

TONGUES—LEAST OF THE GIFTS? SOME EXEGETICAL OBSERVATIONS ON 1 CORINTHIANS 12-14

by Gordon D. Fee

One of the common charges brought against Pentecostals/charismatics is that in their high level of interest in glossolalia they are seeking something that the Bible describes as the least of the gifts. Such an accusation is based on an interpretation of 1 Corinthians 12-14 that sees Paul as actually saying this in chapter 12 (by always listing tongues last and by allegedly contrasting it to the "better gifts" in 12:31), and that sees him as "condemning tongues with faint praise" in chapter 14. Such a view continues to be found in evangelical/fundamentalist books or commentaries¹ and was even tendentiously brought into the first edition of the New International Version, by translating 12:28, "... and *finally* those speaking in different kinds of tongues."²

¹See, e.g. W. Harold Mare, "1 Corinthians," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (ed. Frank E. Gaeglein, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), vol. 10, pp. 261-281.

²The deletion of this word in the second edition (1978) was the result of a letter to the editors in which I indicated that the translation with "finally" was pejorative and based on questionable exegesis.

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The problem with most such interpretations—and the fault here belongs to Pentecostal interpreters as well (I am tempted to say *especially*)—is that “exegesis” has been the servant of prior hermeneutical concerns rather than the other way around.³ I do not herewith claim exemption from such a reading of the text; but what I do hope to offer in this paper are some exegetical suggestions that are consistent not only with the data in 1 Corinthians 12-14 but with the whole of 1 Corinthians.

The exegetical problem areas are three: (1) A proper understanding of the nature of the problem that Paul is addressing in these chapters; (2) the nature of the argument in chapter 12, and especially the function of the “gift lists”, and (3) the meaning of the crucial text, 12:31: *zeloute de ta charismata ta meizona* (But eagerly desire the greater gifts [NIV]).

THE NATURE OF THE PROBLEM

It should go without saying that the absolutely first task in the exegesis of the epistles is to provide a provisional reconstruction of the problem to which the epistle (or section thereof) is providing an answer. Such a reconstruction must account for all the data and must regularly be kept in view during the exegetical process. Furthermore, in 1 Corinthians 12-14 it is arguable that the nature of the problem must reflect a perspective consistent with that found in the rest of the letter, especially chapters 7-16.

Yet it is precisely at this point that most of the popular literature, as well as some of the better commentaries, have had their greatest difficulty. Even when this section of a commentary begins with a brief look at the problem, the exegesis usually proceeds without further reference to it. Most of the literature assumes the stance—even if it is not carefully spelled out—either that Paul is *informing* the Corinthians in matters where they have theological/experiential deficiencies or that he is *correcting an abuse* that has come to his attention.

Those who see him as basically giving teaching think of the Corinthian letter as one that is asking such questions of Paul. That is, “Paul,

³In this regard the books by John F. MacArthur (*The Charismatics*, Zondervan, 1978) and Charles R. Smith (*Tongues in Biblical Perspective*, DMH Books, 1973), are particularly notorious. MacArthur especially engages in all kinds of exegetical gymnastics to avoid the plain sense of texts. The commentary by Mare (Note 1) is also faulty at this point.

what do you think about . . . ?”⁴ This seems to be supported by the way Paul begins his response in 12:1: “Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant.” Thus they have asked a question, based perhaps on the “enthusiasm” of some of their number, and Paul is seeking to fill in the lacunae in their understanding.

Those who see chapters 12-14 as basically correcting an abuse, see the Corinthian letter to Paul from the perspective of a divided church, in which the glossolalics were abusing the non-glossolalics.⁵ Paul’s answer in this latter case takes the side of the non-glossolalics.

The problem with the “giving information” interpretation, as J. C. Hurd has pointed out,⁶ is that it does not take seriously enough the clearly combative nature of Paul’s answer, and that this answer must be consistent with his response to other items from their letter. I would add that this position tends very often not to see the structural unity of the *whole* section, that is, that Paul is giving a single answer to a rather singular problem. On the other hand, again as Hurd has argued,⁷ Paul’s responses in 1 Corinthians 7-16 to the Corinthian letter have very little in them to suggest that the letter comes from one of the parties in chapters 1-4. Indeed what is revealed throughout 1 Corinthians is not so much a church deeply divided internally but a church “divided” from its founder. The strongly rhetorical, combative, defensive nature of 1 Corinthians makes sense best if we see the church as over against Paul on issue after issue. It is the failure to see the Corinthians’ anti-Pauline stance that breathes through nearly every section of 1 Corinthians that is the chief weakness of most of the commentaries on this letter.

