waits for somebody to explain what happened.** The assembled body is supposed to receive edification through understandable truth.

Neither does this passage establish an additional private prayer language that every Christian must possess. Romans 8:26–27 teaches that the Spirit helps believers in their infirmities and makes intercession according to God's will, but the reference to "groanings which cannot be uttered" does not command audible tongues or establish that unintelligible syllables constitute the Spirit's intercession. The words "cannot be uttered" should create considerable difficulty for anyone attempting to turn them into instructions for uttering sounds. Likewise, Jude 20 commands believers to pray in the Holy Ghost without prescribing a foreign language, and Ephesians 6:18 commands prayer "always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit." Spirit-directed prayer is not defined by an unintelligible vocabulary. The believer approaches the Father through Jesus Christ, and the Spirit assists according to the will of God. **Prayer does not become more acceptable because the worshipper cannot explain what he is saying. The throne of grace does not require a secret password.**

3. Prophecy, Revelation, and Doctrine: Why the Church Needs Understanding

First Corinthians 14:3 establishes the superiority of understandable prophecy for congregational benefit: "But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort." During the apostolic period, prophecy was a genuine spiritual manifestation involving divine revelation. It should not be reduced without distinction to the ordinary preaching of a completed biblical text, even though faithful preaching today certainly instructs, exhorts, and comforts believers through Scripture. Paul's comparison concerns communication that accomplishes recognizable spiritual purposes. Edification builds believers up through truth. Exhortation urges them toward obedience. Comfort strengthens them through the promises and faithfulness of God. All three require meaningful communication. Nobody can be instructed in a doctrine he cannot understand, and nobody can knowingly obey a command whose meaning remains hidden. **A preacher who communicates nothing understandable may have occupied the pulpit for an hour, but he has not thereby taught the congregation for an hour. Time spent speaking and truth successfully communicated are not identical achievements.**

Paul sharpens the contrast in verse 6: "Now, brethren, if I come unto you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you, except I shall speak to you either by revelation, or by knowledge, or by prophesying, or by doctrine?" Notice the standard he establishes. The usefulness of speech is measured by what it communicates to those hearing it. Revelation, knowledge, prophecy, and doctrine concern substantive truth. Merely producing extraordinary sounds does not accomplish the purpose if the congregation receives no understanding. Paul's question is devastating because he includes himself. Even the apostle who possessed genuine spiritual gifts would fail to profit the Corinthians by speaking in a language they could not understand. The authority of the messenger did not eliminate the necessity of communication. **If the apostle Paul could not edify a congregation through uninterpreted speech, a modern religious performer possesses no greater authority to claim that his unintelligibility is spiritually superior.** The apostolic standard remains higher than the modern excuse.

First Corinthians 14 also exposes the difference between genuine spiritual activity and the mere appearance of spirituality. A speaker may sincerely believe that he is doing something important, but sincerity does not determine whether others receive biblical instruction. Verse 12 commands those zealous of spiritual gifts to seek to excel "to the edifying of the church." That is an unmistakable correction of misplaced priorities. The goal was not to accumulate impressive manifestations or establish personal distinction. It was to strengthen the entire assembly. First Corinthians 12:7 had already declared that the manifestation of the Spirit was given "to profit withal," and Ephesians 4:12 identifies the edifying of Christ's Body as a central purpose of appointed ministries. The two passages agree concerning the importance of spiritual benefit to others. **The question governing**

Christian service is not how extraordinary the servant appeared, but whether God's truth was faithfully communicated and His people were strengthened. A room full of astonished people is not necessarily a room full of instructed believers.

4. Pipes, Harps, and Trumpets: Paul's Illustration That Exposes Meaningless Noise

First Corinthians 14:7 introduces a remarkably practical illustration: "And even things without life giving sound, whether pipe or harp, except they give a distinction in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped?" Paul selects musical instruments because their usefulness depends upon distinguishable sounds arranged meaningfully. A musician does not demonstrate superior artistry by striking random notes without relationship or recognizable purpose. Music requires distinctions through which a melody can be identified. If the sounds cannot be distinguished, the listener cannot recognize what is being played. Paul applies that obvious principle to the exercise of tongues. If even lifeless instruments must produce meaningful distinctions, how much more should the speech of living Christians communicate understandable truth? **A man does not become a gifted musician by throwing his instrument down the stairs, and speech does not become a spiritual gift merely because it produces an impressive amount of noise.** The point is not entertainment. It is intelligibility.

Verse 8 advances the illustration from music to military communication: "For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?" In biblical warfare, a trumpet served as a signal directing men toward an appointed action. Numbers 10:1–10 describes trumpets used for assembling the congregation, directing movement, and sounding alarms. Different purposes required recognizable signals. An uncertain trumpet could leave soldiers confused when immediate obedience was necessary. Paul understands that communication must be sufficiently clear to produce an appropriate response. A military commander who sends meaningless signals cannot reasonably accuse the army of lacking faith when the soldiers fail to understand him. The signal itself has failed its purpose. **A trumpet that cannot tell the difference between assembly and battle is not demonstrating extraordinary musical freedom. It is placing the army in danger.** Likewise, religious speech that communicates no recognizable instruction cannot accomplish the teaching and exhortation for which understandable words are necessary.

First Corinthians 14:9 then applies the illustrations directly: "So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the air." There is the apostolic verdict. Words should be sufficiently understandable for their meaning to be recognized. The alternative is speaking into the air. That description is hardly a commendation of unintelligibility as a superior spiritual achievement. Paul does not announce that the more mysterious the utterance becomes,

the more divine authority the speaker possesses. He asks how anyone can know what is being spoken. The same principle governs faithful Bible teaching, preaching, prayer, and testimony. Truth must be expressed in a manner that communicates its meaning. **A message that never reaches the understanding of its intended hearers has not accomplished its purpose simply because the speaker delivered it enthusiastically.** A full hour of unintelligible speech does not outweigh five minutes of understandable biblical truth.

5. Every Voice Has Signification: The Difference Between Language and Babbling

First Corinthians 14:10 provides one of the clearest statements in the entire discussion: "There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world, and none of them is without signification." The final expression is decisive. Paul recognizes that different voices and languages possess meaning. Their significance may be unknown to a particular listener, but they are not therefore empty sounds. A foreign language can sound unusual to someone who has never learned it, yet the language still communicates thoughts, statements, questions, and instructions. The distinction between meaningful foreign speech and meaningless vocal repetition must not be discarded. When genuine tongues occurred at Pentecost, people recognized their own languages and understood the wonderful works of God. Nothing in 1 Corinthians 14 requires abandoning that standard and redefining the gift as sounds without linguistic content. **The fact that a listener does not understand a language is not proof that heaven invented it. It may simply mean that the listener needs a translator.**

Verse 11 continues, "Therefore if I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh shall be a barbarian unto me." The illustration concerns mutual incomprehension. The speaker and hearer remain unable to communicate because the meaning is not shared. Paul is not suggesting that either person has necessarily lost intelligence or that the language itself is defective. The barrier exists because understanding is absent between them. A person speaking a perfectly intelligible foreign language can be as incomprehensible to an uninstructed hearer as the hearer is to him. Interpretation solves that problem by making meaning accessible. The argument would be considerably weakened if the speech had no meaning to interpret in the first place. **You cannot translate nothing into something merely by declaring yourself inspired. A genuine interpreter supplies the meaning of an actual utterance; he does not invent a sermon to accompany a collection of unexplained sounds.** The Corinthians were being instructed to respect the difference.

This is where modern claims to tongues require serious examination rather than immediate acceptance or indiscriminate ridicule. A person may produce repeated syllables with

genuine religious sincerity, yet sincerity does not establish that those syllables form a supernatural language. An entire congregation may participate enthusiastically, yet collective enthusiasm does not establish apostolic authority. A speaker may claim to have received an interpretation, but the claim itself must not become immune from examination. During the apostolic period, genuine interpretation was itself a spiritual gift, as 1 Corinthians 12:10 records. The Holy Ghost did not authorize men to assign whatever meaning they pleased to an utterance. First John 4:1 commands believers to try the spirits, and 1 Thessalonians 5:21 declares, "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good." **The Christian who examines a claim against Scripture is not insulting the Holy Ghost. He is obeying the Holy Ghost's command to examine it.** Biblical discernment does not require believing every religious assertion merely because somebody becomes offended when questioned.

6. Praying with the Spirit and with Understanding: The Apostle's Own Correction

First Corinthians 14:13 introduces another decisive requirement: "Wherefore let him that speaketh in an unknown tongue pray that he may interpret." Why require interpretation if the purpose of the gift were simply to communicate incomprehensibly? The command demonstrates that intelligible meaning remains essential to the usefulness of the utterance. Verse 14 continues, "For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful." Paul acknowledges that the speaker's spirit may be engaged while understanding remains unfruitful. That statement must be read honestly. It does not celebrate the absence of understanding as the highest spiritual condition. It identifies a deficiency requiring the corrective emphasis supplied immediately afterward. Nor does the passage establish that every modern vocal exercise labeled tongues constitutes genuine prayer in the Holy Ghost. Paul is addressing the operation and regulation of gifts that genuinely existed during the apostolic period. **An apostolic description of what occurs during a genuine gift is not a blank check endorsing every modern activity that borrows the gift's name.**

Verse 15 provides Paul's response: "What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also." Notice the repeated word "also." Paul does not instruct the Corinthians to abandon spiritual participation, but neither does he permit understanding to be discarded. Prayer and singing should unite spiritual engagement with intelligible content. The Christian life is not divided between occasions when the mind is useful and occasions when the mind becomes an obstacle to divine activity. Romans 12:2 speaks of the renewing of the mind, and Ephesians 5:17 commands believers to understand what the will of the Lord is. Genuine spirituality is not hostility toward comprehension. **The Holy Ghost who inspired**

an understandable Bible did not suddenly become opposed to understanding when the congregation began praying. Paul sought the cooperation of spirit and understanding, not the exaltation of unintelligibility above the written Word of God.

Verses 16–17 explain the practical consequence when understanding is absent. Paul asks how an unlearned person can say "Amen" when someone gives thanks if he does not understand what is being said. He then acknowledges, "For thou verily givest thanks well, but the other is not edified." The statement is extraordinarily revealing. The thanksgiving may be genuine, and the speaker may be acting sincerely, yet the congregation remains without the benefit intended. The hearer cannot knowingly affirm what he does not understand. Verse 18 adds Paul's testimony that he spoke with tongues more than the Corinthians, but verse 19 immediately establishes his preference: "Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue." **Five understandable words that teach God's truth accomplish more in the assembly than ten thousand impressive words that leave everybody uninstructed.** Paul did not despise genuine tongues. He refused to worship the spectacle at the expense of understanding.

7. Tongues for a Sign: Isaiah's Warning and the Unbeliever at the Door

First Corinthians 14:20 begins with a rebuke: "Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men." Paul then quotes Isaiah 28 concerning God's warning to Israel: "With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that will they not hear me, saith the Lord." The original prophetic setting concerns a people refusing God's instruction and encountering foreign speech associated with divine judgment. Isaiah 28:11 declares, "For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people," while verse 12 concludes, "yet they would not hear." Paul uses that history to explain the sign function of tongues. First Corinthians 14:22 declares, "Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not." The gift possessed a purpose connected with unbelief, not merely the personal enjoyment of believers. **God did not establish a prophetic sign to Israel so that later generations could turn it into a competition over who sounds most spiritual.**

Yet verses 23–25 provide an apparent difficulty that disappears when the immediate argument is respected. Paul explains that if the entire church gathers and everyone speaks with tongues, unlearned people or unbelievers entering will conclude that the congregation is mad. The apostle is not contradicting his statement that tongues served as a sign to unbelievers. He is demonstrating that disorderly, uninterpreted exercise fails to communicate truth and produces confusion. A sign possesses an appointed purpose, but its misuse does not guarantee that observers will understand that purpose. Verse 24

describes the contrasting effect of understandable prophecy: an unbeliever entering may be convinced and judged by the truth being communicated. Verse 25 describes the secrets of his heart being made manifest, leading him to worship God and acknowledge His presence among the believers. **The unbeliever does not need an auditorium full of competing sounds to discover that God is among His people. He needs to encounter truth that exposes his heart before God.**

The chapter's later instructions reinforce the same point. First Corinthians 14:27 requires tongues speakers to be limited and to speak by course, with an interpreter present. Verse 28 commands silence in the church when no interpreter is available. Verse 33 declares, "For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace," and verse 40 requires all things to be done "decently and in order." These commands governed genuine gifts during the apostolic period and expose the carelessness of treating every modern religious demonstration as automatically divine. Paul also wrote in verse 39, "forbid not to speak with tongues," addressing the legitimate operation of the gift among those Corinthians. That historical command cannot be converted into proof that every present claim is genuine, any more than the existence of true apostles proves that every man claiming apostleship possesses divine authority. **God's power is not authenticated by disorder, and the Holy Ghost never granted anyone permission to disregard His own commandments.** The authority belongs to Scripture, not to the loudest person in the meeting.

