

## ***FIVE CLEAR WORDS, 1 COR. 14:1-25***

The Spirit and Gifts #4

◆**Intro:** I can recall probably my sophomore year at Trinity College when a group of students doing a bible study in the South Hall dorm began to speak in tongues. This was a group of students from the inner city, and apparently from a charismatic background. There was another group of students in South Hall from the suburbs. They had a reputation for frequenting the bar down the street. You never saw them in the weekly chapel services, and they spent a lot of time smoking in the dorm lounge. I did see one of them in class once. What shocked me though, and why I recall this incident was not that some students were speaking in tongues, but that this second group, upon observing the phenomena, grabbed their Bibles and were arguing with the former group as to why they should NOT be speaking in tongues! The surprise was that so far as I could tell, I didn't think they read the Bible, much less knew where to look for information in it. But there they were, Bibles in hand, trying to convince the other students that what they were doing was wrong.

◆The fact is that the Bible does not say that speaking in a foreign tongue without personal knowledge of that language is a bad thing. In fact, it calls it a gift from God. Another part of the gift is evidently a form of personal prayer. The problem in Corinth was that the church folk were getting caught up in the forms of religion, rather than in the helpful worship of God. That's what we're going to look at today.

◆**1.** A quick **background check**, so to speak: In the context of his letter, Paul is addressing worship practices, the central act the believers do together. In chapter 11 he commented on how men and women were both properly worshipers who ought to be conscious of cultural signs of respect

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in their behavior at church. Then he addressed an abuse of the Lord's Supper, which had become somewhat of a wild party when some folk actually got inebriated at church! And then in chapters 12-14 he addresses how to properly use *spiritual gifts in worship to point people to a connection with God*. Apparently 9:30am Sunday morning in Corinth, there was some disorganized mayhem going on. Judging from Paul's cautions we can deduce that in their worship services some folks would 1) spontaneously stand up and prophecy, or 2) speak in a foreign tongue and sometimes over each other without even bothering to wait for a turn! Certainly the Holy Spirit was able and did give miraculous powers to new believers, but it seems that these abilities were going straight to their heads like a stiff drink on an empty stomach! This brings us to our first observation:

◆**1. It is better to be God-oriented than merely religious (or merely spiritual, for that matter.)** I've heard people say things like, "Oh she's very spiritual." about people who neither worship God, nor read his word with any regularity, –as though being spiritual was the measure of value. Satan worshipers are very spiritual too. But I wouldn't commend their habits to you. The Corinthians were very spiritual. What was happening in Corinth is a danger in any culture, and in any religion for that matter. It is also a danger to us. *If we are not careful it is easy to replace true religion with religiosity.* True religion aims at knowing and loving God, discovering from him what makes for good or bad, beauty or evil, life or death. When a God-follower obeys God's directives, it is out of honor for God's authority, or thankfulness and love for his goodness. As is the case with all lovers, they

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naturally want to be like, and to please the one they love. So, we obey. But it is only a small step from joyful obedience into focusing on the rules, or the doings of religion (which I am calling religiosity). So, in the case of all false religions and also the one True Religion, followers may begin to define themselves by their religious activity.

◆ Catholics Christians (a branch of the true religion) may not so much be in love with God, as feel good about making it to Mass or hailing Mary a certain number of times. Likewise, Protestant Christians (another branch of the same true religion) may not so much feel good about knowing Jesus' compassion for them, as they feel good about feeling bad about how sinful they actually are. (I know. There can be a lot of mental gymnastics in religion!) In a similar way, and by contrast, Caribbean pagans may feel good for sacrificing the correct number of cats or obeying the witch doctor. In each case the religious follower is taking solace in their performance, or rule-keeping. But this is not what the true God says.

