

# The spiritual gifts, especially of prophecy and speaking in tongues

*Additional study material*

# 29

A discipleship training to equip  
Christians for works of service,  
so that the Body of Christ may  
be built up (Ephesians 4:11-16).

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*Note: all Bible verses have been translated grammatically from the Greek!*

## **PART I. EXPLANATION OF FIRST CORINTHIANS CHAPTER 11 TO 14**

### **A. 1 CORINTHIANS CHAPTER 11 THE COVERING ON THE HEAD OF WOMEN**

In 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 the apostle Paul instructs Christian women how they ought to behave in public. He instructs them to wear a covering on their head when they pray or preach in public. What is this covering and why must women wear such a covering?

#### **▪ 1 Corinthians 11:2.**

Paul concludes his teaching with respect to the domestic problems in the congregation of Corinth with the words in 1 Corinthians 10:31 to 1 Corinthians 11:1. In 1 Corinthians 11:2 onwards, he gives instructions which apply to every realm.

He first relates some things for which he praises the Christians in Corinth (verse 2) in order to make it easier for him to speak about some issues for which he could not praise them (verse 17). He praises the Corinthian Christians for

thinking of him in every way and for *continually* holding fast to the traditions in the way he *once for all* had passed on to them.<sup>1</sup>

There were no heresies at Corinth except that some people said that there was no resurrection from the dead<sup>2</sup>. However, there were some evils in behaviour at Corinth. In chapter 11 he deals with the abuse of some women praying and preaching with uncovered heads<sup>3</sup>. He also tackles the abuses of the congregation during the Lord's Supper<sup>4</sup>.

Why was it necessary for Paul to pass on certain Christian "traditions" (i.e. customary practices)? At the writing of the First Letter to the Corinthians in 56 A.D. the majority of the New Testament Scriptures did not yet exist! The Gospels and the Book of Acts were not yet published and they are indispensable to keep accurate what Christians preached and taught. These Christian "traditions" consisted of the Word of God as revealed by Jesus Christ to his apostles and a few New Testament prophets<sup>5</sup>. These "traditions" consisted of the teachings, commandments, practices and narratives, etc. of the Christian Faith. The apostles were the ear- and eye-witnesses of Jesus Christ and handed down what Jesus Christ had commanded them to preach, teach and pass on. These Christian traditions did not differ from what was later written in the New Testament, but was the oral version of the teachings of Jesus Christ that had not been recorded in the New Testament. That is why Paul commands that these Christian traditions must be obeyed. These Christian "traditions" are not merely "human traditions"<sup>6</sup>, but traditions that must be passed on everywhere and at all times.

## **1. The first argument of Paul with respect to the behaviour of Christian women in public is derived from God's re-creation ordinance (1 Corinthians 11:3-6).**

### **▪ 1 Corinthians 11:3.**

"I want you to know that the head of every man is the Christ; head of woman (is) the man; and Head of Christ (is) God."<sup>7</sup>.

The word "head" is used figuratively and means "the governing or ruling part". Jesus Christ is the Head of every man, no matter whether he is a Christian or not. The fact that non-Christians do not know or acknowledge Jesus Christ or his Headship does not change the reality or truth of this statement<sup>8</sup>. Jesus Christ is and remains the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

Because the word "every" is lacking in the second part, the second part does not refer to the relationship between men and women in the realm of creation<sup>9</sup> or of marriage<sup>10</sup>, but to the relationship of woman to man in the realm of re-creation. In the realm of re-creation (i.e. in the world wide Church) where Christ is worshipped as Head and Ruler, man rules over women. In the Christian Church woman stands under the authority of the counsel of elders. Because the word "head" in the second part lacks the definite article and the word "woman" lacks the pronoun "every", man's headship over the woman is not as absolute as that of Christ over all people and all things! Nevertheless, the authority of man over woman in the realm of recreation has not been abolished<sup>11</sup>. The Bible clearly delineates the boundaries of all authority-submission relationships!

"The Head of Christ is God". Paul writes to the Corinthians, "Let therefore no one boast about men: whether Paul, Apollos or Cephas; or the world; or life or death; or the present or the future; all are yours. You however are of Christ and *Christ is of God*"<sup>12</sup>. Because all things are the possession of the Church, Christians should not choose particular things or particular leaders and form parties<sup>13</sup>. The above-mentioned leaders are the possession of the Church, just as God makes them available as servants for the Church<sup>14</sup>. The Church is (the possession) of Christ<sup>15</sup> and therefore shares in the glory of Christ. But Christ is of God in a completely different sense. According to his office, Christ is the Mediator who earned and applies salvation until completed and then subjects himself to God the Father<sup>16</sup>. This does not mean that God the Son would be subjected to God the Father, because the above mentioned subjection only applies to his human nature and his historical office as Mediator and not to his divine nature<sup>17</sup> and eternal kingship<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Greek: επιτινω (indicative, present, active) δε υμας οτι παντα μου μεμνησθε (indicative, perfect, deponent) και καθως παρεδωκα (indicative, aorist, active) υμιν τας παραδοσεις κατεχετε (indicative, present, active)

<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:12

<sup>3</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:2-16

<sup>4</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:17-34

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 13:11; John 14:26; John 16:13-15; 1 Corinthians 2:10; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4; Galatians 2:11-12; Ephesians 3:3-5

<sup>6</sup> cf. Matthew 15:1-20

<sup>7</sup> Greek: οτι παντος ανδρος η κεφαλη χριστος εστιν (indicative, present, active); κεφαλη δε γυναικος ο ανηρ (εστιν); κεφαλη δε του Χριστου ο θεος (εστιν).

<sup>8</sup> Ephesians 1:22; Philippians 2:10-11; 1 Peter 3:22

<sup>9</sup> Genesis 3:16

<sup>10</sup> verse 8 and Ephesians 5:22-24

<sup>11</sup> 1 Timothy 2:11-12

<sup>12</sup> 1 Corinthians 3:21-23.

<sup>13</sup> i.e. church denominations

<sup>14</sup> 1 Corinthians 4:1

<sup>15</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:12-13

<sup>16</sup> John 14:28; John 20:17; 1 Corinthians 11:3 and 1 Corinthians 15:23-28.

<sup>17</sup> John 1:1; John 10:30; Colossians 2:9; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 2:8; 1 John 5:20.

<sup>18</sup> 1 Peter 1:11; Revelation 22:3.

It is a fact that God the Father is the Head of Christ as Mediator. It is also a fact that Christ is the Head of every human being<sup>19</sup>. These facts should make it easier for the woman to acknowledge the authority of man in the Church (and the authority of her husband in Christian marriage).

▪ **1 Corinthians 11:4.**

“Every man who prays or prophesies *with something hanging down from his head* dishonours his head.”<sup>20</sup> These words probably refer to “a covering” (as a veil) or to long hair hanging loose.

“Praying” is a very ordinary action and in this context is “praying with and for other people”. “Prophesying” was especially an inspired action of telling people what they should believe and do in a particular situation during the time the New Testament Scripture was not yet in existence. Prophesying in the Corinthian Letters always means “proclaiming a divine revelation” in such a way that it edifies, encourages and comforts people<sup>21</sup>! Prophesying took mostly place in the meetings of the congregation<sup>22</sup>, but sometimes at other occasions<sup>23</sup>. The fact that the ministry of the New Testament prophets was for the benefit of the churches does not imply that prophesying was made or should be made only in the meetings of the congregation. In 1 Corinthians 11:4 prophesying must have been closely associated with the intercessions for others in public.

Women were certainly allowed to prophesy<sup>24</sup>, but not during the public worship services of the congregation, because the phrase “in the church” is expressly used in 1 Corinthians 14:33-38. This leads to the conclusion that in chapter 11 the apostle Paul speaks about *prophesying in public* and in chapter 14 about *prophesying in the worship services of the congregation*. In verse 16 Paul says that the above-mentioned tradition (namely, that women ought to have a covering) ought to be the rule “in all the churches of God” and that Christians ought to stop quarrelling about this matter!

When a man prays or prophesies in public with “a covering” on his head, he acts like a woman. God’s intention is that the difference between men and women should be clear. A man ought to reflect the glory of God and he should not hide this glory under a covering. This description of a man with “a covering” on his head does not mean that this really happened at Corinth, but it could have happened. Paul makes use of *a possible scenario*.

This situation of a man praying and prophesying with a covering on his head does not refer to something that actually happened at Corinth, but to something that may have happened. Paul employs *a hypothetical situation*.

▪ **1 Corinthians 11:5.**

“And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered<sup>25</sup> dishonours her head because it is just as though her head were shaved.”<sup>26</sup>

However it was a fact that some women at Corinth prayed and prophesied in public without a covering on their head. It seems that they had laid their coverings (veils, headbands, bows or ribbons) aside during their prayers and prophesying in public. It seems that they wished to look like men, because they prayed and prophesied like the men in public without a covering on their head.

When a woman prays or prophesies without a covering on her head, she acts like a man. But God intended a woman to reflect and reveal the glory of man and this she does when she behaves like a moral woman in public. By behaving like a man, she dishonours her head (the man), because the absence of a covering on her head would mark her as an immoral woman or a woman that refuses to stand under authority. She would then fail to display her God-given calling to display the glory of man. This glory is that she honours and respects him, also in her outward appearance and behaviour. A moral woman is as “a beautiful crown on his head”<sup>27</sup>. She shows how much he loves her and how well he treats her. The characteristic of a prostitute was a shaven head and they were called “the shaven ones”. Thus, if immoral women are characterised by their hair cut short or shaven off, by their appearance and behaviour as men, then moral women ought to wear a covering on their head and need to distinguish themselves from men. When honourable Christian women failed to do this, they placed themselves on a level with the immoral women in their society.

The apostle Paul is not formulating a rule that Christian women should pray or prophesy with a piece of clothing as a covering on their head. Christian women were expected to appear in public and to behave themselves in public in a respectful way, just as other respectful women in their society normally do.