Conclusion

First Corinthians 14 establishes the biblical distinction between genuine supernatural languages and unintelligible religious activity that fails to communicate meaningful truth. The gift of tongues was real during the apostolic period, and Acts chapter 2 demonstrates that its original manifestation involved recognizable languages understood by people from different nations. At Corinth, Paul addressed the difficulties created when languages were exercised without interpretation before congregations unable to understand them. His correction consistently emphasized intelligibility, edification, interpretation, and order. The expression "unknown tongue" does not establish that the sounds possessed no linguistic meaning. It identifies a communication problem requiring interpretation so others may understand what is spoken. Paul's illustrations of musical instruments, military trumpets, and mutually incomprehensible speakers reinforce the same principle from different directions. **A language unknown to its hearers is still a language. A sound without meaning does not become a language merely because somebody claims supernatural authority for producing it.** The biblical distinction must be preserved.

Neither do the passages concerning speaking unto God, praying in an unknown tongue, or the speaker's unfruitful understanding establish a mandatory private prayer language for

Christians. Paul repeatedly directs the discussion toward understanding, culminating in his preference for five intelligible words over ten thousand words that do not instruct the congregation. The Old Testament relationship between foreign languages and Israel's unbelief further establishes that tongues possessed a historical sign function. Their purpose cannot be determined merely by observing what religious movements have subsequently claimed about them. Genuine apostolic gifts belonged to the period in which God confirmed His foundational witnesses, while the believer's present standing in Christ is established through faith in the gospel and the sealing of the Holy Ghost. Ephesians 1:13 identifies that sealing with hearing and believing the word of truth, not producing an extraordinary utterance. The believer needs sound doctrine, faithful service, and understanding of Scripture rather than pressure to imitate manifestations whose biblical circumstances cannot be reproduced by human determination.

The final question is not whether a religious meeting can generate excitement, produce unusual sounds, or convince participants that something extraordinary occurred. Human beings have always been capable of remarkable enthusiasm, and extraordinary claims deserve examination rather than automatic acceptance. The question is whether the claimed manifestation possesses the characteristics, purpose, and biblical authority of the genuine gift recorded in Scripture. Paul did not write 1 Corinthians 14 to abolish understanding, celebrate unintelligibility, or excuse disorder. He wrote to correct a congregation that had allowed the exercise of spiritual gifts to interfere with the edification of God's people. The Christian should therefore examine the words, understand the setting, respect the commands, and refuse to substitute personal experience for divine revelation. **The Holy Ghost did not inspire thirty thousand verses of Scripture so that a congregation could eventually decide that understanding what God says is unnecessary. At Pentecost, men heard languages they understood. At Corinth, Paul commanded interpretation so men could understand. And today, the same written Word still teaches that truth communicated is worth more than noise admired. When religion celebrates confusion, open the Bible. God has already spoken clearly.**

8 of 10 — Tongues, Signs, and Wonders — Let Your Women Keep Silence: The Rules Modern Tongues Meetings Ignore

Primary Text: 1 Corinthians 14:26–40; 11:3–16; Acts 21:8–9; 1 Timothy 2:11–14

Introduction

There is a rather extraordinary religious arrangement operating in certain churches where nearly anything can be blamed upon the Holy Ghost except obedience to the commandments the Holy Ghost actually inspired. One person begins speaking in an unintelligible tongue, another joins him, somebody across the room starts shouting, several others announce that they cannot control themselves, and the congregation is assured that all this disorder demonstrates the wonderful liberty of the Spirit. Then somebody opens 1 Corinthians chapter 14, reads the apostle Paul's instructions, and suddenly the atmosphere changes. The same people who insist that the Holy Ghost must be obeyed become remarkably reluctant to obey Him. Paul established limits upon speakers, required interpretation, commanded silence under specific circumstances, subjected prophetic utterances to examination, and declared that God is not the author of confusion. He also gave instructions concerning women speaking in the churches. **A congregation cannot prove that it is controlled by the Holy Ghost by disregarding the very commandments the Holy Ghost gave concerning congregational conduct.** Spiritual liberty does not mean freedom from Scripture.

The instructions in 1 Corinthians 14:26–40 were not written to a congregation unfamiliar with spiritual manifestations. Corinth possessed genuine gifts during the apostolic period, as 1 Corinthians 1:7 and chapters 12–14 establish. Yet the possession of genuine gifts did not give the believers permission to exercise them however they pleased. Paul had already rebuked their carnality, division, and spiritual immaturity. First Corinthians 3:3 declares that envy, strife, and divisions demonstrated their carnal condition. Now he addresses their disorderly worship and explains how spiritual gifts were to operate when believers assembled. His governing concern appears in verse 26: "Let all things be done unto edifying." The purpose was not to produce the loudest meeting, advertise the most impressive personalities, or persuade visitors that disorder itself was evidence of divine activity. The purpose was the spiritual profit of Christ's Body. **The Holy Ghost never appointed confusion as the chairman of a church meeting.** A genuine spiritual operation must remain subject to divine order.

The discussion concerning women in verses 34–35 must be handled with the same seriousness as the remaining instructions. Paul commands women to keep silence in the churches and to remain under obedience, yet elsewhere he acknowledges women praying and prophesying, and Acts records the four daughters of Philip who prophesied. Those passages must be examined together rather than allowing one to erase the others. The Bible does not authorize dismissing Paul's restriction as an embarrassment, nor does it authorize pretending that women never spoke, prayed, taught, or ministered in any capacity throughout the New Testament. The immediate context, the distinction between different forms of speaking, and the apostolic teaching concerning authority in the

assembly must govern the interpretation. We will not defend disorder by weakening the commandments, and we will not defend the commandments by inventing prohibitions the text does not establish. **The Scriptures need neither a modern apology nor a religious exaggeration. They need to be believed, rightly divided, and obeyed.**

1. When the Church Comes Together: Everything Must Serve Edification

First Corinthians 14:26 begins, "How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying." The expression "when ye come together" identifies the assembled congregation as the setting under consideration. Paul is not describing a believer praying privately in his home or a conversation between two Christians discussing Scripture. He is regulating what occurs when the church assembles. Several different contributions are mentioned, including psalms, doctrine, tongues, revelation, and interpretation. Their presence reflects the circumstances of the apostolic congregation, where extraordinary gifts and revelatory manifestations were operating. Yet Paul's concluding instruction governs every contribution: all things must be done unto edifying. The issue was not how many people could participate or how unusual their experiences might appear. The issue was whether the congregation received spiritual profit. **A church service is not improved merely because everybody gets an opportunity to demonstrate something. The assembly exists for God's glory and the strengthening of His people.**

The Corinthians had apparently confused the abundance of spiritual manifestations with the proper exercise of those manifestations. Paul had already warned in verse 19 that he would rather speak five words with his understanding, so that he might teach others, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue. The comparison is devastating to any theology that measures spiritual success by the volume of extraordinary utterances. Five intelligible words accomplishing genuine instruction possess greater congregational value than thousands of words nobody understands. First Corinthians 12:7 had established that the manifestation of the Spirit was given "to profit withal," while Ephesians 4:12 identifies the edifying of Christ's Body as a purpose of appointed ministries. These passages agree. Gifts and ministries were not distributed to create spiritual celebrities. They served the Lord's purpose among His people. **If the congregation leaves impressed with the performers but ignorant of the Scriptures, the meeting may have been memorable without having been spiritually profitable.**

The distinction between apostolic circumstances and present Church Age practice must also be maintained. The Corinthians lived during the period when Christ's foundational apostles exercised their ministry and extraordinary gifts were operating. Ephesians 2:20

identifies the Church as built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone. The historical presence of revelatory gifts cannot simply be assumed to authorize identical claims in every subsequent generation. Nevertheless, the apostolic regulations remain authoritative evidence concerning what God considered proper conduct even when those genuine gifts existed. If the Holy Ghost required order when miraculous gifts were authentic, how much less justification exists for disorder surrounding claims whose authenticity has never been established? The Christian congregation today possesses the written Word of God and must conduct its worship according to biblical authority. **The presence of a claimed supernatural manifestation does not suspend the commandments of God. A spiritual gift is not a license to turn the church into a religious free-for-all.**

2. Two or Three, One at a Time, and an Interpreter Required

First Corinthians 14:27 establishes three restrictions that are frequently ignored when modern tongues meetings are compared with Scripture: "If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course; and let one interpret." The language is not difficult. The number of speakers was limited. Two were permitted, or at most three. They were to speak "by course," meaning in sequence rather than simultaneously. An interpreter was required. Those restrictions governed the public exercise of genuine tongues during the apostolic period. Paul did not suggest that ten speakers might participate if the congregation became sufficiently excited. He did not permit everybody to speak simultaneously because the atmosphere seemed unusually spiritual. He did not abandon interpretation because the utterance sounded impressive. **The Holy Ghost established a numerical limit, an orderly sequence, and an interpretive requirement. Anyone claiming the same gift while rejecting those conditions has an argument with the apostle who wrote them.**

The requirement of interpretation deserves particular emphasis because it exposes the purpose of the gift within the assembly. An actual language possesses meaning, but that meaning must be made available to listeners who do not understand it. First Corinthians 14:10 declares that the different voices in the world are not without signification, while verse 13 commands the speaker in an unknown tongue to pray that he may interpret. Verse 16 explains that someone unable to understand an utterance cannot knowingly say Amen to what has been spoken. The concern is intelligible communication. Interpretation was not a theatrical opportunity for another person to deliver whatever religious message happened to enter his mind. It was the means through which meaningful speech could become understandable to the congregation. **An interpretation that cannot be distinguished from somebody inventing a message does not establish the authenticity**

of the original utterance merely because both people claim inspiration. God's people are commanded to examine spiritual claims, not surrender discernment whenever somebody announces that he possesses a gift.

Verse 28 supplies the consequence when interpretation is unavailable: "But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God." Notice that Paul does not command the congregation to proceed with unintelligible speech and simply hope somebody benefits. He commands silence in the church. The speaker might genuinely possess the gift, yet public exercise was prohibited without interpretation. This distinction proves that spiritual ability does not override apostolic regulation. The instruction to speak to himself and to God does not authorize uncontrolled public utterances; it specifically removes uninterpreted speech from the assembly. Paul protects congregational edification without denying the reality of the gift among those Corinthians. **A man who claims that the Holy Ghost compelled him to interrupt the church without an interpreter must explain why the Holy Ghost previously commanded him to remain silent under precisely those circumstances.** Divine inspiration is not divided against itself.

3. The Spirits of the Prophets Are Subject to the Prophets

First Corinthians 14:29 turns from tongues to prophecy: "Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge." The same concern for limitation and order continues. Prophetic utterances were not to overwhelm the congregation through unrestricted participation, nor were they to escape examination merely because someone claimed divine inspiration. Others were commanded to judge what was spoken. First Thessalonians 5:20–21 similarly declares, "Despise not prophesyings. Prove all things; hold fast that which is good." The command to prove all things establishes that receiving a spiritual claim does not require surrendering judgment. During the apostolic period, genuine prophecy was a revelatory gift, not simply another name for ordinary preaching. Nevertheless, even authentic spiritual manifestations were subject to scrutiny and orderly regulation. **A man who claims that his words come from God while forbidding anyone to examine them has already placed his personal authority above the written commandments of God.** That is not spiritual humility. It is religious presumption.

Verse 30 provides another instruction: "If any thing be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace." Once again, silence is commanded under a particular circumstance. The person already speaking was required to yield appropriately rather than demand unlimited attention. Verse 31 explains the purpose: "For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted." The phrase "one by one" is essential. Paul was not encouraging a room full of competing prophetic voices. He was insisting that

communication proceed in a manner allowing people to learn and receive comfort. The broader allowance in verse 31 operates under the numerical and orderly restrictions already established, not as permission for every participant to speak at the same moment. **When everybody speaks at once, everybody may be participating, but very few people are being instructed.** The Holy Ghost did not inspire these regulations because He lacked appreciation for enthusiasm. He inspired them because truth must be communicated in an orderly manner to accomplish its intended purpose.