◆ *"Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, "The teachers of religious law and the Pharisees are the official interpreters of the Scriptures. So practice and obey whatever they say to you, but don't follow their example. For they don't practice what they teach. They crush you with impossible religious demands and never lift a finger to help ease the burden. "Everything they do is for show. On their arms they wear extra wide prayer boxes with Scripture verses inside, and they wear extra long tassels on their robes. And how they love to sit at the head table at banquets and in the most prominent seats in the synagogue! They enjoy the attention they get*

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*on the streets, and they enjoy being called 'Rabbi.' Don't ever let anyone call you 'Rabbi,' for you have only one teacher, and all of you are on the same level as brothers and sisters. And don't address anyone here on earth as 'Father,' for only God in heaven is your spiritual Father. And don't let anyone call you 'Master,' for there is only one master, the Messiah. The greatest among you must be a servant. But those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." Matthew 23:1-12, NLT.*

◆ Jesus point is not that it's a new rule not to call your dad "Father", as opposed to "old Man" or "Baggy Pants", or something else. That would be falling for the very rule-keeping Jesus is denouncing. Jesus is telling you not to use your faith in God to glorify yourself. That's what Paul is telling the church at Corinth too. That's immature. That's what children do. You've seen it; maybe did it when you were younger.

◆ "I beat you to the door! Ha ha!" or

◆ "I have a dried up, empty popsicle stick and yo-o-ou do-on't!"

◆ Right? That's what kids do. They highlight themselves in contrast to the other. But Jesus, teaching about worship and prayer in Matthew 6 said not to pray in the open, on the sidewalk where everyone can be impressed that you are religious. Do it in your closet where no one finds out except God who is the one prayer is to in the first place. So Paul says, "Don't be kids about religion."

◆ "But in a church meeting I would much rather speak five understandable words that will help others than ten thousand words in an unknown language. Dear brothers and sisters, don't be

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childish in your understanding of these things. Be innocent as babies when it comes to evil, but be mature and wise in understanding matters of this kind.” 1 Corinthians 14:19, 20, NLT.

◆ People don't come to church to see you. They come to see God. Help the people see God! Now a corollary:

◆ **2. It is better to be other-oriented than self-centered. That is, it is better to enrich my neighbor than to enrich my image.** This brings us back to the previous chapter, chapter 13 where Paul warned, for example, that if I had a golden tongue but didn't love people, I would be useless in God's scheme of things. If I had the ability to pray over you and remove your cancer with a word, but didn't know you or care about your life, I really haven't brought you much good. If I give away thousands of dollars, but don't have time to listen to your heart, and you don't make it into my prayers, there is no celebration in heaven over that. Listen...

◆ *“If I could speak in any language in heaven or on earth but didn't love others, I would only be making meaningless noise like a loud gong or a clanging cymbal. If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I knew all the mysteries of the future and knew everything about everything, but didn't love others, what good would I be? And if I had the gift of faith so that I could speak to a mountain and make it move, without love I would be no good to anybody. If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I didn't love others, I would be of no value whatsoever.” 1 Corinthians 13:1-3, NLT.*

◆ A. Chapter 14 is about where love and spiritual gifts intersect. In a word its theme is edification. If it doesn't build up, you might as well give it up. Every act of love you do on earth registers in the eternal memory of

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heaven. Every famous thing you achieve is overlooked like a bad commercial in heaven.

◆“*Let love be your highest goal*” 1 Corinthians 14:1, NLT.

◆Check out verse 3: prophecy (vs tongues) is for “strengthening, encouragement and comfort.” That word “strengthening”, also translated “edification”, will appear 7 times in this chapter alone. It is οικο-δομην, or “house- building”. It’s the biblical case for home-improvement! (see v 4,5, 12, 26 for examples)

◆Here’s the principle: Your gifts are for the church’s home-improvement! That’s why Paul encourages prophecy over tongues. Prophecy teaches people things. It builds them. You babbling in another language does nothing for me, unless there is an interpreter. And then the message is the main thing, because a message can change me!

◆Dr. Karl Payne in his book *Spiritual Warfare* writes, “Sarah came to my office and said she needed help. She explained that she didn’t attend our church and that her husband was an elder in another church nearby... Sarah’s case was one of those unusual ones in which I felt comfortable confronting the demonic issue right away... She explained that several years earlier she had felt that somehow God was holding something back from her... She asked God for more of Jesus and confirmation by being able to speak in tongues, which her friends at church were encouraging her to do. Friends at her church told her that just accepting Jesus as Savior wasn’t enough if she wanted to experience real power in her life and service.... She said “Sometimes when I start speaking in my tongue I feel the presence of evil and it makes me feel dirty.””