<sup>19</sup> Colossians 1:16

<sup>20</sup> Greek: *πας ανηρ προσευχομενος* (participle, present, deponent) *η προφητευων* (participle, present, active) *κατα κεφαλης εχων* (participle, present, active) (having something down over the head) *καταισχυνει* (indicative, present, active) *την κεφαλην αυτου*

<sup>21</sup> 1 Corinthians 14:3

<sup>22</sup> 1 Corinthians 14:4

<sup>23</sup> Acts 21:8-11

<sup>24</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:5

<sup>25</sup> Greek: *ακατακαλυπτω τη κεφαλη*

<sup>26</sup> Greek: *εν γαρ εστιν και το αυτο τη εξυρημενη* (participle, perfect, passive) (*ξυραω* = having her head shaved)

<sup>27</sup> Proverbs 12:4; 1 Peter 3:1-6

▪ **1 Corinthians 11:6.**

“For if a woman does not *keep* (her head) covered [present continuous tense], she must *once for all* [aorist tense] have (her longer hair) cut short or shorn off. However, if it is *henceforth* a disgrace for the woman to be cut short or shaven, she *must hence forward* keep her head covered [a command in the present tense]”.<sup>28</sup>

If a woman begins to act like a man (by appearing in public with an uncovered head), then she should be consistent “by having her hair cut short”. Then she will notice that her behaviour in public leads to shame. Everyone (in that culture) agreed that it was shameful for a woman to appear in public with her hair cut short or shaven off, because in that time and in that culture this was the characteristic mark of immoral women.

Before the gospel came to Corinth, Greek women in contrast to Roman women generally lived in the background. This led to widespread abuse of women (e.g. prostitution). The preaching of the gospel restored the Greek women to an honourable place in the Christian community. Also women received from God the authority (the right and the freedom) to take part in ordinary actions like praying as well as extraordinary actions like speaking (prophesying) in public, but not during the public worship services of the congregation<sup>29</sup>.

Many drawings and descriptions from ancient times show that men appeared in public without any covering on their head, while women appeared in public with a covering on their head.

However, it appears that some Christian women at Corinth went too far with respect to their position. They neglected the difference between men and women established by God at the creation<sup>30</sup> by praying and prophesying in public with their heads uncovered just as the men did. Contrary to general custom in Corinth, they removed the covering on their head so that their hair hung slovenly loose around their head. Because the immoral women in Greece let their hair hang untidy loose around their head, their society forced them to cut their hair short or shave it off. That is why these women evidently regarded it unnecessary to wear a covering on their head. They appeared like men in public.

It was therefore necessary that the apostle Paul emphasised that their God-given differences in the area of recreation (the Church) had not been abrogated. God had created them different (male and female)<sup>31</sup> and gave them different functions (to serve by being a leader and to serve by being a helper) and to prophesy or not in the public worship meetings of the congregation.<sup>32</sup>

If a man in that country and culture appeared with a covering on his head he dishonoured his head. “The Head” of a Christian man is Jesus Christ. And if a woman in that country and culture appeared without a covering on her head she dishonoured her head. “The head” of a Christian woman is her husband (verse 3). Paul reasons that if in daily life the culture or custom of a people prescribed that an honourable woman must appear in public with a covering on her head, then an honourable Christian woman must also have a covering on her head when she prays or prophesies in public. In this way Christian women in public distinguish themselves from the immoral women. In a country or culture where everyone is of the opinion that it is a disgrace for a woman to have her longer hair hang slovenly down from her head or have it cut short or shaven off, Christian women ought to keep their hair neatly together by means of a veil, headscarf, bow or ribbon. The point the apostle Paul is making is that whatever Christian women are expected to do under normal circumstances, they should also do they pray or speak (prophesy) in public<sup>33</sup>. The principle is that Christians should not give offence to others by their appearance (clothing) and behaviour!

**Conclusion.** Christian women may intercede for, edify, encourage and comfort other people in public outside the public worship meetings of the congregation. However, they must do this appearing and behaving as all the moral women in their culture and society would do. They may not behave disgracefully according to the norms of their culture. In the Corinthian society (culture) women ought not to appear with untidy hair hanging loosely from their head or with hair cut short or shaven off, because this would identify them with immoral women in their society. In the Corinthian society (culture) women must appear with a “covering” on their head in public.

Thus, the first reason why a woman ought to have a covering on her head is not to be regarded as an immoral, but as a moral Christian woman in her society.

The question is, “What exactly is this covering?” Verse 15 answers this question.

<sup>28</sup> Greek: ει γαρ ου κατακαλυπτεται (indicative, present, medium) γυνη, και κειρασθω (imperative, aorist, medium). ει δε ασχρον γυναικι το κειρασθαι (infinitive, aorist, medium) η ξυρασθαι (infinitive, aorist, deponent), κατακαλυπτεσθω (imperative, present, medium).

<sup>29</sup> 1 Corinthians 14:33-38

<sup>30</sup> Genesis 3:16

<sup>31</sup> Genesis 1:27

<sup>32</sup> Genesis 2:18

<sup>33</sup> For example: in the family circle, in a Bible study group in the congregation or in a meeting, etc.

## 2. The second argument of Paul with respect to the behaviour of Christian women in public is derived from God's creation ordinance (1 Corinthians 11:7-12).

### ▪ 1 Corinthians 11:7.

“But a man ought not to *keep* [present continuous tense] his head covered, since he is *always* [present continuous tense] the image and glory of God. The woman, however, is *always* [present continuous tense] the glory of man.”<sup>34</sup>

By virtue of creation, there is another difference which men and women ought to observe. Christians may not forget this difference. There are two reasons why a woman ought to have a covering on her head in public: she has been created for the glory of man and she has to acknowledge the sovereign authority of God's creation ordinance, because God's angels are watching.

The man and the woman were both created in the image of God<sup>35</sup>. They both have certain moral and spiritual features of God. There is certainly no difference in “their being human”. They are of the same value. But there is definitely a difference in “*what they were created for*”: the man was created for the glory of God and the woman was created for the glory of man.

The word “glory” here does not refer to God's divine characteristics, but to that which honours and magnifies God. God created man by forming him as it were with his own hands from the elements of this earth and by breathing the breath of life into him<sup>36</sup>. The man reveals how beautiful a being God created – a being that reflects the glory of God<sup>37</sup>. But God created the woman in a different way than anything else – he created her by forming her from a part of the man<sup>38</sup>. The woman reveals how beautiful a being God created from the man – a being that reflects the glory of man. Paul does not base his argument on the marriage relationship, but rather on *the created relationship* between man and woman.

In verse 6 Paul says that a woman *must* [a command] keep her head covered, because she must not behave like an immoral woman or a man in her society. And in verse 7 Paul says that a man *ought not to* [an obligation] keep his head covered, because he must not behave like a woman in society. In both cases it is “an obligation” more than an official regulation prescribed by God! Both the woman and the man are obligated to respect the differences in God's created order! Therefore a man should behave like a man and a woman should behave like a woman. God created them different from each other and they should behave different from each other. They should also dress differently.

### ▪ 1 Corinthians 11:8-10.

“For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created<sup>39</sup> for woman, but woman for man. For this reason a woman ought to have ‘a sign of authority’<sup>40</sup> on her head, because of the angels.”<sup>41</sup>

The second reason why women ought to have a covering on their head is because “it signifies that women stand under authority”. Eve was not only created from man, but for the glory of man. God created her with the purpose to be a helper for man<sup>42</sup>. The man could not fulfil the cultural commission<sup>43</sup> without the help of the woman. The man ought not to have a covering on his head, because he reflects the glory of God (verse 7). But the woman ought to have a covering on her head, because she reflects the glory of man (verse 10).

The covering on her head is a sign of *the authority* God gave to her to approach God, to pray and to prophesy. The covering on her head is also a sign of *the authority* God demands from her, thus a sign of her subjection to man, particularly in the social and religious relationships between men and women which God has instituted.

The third reason why women ought to have a covering on their head is “*because of the angels*”. Angels witnessed God's creation of the woman (and the man)<sup>44</sup> and execute God's will<sup>45</sup>. Thus, when women make use of their “covering” in approaching God and in praying and prophesying, they *acknowledge the sovereign authority of God's creation ordinance*!

God's creation ordinance includes the following two things: The woman was “created from man” and therefore her existence is dependent on man. And the woman was “created for man” and therefore the purpose of her existence is to be a helper for man. The fact that the woman was created not only for the sake of man, but also for the sake of God's angels should make it easier for the woman to stand under the authority of the man in her social relationship in Christian marriage<sup>46</sup> and in her religious relationship in the Christian Church<sup>47</sup>.

<sup>34</sup> Greek: ανηρ μεν γαρ ουκ οφειλει (indicative, present, active) κατακαλυπτεσθαι (infinitive, present, medium)

την κεφαλην, εικων και δοξα θεου υπαρχων (participle, present, active). η γυνη δε δοξα ανδρος εστιν (indicative, present, active)

<sup>35</sup> Genesis 1:27

<sup>36</sup> Genesis 2:7

<sup>37</sup> Psalm 8:4-8

<sup>38</sup> Genesis 2:22-23

<sup>39</sup> Greek: εκτισθη (indicative, aorist, passive) < κτιζω

<sup>40</sup> Greek: εξουσια

<sup>41</sup> Greek: δια τουτο οφειλει (indicative, present, active) η γυνη εξουσιαν εχειν (infinitive, present, active) επι της κεφαλης δια τους αγγελους.

<sup>42</sup> Genesis 2:18

<sup>43</sup> Genesis 1:28

<sup>44</sup> Job 38:4-7

<sup>45</sup> Psalm 91:11-12; Psalm 103:20; Daniel 7:10; Hebrews 1:14

<sup>46</sup> Ephesians 5:22-24; 1 Peter 3:1-7

▪ **1 Corinthians 11:11-12.**

“However, in the Lord woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman.<sup>48</sup> For as the woman (came) out of man, so also the man (came) by means of the woman. But everything (comes) out of God.”<sup>49</sup>

In the world (without God)<sup>50</sup> people might think that they are completely independent and therefore behave super-individualistic. But “in the Lord” woman and man are not independent from one another. As they are dependent on one another in their created existence, so they are dependent on one another in their recreated existence. They are dependent on one another in their God-given functions (tasks) in fulfilling the cultural commission in the world and in fulfilling the great commission in the Christian Church and in the Christian marriage.