Verse 32 delivers a direct answer to the modern claim that spiritual manifestations necessarily overpower human self-control: "And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets." Paul does not say that a genuine prophet becomes helpless before an irresistible impulse that prevents obedience. He declares that the spirits of the prophets remain subject to the prophets. The individual possesses responsibility for orderly conduct. Verse 33 immediately supplies the governing principle: "For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints." This does not deny that genuine spiritual experiences may be emotionally powerful. It denies that claims of spiritual power excuse disorder and disobedience. Galatians 5:22–23 includes temperance among the fruit of the Spirit, which agrees with the responsibility Paul establishes. **The Holy Ghost does not seize control of a believer in order to make him disobey the Holy Ghost. A man who blames his misconduct upon divine compulsion has found a remarkably convenient excuse, but not a biblical one.**

4. Let Your Women Keep Silence: The Command in Its Actual Setting

First Corinthians 14:34 declares, "Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law." These words cannot be removed from the Bible because they offend modern assumptions concerning authority. Nor can they be treated as though their placement within a discussion of congregational order were accidental. Paul has been regulating public tongues, prophetic speaking, and the orderly participation of members in the assembled congregation. He now addresses women and commands silence in the churches, associating that restriction with obedience and the authority already established in Scripture. The following verse specifically addresses their questions within that setting. The command therefore possesses real force concerning the public speaking and authoritative participation under discussion. **The apostle did not write these words in invisible ink, and the Church has no authority to erase them merely because the surrounding culture prefers a different arrangement.** Biblical authority is not established by public approval.

Verse 35 continues, "And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church." The instruction identifies a particular issue concerning learning and questioning during the assembly. Paul directs the questions described here away from disruptive participation in the congregational proceedings and into the household setting. This does not establish that women are incapable of learning doctrine, nor does it relieve husbands of their responsibility to know and communicate the Scriptures. Indeed, the instruction assumes that the home should provide an appropriate environment for biblical discussion. It must not be converted into an absurd claim that an unmarried woman can never ask a scriptural question or that no woman may receive instruction from anyone other than a husband. Those conclusions reach beyond the stated circumstances. The passage establishes a restriction upon speaking in the assembled church in the context Paul is regulating. **The Word of God does not need additional human prohibitions attached to it to make its existing commandments authoritative.**

The expression "under obedience, as also saith the law" connects the instruction with the biblical pattern of authority rather than a temporary preference invented by the Corinthians. Genesis 2 establishes the order of creation, while Genesis 3:16 describes consequences associated with the woman's relationship to her husband following the fall. First Corinthians 11:3 likewise identifies an order of headship, stating that Christ is the head of every man, the man is the head of the woman, and God is the head of Christ. These relationships must not be confused with differences in the value of souls before God. Galatians 3:28 affirms the believer's unity in Christ Jesus, but spiritual unity does not abolish every distinction concerning responsibility and authority. **Equality in receiving salvation does not require identical offices in the congregation, any more than belonging to one body requires every member to perform the same function.** The biblical arrangement concerns divinely appointed order, not permission for arrogance, contempt, or mistreatment.

5. Women Praying and Prophesying: The Passages That Must Also Be Believed

First Corinthians 11:5 introduces a fact that cannot be ignored: "But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head." Paul plainly acknowledges women praying and prophesying, and his immediate concern in that passage involves headship and the covering of the head. A woman praying or prophesying was not therefore exercising authority without restraint merely because such activity occurred. The passage establishes that the manner in which she conducted herself mattered. Yet chapter 11 does not explicitly define every setting in which those activities took place. It cannot simply be assumed that Paul was authorizing unrestricted prophetic leadership by women in the assembled congregation contrary to his later instructions.

Neither may chapter 14 be interpreted so broadly that chapter 11 becomes an impossible statement. **A sound interpretation must allow both chapters to remain true without forcing one into silence simply because the other creates a difficult question.** The Scriptures are not contradictory; careless interpretations frequently are.

Acts 21:8–9 supplies additional testimony concerning women who prophesied. Philip the evangelist had four daughters, described as virgins, "which did prophesy." The passage states the fact plainly. These women exercised prophecy during the apostolic period. However, the account does not say that they occupied the office of pastor, governed an assembled congregation, or exercised unrestricted teaching authority over men. It does not even describe the precise occasions on which their prophecies were delivered. Acts 2:17, quoting Joel's prophecy, likewise speaks of sons and daughters prophesying. These passages establish that God did not prohibit every form of prophetic utterance by women throughout biblical history. The question is where, when, and under what authority such manifestations operated. The same distinction appears in Acts 18:26, where Aquila and Priscilla privately instructed Apollos more perfectly in the way of God. **A woman who faithfully explains Scripture within an appropriate setting is not thereby claiming the governing office of the local church.** The inspired accounts distinguish activities that religious arguments often carelessly combine.

First Timothy 2:11–14 provides direct instruction concerning teaching and authority. Paul writes, "Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection," and continues, "But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence." He grounds the instruction in the creation of Adam and Eve, demonstrating that his reasoning extends beyond a passing cultural inconvenience. The governing distinction concerns teaching authority and submission within the established order. First Timothy 3 subsequently identifies qualifications for bishops, while Titus 2:3–5 specifically commands aged women to teach younger women appropriate conduct. Those instructions demonstrate that women possess important teaching responsibilities without occupying every office or exercising every form of authority. Congregational singing, private scriptural discussion, teaching children, and instructing younger women must not automatically be treated as identical to authoritative teaching over the assembled church. **God does not diminish the usefulness of women by assigning different responsibilities. The folly begins when men redefine faithfulness as possessing an office God did not assign.**

6. The Modern Tongues Meeting Under Apostolic Examination

Imagine examining a claimed modern tongues meeting with the actual requirements of 1 Corinthians 14 before deciding whether the activity resembles the biblical record. The first question concerns the number of speakers. Were there two, or at most three, as verse 27

requires? The second concerns their sequence. Did each speak in turn, or were several people speaking simultaneously? The third concerns interpretation. Was the speech meaningfully interpreted so the congregation could understand and receive instruction? The fourth concerns self-control. Did the participants obey the instruction to remain silent when required, or did they insist that they were unable to stop? The fifth concerns the governing authority of the assembly. Were the instructions concerning women, prophetic judgment, and orderly participation respected? These are not standards invented to embarrass a particular denomination. They are found in the chapter regulating the genuine gift. **If a claimed miracle must be protected from the very Bible that describes the genuine miracle, the claim has a serious credibility problem.**

The problem becomes more obvious whenever disorder is defended as evidence that the Holy Ghost is moving with unusual power. First Corinthians 14:33 directly declares that God is not the author of confusion. Verse 40 commands, "Let all things be done decently and in order." Those statements stand alongside the requirements concerning speakers, interpretation, and self-control. They cannot be dismissed as though the apostle temporarily interrupted the supernatural discussion to offer ordinary advice about good manners. The regulations were part of his inspired treatment of spiritual gifts. A speaker who refuses to yield, an assembly unable to provide interpretation, or a congregation encouraging simultaneous unintelligible utterances cannot appeal to Paul's instructions as authorization for those practices. **A preacher cannot disregard five apostolic restrictions and then announce that his meeting is more spiritual because nobody knows what is happening.** The Bible does not identify disorder as an additional gift of the Holy Ghost.

This examination does not require declaring every participant in such meetings deliberately deceptive, nor does it establish that God has lost the power to accomplish extraordinary works. Those are different questions. The immediate concern is whether particular practices agree with Scripture and whether claimed manifestations possess biblical authority. Religious sincerity cannot settle the matter. Emotional excitement cannot settle it. A respected personality's testimony cannot settle it. Deuteronomy 13:1–3 warned Israel that even a remarkable sign must not override previously revealed truth, and 1 John 4:1 commands believers to try the spirits. The New Testament likewise establishes standards by which professed spiritual activity must be judged. **The duty to examine a religious claim does not disappear because the person making it becomes offended.** Faithfulness to God requires greater loyalty to His Word than to the reputation of any minister, movement, or meeting. Where Scripture speaks, the Church must obey.

7. The Commandments of the Lord: Paul's Final Verdict Upon Religious Disorder

First Corinthians 14:36 confronts Corinthian presumption with two questions: "What? came the word of God out from you? or came it unto you only?" Paul exposes the arrogance of behaving as though the Corinthian congregation possessed independent authority to determine how spiritual gifts should operate. The Word of God did not originate with them, nor had they received a private monopoly upon divine revelation. Their practices were subject to the authority of the apostle appointed by Jesus Christ. This is especially important because spiritual enthusiasm frequently tempts a congregation to believe that its experiences place it beyond correction. Once an assembly begins treating its customary practices as unquestionably divine, every biblical objection becomes an unwelcome intrusion. **The Corinthians did not write the commandments of God, and neither has any denomination that came along after them.** The authority to regulate the Church belongs to the Lord, not to whichever religious personality can gather the largest crowd.

Verse 37 supplies one of the strongest statements concerning the authority of Paul's instructions: "If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord." Notice the test. Paul does not instruct the Corinthians to recognize a spiritual man by the intensity of his manifestations, the number of extraordinary experiences he claims, or the impressive titles attached to his name. The man claiming spiritual authority must acknowledge that Paul's written instructions are the commandments of the Lord. This requirement covers the chapter's restrictions upon tongues, prophetic speaking, self-control, and congregational conduct. A person who claims spiritual authority while disregarding those commandments contradicts the very standard Paul established. Verse 38 then declares, "But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant." Paul will not surrender apostolic instruction merely to satisfy someone determined to reject it. **The man who claims the highest spirituality while refusing the written commandments has not risen above ordinary Christianity. He has descended beneath ordinary obedience.**

The chapter concludes with two instructions that must be held together. Verse 39 declares, "Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues." This governed the genuine operation of those gifts among the Corinthians during the apostolic period. It is not permission to accept every modern claim as authentic without examination. Nor should the historical command be erased as though genuine tongues had never existed. Verse 40 then concludes, "Let all things be done decently and in order." The final requirement summarizes the governing principle. God's power does not excuse disorder, and spiritual ability does not release the believer from responsibility. The historical distinction between foundational apostolic gifts and the continuing ministry of the written Scriptures must remain intact, but the authority of God's revealed instructions remains unquestionable. **The Holy Ghost did not command order because He feared**

spiritual power. He commanded order because genuine spiritual power belongs under divine authority. The apostle's verdict stands whether a modern congregation welcomes it or not.

Conclusion

First Corinthians 14:26–40 establishes unmistakable regulations governing the exercise of spiritual gifts within the assembled church. Tongues speakers were limited to two or at most three, required to speak in sequence, and forbidden to address the congregation without interpretation. Prophets were likewise subject to numerical restrictions and examination, and the spirits of the prophets remained subject to the prophets. Silence was commanded when the circumstances required it. Women were instructed concerning public speaking and obedience in the churches, and those restrictions must be understood alongside the New Testament's other statements concerning their prayer, prophecy, teaching responsibilities, and relationship to established authority. The chapter concludes by identifying Paul's instructions as commandments of the Lord. **These were not optional suggestions for congregations that happened to appreciate orderly worship. They were apostolic instructions governing the very gifts the Corinthians claimed to possess.** The possession of a genuine gift never authorized disregard for God's commandments.

The broader Scriptures also prevent an interpretation that needlessly diminishes the legitimate ministry of women. First Corinthians 11 acknowledges women praying and prophesying, Acts 21 records Philip's daughters prophesying, and Titus 2 commands aged women to teach younger women. These truths coexist with Paul's restrictions concerning speaking and authority in the assembled church. The distinction between spiritual value and appointed responsibility must remain intact. Men and women are equally dependent upon the blood of Jesus Christ for salvation, and all believers are called to faithful service according to God's Word. Yet equality in salvation does not abolish every distinction in the order of the local church. Neither does biblical authority excuse domineering conduct, disrespect, or the invention of additional prohibitions. **A church that refuses God's appointed order is disobedient, but a church that adds its own commandments and pretends they came from God is also exceeding its authority.** Both errors must yield to Scripture.