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◆ Dr. Payne suggested they test the spirit controlling her tongue. He writes, “I asked her to begin speaking in her tongue. She did so freely. As she was speaking in her tongue I asked, “Spirit of the tongue, will you confess Jesus Christ has come in the flesh?” She continued to speak in her tongue. There was no response to my question. I repeated the same questions. This time in the middle of her speaking it broke into English and said, “Maybe, maybe.” I commanded the spirit of the tongue that had responded “maybe” to confess Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. This time it said, “No.” ...I commanded the spirit to ...explain the work it was doing in Sarah’s life.... It said its work was deception. It indicated its mission was to divert Sarah’s attention from the Giver to the gift.... I asked the spirit when it had taken advantage of Sarah. It said, “When she called out for me.” I commanded to know when that was and it said, “When she said Jesus was not enough and she wanted more.” ...Sarah renounced the spirit and asked God to forgive her for believing the lie that Jesus had held out on her and that He was not enough. Scripture clearly says in Romans 8:32 “Indeed he who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also , along with Him freely give us all things?”” (p.197f)

◆ The point I want us to see is the demon’s mission: *to divert Sarah from the giver to the gift*. Friends, we said it before, we need to say it again and again until we all live for the right goal. Discovering your spiritual gifts is for the glory of God’s love and the home-improvement (or love) of your neighbor. To do this it must fit with what God’s word teaches us. If it’s

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pointing at you, or you make it about yourself, you have negated its purpose.

◆B. Now how can we apply this? Some of the issues the Corinthians had may not fit for us (head coverings while praying, taking turns prophesying, gorging ourselves at the Lord's dinner (we give you such a small piece of bread you'd have to eat the whole tray to do that!). But the same principle of edification applies.

◆Let's say you don't like a song we sing here in a worship time. If you don't sing or even try, what does that say to those around you? What will your non-Christian guest think watching you? "Oh Christian worship is just about watching other people perform on stage."?

◆Suppose the speaker has just read the Bible and begins to speak about it and you shut yours, settle back and close your eyes. What does that say about the value you place on what we're here for?

◆Suppose we show an funny video clip and you go home and tell someone that there was a funny video in church, but you tell them *because you want them to know that your church is cool, maybe cooler than theirs*. Do you see a problem with this? And suppose they say "What was it about?" and you don't know. Well then we'd be no much different from the Corinthians, would we?

◆Suppose we had such a fantastic worship band that they could sell CDs, but still a visiting family stood alone in the gym with their coffee not knowing who to talk to, while you stand alone with your family paying attention to only your own. That would make us the "clanging cymbal" of 1Corinthians 13, wouldn't it?

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◆ Or suppose God has given you a wonderful home, and you can easily afford to host a Life Group or have the neighbors over that you don't really know that well, and suppose God has given you the gift or maybe just the calling of hospitality, –but you never do it because... you don't want anything to get broken, or people to see all your treasures, or because it will mean you might miss a ball game or a TV show, or \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in your reason.)

◆ **Conclusion:** Let's return to that student group who had Bible knowledge but basically only used it to tell others what they should or shouldn't do. How likely do you think it was that other students would place weight on their religious views? On the other hand, when someone is clearly God-oriented vs merely religious, and other-oriented instead of pointing to themselves, that not only piques interest, but it also follows the biblical summary of the Law, doesn't it? -Love God, and love your neighbor.

◆ We might engage in questioning prayer more often to God, asking Lord show me where I'm pointing at myself so I can renounce it. Show me who you would have me edify with your love.

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Do Christianity and other religions make any difference in American society? Consider these findings from Harvard University researcher Robert D. Putnam: "Faith communities in which people worship together are arguably the single most important repository of social capital in America..."Churchgoers are substantially more likely to be involved in secular organizations, to vote and participate politically in other ways, and to have deeper informal social connections."

"Regular worshipers and people who say that religion is very important to them are much more likely than other people to visit friends, to entertain at home, to attend club meetings, and to belong to sports groups; professional and academic societies; school service groups; youth groups; service clubs; hobby or garden clubs; literary, art, discussion, and study groups; school fraternities and sororities; farm organizations; political clubs; nationality groups; and other miscellaneous groups."

"In one survey..."Regular church attendees reported talking with 40 percent more people in the course of the day."

"About 75–80 percent of church members give to charity, as compared with 55–60 percent of nonmembers, and 50–60 percent of church members volunteer, while only 30–35 percent of nonmembers do....Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (Simon & Schuster, 2000), pp. 66-68