The cultural commission<sup>51</sup> includes the following:

- multiplying and filling the earth with people in God’s image
- subduing the earth by bringing science, culture and preservation to God’s creation
- and ruling God’s created earth (ruling over other people excluded)

Although in the creation order, the woman is given a place below that of man (verse 10)<sup>52</sup>, in the re-creation order (“in the Lord”) the woman is given equal value<sup>53</sup>. The absence of articles with the words “woman” and “man” in the first part show that God’s ordinance does not only refer to the marriage relationship, but also to the general relationship between men and women. Paul does not imply that “in the Lord” every difference between men and women has disappeared! In the realm of re-creation the woman is never a second-rate human being as is found in many cultures of the present world. In the Bible and in the Kingdom of God the woman is never “the possession of the man”, or “the slave of the man” and never “just for the pleasure of the man”.

Although in the re-creation order (“in the Lord”) the woman shares the same benefits of salvation and is equally valuable in God’s eyes, the difference between man and woman in the created order and in the re-created order does not disappear! The Christian women in Corinth may not violate God’s created ordinance and neglect to reflect their difference from men. The difference between men and women should be maintained in the ordinary society in the world and in the Christian society in the Church!

Men and women should particularly respect, admire and maintain one another’s different God-given special functions and positions in the various social relationships which exist on earth. With respect to their physical being, men and women have been given a different sex and appearance. With respect to their social relationships, men and women have been given different functions, responsibilities and positions in the marriage relationship and in the Body of Christ (the Church). God created man and woman on purpose to be different. Therefore the difference between men and women in God’s created order and in God’s recreation order should be maintained and should be expressed in a cultural acceptable manner!

**Conclusion.** Both men and women should acknowledge and respect the differences in God’s created order! The philosophy of modern cultures in the world does not make these differences disappear! Women may not violate God’s created order and deny or neglect the fact that they are different from men. The difference between men and women in should be maintained in secular society as well as in the Christian society!

Both men and women should also acknowledge and respect the differences in God’s re-creation order! God has not abrogated these differences! Women must show these differences visibly by not only dressing differently<sup>54</sup>, but also by having a covering on their heads. And men ought to show these differences visibly by not having a covering on their heads.

On the one hand, the covering on the woman’s head shows that the woman has been given authority to approach God and to pray and preach in public<sup>55</sup>.

On the other hand, the covering on the head of a woman shows that the woman is under authority of (i.e. in subjection to) man:

- in God’s instituted social relationship of Christian marriage<sup>56</sup>
- in God’s instituted religious relationship outside the meetings of the Christian Church<sup>57</sup>
- and inside the Christian organisation<sup>58</sup> and inside the meetings of the Christian Church<sup>59</sup>.

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<sup>47</sup> 1 Timoteüs 2:9-12

<sup>48</sup> Greek: πλην (however) ουτε γυνη χωρις ανδρος ουτε ανηρ χωρις γυναικος.

<sup>49</sup> Greek: τα δε παντα εκ του θεου.

<sup>50</sup> 1 Timoteüs 2:9-12

<sup>51</sup> Genesis 1:28

<sup>52</sup> cf. Genesis 3:16

<sup>53</sup> cf. Galatians 3:28

<sup>54</sup> Deuteronomy 22:5

<sup>55</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:2-16

<sup>56</sup> Ephesians 5:22-24

<sup>57</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:2-16

<sup>58</sup> Titus 1:5-6; 1 Timothy 2:11-12

<sup>59</sup> 1 Corinthians 14:33-38

### 3. The third argument of Paul with respect to the behaviour of Christian woman in public is derived from common sense (1 Corinthians 11:13-16).

#### ▪ 1 Corinthians 11:13-15.

“You *must* judge for yourselves: Is it *at all times* [present continuous tense] proper for a woman to pray to God without a covering (on her head)?<sup>60</sup> Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man wears long hair (or lets his hair grow long), it is a *continual* [present continuous tense] disgrace to him?<sup>61</sup> But that if a woman wears long hair (or lets her hair grow longer) it is a *continual* [present continuous tense] glory to her?<sup>62</sup> For a hairdo (Greek: kome, i.e. her longer hair held neatly together by means of a veil, headband, bow or ribbon) has been given (to her) (by God) as a covering (Greek: peribolaion) *which now continually serves as her covering* [perfect tense].”<sup>63</sup>

The command “to judge for themselves” brings Paul’s third argument into the sphere of common-sense. The Corinthian Christians ought to judge for themselves what is *at all times* culturally proper (fitting, seemly) for a woman to do. There are things Christians do and other things they do not do, because everybody (in their society or congregation) thinks or feels that these things ought to be done or not done. In the case that is discussed here, everybody agrees that it is not culturally proper for a woman to pray or to speak without a covering on her head.

“The very nature of things” means “what human beings are by nature” and “how they behave by nature” as is clear from many pictures and reports about women in classical times and in modern times all over the world, namely, that women “wear their hair longer than men” (Greek: komao) and that women “wear their hair in a neat hairdo” (Greek: kome).<sup>64</sup> The very nature of things teaches people (even today in many countries and cultures) that when men wear long hair it is a disgrace to them, because they appear in public as women. And the very nature of things teaches people (even today in many countries and cultures) that when women wear longer hair it is to their glory, because they appear in public looking like women. “The wearing of longer hair” is the glory of women and it is one thing that distinguishes them from men. Also the clothing of men and women should be clearly different.<sup>65</sup>

God has given to women not simply “longer hair”, but “their longer hair made into a neat hairdo” (Greek: kome) as “a covering” (Greek: peribolaion). Misunderstanding arises when interpreters think that verses 4-6 teaches that a woman *must* have “a piece of clothing” (a veil or hat) on her head, when it really teaches that when a woman draws near to God, prays or speaks in public, she ought to have “something that covers her head” that simply consists of a neat hairdo (with or without a piece of clothing: a shawl, bow or ribbon, etc.).

The misunderstanding is complicated when expositors think that verses 7-10 teaches that “a sign of authority” *must* refer to “a piece of clothing” (a veil or a hat), when it really teaches that the covering on her head (whatever it is) is a sign of her authority and her subjection to authority (cf. verse 10-12). Although the word “covering” in the Bible may refer to a piece of clothing<sup>66</sup>, verse 15 clearly teaches that God has given “the longer hair made into a neat hairdo” (with or without a veil, headband, bow or ribbon) as a covering on the head of the women:

- as a sign of her different sex in the order of creation
- as a sign of her transformation (beauty and order) in the order of re-creation!
- and as the sign of her authority and her subjection to authority in the Christian marriage and in the Christian Church

Paul reasons that what women under normal circumstances do in public within their own society, Christian women ought also do when they pray or prophesy in public<sup>67</sup>. Paul lays claim to common sense.

#### ▪ 1 Corinthians 11:16.

“If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice – nor do the churches of God.”<sup>68</sup>

The Christian women in Corinth did not cut their hair short as the immoral women plied to do in Greece, but they took their hair down and kept it hanging slovenly around their head as if they were in ecstasy as religious immoral women plied to do in Greece when they prayed and prophesied! The Christian women in Corinth had violated God’s creation ordinance and God’s recreation ordinance and thus caused unrest in the congregation.

We therefore find the solution to people’s problem with this passage in the Bible in the difference between the words “hair” and “hairdo” in the original Greek language. While “hair” in Greek is simply called “trichas”<sup>69</sup>, “a hairdo” (the

<sup>60</sup> Greek: εν υμιν αυτοις κρινατε (imperative, aorist, active). τρεπον εστιν (+ indicative, present, active) γυναικα ακατακαλυπτον τω θεω προσευχεσθαι (infinitive, present, deponent)?

<sup>61</sup> Greek: ουδε η φυσικς αυτη διδασκει (indicative, present, active) υμας οτι ανηρ μεν εαν κομα (subjunctive, present, active) ατιμια αυτω εστιν (indicative, present, active)?

<sup>62</sup> Greek: γυνη δε εαν κομα (subjunctive, present, active) δοξα αυτη εστιν (indicative, present, active)

<sup>63</sup> Greek: οτι η κομη αντι περιβολαιου δεδοται (indicative, perfect, passive) [αυτη].

<sup>64</sup> To wear long hair (Greek: komao). To wear a neat hairdo (Greek: kome).

<sup>65</sup> Deuteronomy 22:5. The type of clothing men and women wear in a particular culture may differ very much from that in another culture!

<sup>66</sup> Deuteronomy 22:12; Isaiah 50:3

<sup>67</sup> For example: in a house fellowship, Bible study group or in a meeting, etc.

<sup>68</sup> Greek: ει δε τις δοκει (indicative, present, active) φιλονεικος ειναι (infinitive, present, active), ημεις τοιαυτην συνηθειαν ουκ εχομεν (indicative, present, active), ουδε αι εκκλησιας του θεου.

<sup>69</sup> Numbers 6:18

longer hair neatly made up and held together with or without a piece of clothing) in Greek is called “kome” (verse 15)! The “covering” is not simply “a veil or hat”, but “her longer hair made into a neat hairdo with or without some piece of clothing”. Longer hair that is kept neat is sufficient!

The apostle Paul is not trying to enforce the wearing of a veil or hat on women. He is also not giving instructions about the hairdo of women. But he is teaching that what women ply to do in other circumstances, Christian women should also do when they worship God or when they serve God by praying or prophesying (speaking) in public. The only thing the apostle requires of Christian women is a neat hairdo at all times. A neat hairdo and female clothing distinguish a woman from a man in society *outside* the Church and also *inside* the Church. The apostle Paul demands this traditional practice not only from the congregation at Corinth (verse 2), but also from all the congregations (verse 16).

The Corinthian Christians were contentious and they would approve or disapprove of certain customs. Whatever the case may be, *the apostle requires this traditional practice from all congregations in the world*. Women are wrong when they neglect their difference from men, because God brought about this difference not only in the order of creation (the world), but also in the order of re-creation (the Church).

**Conclusion.** The Bible regards it “natural” and “common sense” when men have shorter hair and women wear their longer hair in a neat hairdo. The apostle Paul regards this tradition (customary practice) as the required norm for all congregations in the world. The issue is rather one of the heart than one of outward appearance.

▪ **1 Corinthians 11:17-34.**

THE LORD’S SUPPER is explained in the delta course – Growth studies (IV – 03).

## B. 1 CORINTHIANS CHAPTER 12. THE DIVERSITY OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS (GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT)

### 1. There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, services and manifestations of these gifts.

▪ **1 Corinthians 12:4-7.**

The apostle Paul addresses all (the Corinthian) Christians and teaches them that there are different kinds of spiritual gifts, *ordinary and extraordinary gifts*, but it is still the same Holy Spirit that in a sovereign way gives these gifts. He teaches that there are different kinds of ministries (service), *ordinary and official services*, but it is still the same Lord Jesus Christ each Christian serves. And he teaches that there are different kinds of working (effects, products), *ordinary and extraordinary manifestations* of the Spirit, but it is still the same God who works these in and through Christians for the common good of all Christians.