The decisive question concerning modern tongues meetings is therefore not whether the participants were excited, sincere, emotionally moved, or convinced that something extraordinary occurred. The question is whether their claims and practices agree with the written commandments of the Holy Ghost. Paul required understanding, interpretation, limitation, self-control, examination, and order. He refused to allow extraordinary manifestations to become an excuse for congregational confusion. His instructions

concerning women cannot be dismissed whenever they become inconvenient, nor can the rest of the chapter be discarded because a modern religious movement prefers a different arrangement. The Christian must place the Word of God above every experience and every personality claiming supernatural authority. **You cannot prove that the Holy Ghost is leading your meeting while refusing to obey the Holy Ghost's instructions for the meeting. You cannot establish divine inspiration by announcing that nobody can control himself when God explicitly said the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. And you cannot claim superior spiritual authority while disregarding what Paul called the commandments of the Lord. The Holy Ghost has spoken. The rules are written. The Church's responsibility is not to improve upon them, explain them away, or perform around them. It is to obey them.**

9 of 10 — Tongues, Signs, and Wonders — The Signs of an Apostle: Miracles, Healings, and Credentials from God

Primary Text: 2 Corinthians 12:11–12; Mark 16:14–20; Acts 3:1–16; 5:12–16; 14:3; Romans 15:18–19; Hebrews 2:3–4

Introduction

There is a considerable difference between a man whom God authenticates through miracles and a man who authenticates himself through advertisements about miracles. The first possesses divine credentials; the second possesses a publicity department. The distinction becomes especially important when examining the extraordinary signs accompanying the apostles of Jesus Christ during the foundational period of the Church. These men were not traveling religious entertainers attempting to attract crowds through spectacular demonstrations. They were appointed witnesses of the risen Saviour, commissioned to proclaim His message, and accompanied by supernatural works through which God confirmed their testimony. The lame walked, the sick were healed, unclean spirits were expelled, and extraordinary signs occurred through men whom the Lord had appointed. The accounts were not hidden behind mysterious testimonies or unverifiable claims. They were recorded as historical events involving identifiable people, recognizable afflictions, and public witnesses. **The apostles did not advertise miracles to establish their reputations. God performed miracles to establish the authority of their message.** That distinction separates divine credentials from religious showmanship.

Second Corinthians 12:12 supplies the foundational statement: "Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds."

Paul was defending his apostleship against those who challenged his authority, and he pointed toward evidence that God had provided among the Corinthians themselves. Notice that he did not merely claim to possess an impressive title. He directed attention toward what had actually occurred through his ministry. The signs were associated with his apostolic commission, and their purpose extended beyond providing temporary relief from physical suffering. They authenticated a messenger entrusted with divine revelation and the proclamation of Jesus Christ. Hebrews 2:3–4 reinforces this relationship by describing God bearing witness to the message through signs, wonders, divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost. The miraculous works were connected with the confirmation of the Word. They were not independent religious attractions. **A sign that confirms God's message serves its appointed purpose; a spectacle that replaces God's message has already abandoned the reason the sign was given.**

Yet another distinction must be maintained throughout this examination. Almighty God has never surrendered His power to heal the sick, answer prayer, deliver the afflicted, or intervene in the lives of His people. The cessation of foundational apostolic credentials does not mean that the Creator has become helpless. What must be challenged is the assertion that particular individuals today possess the same identifying miraculous authority granted to Christ's appointed apostles. The Bible itself distinguishes the exercise of extraordinary power from a universal guarantee of physical healing. Paul suffered infirmities, Timothy experienced recurring stomach difficulties, Trophimus was left sick, and Epaphroditus nearly died. Those accounts belong to the same New Testament that records astonishing miracles. Both sides must be believed. **The Bible does not teach that God has lost His power, and it does not teach that every sickness must disappear whenever somebody claims apostolic authority.** The question is not whether God can heal. The question is whether the individual claiming divine credentials possesses the biblical evidence necessary to support that claim.

1. The Signs of an Apostle: Credentials That Came from God

Paul's statement in 2 Corinthians 12:12 must first be understood within the conflict surrounding his apostolic authority. In chapter 11, Paul exposes false apostles and deceitful workers who transformed themselves into the apostles of Christ. These were not merely mistaken church members who needed correction concerning an obscure doctrine. They were men making claims to religious authority that did not belong to them. Paul therefore distinguished his genuine commission from their pretensions. In 2 Corinthians 12:11, he declares that he was "in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing." The following verse introduces the signs of an apostle. His authority rested upon Christ's appointment, not personal ambition. Galatians 1:1 identifies him as an

apostle "not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father." **A genuine apostle did not become an apostle by purchasing a title, gathering admirers, or announcing that heaven had finally recognized his exceptional personality.** His commission originated with the risen Lord.

Paul's apostolic qualification was also connected with his encounter with the resurrected Christ. First Corinthians 9:1 contains his pointed question: "Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?" First Corinthians 15:8 records Christ appearing to Paul "as of one born out of due time." The original twelve occupied a particular position in the historical ministry of Jesus Christ, and Acts 1:21–22 established qualifications concerning the replacement of Judas. Paul's apostleship was extraordinary, but it was no less genuinely bestowed by Christ. His signs were therefore not an attempt to acquire an office through supernatural demonstrations. They confirmed an office already given through divine commission. This order is important because modern religious pretenders frequently reverse it. They claim a title and then demand that others interpret ordinary experiences as proof of that title. **The apostles received their authority from Christ and their credentials from God. The counterfeit begins with a business card and hopes nobody asks for the credentials afterward.**

Nevertheless, it would be inaccurate to argue that only the twelve apostles ever performed miracles. Acts 6:8 records Stephen doing great wonders and miracles among the people, while Acts 8:6–7 describes remarkable signs accompanying Philip's ministry in Samaria. Barnabas also participated in miraculous apostolic ministry, as Acts 14:3 demonstrates. The biblical distinction is not that every miracle was restricted exclusively to one of the original twelve. Rather, extraordinary signs accompanied God's foundational witness and authenticated the divine message being proclaimed. Second Corinthians 12:12 identifies signs among Paul's apostolic credentials without establishing that every person through whom God worked a miracle automatically became an apostle. The office and the manifestation must remain distinct. Ephesians 2:20 describes the Church as built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone. **A foundation is laid to support the building, not repeatedly excavated so that every generation can appoint another crew of foundation layers.** The apostolic ministry possessed a historical purpose within God's revealed plan.

2. Mark 16: The Commission, the Signs, and the Confirmation of the Word

Mark 16:14–20 presents the risen Jesus Christ commissioning His disciples following His resurrection. Verse 15 records His command: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." The authority of the command belongs to the resurrected Saviour, not to a religious organization attempting to establish its own reputation. The passage then

describes signs that would accompany believers, including casting out devils, speaking with new tongues, taking up serpents, remaining unharmed by deadly drink, and laying hands upon the sick with recovery following. These statements must not be dismissed because their supernatural character offends unbelief. The King James Bible records them, and the extraordinary apostolic history in Acts demonstrates genuine manifestations of divine power. Yet their historical setting must not be abandoned. Christ was commissioning witnesses at the beginning of the gospel's outward proclamation. **A miraculous promise connected with the Lord's commissioned witnesses cannot be turned into permission for every religious performer to advertise unlimited supernatural authority.**

Verse 20 supplies the decisive explanation: "And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen." The purpose is stated plainly. The Lord worked with His messengers and confirmed the Word through accompanying signs. The signs did not possess an independent commission to entertain the nations. They testified concerning the message the disciples proclaimed. This distinction also prevents a careless reading of the promises as though every individual Christian must personally demonstrate every listed manifestation. First Corinthians 12:29–30 expressly denies that all believers possess identical gifts. Acts records remarkable fulfillments of Christ's commission, including supernatural tongues and extraordinary deliverances, but does not establish that every convert exercised the entire collection. **If every Christian must demonstrate every sign in Mark 16, the interpreter had better explain why Paul later asked whether all speak with tongues and whether all possess the gifts of healing.** Scripture must interpret Scripture.

The references to serpents and deadly drink must likewise remain within the purpose of God's protection rather than being converted into reckless demonstrations. Acts 28:3–6 records a viper fastening upon Paul's hand on Melita, while the islanders expected him to die. He suffered no harm, and the incident became an extraordinary testimony before the witnesses. The passage does not command Christians to search for poisonous creatures to establish their faith. Nor does Mark 16 authorize deliberately drinking poison to test God. Matthew 4:7 records Christ's declaration, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." The biblical signs accompanied divine service; they were not invitations to manufacture danger for religious publicity. The same principle applies to healing. Christ's promise concerning signs belonged to His commission and was demonstrated through His appointed witnesses. **God's ability to preserve a servant from danger is not permission for the servant to create unnecessary danger and then demand a miracle.** Faith obeys God's Word; presumption invents a performance and expects God to sponsor it.

3. The Lame Man at the Temple: A Miracle Nobody Could Explain Away

Acts 3:1–16 provides one of the clearest recorded examples of an authentic apostolic healing. Peter and John were going up together into the temple at the hour of prayer when they encountered a man lame from his mother's womb. The man was carried daily and placed at the temple gate called Beautiful to ask alms from those entering. His condition was neither recent nor obscure. He had been disabled from birth, and his presence at the temple was familiar to those who regularly passed through the area. When he requested alms from Peter and John, Peter answered in verse 6, "Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk." **Peter did not begin by investigating whether the man's donation was sufficient to qualify for a healing. He proclaimed the authority of Jesus Christ and commanded a man who had never walked to rise.** The miracle was public, immediate, and unmistakable.

Acts 3:7 records Peter taking the man by the right hand and lifting him up, after which "immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength." The next verse describes him leaping up, standing, walking, and entering the temple with the apostles, "walking, and leaping, and praising God." The specificity matters. This was not a testimony about a temporary improvement in a condition nobody could establish. The man's lifelong disability was known, the healing occurred immediately, and the result was visible to the multitude. Acts 4:22 later reveals that the man was above forty years old. The opponents of the apostles could not dismiss the event by claiming that an unknown visitor had briefly experienced something difficult to verify. Acts 4:14 records that when they saw the healed man standing with Peter and John, "they could say nothing against it." **A man lame for more than forty years was standing in front of them. The religious authorities could dispute the apostles' doctrine, but they could not argue his legs back into their former condition.**

Peter immediately refused to accept personal glory for the miracle. Acts 3:12 asks why the people were looking upon the apostles "as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk." That statement should be engraved above the entrance of every establishment claiming to specialize in miraculous healings. Peter expressly denied that his personal holiness or power produced the result. He directed the audience toward the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who had glorified His Son Jesus. He then confronted Israel with the rejection and crucifixion of Christ and proclaimed His resurrection. Acts 3:16 identifies faith in Christ's name as central to the healing and declares that the man had received perfect soundness before them all. **The miracle did not end with the healed man becoming an advertisement for Peter. It became an opportunity for Peter to**

preach the resurrected Saviour to Israel. The sign authenticated the message instead of replacing it.

4. Signs in Jerusalem and Beyond: God Confirmed the Apostolic Witness

Acts 5:12 declares, "And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people." The passage describes remarkable public manifestations accompanying the ministry in Jerusalem. Verses 15–16 record sick people being carried into the streets and placed upon beds and couches, with the expectation that Peter's passing shadow might overshadow some of them. Multitudes came from surrounding cities bringing the sick and those troubled by unclean spirits, and the inspired record concludes that "they were healed every one." This was an extraordinary period of apostolic testimony. The manifestations were not presented as ordinary medical improvements or claims that nobody could verify. They involved public gatherings, recognizable physical conditions, and remarkable results. Yet the emphasis remains upon what God accomplished through His appointed witnesses. **The apostles were not distributing an invisible product with benefits nobody could identify. The sick were brought before them, divine power operated, and the results were visible.** That is the standard of evidence supplied by the historical account.

The gospel's outward movement brought further demonstrations. Acts 14:3 describes Paul and Barnabas remaining in Iconium, speaking boldly in the Lord, "which gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands." Notice again the relationship between the miraculous works and the message. God gave testimony to the Word of His grace. At Lystra, Acts 14:8–10 records a man impotent in his feet, crippled from his mother's womb, who had never walked. Paul perceived that he had faith to be healed and commanded him to stand upright, whereupon the man leaped and walked. The crowd wrongly interpreted the event as evidence that pagan gods had appeared among them. Paul and Barnabas rejected that conclusion and directed them toward the living God. **A miracle does not become a license for idolatry merely because the spectators cannot explain what happened. The apostles refused worship when the crowd tried to turn God's work into a monument to men.**

Romans 15:18–19 provides Paul's own description of the larger ministry: Christ worked through him to make the Gentiles obedient, "through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God." His ministry extended from Jerusalem and round about unto Illyricum, carrying the gospel into Gentile regions. Hebrews 2:3–4 supplies the broader doctrinal explanation, describing the salvation first spoken by the Lord and confirmed by those who heard Him, with God bearing witness through signs, wonders, divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost. These passages identify the purpose and historical character of

the manifestations. They accompanied the foundational proclamation and confirmation of the message. First Corinthians 1:22 also reminds us that the Jews required a sign, while 1 Corinthians 14:21–22 connects tongues with Israel's history of unbelief. **The signs served divine revelation, not religious ambition. Their importance rested upon the truth they authenticated, and their extraordinary character belonged to the historical circumstances in which God supplied them.**

5. Special Miracles at Ephesus and the Man Who Tried to Purchase Power

Acts 19:11 introduces another remarkable testimony concerning Paul's ministry: "And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul." Verse 12 explains that handkerchiefs or aprons brought from his body to the sick were associated with diseases departing and evil spirits going out. Notice the first words of the account. God wrought the miracles. Paul did not manufacture them through a personal technique, nor did the passage establish a permanent commercial procedure for distributing blessed objects. The extraordinary character of the manifestations belonged to God's operation through His apostle. These events occurred during Paul's ministry in Ephesus, where the gospel was being proclaimed amid considerable spiritual opposition. **A miracle associated with an apostle's handkerchief is not permission for every religious businessman to start selling miracle cloths through the mail. The passage says God wrought special miracles; it does not say Paul opened a supernatural textile department.** Scripture identifies the divine source, not a marketable formula.