I have argued elsewhere,⁸ following Hurd’s general perspective but not his specific reconstructions, that one can best make sense of all the data in 1 Corinthians 7 and 8-10 by assuming three things: (1) that the Corinthian letter to Paul was the product of the whole church, not just a party within it (after all, of those who presumably carried the letter

⁴See, *inter alia*, the commentaries by Findlay, Evans, Grosheide, Morris, Mare, Bousset, Weiss, Leitzmann and Wendland.

⁵See, e.g., Kirsopp Lake, *The Earlier Epistles of St. Paul*, 2nd ed. (London: Rivingtons, 1914), 206-209.

⁶*The Origin of 1 Corinthians* (London: S.P.C.K., 1965), pp. 193-195.

⁷*Ibid.*

⁸“1 Corinthians 7:1 in the NIV,” *JETS* 23 (1980); “*Eidolothuta* Once Again: An Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 8-10,” *Biblica*, 61 (1980).

[16:15-17], Stephanas at least would have been a "Paulinist"); (2) that the letter was a response to Paul's earlier letter (1 Corinthians 5:9) and that its tone was basically combative: "Paul, you say... but we think... Why can't we?" rather than, "Paul, we respect your apostolic opinion, what do you think about...?" (After all Paul takes issue with them on every single item in the letter!); and (3) that Paul's responses, even when they appear to digress (such as in chs. 8-10), are in fact unified arguments to singular problems,—even though the singular problem at times may have had more than one side to it.

If this be true of the arguments in chs. 1-4, 6:12-20, 7, 8-10 and 15, for example, it is proper to assume a similar stance for 12-14, especially given the argumentative nature of the answer. What, then, is the problem? What have they argued for over against Paul in this section of their letter?

Even the most casual reading of 1 Corinthians 12-14 makes it abundantly clear that the problem has to do with the gift of tongues. This can be seen first of all by the sheer weight of numbers—"speaking in tongues" is mentioned or referred to at least 19 times.⁹ It is further demonstrated by the fact that it is the only gift that makes all seven "gift lists," where in the course of the argument Paul lists or refers consecutively to three or more gifts.¹⁰ The final proof lies in the structure of the argument itself. Similar to the long arguments of chs. 1-4 and 8-10, where Paul begins by addressing the larger theological issue raised by the Corinthian position before he moves to a specific response to the problem at hand, so here, chs. 12-13 in a more general and theological way lead to the correctives of ch. 14. These correctives, with their running contrast between tongues and prophecy and the concomitant plea for intelligibility for the sake of edification, followed in turn by the concern for the ordering of spiritual gifts in the assembly, especially tongues, make it clear that this gift is the culprit. The problem is, *how* is tongues being abused and *what* is the Corinthian position?

At this point, of course, the reconstruction becomes more speculative, but there are enough clues from what is actually said in the text to give us a viable working hypothesis. Some things from ch. 14 are cer-

⁹12:10, 28, 30; 13:1, 8; 14:2, 4, 5, 6, 13, 14, 18, 19, 22, 23, 26, 27, 39.

¹⁰12:8-10; 12:28, 12:29-30; 13:1-3; 14:6; 14:26.

tain. The problem has to do with the community at worship.¹¹ The plea for edification in community worship, coupled with the twin arguments for the need for intelligibility and orderliness in order to edify, makes it a respectable guess that precisely the opposite obtained in the Corinthian community. Indeed, everything makes sense if 14:23 ("If the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues," NIV) is not hypothetical, but actual. One need only note how often in ch. 14 Paul seems to reflect similar Corinthians attitudes or practices: 14:5 "I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but . . ."; 14:9 "So it is with *you*, Unless you speak intelligible words . . ."; 14:12 "So it is with *you*, since you are eager to have spiritual gifts . . ."; 14:16-17 "If *you* are praising God with your Spirit . . ."; 14:32 "The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets"; 14:36 "Did the word of God originate with you?" 14:37 "If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted. . ."