For example, the Holy Spirit gives the same gift of “teaching” to several Christians. Although they have the same gift, their ministries (services) are different: one Christian receives the gift of teaching immature children and the other the gift of teaching mature believers. They also manifest the same gift in completely different ways: one Christian manifests his gift of teaching by telling stories from the Bible and the other manifests his gift of teaching by clearly explaining the what, why and how of a teaching in the Bible.

### 2. The distribution of spiritual gifts is the sovereign prerogative of God.

▪ **1 Corinthians 12:8-11,28-30.**

Paul teaches the Corinthian Christians that there are not only a great variety of gifts, but that the distribution of these gifts is the sovereign prerogative of God (1 Peter 4:10-11), of Christ (Ephesians 4:7,11) or of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:11). Therefore, the reception of a particular spiritual gift is not the free choice of the individual Christian! Timothy became aware that he had received a spiritual gift for his task by<sup>70</sup> a prophetic utterance in conjunction with<sup>71</sup> the laying on of hands by the council of elders at Ephesus (1 Timothy 4:14).

**An explanation of the various spiritual gifts (cf. Delta course 29 and section III below)**

The words “to each one just as he *again and again* [present iterative tense] determines” (verse 11)<sup>72</sup> does not imply or proof that each and every Christian in the world has received a spiritual gift. Christians differ with each other about the meaning of the word “each” and thus about the question whether each Christian in the world receives a spiritual gift or not.

**The word “each” may have general meaning**

The word “each”<sup>73</sup> in the Bible may be used in the sense of “every person that has ever lived” (Romans 2:6) or “every person that repents and believes” (Acts 2:38; Romans 12:3; Romans 14:12). Therefore some Christians believe that the word “each” in 1 Corinthians 7:7, 1 Corinthians 12:7, 1 Corinthians 14:26 and 1 Peter 4:10 has universal meaning in the sense that “each and every Christian has received a spiritual gift”.

<sup>70</sup> Greek: δια

<sup>71</sup> Greek: μετα

<sup>72</sup> Greek: εκαστω καθως βουλεται (indicative, present, passive)

<sup>73</sup> Greek: εκαστος

### **The word “each” may have limited meaning**

The word “each” in the Bible may be used in the sense of “every one belonging to a particular group”: every hypocrite (Luke 13:15); every one in the crowd (John 6:7); and every Christian that had need (Acts 4:35). Therefore other Christians believe that the word “each” in 1 Corinthians 7:7, 1 Corinthians 12:7, 1 Corinthians 14:26 and 1 Peter 4:10 has limited meaning in the sense of “every Christian in the Body of Christ to whom the Spirit in a sovereign way has given a spiritual gift” (1 Corinthians 12:11,28-30). Therefore it is not absolutely necessary that the Holy Spirit gives a spiritual gift to each Christian that ever lived!

When the apostle asks, “Are all<sup>74</sup> (Christians) apostles?” “Are all prophets?” “Are all teachers?” it is the Greek way of emphasising that those gifts are given only to some Christians. And when the apostle asks, “Do all (Christians) work miracles?” “Do all have gifts of healing?” “Do all speak in tongues (languages)? Do all interpret?” it is the Greek way of emphasising that those gifts are given only to some Christians.

### **3. Christians must earnestly desire the greater spiritual gifts.**

#### **▪ 1 Corinthians 12:31a.**

The words “eagerly desire the greater gifts”<sup>75</sup> are addressed to those Christians to whom the Holy Spirit has given spiritual gifts in a sovereign way. Christians who receive one or another spiritual gift must eagerly desire<sup>76</sup>, not a particular spiritual gift, but “a greater spiritual gift”. They must remember the following:

#### **They must eagerly desire what GOD desires.**

God commanded such Christians to eagerly desire not just any spiritual gift, but the greater gifts. According to the apostle Paul the greater spiritual gifts are: first apostles, second: prophets; and third: teachers (1 Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 4:11; 1 Corinthians 14:1).

#### **They must submit to the Holy Spirit.**

The Triune God distributes spiritual gifts in an absolute sovereign way: The Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:11), the Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 4:7) or God (1 Peter 4:10-11).

#### **They must love.**

Even if a Christian has not received any spiritual gift, he must pursue the most excellent way. The most excellent way is: love! Even if all the spiritual gifts are lacking in an individual Christian’s life or even in the Christian congregation, love may never be lacking! It is never the possession or exercise of the gifts of the Spirit that prove whether a Christian is “spiritual”, but rather the bearing of the fruit of the Spirit, especially love and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23)! Compare 1 Corinthians 1:7 with 1 Corinthians 3:1-4).

### **4. The most excellent way is the exercise of love.**

#### **▪ 1 Corinthians 12:31b.**

“Now I will show you the most excellent way.”<sup>77</sup> The apostle Paul teaches that there is a far more excellent way to live the Christian life than to exercise these above mentioned spiritual gifts!

## **C. 1 CORINTHIANS CHAPTER 13. THE GIFTS OF TONGUES AND PROPHECY IN RELATION TO LOVE**

### **1. The exercise of love is the most excellent way!**

#### **▪ 1 Corinthians 13:1-3.**

Even if a Christian has received the gift of tongues and is able to speak in known languages of man or unknown languages of angels, but does not have love, he only produces a lot of noise. Even if a Christian has received the gift of prophecy (preaching) and is able to know (fathom) all mysteries and know all knowledge, but has no love, he is a big “zero”. Even if a Christian has received the gift of faith that can perform miracles like moving a mountain, but has no love, he is nothing. Even if a Christian has received the gift of giving and gives all he possesses to the poor or gives his life in martyrdom, but has no love, he gains nothing.

The most excellent way to live the Christian life is not the exercise of spiritual gifts, but to love in everything the Christian is and does!

#### **▪ 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a.**

Paul summarises the characteristics of Christian love. Love is patient and can for example wait to exercise a particular spiritual gift. Love is kind and will not exercise a spiritual gift when it is not helpful. Love does not envy the spiritual

<sup>74</sup> Greek: παντες

<sup>75</sup> Greek: ζηλουτε (imperative, present, active) δε τα χαρισματα τα μειζονα

<sup>76</sup> cf. Philipians 4:6-7

<sup>77</sup> Greek: Και επι καθ υπερβολην οδον υμιν δεικνυμι (indicative, present, active)

gift given to another person. Love will not boast about the spiritual gift he received, etc. “Love *never ever* [present continuous time] fails (literally: falls, come to an end)(verse 8a)!<sup>78</sup>

## 2. The spiritual gifts of prophecy, tongues (languages) and knowledge will pass away because they are imperfect and temporary.

### ▪ 1 Corinthians 13:8b-9.

“Whether (we speak of) prophecies, they will *certainly* cease”<sup>79</sup>. “Whether (we speak of) tongues, they will *certainly* be stilled”<sup>80</sup>. “Whether (we speak of) knowledge, they will *certainly* pass away”<sup>81</sup>. For we know in part and we prophesy in part.”<sup>82</sup>

This refers to knowledge in the sense of a spiritual gift, specific knowledge that is revealed to a prophet (like the knowledge of the prophet Agabus about Paul’s imminent arrest and imprisonment in Jerusalem)(Acts 20:10-11).

The Christians to whom the Holy Spirit has given the spiritual gifts of prophesying, or of speaking in tongues or of knowledge must realise that their spiritual gift is certainly going to pass away, because it is *imperfect (only in part) and temporary (only for a time)*.

The question is “When are they going to pass away?” Christians differ with one another about this point.

#### **First explanation. These spiritual gifts will pass away in the distant future when Jesus Christ returns.**

This means that Christians may expect that these particular spiritual gifts of speaking in tongues (languages), prophesying and knowledge attained through revelation will continue to function until the second coming of Christ, when the perfect new heaven and new earth is introduced.

#### **Second explanation. These spiritual gifts will pass away in the near future when the revelation and recording of the New Testament Scriptures has been completed.**

This means that Christians may expect that these particular spiritual gifts of speaking in tongues (languages), prophesying, and knowledge attained through revelation will continue to function only during the early period of the New Testament when Christians did not yet possess the Gospels, the Book of Acts, the Letters or the Book of Revelation. After the establishment of the New Testament Scriptures these special spiritual gifts would not be needed anymore.

#### **Third explanation. These spiritual gifts will pass away in the near future when Christians have grown up to spiritual maturity.**

This means that Christians may expect that these particular spiritual gifts of speaking in tongues (languages), prophesying, and knowledge attained through revelation will continue to function only until the Christians in Corinth to whom the Spirit has given these gifts will have become mature Christians and will have put away their immature (childish) behaviour in the congregation.

There is a time in a Christian’s life when he knows “in part” (the knowledge revealed to him is imperfect) and prophesies “in part” (his proclaiming of that knowledge is imperfect) – Note: the speaking in tongues is not even named and it was therefore not necessary for a Christian to speak in tongues at all even in the early New Testament period!<sup>83</sup>

This means that Christians may expect that speaking in tongues and prophecy and knowledge attained through revelation will cease when a Christian has grown to spiritual maturity..

## 3. Imperfection passes away when maturity has come and remains.

### ▪ 1 Corinthians 13:10.

“But when perfection (i.e. spiritual maturity) *once for* has come, the imperfect (imperfection)(i.e. spiritual immature behaviour) will certainly disappear”.<sup>84</sup>

The Christians to whom the Holy Spirit has given the spiritual gifts of prophesying, or of speaking in tongues or of knowledge attained through revelation must realise that when perfection (i.e. spiritual maturity) would *once for all* come, imperfection (i.e. spiritual immature behaviour) would *certainly* pass away. Then these Christians will stop their childish behaviour.

The question is, “What is meant by *imperfection* and *perfection*?” Does it refer to the maturity of the Christian, or the completion of the New Testament, or to the arrival of the new heaven and the new earth?

<sup>78</sup> Greek: η αγαπη ουδεποτε πιπτει (indicative, present, active)

<sup>79</sup> Greek: ειτε (ειτε ...ειτε = if...if; whether...or) δε προφητεια καταργηθησονται (indicative, future, passive). Here the future tense expresses an absolute certainty!