The surrounding narrative provides a particularly fitting warning against imitating apostolic authority without possessing it. Acts 19:13–16 describes certain wandering Jewish exorcists attempting to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those possessed with evil spirits. Seven sons of Sceva participated in such activity, using the expression, "We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth." The evil spirit answered, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?" The possessed man then overcame them, leaving them fleeing naked and wounded. Their borrowed religious language did not confer apostolic authority. They recognized that Paul's ministry possessed power, but repeating his words was not equivalent to receiving his commission. The result became known throughout Ephesus, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. **Borrowing the apostle's vocabulary did not give those men the apostle's authority. They discovered that repeating a divine name without divine authorization is a dangerous substitute for actually belonging to the Lord.**

Acts 8 presents another warning through Simon, who had previously practiced sorcery in Samaria and astonished the people. When he observed the Holy Ghost being given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered money and requested that the same power

be granted to him. Peter answered in verse 20, "Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money." The rebuke exposes the wickedness of treating spiritual authority as merchandise. Simon desired the ability to distribute what God alone could give, and he attempted to acquire that authority through financial negotiation. The incident does not condemn voluntary support for genuine ministry, but it absolutely condemns attempts to purchase supernatural power. **A man who treats God's power as merchandise has already demonstrated that his heart is occupied with the marketplace rather than the ministry.** The apostolic gift belonged to God's sovereign purpose, not to whoever could afford the highest price.

6. Paul's Thorn, Timothy's Stomach, and the Sick Saints Who Were Not Miraculously Healed

If apostolic healing power meant that every faithful believer could obtain guaranteed physical health, Paul's own testimony would create an extraordinary difficulty. Second Corinthians 12:7–10 describes a thorn in the flesh given lest he be exalted above measure through the abundance of revelations. Paul besought the Lord three times that it might depart from him. The Lord answered, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness." Paul did not receive the removal he requested, but he received sufficient grace and learned to glory in his infirmities so the power of Christ might rest upon him. The precise nature of the thorn is not explicitly identified, and inventing a medical diagnosis is unnecessary. The doctrinal point is unmistakable. **The apostle who possessed genuine miraculous credentials also experienced an affliction God did not remove when he requested its removal.** His authority did not place the Lord under obligation to satisfy every personal petition.

First Timothy 5:23 presents another inconvenient passage for anyone promising that sufficient faith guarantees freedom from bodily infirmity. Paul instructed Timothy, "Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities." Timothy was a faithful minister, entrusted with significant responsibilities, yet he suffered recurring physical problems. Paul did not rebuke him for lacking faith, accuse him of secretly welcoming sickness, or command him to visit the nearest apostolic healing service. He supplied practical instruction addressing the condition. The passage concerns a specific medicinal recommendation in its historical setting and does not authorize drunkenness or the careless use of alcohol. Its importance here is that Paul acknowledged Timothy's recurring infirmities without treating them as proof of spiritual failure. Galatians 4:13 likewise records Paul ministering through infirmity of the flesh. **The New Testament refuses to teach that physical suffering automatically reveals a defective Christian. A**

sick saint can possess genuine faith, sound doctrine, and the approval of God while his body remains afflicted.

Two additional examples make the distinction unavoidable. Second Timothy 4:20 records Paul's statement, "Trophimus have I left at Miletum sick." The apostle does not explain that Trophimus had lost salvation, failed to claim a promise, or rejected an available miracle. He simply reports that the man was left sick. Philippians 2:25–30 describes Epaphroditus becoming dangerously ill in connection with his service to Christ. Verse 27 declares, "For indeed he was sick nigh unto death: but God had mercy on him." Paul acknowledged God's mercy in the man's recovery without claiming that every faithful servant would necessarily receive the same outcome. Romans 8:23 teaches that believers still await the redemption of their bodies, and 1 Corinthians 15:51–53 describes the future transformation when mortality puts on immortality. **The soul's salvation is not a promise that the present body has already become immortal. The Christian possesses eternal life in Christ while still living in flesh subject to weakness, suffering, and death.** Final bodily redemption remains future.

7. Modern Miracle Claims: Testing the Credentials Without Denying God's Power

The historical evidence for apostolic signs establishes a serious standard against which claims of continuing apostolic authority must be examined. The apostles did not merely announce impressive experiences; God authenticated their ministry through extraordinary works connected with identifiable witnesses and the proclamation of His Word. The man lame from birth walked publicly at the temple. The cripple at Lystra rose and walked. Diseases departed and evil spirits were expelled during Paul's extraordinary ministry. These records involve particular manifestations rather than vague declarations that somebody somewhere might have experienced improvement. A modern person claiming the same apostolic credentials should not expect exemption from reasonable examination merely because he attaches the word *miracle* to his ministry. **An extraordinary claim does not become more believable because its claimant becomes angrier whenever somebody requests extraordinary evidence.** Biblical faith does not require Christians to abandon the discernment Scripture commands.

This does not mean that every contemporary testimony of healing must be dismissed automatically. God remains able to heal according to His sovereign will, and James 5:14–16 provides instruction concerning prayer for the sick. Philippians 4:6 encourages believers to bring their requests before God, while 2 Corinthians 12 reminds them that His answer may involve sufficient grace rather than the removal of suffering. A reported recovery may deserve thanksgiving, careful examination, or both, depending upon the circumstances. But an individual recovery does not automatically establish that a particular minister

possesses the foundational office and credentials of an apostle. God may answer a prayer without authorizing the person praying to claim an office reserved for His appointed foundational witnesses. **The power of God is unlimited; the authority of man is not. Those two truths must not be confused merely because a preacher finds apostolic titles attractive.** The Lord remains sovereign over His gifts and operations.

The biblical argument for the historical cessation of foundational apostolic signs rests upon their appointed purpose and relationship to the establishment of the Church, not upon the notion that God has somehow exhausted His miraculous ability. Hebrews 2:3–4 connects signs with the confirmation of the original testimony, and Ephesians 2:20 identifies the foundational ministry of apostles and prophets. Second Corinthians 12:12 explicitly associates extraordinary signs with Paul's apostolic credentials. These passages support distinguishing the foundational manifestations from ordinary ongoing Christian experience. Yet Scripture does not provide a calendar date marking the last possible occurrence of every miraculous gift, and the doctrine should not be defended through invented historical details. Meanwhile, 1 John 4:1 commands believers to try the spirits, and 1 Thessalonians 5:21 declares, "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good." **The Christian is not commanded to believe every miracle claim, nor is he commanded to deny every possible miracle. He is commanded to believe the Word of God and exercise discernment concerning the claims of men.**

Conclusion

The signs of an apostle belonged to a remarkable period in which God authenticated His appointed witnesses and confirmed the proclamation of Jesus Christ. Paul's declaration in 2 Corinthians 12:12 identifies signs, wonders, and mighty deeds among the credentials accompanying his apostleship. Mark 16:20 explains that the Lord worked with His messengers, confirming the Word through signs following. Acts records public healings, extraordinary deliverances, and miraculous manifestations associated with the preaching of the gospel. Hebrews 2:3–4 places those works within the confirmation of the message first proclaimed by the Lord and communicated through His appointed witnesses. The miracles were genuine, their divine source was unmistakable in the inspired record, and their purpose extended beyond attracting public attention. **The apostles were not commissioned to build religious empires around spectacular performances. They were commissioned to testify concerning Jesus Christ, and God supplied the credentials appropriate to their foundational ministry.** The message mattered more than the messenger, and the Saviour mattered more than the sign.

The same Scriptures that record extraordinary healings also record faithful servants enduring physical afflictions. Paul possessed a thorn in the flesh that the Lord did not

remove after repeated prayer. Timothy suffered recurring infirmities. Trophimus was left sick, and Epaphroditus came near death before experiencing God's mercy. These accounts cannot be erased without damaging the very New Testament used to defend miraculous healing. The believer's salvation rests upon the finished work of Jesus Christ, not upon his present physical condition. Ephesians 2:8–9 establishes salvation by grace through faith, while Ephesians 1:13 identifies the believer's sealing with the Holy Spirit of promise. The redemption of the body awaits its appointed fulfillment. **A Christian lying in a hospital bed is not necessarily less faithful than the preacher standing beside him. The sick saint may possess a stronger testimony of grace than the man who loudly promises a healing he has no authority to guarantee.** God's goodness is not measured by the absence of suffering.

The final distinction concerns divine authority and human presumption. Almighty God can heal, deliver, restore, and accomplish whatever agrees with His sovereign purpose. No Christian should surrender that truth merely because religious counterfeits have abused the subject. But neither should anyone grant apostolic authority to a modern claimant simply because he announces extraordinary experiences, distributes supposed healing objects, or collects testimonies intended to impress an audience. The biblical apostles possessed credentials supplied by God, and their signs confirmed the Word rather than competing with it. The Church today possesses the written testimony of those foundational witnesses and is responsible to believe, preach, and obey the Scriptures. **God does not need a counterfeit miracle to defend a genuine gospel. He does not need a religious salesman to market His power, and He does not need another self-appointed apostle to improve upon the testimony He has already given. The apostles had their commission, the signs had their purpose, and the Word of God remains the authority. When the spectacle has ended and the advertisements have been forgotten, Jesus Christ is still risen, the gospel is still sufficient, and the power belongs to God alone.**

10 of 10 — Tongues, Signs, and Wonders — Strange Fire in the Church: Testing Modern Tongues and Miracles by the King James Bible

Primary Text: 1 Corinthians 14:9–40; 12:13–30; Matthew 7:21–23; 2 Thessalonians 2:9–12; 1 John 4:1; Hebrews 2:3–4

Introduction

There is something seriously wrong with a religious system that demands absolute faith in extraordinary experiences while treating the written Word of God as an inconvenient

obstacle to those experiences. A man stands before a congregation, announces that the Holy Ghost has taken control, begins producing sounds nobody understands, and assures the audience that the absence of understanding proves the presence of supernatural power. Another claims the ability to heal diseases, although the evidence seldom resembles the unmistakable miracles recorded in the Book of Acts. Another announces that he possesses apostolic authority, delivers supposed revelations from heaven, and becomes offended when somebody opens a King James Bible to examine his claims. The modern religious marketplace has developed an astonishing collection of supernatural merchandise, complete with professional presentations, impressive titles, emotional appeals, and carefully cultivated expectations. Yet the one examination capable of distinguishing biblical truth from religious invention is frequently the examination its promoters least appreciate. **When a man's supernatural authority disappears the moment somebody opens the Bible, the problem is not a shortage of faith in the audience. The problem is a shortage of biblical authority in the performance.**

The Scriptures never instructed Christians to accept every spiritual manifestation merely because somebody claims that God produced it. First John 4:1 commands, "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world." That is not the language of gullibility. It is a direct command to exercise discernment. First Thessalonians 5:21 likewise declares, "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good." The believer is not commanded to become a collector of extraordinary testimonies, a defender of every religious personality, or a willing participant in every experience advertised as supernatural. He is commanded to examine what he hears and believes. The genuine gifts of the apostolic period had recognizable characteristics, definite purposes, and inspired regulations. Those characteristics did not become meaningless when the final apostle departed from the scene. **A counterfeit is not exposed by pretending the genuine article never existed. It is exposed by knowing the genuine article well enough to recognize what does not belong.**

The concluding question concerning tongues, signs, and wonders is therefore not whether God possesses supernatural power. He does. Neither is it whether the Holy Ghost performed extraordinary works during the apostolic period. Scripture establishes that beyond dispute. The question is whether modern religious claims agree with the biblical record, whether the manifestations possess the characteristics God identified, and whether their promoters submit to the commandments governing Christian doctrine and worship. We must distinguish genuine miracles from religious performances, scriptural faith from reckless credulity, divine revelation from human invention, and the sovereign power of God from the alleged authority of self-appointed miracle workers. We must also distinguish the warning concerning lying wonders during future prophetic events from

careless accusations that every unusual contemporary experience comes directly from Satan. **Biblical discernment requires neither believing everything nor accusing everybody. It requires something considerably more demanding: examining the evidence, understanding the Scriptures, and refusing to let religious enthusiasm outrank the Word of God.**

1. Strange Fire: When Religion Offers God Something He Never Commanded

Leviticus 10:1–2 supplies a solemn historical illustration concerning unauthorized religious activity. Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took their censers, placed fire and incense therein, and offered "strange fire before the LORD, which he commanded them not." The consequence was immediate judgment when fire went out from the LORD and devoured them. The central issue was not that the men lacked religious activity. They were performing something resembling priestly service, using instruments associated with worship, and operating within Israel's divinely appointed religious system. Their offense concerned offering what God had not commanded. The similarity between authorized worship and unauthorized imitation did not make the offering acceptable. Leviticus 10:3 records Moses explaining that the LORD would be sanctified in those who came near Him. **Religious activity does not become obedience merely because somebody performs it in a sacred place, uses biblical terminology, or insists that his intentions are sincere.** God's commandments determine what He authorizes.