We may affirm, therefore, from ch. 14, that the Corinthians were *overly* enthusiastic about tongues, to the point of disorder. Chapter 12 prepares the way for the specific correctives of ch. 14 by suggesting that they were also *singularly* enthusiastic about tongues. That is, the Corinthian abuse not only destroyed the church as a worshipping community, but it had also given them a very myopic view of the Spirit. The point of ch. 12, it seems clear, is *not* to inform them as to the nature and function of spiritual gifts, but to expand their horizons to see how much more diverse the ministry of the Spirit is than their singular enthusiasm about tongues had allowed. Thus at every turn the emphasis is on diversity, which will always include tongues, but only after the emphasis on diversity is heard.

All of this seems relatively certain; what is less certain is *why* they were doing this and what they had told Paul in their letter. At this point one needs to offer a view of the nature of the Corinthian false theology as a whole, a matter that is much debated and which lies beyond the limits of this paper. But a few words are in order.

Elsewhere¹² I have argued for a view "that sees their problem as basically an over-realized eschatology, informed by an improper understanding of spiritual enthusiasm." This latter was probably based on some form of hellenistic dualism that took a negative view of present bodily existence. On such a view their criteria for spirituality would

¹¹See such passages as v. 16, 19, 23-25, 26, plus vv. 3 and 4 where the one who prophesies "speaks to men" and "edifies the church."

¹²1 Corinthians 7:1, "p. Cf. my study guide, *Corinthians* (Brussels, ICI, 1979), pp. 84-86.

be considerably different from Paul's. Indeed there is much in both 1 and 2 Corinthians to suggest that they thought of themselves as spiritual in a way that excluded Paul.

Thus they denied a future bodily resurrection (ch. 15), kept their marriages "pure" while consorting with prostitutes (6:12-7:16), argued for non-contamination at the idol-temples (8-10), etc., because they were already realizing the future in its fullness (4:8). Already they were rich; already they had come to reign. The resurrection for them was spiritual; who needs a future resurrection of the body (15:12, 35).

If this is a correct view of things, then chs. 12-14 fit in perfectly. The Corinthians indeed thought of themselves as spiritual (14:27), as already realizing the future. The evidence for this was in their community worship, where all were speaking the language of heaven, the tongues of angels (13:1).¹³ Why should they not continue to do so? The fact of tongues itself was evidence enough for them of a spirituality that showed the future to have arrived.

If this final reconstruction is a bit more speculative, it must be insisted on that some such overview of the Corinthian false theology—and one that includes all the data from 1 and 2 Corinthians—must continually inform, and in turn be informed by, our exegesis of these letters. The point for now is that all of 1 Corinthians 12-14 makes sense as a response to this kind of problem, predicated on this kind of theology. Not only does Paul correct their singular and overly enthusiastic view of tongues, but he also tries to replace their false spirituality with a genuine one. A true work of the Spirit, Paul says, will be judged by its content, not simply its mode (12:1-3), and it will have love as its aim (= the edification of the whole community), not "spirituality" as such (13:1-13).

THE ARGUMENT OF CHAPTER 12

Although the whole of Paul's argument can be seen as a response to this insistence of theirs on "tongues in the community at worship," the crucial matters for this paper lie in ch. 12. Here, because of its more

¹³A common interpretation of 13:1 is that Paul "was using hyperbole-exaggeration to make a point" (Mac Arthur, *op cit.*, p. 163). But this fails to take seriously the context of 13:1-3 in which tongues, now mentioned first because it was the problem, is followed by three other charismata mentioned in ch. 12. Furthermore, there is good evidence that early Christians understood tongues as speaking the language of angels. See *The Testament of Job* 48-52 (ed. R. A. Kraft; Scholar's Press, 1974, pp. 83-85, a Jewish apocalypse reworked by Christian hands, where Job's three daughters are caught up in the "Spirit" and speak the "dialects of the angels.")

general nature and less combative tone, one might be tempted to see the point as basically informational. But a close look at the argument suggests otherwise.

The argument begins, in vv. 1-3, with one of the more difficult passages in 1 Corinthians. But if some of the particulars are less certain (the grammar of v. 2; the meaning of "Jesus is cursed"), the overall point is not so obscure. Paul deliberately begins by reminding them of their own knowledge and experience of ecstasy as pagans. Formerly they had been "carried away" (*apagomenoi*), wherever the demonic spirits had led them. His point seems to be that it is not the *fact* of ecstasy itself that is the evidence of the Spirit—and *this* is what he does not want them to be ignorant of—but the *content* of spiritual utterance. Even as pagans they knew ecstasy, but *the* Spirit will be evidenced by the exaltation of Jesus as Lord.