<sup>80</sup> Greek: ειτε γλωσσαι παυσονται (indicative, future, middle). Here the future tense expresses an absolute certainty!

<sup>81</sup> Greek: ειτε γνωσις καταργηθησεται (indicative, present, active). Here the future tense expresses an absolute certainty!

<sup>82</sup> Greek: εκ μηρουγη ερουσ γαρ γινωσκομεν (indicative, present, active) και εκ μερουσ προφητεουμεν (indicative, present, active)

<sup>83</sup> Greek: εκ μηρουγη ερουσ γαρ γινωσκομεν (indicative, present, active) και εκ μερουσ προφητεουμεν (indicative, present, active)

<sup>84</sup> Greek: οταν (whenever: a temporal particle in a conditional clause) δε ελθη (subjunctive, aorist, active) το τελειον, το εκ μερουσ καταργηθησεται (indicative, future tense, passive). Here the future tense expresses an absolute certainty!!

#### ▪ 1 Corinthians 13:11.

“When I was a child<sup>85</sup>, I talked as a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child.<sup>86</sup> When I became a man (a mature Christian)<sup>87</sup> and *remain* (a mature Christian) [perfect tense], I have put childish ways behind me *and childish ways are a thing of the past* [perfect tense].”<sup>88</sup>

Paul uses the word “child”<sup>89</sup> five times and the fifth time “the things of a child” means “childish ways”. Paul says that when he was a child (i.e. a young Christian), he spoke, thought and reasoned as a child (i.e. as an immature Christian). There was a time in his life when his knowledge of God’s revelation was incomplete and imperfect and when he spoke about this incomplete knowledge in a childish immature way.

But when he had become a mature man and now is and remains a mature man [perfect tense] (i.e. a mature Christian), he had abolished (wiped out, put away, put behind him) his childish ways and now this immature behaviour remains abolished [perfect tense]!

The perfect tense emphasises that an action took place in the past, but the effect or result of that action continues in the present time. Here Paul emphasises that he now remains in that condition of maturity! Note what the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews says about infant Christians who still need “milk” and mature Christians who eat “solid food” (Hebrews 5:11 – 6:3).

#### 4. The perfect view of things and the perfect knowledge comes at the second coming.

#### ▪ 1 Corinthians 13:12.

“But *at the present time (now)* we (i.e. including the Christians at Corinth) *continually* [present continuous tense] see an indistinct image by means of a mirror, *but then* face to face.<sup>90</sup> Now I *still* [present continuous tense] know in part; then I shall [future tense] know *fully* even as I *once for all* [aorist tense] am fully known (by God).”<sup>91</sup>

Paul uses the word “to see” to express the whole Christian life, including the exercise of spiritual gifts. A mirror in the old days gave a very poor image and therefore a Christian could not yet see the whole reality. He could see the reality only as an indistinct mirror image (e.g. dimly). Because these Christians express the Christian life (including the exercise of spiritual gifts) dimly (not perfectly), the absolute perfection has not yet come.

Nevertheless, all the time a Christian is growing towards spiritual maturity he sees the reality better and better! “And we all, who with unveiled faces [perfect tense] *continuously* [present continuous time] reflect the Lord’s glory (look at the glory of the Lord), are *continuously* [present continuous time] being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”<sup>92</sup>

A Christian with an unveiled face is a born-again Christian (cf. 2 Corinthians 3:14-16). As long as he continues to look at the (still indistinct) reflection in the mirror (i.e. the glory = character of the Lord Jesus Christ), he is *more and more* being transformed (changed) so that he begins to look more and more like Jesus Christ. This transformation (change) into the image of Jesus Christ progresses with ever-increasing glory, (i.e. the Christian obtains more and more the characteristics of Jesus Christ in his life). What the Christian “sees” is not untrue, but it is still imperfect as to its degree.

Now *in the present time* [present tense] the apostle Paul and Christians (including the Christians at Corinth) know “in part” (imperfect). Now their knowledge of reality is still incomplete.

But when perfection has *once for all* [aorist tense] come, Christians will see Jesus Christ face to face without the means of a mirror. They will *certainly* [future tense] know the reality (God, people, themselves, the world) *completely (through and through)* just as they themselves are *once for all* [aorist tense] known (by God) *completely (through and through)*. They will see reality completely and perfectly. From Christ’s second coming to all eternity Christians will see things as they really are. They will know all things completely (through and through). They shall look into the face of Christ and with respect to their human spirit (whole personality) be like Jesus Christ (1 John 3:2). And at the second coming their physical bodies will be resurrected and be perfect like Christ’s glorified body (Philippians 3:21; Revelation 22:4)!

<sup>85</sup> Greek: νηπιος

<sup>86</sup> Greek: οτε (when: time particle) ημην (indicative, imperfect, deponent) νηπιος, ελαλουν (indicative, imperfect, active) ως νηπιος, εφρονουν (indicative, imperfect, active) ως νηπιος, ελογιζομην (indicative, imperfect, deponent) ως νηπιος.

<sup>87</sup> In Ephesians 4:13 the word “τελειον” is translated with a “mature” man.

<sup>88</sup> Greek: οτε γεγονα (indicative, perfect, active) ανηρ, κατηρηκα (indicative, perfect, active) τα του νηπιου. The perfect tense expresses an event in the past of which the effect continuous in the present time! Paul remains in this state of maturity and perfection.

<sup>89</sup> Greek: νηπιος

<sup>90</sup> Greek: βλεπομεν (indicative, present, active) γαρ αρτι δι εσοπτρου (mirror) εν ανιγματι (indistinct image), τοτε δε προσωπον προς προσωπον.

<sup>91</sup> Greek: αρτι γινωσκω (indicative, present, active) εκ μερους, τοτε δε επιγνωσομαι (indicative, future, deponent) καθως και επιγνωσθην (indicative, aorist, passive)

<sup>92</sup> Greek: ημεις δε παντες ανακαλυμμενω (participle, perfect tense, passive) προσωπω την δοξαν κυριου κατοπτριζομενοι (participle, present, deponent) την αυτην εικονα μεταμορφουμεθα (indicative, present, passive) απο δοξης εις δοξαν, καθαπερ απο κυριου πνευματος.

The aorist tense expresses a *once for all* past action. The present tense expresses an action that is not yet completed, but is *ongoing*. And the future tense expresses an action that will *certainly* take place.

### **The question is, “When is this future?”**

Was this future in the past when the Canon of the New Testament was completed and all the things which Christians needed to know had been revealed by the apostles?

Or is this future in the present time when a Christian wakes up from his spiritual inertia, abandons his childish ways and begins to behave as a mature adult (1 Corinthians 13:11)?

Or is this future when Jesus Christ returns and all Christians will see him face to face? Will it be when they see the perfect reality of Christ?

What is certain is that from Christ’s second coming onwards into all eternity Christian shall know completely (through and through) as they are known by God.

But in the context of 1 Corinthians chapter 12 to 14 the apostle Paul urges the Corinthian Christians towards spiritual mature behaviour in the meetings of the congregation. **The growth towards spiritual maturity and perfection must begin here and now** and must not be delayed till the second coming (1 Corinthians 3:1-15)!

“Seeing” and “knowing” implies a Christian’s entire intellectual life. Paul does not speak of “knowing” in the sense of the knowledge derived from the spiritual gifts of prophecy, tongues or a word of knowledge. This knowledge will only be an imperfect and temporary reality *for some Christians* to whom the Spirit has given a spiritual gift. Paul speaks of “knowing” in the sense of living with Christ to all eternity (cf. John 17:3). That knowledge will be the perfect and eternal reality *for every Christian!* While the knowledge of the spiritual gifts is always *in part*, the knowledge as God knows will be *complete and perfect*.

However, the words “as also”<sup>93</sup> do not imply a full equality between the Christian’s knowledge and God’s knowledge. Even in the realm of eternal glory the “knowing” of a Christian will be of another order than “knowing” God and his knowledge (Deuteronomy 29:29).

## **5. The exercise of love far surpasses the exercise of spiritual gifts.**

### **▪ 1 Corinthians 13:13.**

“Now these three *must* remain [imperative]: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these (is) love.”<sup>94</sup>

The word “now” expresses a conclusion, not time. Faith, hope and love will not simply remain until we die. It will continue beyond death to all eternity. “Love never fails” (verse 8). And because faith and hope are predicated to love (verse 7), also faith and hope are eternal. While **the spiritual gifts belong only to the present dispensation** (before the second coming of Christ), faith, hope and love also belong to the future dispensation (after the second coming of Christ).

**Faith.** Paul does not speak about “faith that saves” (cf. Romans 1:21; Romans 2:5) and also not about “faith that performs miracles” (Romans 12:9; Romans 13:2), but about “faith that expresses the relationship between man and God and the relationship between man and God’s creation”. Christians believe that God is as he has revealed himself and that creatures are as they appear to be.

**Hope.** Although Christian hope at the present time is sometimes attended by uncertainty and apprehension that the end may be quite different from what the Christian expects it to be, Christian hope implies that God, his Word and his new creation will remain for ever what it is. Christian hope is *an absolute sure expectation* that will never disappoint!

**Love.** Love governs and sustains all relationships (verse 4-8). It gives direction to the Christian’s life; it enables the Christian to do many things (verse 7); it makes it impossible for the Christian to hate anything else except sin. The teaching about “love” in 1 Corinthians 12:31b to 13:13 occupies the most important place (namely, in the centre) of the teaching about the spiritual gifts (chapters 12 to 14). It is a warning against the overestimation of the gifts of tongues and at the same time an exhortation to use all spiritual gifts rightly (i.e. with love). But remember that the spiritual gifts of prophecy, tongues and knowledge belong only to the present imperfect and temporary dispensation, not to the future perfect and eternal dispensation!

## **D. 1 CORINTHIANS CHAPTER 14. THE GIFTS OF PROPHECY AND TONGUES IN THE MEETINGS OF THE CHURCH**

The apostle Paul closes chapter 12 with the words, “Pursue the greater spiritual gifts.”<sup>95</sup> Yet I will show you the most excellent way.”<sup>96</sup>

<sup>93</sup> Greek: καθως και

<sup>94</sup> Greek: νυνι δε μενει (imperative, present, active) πιστις, ελπις, αγαπη, τα τρια ταυτα. μειζων δε τουτων η αγαπη.