The historical distinction must be preserved. Nadab and Abihu were priests serving under Israel's law, and their judgment cannot be mechanically transferred to every Christian gathering where questionable spiritual practices occur. The Church is not Israel's Levitical priesthood, and the passage does not authorize predicting that God will send literal fire upon a congregation because its worship contains errors. Nevertheless, the principle is unmistakable: approaching God does not grant human beings unlimited authority to invent their own methods of worship and then demand His approval. Deuteronomy 12:32 warned Israel against adding to or diminishing from what God commanded, while Colossians 2:23 identifies the danger of "will worship," religious activity arising from humanly devised devotion rather than divine authority. The believer must distinguish legitimate application from unauthorized imitation. **The flesh has always been remarkably talented at manufacturing religious substitutes. Give it a little ceremony, a handful of biblical expressions, and an enthusiastic audience, and it will attempt to produce a spiritual experience without waiting for God to authorize anything.**

That principle brings us directly to the contemporary claims surrounding supernatural gifts. When somebody declares that unintelligible sounds are equivalent to Pentecostal tongues, the question is whether Scripture establishes that equivalence. When a minister claims

apostolic healing authority, the question is whether his credentials resemble those God supplied to the apostles. When alleged prophecy introduces teaching contrary to the written Word, the question is whether God authorized a new revelation contradicting what He previously revealed. The Christian must not reject genuine divine activity simply because it is extraordinary, but neither may he baptize every extraordinary claim with the name of the Holy Ghost. Jeremiah 23:21 records the LORD declaring concerning false prophets, "I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran: I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied." **A man may run enthusiastically without being sent, speak confidently without receiving a revelation, and perform religiously without possessing divine authority. The Bible calls for examination before admiration.**

2. Pentecost Was a Language Miracle, Not a Competition in Unintelligibility

Acts 2:4 records that the disciples "began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." The following verses explain what occurred. Acts 2:6 declares that every man heard them speaking in his own language, and verse 8 records the astonished question, "And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?" The audience included Jews from numerous nations who recognized the languages being spoken. Acts 2:11 identifies the content: "we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God." These statements establish the character of the miracle. It involved meaningful communication through languages ordinarily unknown to the Galilaean speakers. The hearers were astonished because they understood what they heard. No congregation was instructed to invent syllables, no minister coached the speakers into producing unusual sounds, and no one declared that incomprehensibility itself was the miracle. **At Pentecost, the Holy Ghost removed a barrier to understanding. Modern religious confusion frequently attempts to make the barrier itself the evidence of His presence.**

First Corinthians 14 does not overturn the meaning established at Pentecost. Paul discusses the problem created when a genuine language is unknown to the assembled hearers and therefore requires interpretation. Verse 10 declares that the various voices in the world are not without signification, while verse 11 describes the inability of two people to communicate when they do not understand one another's speech. The distinction between meaningful language and meaningless sounds is essential. A speaker may use an actual foreign language that nobody present understands, but the language itself still possesses meaning. Verse 13 consequently commands the speaker in an unknown tongue to pray that he may interpret. An interpretation supplies understandable meaning; it does not magically transform meaningless noises into a message through somebody else's imagination. **A foreign language does not cease to be a language because the**

congregation cannot understand it, and an unintelligible performance does not become a foreign language because the congregation is told to admire it. The inspired standard concerns genuine communication.

Claims involving a supposed private heavenly prayer language require the same examination. First Corinthians 14:2 states that the speaker in an unknown tongue speaks unto God when no man understands him, but the surrounding passage does not establish unintelligibility as an independent spiritual virtue. Verse 15 joins prayer with the spirit and prayer with understanding, while verse 19 places five understandable words above ten thousand words that fail to teach the congregation. First Corinthians 13:1 employs the extraordinary expression "tongues of men and of angels" within Paul's argument that even remarkable abilities are worthless without charity. It does not command Christians to invent angelic speech. Likewise, the unspeakable words heard in paradise in 2 Corinthians 12:4 were words not lawful for Paul to utter, not a vocabulary distributed for every believer to practice. **The Holy Ghost never commanded Christians to abandon their understanding in order to prove that they possess Him. The God who inspired an understandable Bible has not suddenly developed an affection for meaningless communication.**

3. The Corinthian Rulebook: The Holy Ghost Required Order, Not Chaos

First Corinthians 14:27 establishes specific requirements for the public exercise of tongues: "If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course; and let one interpret." The restrictions are unmistakable. The number of speakers was limited, they were required to speak in sequence, and interpretation was necessary. Verse 28 adds that where no interpreter was present, the speaker must keep silence in the church. These were not suggestions offered to people who preferred quiet religious meetings. They were inspired regulations governing genuine spiritual gifts operating during the apostolic period. Paul did not authorize simultaneous unintelligible utterances because the atmosphere became exciting. He did not permit the absence of interpretation to be excused by appealing to heavenly mystery. **When the Holy Ghost says two or three, He does not secretly mean two hundred. When He says speak by course, He does not mean everybody at once. And when He commands silence, shouting louder is not an acceptable interpretation.**

The same chapter confronts the claim that genuine spiritual activity necessarily overwhelms human responsibility. First Corinthians 14:32 declares, "And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets." Paul did not teach that a prophet became helpless before an irresistible force that prevented orderly behavior. He required self-control and submission to the established regulations. Verse 33 explains, "For God is not the author of

confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints." Verse 40 commands, "Let all things be done decently and in order." These instructions expose the contradiction involved when disorder is advertised as evidence of extraordinary divine power. Galatians 5:23 includes temperance among the fruit of the Spirit. **The Holy Ghost does not need to remove a believer's ability to obey Scripture in order to demonstrate that He has filled him.** A claimed manifestation which supposedly requires disobedience to God's written commandments has established a serious problem with its own credibility.

Paul also addresses women's participation and authoritative speaking in 1 Corinthians 14:34–35, while 1 Corinthians 11:5 acknowledges women praying and prophesying, and Acts 21:9 records Philip's four daughters prophesying. These passages must be interpreted together, distinguishing the particular restrictions governing the assembled church from other legitimate activities. First Timothy 2:11–14 further establishes limitations concerning teaching and authority, grounded in the order of creation. The authority of these instructions cannot be erased because modern religious customs prefer unrestricted participation, nor should additional prohibitions be invented beyond Scripture. The larger issue remains the same: the assembly is governed by divine revelation rather than individual impulse. First Corinthians 14:37 declares that anyone claiming to be spiritual must acknowledge Paul's instructions as "the commandments of the Lord." **A man who insists that he possesses extraordinary spirituality while rejecting the written commandments has not demonstrated that he is above ordinary Christians. He has demonstrated that he is unwilling to submit to ordinary biblical authority.**

4. Apostolic Credentials: The Difference Between a Miracle and a Performance

Second Corinthians 12:12 identifies extraordinary signs among the credentials associated with Paul's apostleship: "Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds." Hebrews 2:3–4 connects miraculous manifestations with the confirmation of the salvation first proclaimed by the Lord and communicated through His appointed witnesses. Mark 16:20 similarly records the Lord working with His messengers and "confirming the word with signs following." The stated purpose was authentication of the divine message, not the establishment of an endless religious entertainment industry. Ephesians 2:20 describes the Church as built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone. Foundational credentials belong to a foundational ministry. **God did not appoint apostles so that every ambitious religious personality in subsequent centuries could inherit their authority by adopting their titles. A divine commission requires more than a confident announcement that heaven has supposedly approved the claimant.**

Examine the healing recorded in Acts 3. The lame man had been disabled from birth and was known to those who encountered him at the temple. Peter commanded him in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth to rise and walk. Acts 3:7 records that his feet and ankle bones immediately received strength, and the man entered the temple walking, leaping, and praising God. Acts 4:22 identifies him as more than forty years old, while Acts 4:14 records the healed man standing before the authorities, leaving them unable to deny what had occurred. That is an identifiable miracle with public witnesses and an observable result. Peter did not require a complicated explanation concerning why the healing was invisible, delayed, or detectable only through personal testimony. **The apostles did not need a collection of carefully edited success stories to establish that a man who had never walked was now standing on his own two feet.** The miracle provided testimony concerning Jesus Christ.

Acts 5 records many signs and wonders wrought by the hands of the apostles, while Acts 19:11 specifically declares that God performed special miracles through Paul. The inspired account identifies God as the source. It does not establish a commercial system for selling miraculous objects or purchasing supernatural authority. Simon's attempted purchase of apostolic power in Acts 8 received Peter's severe rebuke. Yet claims involving miracle cloths, guaranteed healings, purchased spiritual privileges, and self-appointed apostolic authority continue to demand examination. A person claiming that God healed somebody should be willing to distinguish verified recovery from an unverified assertion. A minister claiming the same credentials as Paul should expect questions concerning the nature and evidence of those credentials. **The Bible does not teach that every reported healing is fraudulent, but it certainly does not authorize granting apostolic authority to every preacher who claims to have witnessed one.** God's sovereign intervention and a man's asserted office are two different questions.

5. False Prophets, Lying Wonders, and the Danger of Religious Deception

Matthew 7:21–23 contains one of the most sobering warnings in the New Testament. Jesus declares that not everyone saying, "Lord, Lord," shall enter the kingdom of heaven. Many will claim to have prophesied in His name, cast out devils, and performed wonderful works. Yet the Lord answers, "I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." The warning establishes that extraordinary religious claims, even when associated with the name of Jesus Christ, do not themselves prove that the claimant belongs to Him. The passage must be respected in its immediate kingdom setting rather than carelessly transformed into a declaration that every modern person reporting an unusual experience is necessarily lost. Nevertheless, its warning is unmistakable. **A man may attach the name of Jesus to his**

religious activity and still stand condemned before the very Christ whose name he employed. Religious publicity is not regeneration, and impressive claims are not salvation.

Second Thessalonians 2:9–12 carries the warning into the prophetic future, describing the coming of the man of sin "after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders." The passage concerns a particular future deception associated with the revelation of that wicked one and the judgment of those who refused the love of the truth. Its prophetic setting must remain distinct from ordinary Church Age circumstances. The passage does not authorize labeling every questionable modern healing meeting as the direct operation of the Antichrist or declaring every unusual religious experience a satanic miracle. What it establishes is the terrible fact that supernatural appearances can accompany deception, and people refusing divine truth may become vulnerable to lying wonders. **A miracle claim is not self-authenticating merely because it is spectacular. The devil does not need to abolish religion when he can deceive people through religion that has abandoned the truth.** The written Word remains the proper standard.

First John 4:1 commands the testing of spirits precisely because false prophets exist. Deuteronomy 13:1–3 had already warned Israel that even a sign or wonder appearing to come to pass could accompany a message directing people away from the LORD. The lesson is not that extraordinary events never occur, but that their appearance does not cancel God's previous revelation. This also requires careful distinctions among modern claims. A deliberately staged miracle involves deception when the staging is established. An unsupported healing testimony lacks sufficient evidence but is not automatically proof of deliberate fraud. A person repeating learned religious sounds may sincerely believe the practice supernatural without that belief establishing its divine origin. The circumstances must determine the conclusion. **Suspicion is not evidence, sincerity is not proof, and an accusation is not a verdict.** Biblical discernment requires honesty about what can be established, what remains uncertain, and what directly contradicts the Scriptures.