With that basic principle stated, the whole of the rest of the chapter has a very singular theme, played in various motifs—namely, the fact of and need for a diversity of *charismata*. "Different kinds of charismata there are, and services and working," says Paul (vv. 4-6), and in each case the *diareseis* (different kinds) is repeated and emphasized. Verses 7-11 then elaborate this point by actually listing some of this variety. The purely *ad hoc* nature of this, and all the other, lists must be emphasized. The list is neither exhaustive nor ordered. Paul is *not* saying, "There are nine spiritual gifts and these are the sum of them," nor, "There are nine spiritual gifts and tongues is the least of them." Rather he is saying, "There are a great variety of spiritual gifts and here are some of them." Moreover, the emphasis in this listing is not on the gifts themselves at all. In contrast to every other enumeration of this kind in Paul, here he places first, and repeats nine times, the words *ho*, *hetero* and *allo* (to one, to another, to another). In other such listings, such as Rom. 12:6-8 or 1 Cor. 12:28, Paul's style is to repeat the connective word a few times, then to drop it in favor of the list itself. Thus in Rom. 12 he says, "whether, whether, whether, whether," then merely lists the final three members. But this stylistic feature does *not* occur here precisely because the emphasis is not on the list, or gifts, as such, but on the need for *each person* to be a part of the ministering body, and each one to do so in his or her own diverse way.

This same emphasis on diversity is also the point of the analogy of the body that follows (12:12-26). It must be noted here especially, in contrast to much of the popular literature and preaching, that Paul is not by this analogy striving for unity within a divided church. Quite the contrary, he is arguing for the need for diversity in a church arguing for uniformity. Every part of the argument says this. Verses 12-14 provide the preamble: Just as the body is one (unity is the *presupposition* of the

analogy) but has many parts, so also the church, which is one because of its common experience of the Spirit (v. 13), must have a variety of gifts and ministries. In the analogy proper, he then makes two points: (1) One must not be *jealous* of another's gift (vv. 15-20); that is, to deny one's own place in the body because it is not like another's is sheer folly. (2) One must not *disregard* another's gift (vv. 21-26), that is, to deny another person's place or function in the body because it is not like one's own is likewise folly. Again, it is clear that both points emphasize the value of diversity.

Finally, and one more time, vv. 27-30 repeat the same theme. In v. 28 Paul offers another *ad hoc* list, which now, because it flows directly out of the preceding analogy of the body and its functions, expands to include more than charismata per se. Here indeed Paul *begins* with a concept of rank, but that quickly disappears. After the first three (apostles, prophets, teachers), which are clearly *persons* with these functional ministries,¹⁴ he returns to the list of vv. 8-10 and randomly picks two of these charismata (but now lists them in their reverse order!). He then adds two other items ("helps" and "administrations"), before concluding with tongues.

One is tempted at this point to see these groupings as perhaps related to the "workings," "services" and "charismata" of vv. 4-6. But that would be too neat and would surely be to miss Paul's point. After all, a prophet and apostle from Paul's point of view would be a *diakonos* (servant) of the church,¹⁵ yet prophecy itself is called a *charisma*. If from our point of view Paul seems to mix apples and oranges, it is because our concerns tend to be different from his. He is *not* trying to sort out, categorize and rank "the spiritual gifts." His concern remains singular, and this is evidenced by the (partial) repetition of v. 28 in vv. 29-30 with the questions, "Are all one thing? Do all have one ministry?". The Answer is, "Of course not." The Corinthians lacked unity, yet insisted on uniformity. The Triune God insists on unity, but glories in diversity.

Some final exegetical words, therefore, need to be said about the gift lists. First, they are all *ad hoc*, not definitive nor exhaustive. This is demonstrated by several data: (a) The list always serve in a *functional* way in the argument; they are not the point of the argument itself. (b) No two lists are exactly alike, and in most cases they include items that

¹⁴See e.g. A. D. Palma, "Spiritual Gifts—Basic Considerations," *Pneuma* 1 (1979) 17-18.