<sup>95</sup> Greek: ζηλουτε (imperative, present, active) δε τα χαρισματα τα μειζονα

Christians must realise that the way of love is far more important than exercising the spiritual gifts! In 1 Corinthians chapter 13 he compares the spiritual gifts with love and defines what love is. He teaches that the spiritual gifts of prophecy, tongues and knowledge are imperfect and temporary. That is, they never bring perfection and they last only for the period of immaturity (1 Corinthians 13:8-10)! This means that even if a Christian has not been given any spiritual gift, he must pursue love! And even if certain spiritual gifts are not present in a congregation, love must always be present! Not the spiritual gifts, but love characterises genuine Christians! Not the possession of the gifts of the Spirit, but the manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit shows who is genuinely “spiritual” (compare 1 Corinthians 1:7 with 1 Corinthians 3:1-4)! Not the exercise of spiritual gifts, but the growth towards “maturity that is measured by the fullness of Christ”<sup>97</sup> proves that a Christian is moving towards perfection (1 Corinthians 13:8-13; Ephesians 4:13-15)!

In 1 Corinthians chapter 14 Paul compares the gift of prophecy with the gift of tongues (languages). He addresses those Christians to whom the Holy Spirit has given spiritual gifts. He warns those who were abusing the gift of tongues not to overestimate their gift, but to use it rightly as taught in this chapter. He combats the too hasty appreciation and wrong use of the gift of tongues in the congregation of Corinth and teaches the correct place and the correct use of this spiritual gift.

He says that *it is worthless to speak in tongues during the meetings of the congregation* as was done in Corinth (1 Corinthians 14:1-19). He gives a general admonishment with regard to which motives should guide the Corinthians to speak in tongues or refrain them from speaking in tongues (1 Corinthians 14:20-21). He explains the difference in the use of tongues and prophecy during the meetings of the congregation by quoting a prophecy in the Old Testament about the speaking in tongues (1 Corinthians 14:22-25). Finally, he sets important rules for the exercise of spiritual gifts during the meetings of the congregation (1 Corinthians 14:26-40).

## **1. Love is always more important than the spiritual gifts and the gift of prophecy is more important than the gift of speaking in tongues (1 Corinthians 14:1-5).**

### **▪ 1 Corinthians 14:1.**

Paul resumes his exposition about spiritual gifts and especially addresses those Christians to whom the Holy Spirit has given a spiritual gift.

“You *must continually* pursue love. And you *must continually* eagerly strive for the spiritual gifts, but rather that you may *continually* prophesy.”<sup>98</sup> All three verbs are in the present continuous tense.

This is the biblical order of importance for every Christian: A Christian must “pursue” (run after, strive for, seek after, aspire to) the following: righteousness by faith (Romans 9:30), love for strangers (hospitality)(Romans 12:14) and what is good for others and everyone else (1 Thessalonians 5:15). But above all a Christian must pursue Christian love as is taught in chapter 13!

Then a Christian must “eagerly desire” (in a good sense strive for, earnestly exert oneself to obtain) “the greater spiritual gifts” (1 Corinthians 12:31), which according to verse 1 is “prophecy”. Not the gift of speaking unintelligible tongues (languages), but the gift of proclaiming the truth in intelligible words is the greater spiritual gift! Paul immediately places the gift of prophecy near the top of the list of spiritual gifts (Romans 12:6; 1 Corinthians 14:1; Ephesians 4:11; 1 Peter 4:11), but places the gift of tongues at the bottom of the list (1 Corinthians 12:10,30)!

### **▪ 1 Corinthians 14:2.**

“For the one *accustomed* [present iterative tense] to speak in another (unintelligible) tongue speaks not to man, but to God, because (although God understands) no one else understands it. Through the Spirit (or: through his human spirit) he is speaking mysteries (intimacies known only to God).”<sup>99</sup>

Paul acknowledges the gift of tongues as one of the spiritual gifts, because it is also a manifestation of the presence of the Holy Spirit. It need not be neglected, but must also not be overestimated. He clearly refers to a person whose custom it is to speak in unintelligible tongues (languages). Such a person does not speak for the benefit of man, but to glorify God. He speaks “mysteries”, that is, he says things which are not clear either to himself or to other people. Consequently no one understands and no one is edified, encouraged or comforted.

### **▪ 1 Corinthians 14:3.**

“But the one whose custom it is [present iterative tense] to prophesy (intelligible truths), speaks (intelligibly) for (the benefit of) men for their edification, encouragement and comfort”.

<sup>96</sup> Greek: και επι καθ υπερβολην οδον υμιν δεικνυμι (indicative, present, active)

<sup>97</sup> Greek: μεχρι καταντησωμεν (subjunctive, aorist, active)(arrive at something. so that one comes to possess it, attain to something) οι παντες εις την ενοτητα της πιστεως και της επιγνωσεως του υιου του θεου, εις ανδρα τελειον, εις μετρον ηλικιας του πληρωματος του Χριστου

<sup>98</sup> Greek: διωκετε (imperative, present, active) την αγαπην, ζηλουτε (imperative, present, active) δε τα πνευματικα, μαλλον δε ινα προφητευητε (subjunctive, present, active)

<sup>99</sup> Greek: ο γαρ λαλων (participle, present active) γλωσση ουκ ανθρωποις λαλει (indicative, present, active) αλλα θεω, ουδεις γαρ ακουει (indicative, present, active), πνευματι δε λαλει (indicative, present, active) μυστηρια

People understand what he is saying and consequently are edified, encouraged and comforted. That is why the gift of speaking in intelligible words (prophecy) is a much greater gift than the gift of speaking in unintelligible tongues (languages)!

It is clear that *the gift of prophecy was not given to every Christian* (1 Corinthians 12:29). “Prophecy” is that gift of the Holy Spirit through which God reveals to Christians what they need to know or do in a particular circumstance. New Testament prophecy *is above all words that edify, encourage and comfort* Christians (1 Corinthians 14:3,12; Acts 15:28-32). The human spirit controls the utterance of prophecy. That is why it is understandable that “prophecy” in this sense can be delayed to a later moment (1 Corinthians 14:30) or may be repeated several times in different locations (Acts 15:28-32).

▪ **1 Corinthians 14:4.**

“He who *is accustomed* [present tense] to speak (unintelligible sounds or words) in a tongue *edifies himself*, but he who *is accustomed* [present tense] to prophesy (in intelligible words) *edifies the church*.”

The one who *is used to* speaking in tongues *edifies himself*, because the gift of tongues assures him that he possesses the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 10:45-46 where however the speaking occurred in intelligible languages). But because no one (even he himself) knows what he is saying, he cannot explain what he intends to say unless someone else interprets or he has also received the gift of interpretation of tongues (verse 5). This last mentioned exception, namely that a Christian possesses the gift of tongues and the gift of interpretation at the same time, did not seem to occur in the congregation of Corinth. That is why the apostle Paul commands these members of the Corinthian congregation to subject themselves to certain limiting rules that are commanded by the Lord (1 Corinthians 14:26-40)! But the Christian who *is used to* [present iterative tense] prophesy, edifies everyone in the congregation.

*Because the exercise of the spiritual gifts are under the full control of the human spirit of Christians and also because the elders of the congregation are responsible to see that the trustworthy message of the Bible and sound doctrine is proclaimed in the meetings of the congregation, all Christians making use of spiritual gifts are subject to the leadership of the counsel of elders of the church (Titus 1:9).*

▪ **1 Corinthians 14:5.**

“I would like all of you to speak in languages (tongues) [present tense], but more that you would prophesy [present tense]”<sup>100</sup>. He who *is accustomed to* prophesy [present tense] is greater than one who *is accustomed to* speak [present tense] in languages (tongues) [present tense], unless he *is accustomed to* interpret it [present tense], so that the church may *once for all* receive edification [aorist tense].”<sup>101</sup>

It seems that there were people in the congregation of Corinth who *used to* speak or were *accustomed to* speak in tongues, but were not able to explain what they were saying. It also seems that were only a few people in the congregation of Corinth who *used to* prophesy. There was no clear presentation of the Christian message in the congregation at Corinth!

Paul *constantly* desired or longed for another situation. He *constantly* desired that all within the congregation of Corinth *would be accustomed to* speak by means of their human spirit and at the same time *by means of their human minds* in clear intelligible words (cf. verse 15). To put it in other words: that they would express what they would like to say with their spirit in clear intelligible words by means of their mind. However, because this did not happen in Corinth at all, Paul rather desired that all within the congregation would *be accustomed to* prophesy, that is, *permanently* possess the gift of prophecy.

The apostle Paul directs his teaching and command to those Christians who *were accustomed to* strive after the use of spiritual gifts. Only if a Christian who *was accustomed to* speak in tongues would also explain (interpret) what he was saying in tongues, would he be equally useful in the congregation as the Christian who *was accustomed to* prophesy. Paul would have liked the Christians at Corinth to possess two spiritual gifts at the same time (as he himself possessed): the gift of speaking in tongues (languages) and the gift of explaining tongues (languages), because a tongue (language) that is explained (translated) has the same value as prophecy, because they both edify the congregation! However, because this was not happening in the congregation at Corinth at all, Paul would rather have all the Christians at Corinth prophesy! The gift of prophesy is of greater value than the gift of tongues (languages), because it is not only an indication for the possessor that the Holy Spirit is present, but at the same time edifies the whole congregation!

<sup>100</sup> Greek: θελω (indicative, present, active) δε παντας υμας λαλειν (infinitive, present, active) γλωσσαις, μαλον δε ινα προφητευητε (subjunctive, present, active). The subjunctive expresses his (constant) longing.

<sup>101</sup> Greek: μειζων δε ο προφητευων (participle, present, active) η ο λαλων γλωσσαις, εκτος (outside; with ει μη unless, except) ει μη διερμηνησθην (subjunctive, present, active), ινα η εκκλησια οικοδομην λαβην (subjunctive, aorist, active)

## 2. Genuine communication is very important in the congregation (the conclusion) (1 Corinthians 14:6-11).

### ▪ 1 Corinthians 14:6-11.

“Now, brothers, if I *would* come to you speaking in languages (tongues), what good *will* I be to you, unless I *would* speak (to you) by means of some (intelligible) revelation, knowledge, prophecy or word of instruction?”<sup>102</sup>

Paul employs *hypothetical (assumed) examples* in his attempt to show the much greater value of prophecy than tongues. If Paul would only speak in a strange language (tongue) in the meeting at Corinth, he would benefit no one. What would benefit them is that he would speak to them a revelation, knowledge, prophecy or a word of instruction in clear intelligible words (verse 6)! The utterance of merely unintelligible sounds of a language or tongue would benefit no one!