6. God Still Heals: Sovereign Power Is Not an Apostolic Franchise

The cessation of foundational apostolic sign gifts must never be confused with a denial of God's continuing omnipotence. Jeremiah 32:17 declares, "Ah Lord GOD! behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee." The God who created all things has not become incapable of healing sickness or intervening in the affairs of His creatures. James 5:14–16 provides instruction concerning prayer for the sick, and Philippians 4:6 commands believers to bring their requests before God. The Christian has every reason to pray, trust the Lord, and acknowledge His mercy when healing occurs. But God's ability to heal does not mean that an individual possesses the permanent apostolic credentials associated with the

foundational witnesses. **The power belongs to God. A man cannot convert God's sovereign ability into his personal professional title merely by announcing that miracles operate through his ministry.** The distinction protects both genuine faith and biblical authority.

The apostle Paul himself supplies the necessary correction to any teaching that presents healing as an unconditional entitlement of every faithful believer. In 2 Corinthians 12:7–10, Paul describes a thorn in the flesh and his repeated requests that it be removed. The Lord answered, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness." The precise nature of the thorn is not explicitly identified, but the result is clear. Paul received sufficient grace rather than the removal he requested. First Timothy 5:23 records practical instruction concerning Timothy's stomach and frequent infirmities. Second Timothy 4:20 states, "Trophimus have I left at Miletum sick." Philippians 2:27 describes Epaphroditus being sick near unto death before God showed him mercy. **The same New Testament that records the lame walking also records faithful servants suffering without an immediate miracle. A doctrine that can explain the miracles but must hide the sick saints has failed to read the whole Bible.**

The believer's present body remains subject to mortality while awaiting the redemption promised through Jesus Christ. Romans 8:23 identifies Christians as waiting for "the redemption of our body," and 1 Corinthians 15:51–53 describes the coming transformation when corruption puts on incorruption and mortality puts on immortality. These future promises must not be prematurely converted into a guarantee that every physical affliction will disappear during the present life. Nor should a sick believer be accused of spiritual failure because his prayers have not produced the desired recovery. God may heal, sustain through suffering, supply wisdom concerning treatment, or provide sufficient grace through circumstances He has not removed. The believer remains secure in Christ. **A hospital bed cannot cancel the blood of Jesus Christ, and an unanswered request for physical healing does not prove the absence of the Holy Ghost.** The Christian's eternal standing rests upon the finished work of his Saviour, not the temporary condition of his flesh.

7. The Gospel Is Enough: Stop Chasing Signs and Start Believing Scripture

First Corinthians 12:13 declares, "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." The word "all" is decisive. Paul identifies an operation shared by every saved member of Christ's Body. Yet verse 30 asks, "do all speak with tongues?" The question belongs to a series demonstrating that not all believers possess identical gifts. Consequently, the universal baptism of believers by the Spirit cannot be made dependent upon a particular gift Paul does not attribute to everyone. Romans 8:9 further declares,

"Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." **The Holy Ghost is not distributed in installments by preachers who claim authority to determine when believers have become sufficiently spiritual.** Those who belong to Christ possess His Spirit, whether or not they have experienced an extraordinary manifestation.

Ephesians 1:13 identifies the believer's sealing with remarkable clarity: "In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise." The doctrinal order concerns hearing the gospel, believing, and being sealed. Ephesians 4:30 declares that believers are sealed unto the day of redemption. These statements provide assurance grounded in God's saving operation rather than the unstable testimony of personal sensations. The gospel itself is defined in 1 Corinthians 15:3–4 through Christ's death for our sins, burial, and resurrection according to the Scriptures. Ephesians 2:8–9 establishes that salvation is by grace through faith, not of works. **A sinner is not saved by producing a religious experience. He is saved through faith in the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ.** Anything added as a condition of salvation becomes a corruption of the gospel.

The Christian life thereafter must be governed by the written Word rather than an endless pursuit of extraordinary experiences. Second Timothy 3:16–17 declares that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness, furnishing the man of God unto good works. That is an extraordinary statement concerning the sufficiency and authority of divine revelation. The believer is not commanded to search constantly for another apostle, another Pentecost, another heavenly message, or another performance through which he can verify a salvation already declared in Scripture. He is commanded to study, believe, obey, and faithfully serve. Second Timothy 2:15 requires rightly dividing the word of truth, while Colossians 3:16 commands believers to let the word of Christ dwell in them richly. **The man who possesses a King James Bible and refuses to study it has no business complaining that God has not supplied enough revelation. The Book is open, the doctrine is written, and the responsibility to believe it remains.**

Conclusion

The biblical testimony concerning tongues, signs, and wonders is neither obscure nor contradictory when its historical settings and doctrinal distinctions are preserved. At Pentecost, men heard meaningful languages associated with the extraordinary arrival of the Holy Ghost and the apostolic witness to Israel. At Cornelius's house, tongues supplied testimony that believing Gentiles had received the same Holy Ghost. At Ephesus, extraordinary manifestations accompanied the reception of fuller revelation concerning Jesus Christ among disciples previously connected with John's baptism. In Corinth,

genuine spiritual gifts operated, but their exercise was subject to restrictions concerning understanding, interpretation, limitation, self-control, and order. The apostles possessed miraculous credentials associated with the confirmation of God's message, while the completed apostolic testimony continues to direct believers toward the risen Saviour. **The signs had their purposes, the gifts had their regulations, and the apostles had their commission. Confusion begins when men abandon those distinctions and declare that every modern religious performance possesses identical authority.** The Scriptures establish the standard, and the Christian must refuse to lower it.

The warnings concerning false prophets and lying wonders likewise demand sober attention without careless exaggeration. Matthew 7 demonstrates that impressive religious claims cannot substitute for genuinely belonging to Jesus Christ. Second Thessalonians 2 reveals the terrible future deception associated with satanic signs and the rejection of divine truth. First John 4 commands believers to test spiritual claims rather than accepting them indiscriminately. These passages do not require denying every reported miracle, accusing every sincere participant of deliberate dishonesty, or pretending that God's sovereign power has ceased to operate. They require discernment grounded in Scripture. A verified divine intervention should produce thanksgiving to God, not worship of a human instrument. An unsupported claim should remain unsupported until evidence establishes more. A practice contradicting God's written commandments must not be defended merely because its participants are enthusiastic. **The truth has nothing to fear from honest examination. It is religious pretension that becomes nervous when somebody starts asking biblical questions.** Genuine faith rests upon the authority of God, not the reputation of the performer.

The final verdict concerning this entire subject is found in the sufficiency of Jesus Christ and the authority of His written Word. The Christian does not need an imitation of Pentecost to know that he possesses the Holy Ghost. He does not need a self-appointed apostle to assure him that the blood of Christ is sufficient. He does not need a collection of miraculous claims to establish what the gospel has already declared. Salvation is by grace through faith, the believer is sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, and the Scriptures furnish the man of God for faithful service. Let others chase performances if they insist upon making religious excitement their standard. The servant of Christ must choose the more excellent way: sound doctrine, biblical charity, holy conduct, prayer, faithful witness, and unwavering confidence in the finished work of the Saviour. **The devil does not need to destroy a Bible when he can persuade people to exchange its authority for an experience. But an experience cannot improve upon Calvary, a miracle cannot replace the gospel, and a claimed revelation cannot outrank the Word of God. The apostles have testified. The Scriptures have spoken. Jesus Christ is risen. The Holy Ghost has**

sealed the believer. Stop demanding another sign when God has already given His Son.

Tongues, Signs, and Wonders

Apostolic Credentials in Their Proper Time

Conclusion to the Ten-Essay Series

After ten thorough examinations of the Scriptures concerning tongues, signs, wonders, miraculous healings, spiritual gifts, and the credentials of the apostles, one conclusion stands above every religious tradition, every denominational claim, and every extraordinary experience that men have attempted to place alongside the Word of God: **the Bible means what it says, and God never authorized anybody to rewrite its instructions to accommodate a religious performance.** We have examined the languages spoken at Pentecost, the prophetic relationship between Israel and miraculous signs, the remarkable events involving Cornelius and the Gentile believers, the twelve disciples at Ephesus, the distribution of gifts within Christ's Body, the meaning of tongues of men and angels, the regulations governing public worship, and the extraordinary credentials associated with the foundational apostles. Throughout these studies, the same principle has emerged repeatedly. God gave particular manifestations for particular purposes, within identifiable historical settings, through men whom He appointed and according to instructions He inspired. The difficulty has never been that God failed to explain the purpose of His signs. The difficulty is that men have continually attempted to separate the signs from the purposes for which God gave them. **Once the message is discarded, the sign becomes a religious attraction. Once the authority is discarded, the attraction becomes a doctrine. And once the doctrine becomes a denominational possession, the Bible is frequently treated as an unwelcome visitor.**

Let us settle the question concerning apostles once more, because it strikes directly at the foundation of the entire discussion. Ephesians 4:11 declares, "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers." Nobody has denied that God gave apostles. The Scriptures declare it plainly. But Ephesians 2:20 also declares that the household of God is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone." There is the distinction that religious ambition repeatedly overlooks. The apostles and prophets occupied a foundational position in God's establishment of the Church. The continuing work of evangelists, pastors, and teachers does not require that every foundational office be

reproduced indefinitely. A foundation is not a temporary suggestion awaiting revision by the next generation of builders. It establishes the structure upon which the building continues. **You lay a foundation once. You build upon that foundation afterward. A man who announces that he is laying another foundation two thousand years later had better explain why the first one was insufficient.** Jesus Christ remains the chief corner stone, and the Church has not been waiting centuries for another collection of self-appointed apostles to finish a job the Lord already established through His chosen witnesses.

The historical qualifications of the apostles also deserve more respect than they generally receive from modern claimants. Acts 1:21–22 connects the replacement of Judas with firsthand witness to Christ's resurrection and the historical ministry of the Lord. Paul received his extraordinary commission directly from the risen Jesus Christ, declaring in Galatians 1:1 that he was an apostle "not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father." In 1 Corinthians 9:1, he asks, "Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?" And when challenged concerning his apostleship, he could point to the genuine signs God had wrought through his ministry. Second Corinthians 12:12 declares, "Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds." Those credentials were not impressive religious titles printed beneath somebody's name. They were the testimony of God accompanying His appointed messenger. **An apostle was not a preacher who became dissatisfied with being called a pastor. He was not a religious entrepreneur who discovered that the word *apostle* attracted greater attention. He was a man commissioned by Jesus Christ, entrusted with foundational authority, and authenticated through divine operations that could not be manufactured by human ambition.** A title without its biblical qualifications is merely a claim wearing a respectable suit.

The genuine miraculous signs recorded in Acts were equally unmistakable. Consider the lame man at the temple in Acts chapter 3. He had been disabled from birth, was known to those who encountered him, and was more than forty years old according to Acts 4:22. Peter commanded him in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth to rise and walk. Immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength, and he entered the temple walking, leaping, and praising God. The religious authorities could not argue the evidence away because the healed man stood directly before them. Acts 4:14 declares that they could say nothing against it. The apostles were not asking the audience to accept an invisible improvement in a condition nobody could verify. God performed a public miracle, and the result was recognizable. Acts 5 records many signs and wonders wrought through the apostles, while Acts 19 describes special miracles God performed through Paul. **When God authenticated His apostles, He did not require professional advertising, carefully selected testimonies, or explanations concerning why the promised miracle could not**

be demonstrated. The evidence accompanied the message, and the message pointed toward Jesus Christ. The miracles were not substitutes for preaching. They were divine credentials supporting the preaching of the resurrected Saviour.

Then we have the gift of tongues, perhaps the most misunderstood and most frequently imitated of the apostolic manifestations. Acts chapter 2 does not describe a congregation producing unintelligible sounds and then congratulating itself for entering a higher spiritual dimension. The disciples spoke with other tongues as the Holy Ghost gave them utterance, and the assembled hearers recognized the languages wherein they were born. Acts 2:8 asks, "And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?" Acts 2:11 identifies the content as the wonderful works of God. The miracle involved meaningful communication across linguistic boundaries. First Corinthians 14 later required interpretation whenever the congregation could not understand the language being spoken. Paul did not commend confusion as superior spirituality. He rebuked it. He compared unintelligible speech to an uncertain trumpet and declared that he would rather speak five understandable words than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue. **At Pentecost, God gave supernatural languages that people understood. At Corinth, Paul demanded interpretation so people could understand. Somehow modern religion has taken those two chapters and produced the doctrine that understanding is unnecessary. That is not an improvement upon apostolic Christianity. It is a retreat from the plain words of Scripture.**

The prophetic purpose of tongues also cannot be removed from the discussion. First Corinthians 1:22 declares, "For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom." First Corinthians 14:21–22 connects tongues with Isaiah's warning concerning God speaking to unbelieving Israel through men of other tongues and other lips. Isaiah 28:11–12 belongs to the historical background of divine judgment upon a people who refused God's instruction. The sign possessed significance beyond the temporary excitement of those witnessing it. At Pentecost, Jewish hearers encountered supernatural languages while Peter proclaimed the resurrection and exaltation of the Messiah whom Israel had rejected. At Cornelius's house, Jewish believers were astonished when the Holy Ghost fell upon Gentiles, and the tongues supplied recognizable testimony that God had granted believing Gentiles the same gift. At Ephesus, men associated with John's preparatory baptism received fuller instruction concerning Jesus Christ through Paul's ministry, followed by extraordinary manifestations. **The signs had audiences, purposes, and historical settings. Remove those distinctions, and the Bible becomes a collection of isolated religious performances waiting for somebody to imitate them. Preserve those distinctions, and God's unfolding revelation becomes understandable.** The Holy Ghost did not inspire those details so that Christians could disregard them.