¹⁵This term, especially in the earlier Paul, is a favorite in describing himself and his fellow ministers (1 Thess. 3:2; 1 Cor. 3:5; 2 Cor. 3:6; Rom. 15:8; 16:1).

seem to move beyond *charismata*, as supernatural manifestations of the Spirit. The later lists also include further *charismata* (=special, extraordinary endowments of the Spirit) not mentioned in 12:8-10. Thus in the *ad hoc* list in 14:6 Paul includes *apokalypsis* (revelation) and *didache* (word of instruction), along with knowledge and prophecy and discernment are not even mentioned but are included in the ensuing elaboration (14:29-32). (d) Finally, and most importantly, the gifts themselves are never defined or explained. If gifts *per se* were the *intent* of such listings, then surely one would expect some kind of explanation. But not so; they simply have a different function in the argument.

Second, their function in the argument of chapter 12 is to emphasize the fact of and the need for diversity of Spirit gifts and ministries over against the Corinthians' over- and singular enthusiasm about tongues. Third, they are therefore not given in order to define or rank them except in the case of the primary functional ministries in the church. Fourth, and for our argument the most important, tongues, which is the only gift that makes all seven enumerations in these chapters, always appears at the end of the listings in chapter 12 because this is where the problem lay. But it is not listed last because he thinks it least! On the contrary, the lists emphasize variety within unity; and variety always *includes* tongues, but will not allow the tongues to be *exclusive*. Thus tongues is listed last because it is a part of the diversity, but in this argument it always makes the list only after diversity is heard.

THE MEANING OF 12:31

After all this emphasis on variety and unity and on not being jealous of, or disregarding, another's place in the body, v. 31 comes as something of a shock. How can Paul now talk about "greater gifts" after he has been trying to destroy the kind of thinking for 27 verses (12:4-30)?

There are four possible interpretations of this text:

1. The traditional interpretation, which sometimes fails even to see the difficulties,¹⁶ has been to view the verb as an imperative, and therefore as an exhortation in light of an alleged ranking of gifts in vv. 27-30 to seek the items high up on the list and, conversely, to stop seeking tongues at all. Thus W. H. Mare recently has commented: "Having mentioned tongues and their interpretation, Paul urges Christians to seek the better gifts — not that of speaking in tongues."¹⁷ As we have already noted, Mare has also rather thoroughly missed

¹⁶See, e.g., the otherwise excellent commentary by C. K. Barrett (New York: Harper, 1968), p. 296.

¹⁷*Op. cit.*, p. 267.

the nature of the problem in this whole passage. Nevertheless, even an exegete as skilled as C.K. Barrett has commented similarly: "Yet it was proper to give the advice, *Strive for* (be ambitious to acquire) *the greater gifts* — proper because the Corinthians evidently valued too highly what Paul regards as one of the lowest gifts, that of speaking with tongues."¹⁸

But such an interpretation is fraught with difficulties. (a) It does not take seriously how contradictory this statement is to the whole argument that has preceded. (b) It looks back to the previous list to see tongues as "one of the least," but fails to acknowledge that the item at the top of the list (apostle) and therefore by the same reasoning the "greatest," *cannot* be striven for. (c) It fails to note that Paul does not in fact rank the gifts in such a way as to help the Corinthians know what the "greater gifts" are that they should strive for. Prophecy, for example, is sixth on the first list, second on the second list, but becomes *the* gift used to contrast intelligibility with non-intelligibility in ch. 14. (d) It fails to note that where Paul does in fact contrast prophecy and other intelligible gifts with tongues (14:1), he does not use the adjective "greater" in the exhortation. (3) It devalues or otherwise must circumvent Paul's very positive statements about tongues in ch. 14.

2. Another possible option I have yet to find in print was once suggested to me by my friend Larry W. Hurtado. On the basis of 14:12, that the Corinthians *were* in fact zealous to be "spiritual" (lit. "zealous of spirits), and since at several places in 1 Cor. 7-16 (e.g. 6:12-13; 17:1; 8:1, 4) Paul's statements only make sense if he is quoting their letter, it is possible that *zeloute de ta charismata ta meizona* is *their* position which Paul is quoting and will then qualify. " 'But seek earnestly the greater gifts,' you say; well, I will show you a way far superior to that."

This option has clear merit, but it also has some strikes against it. In every other such alleged citation, it appears at the beginning of Paul's argument, he partially agrees with them, but then sharply qualifies their position. Since our verse does not appear at the beginning, nor have some kind of signal such as "we know that . . ." as in 8:1 and 4, and since ch. 13 does not appear to be a real qualification of seeking "higher gifts," the solution to this problem must lie in one of the final two options.