Music instruments must play a tune in order to be appreciated (verse 7). A trumpet must sound a clear call in order to make people ready for battle (verse 8). Likewise, a speaker in the meeting of the congregation must use intelligible words in order to be understood. Otherwise he would simply speak into the air (verse 9). All existing languages in the world have meaning (verse 10), but if the meaning is not grasped, the speaker and listener would remain complete strangers to one another (verse 11). In every normal conversation there must always be one who speaks and one who understands what is said. Both of them must get the drift of what is said or the conversation would be impossible. This means that *sounds* by themselves are insufficient. In order to be sufficient, sounds must communicate *meaning*. Likewise, the sounds of a language or tongue will remain insufficient, unless it conveys a revelation, knowledge, a prophecy or a word of instruction in clear intelligible words!

## 3. Christians may only use spiritual gifts when what they communicate is intelligible and thus edify the people present (the application) (1 Corinthians 14:12-17).

### ▪ 1 Corinthians 14:12.

“Since (some of) you are *continually* [present tense] zealots eager to possess spirits (note that it does not say: “zealots striving to possess spiritual gifts”) <sup>103</sup>, you *must at all times* [a command in present continuous tense] seek to excel in building up the congregation (i.e. at all times seek to excel in spiritual gifts like prophecy or the preaching and teaching of God’s Word that build up the congregation) (verse 12).”<sup>104</sup>

Paul alludes to the zeal of some people in Corinth to possess spirits (sic!), *instead of spiritual gifts!* Apparently, there were *non-Christian spirits* operating in or out of the meetings of the congregation in Corinth that enabled some people to speak in tongues. There were certainly non-Christian spirits operating in the meetings of the congregation that enabled people to speak lies (1 John 4:1)! The Gospels teach us that a demon-possessed person has no control over what the evil spirit in him is saying (Mark 5:1-15).

Paul spurs the Christians who *are accustomed to* possess and use spiritual gifts, to stop chasing after the abilities of these non-Christian spirits that cause such confusion among the hearers in the congregation. In stead Christians must *at all times* seek to excel in building up the Church. They must at all times seek to excel in the use of gifts of the Holy Spirit that edify the whole congregation. Such gifts always communicate God’s Word clearly in intelligible words! Paul has in mind what ought to happen in all the official meetings of the congregation.

### ▪ 1 Corinthians 14:13.

“For this reason anyone who *is accustomed to* speak in a tongue (a language) *must* pray [a command in the present continuous tense] that he may interpret (translate) what he says.”<sup>105</sup>

Apparently the Christians who *were accustomed to* speak in tongues during the meetings of the congregation were not accustomed to interpret or explain what they were saying in tongues. It was this speaking in unintelligible tongues without translation or interpretation that caused Christians not to be edified (verse 17) and caused other people present to say that these Christians were “mad” (verse 23)!

Based on what Paul says in verse 15, Paul is not saying that Christians who were accustomed to speak in tongues had to pray that they may receive the gift of interpretation after they had spoken in tongues! Paul does not teach that a Christian must first speak unintelligible sounds of a tongue by means of his spirit and after that speak intelligible words by means of his mind (that is, that he must translate or interpret what he had said in tongues)!

<sup>102</sup> Greek: Νυν δε, αδελφοι, εαν ελθω (subjunctive, aorist, active) προς υμας γλωσσαις λαλων (participle, present, active), τι υμας ωφελησω (indicative, future, active), εαν μη υμιν λαλησω (subjunctive, aorist, active) η εν αποκαλυψει η εν γνωσει η εν προφητεια η (εν) διδαχη.

<sup>103</sup> The translation “spiritual gifts” (Greek: πνευματικων) is based on a late Greek manuscript from the 9th century A.D. (P). The majority reading (πνευματων) is based on the oldest Greek manuscripts.

<sup>104</sup> Greek: ουτως και υμεις, επει ζηλωται εστε (indicative, present, active) πνευματων, προς την οικοδομην της εκκλησιας ζητειτε (imperative, present, active) ινα περισσευητε (subjunctive, present, active)

<sup>105</sup> Greek: Διο ο λαλων γλωσση προσευχεσθω (imperative, present, deponent)

Paul also does not say that a Christian must pray for one or another spiritual gift he may desire to possess, because the giving of spiritual gifts is the sovereign prerogative of God the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit (1 Peter 4:10-11; Ephesians 4:7; 1 Corinthians 12:11)! The Christians at Corinth must not think that it is a good thing to pray for the gift of speaking in tongues, or for the gift of interpreting tongues, or for any spiritual gift they desire to possess, because God has already commanded them to eagerly seek the greater gifts (1 Corinthians 12:31a; 1 Corinthians 14:1)<sup>106</sup>! Their heart must desire what God desires! “The greater spiritual gifts” are according to the Bible: (1) apostles or Christians sent out on a mission, (2) prophets or prophecy and (3) teachers or teaching God’s Word (1 Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 4:11).

Paul teaches that the Christian *who is accustomed* to speak in tongues must pray that he would be able to *simultaneously* explain (interpret) what he wants to say in tongues! He must pray that he may express what he wants to say in unintelligible sounds of a tongue by means of his spirit in intelligible words by means of his mind! He must pray that he may speak clearly intelligible words *simultaneously* by means of his spirit and his mind! He must pray that his speaking (or singing, praying, praising, thanking) in tongues may be expressed, not in unintelligible sounds by means of his spirit, but in clearly intelligible words by means of his mind (verse 15)!

God is free to hear his prayer and enable him to say in intelligible words with his mind what he wanted to say with only his spirit (verse 15). But God is also free not to answer his prayer, so that even if he could speak in unintelligible tongues, he would not be able to explain or interpret what he was saying. In that case he must refrain from speaking in tongues in any audible way during the meetings of the congregation. Then he must limit his speaking in tongues to a place and a time when he could speak to God alone. Even the whispering or mumbling in tongues during the meetings of the congregation would be heard by others and is strictly forbidden (verse 28)!

Paul speaks about the abuse of speaking in tongues without translation or interpretation during the meetings of the congregation! That was the problem in the congregation at Corinth. This problem does not seem to have occurred in any other congregation in the New Testament Church!

#### ▪ 1 Corinthians 14:14.

“For if I pray in tongues, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful.”<sup>107</sup>

Because Paul is going to say something that would be hard for some Corinthian Christians to hear, he switches to the first person singular (“I”). With the word “if” Paul pictures a hypothetical (assumed) situation in the congregation at Corinth. The words, “If I pray in tongues by means of my spirit” he wants to say, “If (a possible situation) someone prays in tongues by means of his spirit.” Speaking in tongues is a speaking to God (1 Corinthians 14:2), but can also be a praying to God, a singing to God, a thanking of God or a worshipping of God. What Paul says in verse 19 shows that he himself did not have the habit to do what he says in verse 14-15, namely, to pray, sing or speak in tongues! *He is simply stating a hypothetical case, a general possibility.*

“The spirit”<sup>108</sup> refers to the acting person in the centre of someone’s life and views man as a personality (cf. “heart” in Proverbs 4:23). “The mind”<sup>109</sup> views man as a knowing and thinking being. When the human spirit is renewed, the mind is also renewed without changing its function (Ephesians 4:23-24; Romans 12:2). Not only is the human spirit of the Christian sanctified, but his human spirit is also gifted, inspired and moved by the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:15-16). Normally, a person acts or functions by means of his mind. But with the gift of tongues his mind is inactive, that is, the person speaking in unintelligible tongues is not using his mind! His emotional behaviour seems to dominate his rational behaviour. Therefore what he says is unintelligible for himself (i.e. for his own human spirit), but also unintelligible for other people (i.e. the human spirit of other people). Paul teaches that a Christian must subject his human spirit to the control of his mind so that everything happening within the meetings of the congregation would promote order, peace and edification (verse 32-33).

#### ▪ 1 Corinthians 14:15.

“What is the case? I will pray with my spirit and I will also pray with my mind. I will sing with my spirit and I will also sing with my mind.”<sup>110</sup>

Paul continues his depiction of a hypothetical (possible) situation in the congregation of Corinth and explains what he would do – that is, what a Christian who is accustomed to speak in tongues ought to do. *He would pray with his spirit and at the same time pray with his mind.*

This means that a Christian should let the gift of speaking in tongues by means of his spirit work or function by means of his mind. This is actually what Paul does (verse 18-19). Paul does not speak unintelligible words by means of his spirit, but only speaks what his spirit wants to say by means of intelligible words of his mind! He does this because his

<sup>106</sup> Greek: ζηλουτε (imperative, present, active) δε τα χαρισματα τα μειζονα

<sup>107</sup> Greek: εαν γαρ προσευχωμαι (subjunctive, present, deponent) γλωσση, το πνευμα μου προσευχεται (indicative, present, deponent), ο δε νους μου ακαρπος εστιν (indicative, present, active).

<sup>108</sup> Greek: το πνευμα

<sup>109</sup> Greek: το νους

<sup>110</sup> Greek: τι ουν εστιν (indicative, present, active); προσευχομαι (indicative, future, deponent) τω πνευματι, προσευχομαι δε και τω νοι. ψαλω (indicative, future, active) τω πνευματι, ψαλω δε και τω νοι.

goal is to edify people, not to confuse them. That is why he expresses what his spirit would like to say by means of his mind. He communicates with other people by means of his mind! During the meetings of the congregation he would always speak (pray, sing, praise or thank) with his spirit and at the same time speak (pray, sing, praise or thank) with his mind. He expresses what his spirit inside him (i.e. his heart) wants to say by means of the intelligible words of his mind! He subjects the function of his spirit to the function of his mind (cf. verse 32). During the meetings of the congregation he would never speak (pray, sing, praise or thank) only by means of the unintelligible sounds of his spirit, because it would make no sense to the other people present.

This does not imply that Paul was accustomed to speak (pray, sing, praise, thank) in unintelligible sounds by means of his spirit when he was alone by himself. He was mature in his thinking and actions (verse 19-20). He possessed both the gift of speaking in tongues and the gift of interpreting tongues. And he also taught others that the function of the human spirit must be subjected to the function of the mind.