The doctrine of salvation becomes especially important at this point because religious confusion concerning tongues frequently produces confusion concerning the Holy Ghost Himself. Some insist that a person must speak in tongues to prove that he has received the Spirit. Others teach that salvation is incomplete until a second supernatural experience occurs. Yet 1 Corinthians 12:13 declares, "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body," while verse 30 asks, "do all speak with tongues?" Paul plainly distinguishes the universal operation of the Spirit from a particular gift that was not distributed to every believer. Romans 8:9 declares, "Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." Ephesians 1:13 teaches that believers, after hearing and believing the gospel, were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. Ephesians 4:30 further establishes that believers are sealed unto the day of redemption. **The Christian does not receive a temporary membership card in the Body of Christ while waiting for a religious personality to confirm his salvation through an extraordinary performance.** He belongs to Christ through faith in the gospel, possesses the Spirit of Christ, and is sealed by the Holy Ghost according to the promise of God. The believer's assurance belongs to the written Word, not to the emotional intensity of a meeting.

Consider also what Paul actually commanded concerning spiritual gifts in the assembled church. First Corinthians 14:27 limited tongues speakers to two, or at most three, required them to speak by course, and demanded interpretation. Verse 28 commanded silence when no interpreter was present. Verse 32 declared that the spirits of the prophets were subject to the prophets. Verse 33 stated that God was not the author of confusion, and verse 40 commanded that everything be done decently and in order. Paul also established restrictions concerning speaking and authority within the assembly, which must be understood alongside the other passages addressing women's legitimate ministries and responsibilities. The important fact is that genuine spiritual gifts were never exempt from the commandments of God. In verse 37, Paul declares that anyone claiming to be spiritual must acknowledge that his instructions are "the commandments of the Lord." **A congregation cannot establish its submission to the Holy Ghost by violating the Holy Ghost's commandments. A man cannot claim that the Spirit has taken away his self-control when the Spirit expressly declared that the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. And a religious movement cannot call disorder a miracle merely because nobody has the courage to open the Bible and correct it.** God's power operates according to God's authority.

Nevertheless, the correction of false teaching must never become an excuse for denying what God genuinely accomplished during the apostolic period. The miracles were real. The languages were real. The extraordinary manifestations were real. The apostles possessed genuine authority, and the Holy Ghost confirmed the message through supernatural works.

The biblical argument concerning the historical cessation of foundational apostolic sign gifts does not require pretending that these events were symbolic stories, psychological experiences, or religious misunderstandings. Nor does it require forcing 1 Corinthians 13:10 to identify the completion of the biblical canon as the direct meaning of "that which is perfect." The chapter's references to seeing face to face and knowing even as one is known direct attention toward the future completion awaiting the believer in relation to Jesus Christ. Meanwhile, the historical purpose of apostolic credentials is established through passages such as Hebrews 2:3–4, 2 Corinthians 12:12, and Ephesians 2:20. **A correct doctrine does not need a dishonest interpretation to keep it standing. The Word of God is strong enough to defend itself without somebody bending a verse into a shape the Holy Ghost never gave it.** We must distinguish the foundational purpose of particular gifts from the final perfection associated with Christ's coming.

Neither should the cessation of those foundational credentials be confused with the proposition that God no longer heals, answers prayer, delivers His servants, or intervenes in the affairs of mankind. Almighty God has not lost His power. Jeremiah 32:17 declares that nothing is too hard for Him. James 5:14–16 gives instruction concerning prayer for the sick, and Philippians 4:6 directs believers to make their requests known unto God. But the sovereign ability of God to heal someone today is not the same thing as granting a particular individual the permanent miraculous credentials of an apostle. Furthermore, Scripture never promised that every faithful servant would experience immediate deliverance from bodily suffering. Paul endured his thorn in the flesh and received the Lord's answer, "My grace is sufficient for thee." Timothy suffered recurring infirmities. Trophimus was left sick at Miletum. Epaphroditus nearly died before God showed him mercy. **A sick Christian is not a second-class believer, and a hospital bed does not cancel salvation by grace. The same God who can heal the body has promised something infinitely greater than temporary relief from its afflictions: the redemption of that body when Jesus Christ completes the believer's appointed transformation.** Romans 8:23 and 1 Corinthians 15:51–53 establish that future hope.

There is another danger which deserves sober attention before this study closes. Not every person who believes he has experienced supernatural tongues or witnessed an extraordinary healing is deliberately dishonest. Many Christians have inherited teachings from churches, families, or religious traditions they sincerely trust. They may love Jesus Christ, desire to serve Him, and possess little understanding of the passages governing spiritual gifts. Such people need biblical instruction, not personal ridicule. Yet sincerity cannot transform an incorrect doctrine into truth. Others may exploit religious enthusiasm through staged demonstrations, unsupported healing claims, or invented revelations, and those practices deserve exposure when the evidence establishes them. First John 4:1

commands believers to try the spirits, while 1 Thessalonians 5:21 declares, "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good." **A sincere error remains an error, a deliberate deception remains a deception, and an unproven claim remains unproven no matter how enthusiastically somebody repeats it.** Biblical discernment must distinguish these matters instead of making accusations that outrun the evidence or surrendering judgment to protect religious feelings. The authority of Scripture is sufficient without either gullibility or recklessness.

The warning becomes even more serious when religious experience begins replacing the gospel itself. Jesus Christ declared in Matthew 7:21–23 that many would claim to have prophesied, cast out devils, and performed wonderful works in His name, yet He would answer some of them, "I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." Those are sobering words. Extraordinary religious claims do not guarantee that a person belongs to Christ. Second Thessalonians 2:9–12 describes future lying wonders associated with satanic deception and the rejection of divine truth. The prophetic setting must remain intact, but the warning against deception cannot be dismissed. The devil has never needed to destroy every form of religion to accomplish his purposes. False religion can become an effective instrument precisely because it borrows enough biblical language to sound familiar while replacing essential truth with something else. **A man may speak constantly about miracles and never explain the gospel. He may advertise the power of the Spirit while denying the sufficiency of Christ's blood. He may collect thousands of admirers while leaving them ignorant of how a sinner is saved. When that happens, the spectacle has not strengthened Christianity. It has displaced the very message Christianity was commissioned to proclaim.**

And that brings us to the central truth that must never be overshadowed by this entire discussion. Jesus Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, was buried, and rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. That is the gospel Paul delivered in 1 Corinthians 15:1–4. Ephesians 2:8–9 declares that salvation is by grace through faith, not of works. Romans 4:5 identifies the righteousness counted to the one who believes on Him that justifieth the ungodly, and Romans 5:1 declares that being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. These are not inferior truths waiting to be supplemented by some remarkable religious experience. They concern the eternal salvation of the soul, reconciliation with God, and the believer's secure position in Jesus Christ. **A sinner does not need to learn how to speak in tongues before he can be saved. He needs to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. A Christian does not need to obtain a second spiritual certificate from a preacher claiming apostolic power. He needs to understand what God has already given him in Christ.** Salvation is not a performance. It is the gift of God received through faith.

The lasting spiritual responsibility of the Church is therefore not to reproduce every extraordinary manifestation that accompanied its foundational establishment. It is to continue faithfully in the doctrine God delivered through His appointed witnesses. Acts 2:42 records the early believers continuing stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, while 2 Timothy 2:15 commands the workman to study and rightly divide the word of truth. Second Timothy 3:16–17 declares that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness, furnishing the man of God unto all good works. The Christian has not been left spiritually impoverished because the foundational apostles completed their appointed ministry. He possesses the written testimony through which God has revealed the gospel, the doctrine of the Church, the promises of grace, and the prophetic hope awaiting the redeemed. **A preacher with an open King James Bible, rightly divided and faithfully taught, is doing something of greater lasting value than a performer who can astonish an audience while leaving it ignorant of divine truth.** Five understandable words that teach Scripture remain more profitable than ten thousand words nobody understands.

And let nobody imagine that the purpose of these studies is to win arguments with every person who claims an apostolic gift or insists that a particular modern preacher possesses supernatural credentials. There will always be those who refuse correction, regardless of how plainly the verses are presented. Some will reply with personal testimonies, others with denominational traditions, and still others with accusations that questioning their claims amounts to resisting the Holy Ghost. But there is a straightforward answer to every honest biblical question: open the Scriptures and examine the evidence. The standard is not a man's country, church affiliation, religious reputation, or personal enthusiasm. The standard is the Word of God. **A Christian in South Africa needs the same gospel as a Christian in America. A believer in Europe needs the same written authority as a believer in Asia. Truth does not cross an ocean and suddenly become subject to a different set of apostolic commandments.** The Holy Ghost did not give one Bible for the first-century Corinthians and another standard for modern congregations claiming the same gifts. His Word deserves obedience everywhere.

The responsibility becomes personal when the final page is turned. Every believer must decide whether the King James Bible will govern his understanding or whether his understanding will be governed by experiences that cannot withstand examination. A man may have sincerely believed a doctrine for decades and still discover that the Scriptures teach something different. When that happens, his responsibility is not to defend the error because correcting it would be embarrassing. His responsibility is to believe God. Apollos was mighty in the Scriptures, yet Acts 18 records Aquila and Priscilla explaining the way of God to him more perfectly. His ministry was strengthened through correction, not

diminished. The willingness to learn from Scripture is not weakness. It is submission to divine authority. **A man who cannot be corrected by the Bible has placed himself in a position no Christian has any business occupying. The Word of God is not on trial before our experiences. Our experiences are on trial before the Word of God.** That is the distinction upon which sound doctrine depends.

As this ten-essay series closes, let the final emphasis rest where the apostle Paul consistently placed it: upon Jesus Christ and the truth God has revealed concerning Him. First Corinthians 1:23 declares, "But we preach Christ crucified." Galatians 6:14 records Paul refusing to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Colossians 2:10 declares, "And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power." There is the believer's sufficiency. Not complete in a miraculous performance. Not complete in an apostolic title. Not complete in the ability to produce unfamiliar sounds. Complete in Jesus Christ. The Spirit has sealed the believer, the Scriptures have been given for instruction, and the risen Saviour remains the Head of His Body. The Christian can pray with confidence, serve with humility, preach with conviction, and await Christ's coming without searching for another foundational apostle to authenticate what God has already established. **The foundation is laid. The chief corner stone is secure. The gospel is sufficient. The Word is authoritative. And no religious performance can add one drop of saving power to the blood Jesus Christ shed at Calvary.**

So let the final word be unmistakable. God gave apostles, and their ministry had a purpose. God gave signs, and those signs had a purpose. God gave tongues, and those tongues had a purpose. God established His Church upon the foundation He appointed, and that foundation does not need to be laid again. The Holy Ghost did not inspire the Scriptures so that men could spend the next two thousand years inventing experiences to compete with them. If someone claims apostolic authority, examine the apostolic qualifications. If someone claims miraculous tongues, examine the languages at Pentecost and the regulations at Corinth. If someone claims supernatural healing power, examine the unmistakable credentials God supplied to His appointed witnesses. If someone claims a revelation from heaven, examine it against what God has already written. And if somebody tells a saved Christian that he does not possess the Holy Ghost because he has never spoken in tongues, open Ephesians 1:13 and let God answer him. The Christian faith does not stand upon a spectacle. It stands upon the crucified and risen Jesus Christ. The signs pointed toward Him, the apostles testified of Him, the Scriptures reveal Him, and salvation is found in Him. The foundation has been laid, the testimony has been delivered, and the Saviour is coming again. Stop chasing the signs when God has already given the substance. Stop exalting the performance when Scripture has already established the

truth. And above all, never trade the certainty of God's written Word for the uncertainty of man's extraordinary claims. The Bible has spoken. Let God be true, but every man a liar.