3. In an article published in 1963, Gerhard Iber argued convincingly that the solution to 12:31 lies in seeing the *de* as adversative, not consecutive, and the *zeloute* as an indicative, not an imperative.¹⁹

¹⁸*Op. cit.*, p 296

¹⁹"Zum Verständnis von I Cor 12 31," *ZNW* 54 (1963) 13-52 Cf A Bittlinger, *Gifts and Graces* (Grand Rapids Eerdmans, 1967, pp 73 75, who wholeheartedly adopts this alternative

Thus Paul, after arguing strenuously for an obliteration of their ranking of gifts by showing the need for diversity, has remonstrated, "But you are seeking the so-called greater gifts. Rather I will show you a 'more excellent way.'" Thus, Paul goes on, you must exhibit love; indeed, pursue love, and in that context simply seek spiritual gifts. And when one is doing both—pursuing love and seeking spiritual gifts—he or she will seek for an intelligible gift such as prophecy (or a revelation or knowledge of teaching, 14:6) for only what is intelligible will edify the community.

This is a particularly attractive option and has against it only the fact that the *zeloute* in a similar context in 14:1 is clearly an imperative. But as Iber points out, when it does become an imperative in 14:1 it does *not* have the *ta meizona* of 12:31. Thus Paul would be saying, "You are seeking the 'better' gifts; what you should be doing is simply seeking spiritual gifts in the context of love."

4. The final option, and the one I finally settle for, is to see the *zeloute* as an imperative in 12:31, but not in contrast to 12:4-30. That is, Paul really does mean to say, "But eagerly desire the greater gifts." However, he is not thinking *back* to a list of gifts they should desire in the order he has given them. Rather he is looking ahead to his next point, the need for intelligibility in the community; and in the community *all* the intelligible gifts edify the community and tongues by itself does not. But before he can get that point made, he interrupts himself to give the proper framework in which the "greater gifts" are to function, namely, love.

If in 13:1-3 tongues is mentioned first as having no value without love, again it is only because that is *their* favorite. But as Paul clearly says, *none* of the gifts, indeed not even charitable deeds (!), counts for anything if one is not doing it in love *i.e.*, seeking not one's own but another's welfare.

In this interpretation 14:1 is resumptive. "Pursue love," he says. Now in *that* context *zeloute* the things of the Spirit, especially those gifts that are intelligible and will thus edify the community.

THE ARGUMENT OF CHAPTER 14

We may conclude these exegetical notes by referring once again to the argument of chapter 14. It needs to be emphasized once more that Paul does *not* say that tongues is inferior to prophecy. What he says is that in church intelligibility is preferred to non-intelligibility, because the former seeks to edify the whole community while the latter is only for one's own edification. The pursuit of love demands that in church one

seek to edify the whole community.

Furthermore, Paul is clearly not "damning tongues with faint praise," unless one argue that his positive statements are not really to be taken seriously. But quite the contrary. With interpretation even tongues becomes intelligible and is therefore one of the "greater gifts" in church. Hence the regulations on order in 14:27-28, so that tongues might become intelligible and therefore edify.

That Paul values tongues as a private gift is reflected in several ways, and not simply in his "I would like every one of you to speak in tongues" (14:5) and "I think God I speak in tongues more than all of you" (14:18). The one who speaks in tongues is speaking to God (14:2)²⁰ and thereby edifying himself (14:4). Such a person prays and sings with his Spirit. Even if the mind is unfruitful, the clear implication is that not all Spirit-communicated edification must pass through the cortex of the brain. Such affirmations are scarcely consonant with seeing tongues as the least of the gifts. Nonetheless, *in church* only what edifies the whole church must be manifested.

Such an interpretation, we would argue, is not the servant of a prior hermeneutical commitment, but is correct simply because it touches all the bases and makes sense of all the data.

²⁰In what must be classified as a curiosity—or absurdity—MacArthur (*op. cit.*, p. 161) has argued: "Paul's comment in 1 Corinthians 14:2 is not a commendation to the Corinthians; he was using satire. It is also possible from the Greek, because of the absence of the definite article, to translate the term for God as 'a god'—referring to a pagan deity. Whether we want to take 1 Corinthians 14:2 as a satire or as a reference to a pagan deity, it is condemnation, not commendation. The context demands this." In all of this, of course, he conveniently overlooks 14:28 where Paul says *to theo* and clearly says, "let him speak . . . to God!"



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