Paul is saying this because he wants to make it very clear that where there is no communication and no understanding due to lack of explanation or interpretation of tongues, the gift of speaking in tongues may not be used in the meetings of the congregation! Speaking unintelligible words by means of only the spirit when one is alone (verse 28) and speaking intelligible words by means of the mind when among other people (verse 15) are both sanctified by the Holy Spirit and thus good. *But clear communication must determine which line of conduct ought to be followed during the meetings of the congregation.*

#### ▪ **1 Corinthians 14:16.**

“If you are praising God with your spirit, how can the one who takes the place reserved for the non-member say ‘Amen’ to your thanksgiving, since he does not know what you are saying?”<sup>111</sup>

Paul now switches back to the second person singular (“you”) and points out that some people in the congregation of Corinth were not communicating with intelligible words. Therefore other people could not respond with understanding to what they were saying! These people were praising (thanking) God by means of their spirit without anyone else understanding what they meant to say! When a person praises or thanks unintelligible words by means of his spirit, how can “the non-members”<sup>112</sup> then say “Amen” to what is said? “Praising” and “thanking” stand on the same line as “praying”, “singing” and “speaking” by means of the human spirit.

The Greek word “idiotes” does not refer to “an ignorant Christian”, not to “a Christian who does not possess the gift of tongues or the gift of interpretation”. The sentence: “one who finds himself among those who do not understand” (NIV) is better translated with the words: “the one who takes the place reserved for the non-member.”<sup>113</sup> When someone praises (blesses), thanks, prays, sings or speaks<sup>114</sup> with his human spirit and not at the same time with his human mind, people who are non-members of the congregation cannot say “Amen” to what is said. But when what he wants to say with his spirit is expressed in intelligible words by means of his mind, everyone present can say “Amen” to what is communicated.

In the religious meetings during the Old Testament period it was the custom of people to declare their approval or agreement by saying “Amen!” (1 Chronicles 16:36; Nehemiah 5:13; Nehemiah 8:6). The word Amen” means: “So be it!” and “This I believe!” But in the meetings of the congregation at Corinth this would not be possible when someone was speaking, praying or singing unintelligible words (tongues) by means of only his human spirit.

The Christians in Corinth overestimated (overrated) the gift of speaking in tongues and regarded Christians who did not speak in tongues as second-rate or imperfect Christians. However, the apostle Paul addresses this abuse and gives to everyone present in the meeting his or her rightful place. The members who were not accustomed to speak in tongues are not second-rate or imperfect Christians!<sup>115</sup> And the non-members present must be able to say “Amen!” to everything that is communicated during the meeting of the congregation!

#### ▪ **1 Corinthians 14:17.**

“You may be giving thanks well enough, but the other man is not edified.”<sup>116</sup>

*This leads to the conclusion that during the meetings in the congregation people were not allowed to speak in tongues if it was done by means of unintelligible words of the human spirit only, because the majority of members who did not*

<sup>111</sup> Greek: επει εαν ευλογης (subjunctive, present, active) (εν) πνευματι, ο αναπληρων (participle, present, active) τον τοπον του ιδιωτου πως ερει (indicative, future, active) το Αμην επι τη ση ευχαριστια, επειδη τι λεγεις (indicative, present, active) ουκ οιδεν (indicative, perfect, active)?

<sup>112</sup> Greek: ο αναπληρων τον τοπον του ιδιωτου = “the one who fills or takes the place in the congregation reserved for the non-member”. It does not refer to someone who does not possess the gift of speaking in tongues, someone contrasted with those speaking in tongues.

<sup>113</sup> Greek: ιδιωτης = not “the idiot”, not “the unbeliever (απιστοι), but rather “the non-member”, “the person standing between the unbeliever (απιστοι) and the full-fledged Christians” (πιστοι). In religious associations the term is used for “non-members” who participate in the sacrifices. Obviously he is a kind of proselyte or catechumen. He had a special place (τοπος) in the room where the Christians assembled (Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich “Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian Literature”).

<sup>114</sup> Greek: praise or bless (ευλογεω), thank (ευχαριστεω), pray (προσευχομαι), sing (ψαλλω) or speak in tongues (λαλεω γλωσση)

<sup>115</sup> They are not in need of a so-called “baptism with the Spirit” in the sense of “a second blessing” as if only people who speak in tongues are real first-rate Christians!

<sup>116</sup> Greek: συ μεν γαρ καλωσ ευχαριστεις (indicative, present, active), αλλ ο ετερος ουκ οικοδομειται (indicative, present, passive) “

have the gift of interpretation and the non-members present would not understand what the speaker was saying. They would not be edified in their faith.

In the meetings of the congregation the person accustomed to speak in tongues must express what he wants to say in his human spirit by means of intelligible words of his mind, so that everyone present may understand and be edified! The person speaking a language (tongue) by means of his mind is not less inspired than the person speaking in a tongue by means of his spirit only. On the contrary, he is “more spiritual”, because he obeys God’s command with respect to speaking in tongues (languages). The only difference is that the person speaking (or praying, or singing, or praising, or thanking) by means of unintelligible words of his spirit does not communicate and consequently does not edify or love others, while the person speaking (or praying, or singing, or praising, or thanking) by means of intelligible words of his mind really communicates and consequently edifies and loves all his hearers!

#### **4. Christians ought to follow the example of the apostle Paul In the matter of expressing spiritual gifts (the recommendation) (1 Corinthians 14:18-19).**

##### **▪ 1 Corinthians 14:18.**

“I thank God that I speak in languages (tongues) more than all of you.”<sup>117</sup>

The apostle Paul makes himself a practical example for other Christians (cf. 1 Corinthians 4:16), just as he himself is following the practical example of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1). Jesus Christ is the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:17; cf. 1 Peter 1:10-12) and yet he always communicated only in clear and intelligible words, both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament!

Although Paul says that he speaks more languages with the full force of his inspired human spirit in clear intelligible words of his inspired human mind than the Christians in Corinth, he never makes use of this ability in any meeting of the congregation! He never speaks languages which his hearers cannot understand and he never speaks by means of his human spirit without at the same time expressing what his spirit wants to say in intelligible words of his mind! He always speaks (prays, sings, praises, thanks) with his whole inspired spirit (heart) by means of clear intelligible words of his inspired mind (verse 15)!

##### **▪ 1 Corinthians 14:19.**

“But in the congregation I would rather *once for all* speak five intelligible words to *once for all* instruct (to catechize) others than ten thousand words in another language (tongue).”<sup>118</sup>

Paul says that he rather speaks a few intelligible words with his mind in Aramaic or Greek (which his hearers understand) than many unintelligible words or sounds with his spirit.

This means that the person who is accustomed to speak in unintelligible tongues has complete power and control over his human spirit, just as the person who is accustomed to prophesy in intelligible words (verse 32). Such a Christian is able to choose one of the following ways:

- He may choose to make no use of his ability to speak in unintelligible tongues, but instead *to only prophesy with intelligible words* by means of his mind (verse 1).
- He may choose to make use of his spiritual gift of speaking in tongues, but *only express what his spirit wants to say by means of intelligible words of his mind* (like the apostle Paul in verse 15).
- He may choose to delay his speaking in tongues by means of his spirit *until there was someone present in the congregation who could and would immediately explain or interpret* what he was saying by means of his spirit (verse 27).
- Or he may choose *to keep quiet in the meetings of the congregation* and only speak by means of his spirit in tongues to himself and to God (verse 28), best when he would be alone in his room. But he may not whisper or mumble in tongues during the meetings of the congregation. He may also not make a show with his lips or body as if he were speaking in tongues (Matthew 6:5-8).

“Speaking by means of the mind” consists of speaking intelligible words in prophecy (preaching), in teaching (instruction), in words of knowledge and in words of wisdom, etc. It is always communication by means of clear intelligible words which everyone can understand. This implies that speaking in tongues is beneficial and edifying only for those people who are *accustomed to* speak unintelligible words by means of their spirit when they are alone with God (verse 4 and 27). This also implies that speaking intelligible words by means of the mind is beneficial and edifying for everyone present in the meetings of the congregation (verse 3, 16 and 19)!

There is not a single proof in the Bible that the Lord Jesus Christ or the apostle Paul or any other apostle or person known in the whole New Testament revelation spoke in unintelligible tongues in which he switched off the function of his mind in any meeting of Christians! On the contrary, there is overwhelming proof that Jesus Christ and the apostles spoke many Holy Spirit inspired messages only by means of the intelligible words of their minds throughout their

<sup>117</sup> Greek: ευχαριστω (indicative, present, active) τω θεω, παντων υμων μαλλον γλωσσαις λαλω (indicative, present, active)

<sup>118</sup> Greek: εν εκκλησια θελω πεντε λογους τω νοι μου λαλησαι (infinitive, aorist, active), ινα και αλλους κατηχησω (subjunctive, aorist, active) η μυριους λογους εν γλωσση. κατηχεω = to catechize, to instruct in religious matters.

ministries. “Our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction”<sup>119</sup> (1 Thessalonians 1:5)! There is also plenty of proof that the Christian congregations in the New Testament followed Christ’s and Paul’s example. “You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit” (1 Thessalonians 1:6). They even passed this example on to other congregations. “And so you became a model to all the believers” (1 Thessalonians 1:7).

There is also no decisive proof that the apostle Paul did not have the gift of interpretation or translation. Verse 19 only says that Paul *constantly* desired to speak intelligible words by means of his mind rather than speak thousands of unintelligible words by means of his spirit (cf. verse 5), because his motive was to instruct and edify others! In all probability Paul must have possessed the gift of tongues and the gift of interpretation, otherwise he would not have been able to write about these gifts in the way he did!

## **5. Christians must become adults in their thinking (the commands) (1 Corinthians 14:20; cf. 1 Corinthians 13:9-11).**

### **▪ 1 Corinthians 14:20.**

“You *must* not *continue* to be like children in your thinking, but you *must* be (as) children in regard to evil. You *must* be (as) mature adults in your thinking”<sup>120</sup>.

Paul gives *commands* concerning the motives which should move the Christians in the congregation of Corinth to abandon their childish practice of speaking in unintelligible tongues during the meetings of the congregation. [All three verbs are commands!] Because the Christians in Corinth laid all emphasis on the speaking of tongues, they behaved like immature children who produce strange and unintelligible sounds which no one could understand. