

1 CORINTHIANS: MOVING FROM THE CARNAL TO THE SPIRITUAL STATE

Part XXIX: Understanding Whether God Wants Us To Seek To Speak In Tongues

(1 Corinthians 12:29-31a et al.)

I. Introduction

- A. Many Christians claim that since 1 Corinthians 12:31a KJV directs, "But covet earnestly the best gifts," God wants every believer to seek to speak in tongues like professing Christians in the Charismatic Movement.
- B. Others claim that unless one has spoken in tongues, he does not have the Holy Spirit and his is not saved!
- C. 1 Corinthians 12:29-31a answers concerns about these matters, so we study the passage in its edifying insight:

II. Understanding Whether God Wants Us To Seek To Speak In Tongues, 1 Corinthians 12:29-31a.

- A. From the context, we know Paul's readers were all believers who had the Holy Spirit, 1 Corinthians 1:2; 12:13:
 - 1. Paul's readers were "called to be saints" who themselves called upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ as true believers who were truly saved people, 1 Corinthians 1:2 KJV, ESV.
 - 2. These readers had also all been baptized into one body by the Holy Spirit and they had all been made to drink spiritually into one Holy Spirit in the sense of utilizing His power for life and service, 1 Cor. 12:13.
- B. However, not all of these truly saved people had spoken in tongues, 1 Corinthians 12:29-30:
 - 1. Each of the questions in 1 Corinthians 12:29-30 about whether the believers at Corinth were *all* apostles, *all* prophets, *all* teachers, *all* workers of miracles or *all* had the gifts of healing or *all* spoke with tongues or *all* interpreted them are rhetorical questions that require the negative answer, "No!":
 - a. In the New Testament Koine Greek language, when one asks a rhetorical question that expects a positive answer, the indicative mood of the verb is used together with the negative adverb *ou*, but if one asks a rhetorical question that expects a negative answer, the indicative mood of the verb is used together with the negative adverb *me*. (J. Gresham Machan, N. T. Greek For Beginners, 1951, p. 197)
 - b. Applied to 1 Corinthians 12:29-30, each of the rhetorical questions that appear in these verses have the negative adverb *me* with the indicative mood of the verb, so they each expect the negative answer, "No!" (U. B. S. Greek New Testament, 1966, p. 607)
 - c. Accordingly, Paul meant to state by his question in 1 Corinthians 12:30b that **NOT** all members of the body of Christ in Corinth spoke in tongues!
 - 2. Thus, not all truly saved people at Corinth spoke in tongues, meaning a believer can be saved apart from possessing the spiritual gift of speaking in tongues and apart from speaking in tongues!
- C. Also, Paul's call to "covet earnestly the best gifts" (1 Corinthians 12:31a KJV) does **NOT** direct believers to speak in tongues, and we explain (as follows):
 - 1. The "best" gifts in the context were the gifts of higher rank that Paul discussed in 1 Corinthians 12:28, those gifts being **first** apostles, **second** prophets, **third** teachers, followed in descending order by miracles, gifts of healing, helps, administrations and **finally** speaking in tongues.
 - 2. The greater gifts then would **NOT** be speaking in tongues, administrations, helps, healing and performing miracles, **BUT RATHER** apostles, prophets and teachers!
 - 3. Also, Paul already noted in 1 Corinthians 12:11 that the Holy Spirit sovereignly decided which believer would get which gift, that no believer can obtain the gift he desires to possess just because he desires it!
 - 4. The Greek verb rendered "covet earnestly" (1 Cor. 12:31a KJV) is *zeloo*, "desire earnestly" (Thayer's Grk.-Eng. Lex. of the N. T., 1963, p. 271), so Paul was directing his readers to put a higher priority on seeking to have God the Holy Spirit assign believers to their body who had the gifts of apostleship, prophecy and teaching above those who spoke in tongues, the opposite of what the Corinthians did! (cf. 1 Cor. 14:1-25)
- D. [In our later study of 1 Corinthians 14, we will learn that the Charismatic Movement "gift of tongues" is nothing like the New Testament gift: Charismatics do not supernaturally speak in other human languages where the gift of tongues in the New Testament equipped believers to speak supernaturally in other known human languages that they personally had not otherwise known! (cf. Acts 2:1-12 with 1 Corinthians 14:9)]

Lesson: (1) *Even in the Early Church, not all believers spoke in tongues, meaning one does not have to possess that spiritual gift to be saved!* (2) *Since the Holy Spirit sovereignly distributes the gifts as He wills, no believer can expect God to give him that true gift by doing anything to get it!* (3) *The greater gifts God wants believers to seek to have in the body are not tongues speaking, miracles, etc., but teachers (as apostles and prophets no longer exist).*

Application: *May we see that 1 Corinthians 12:29-31a does not condone, but it counters Charismatic beliefs!*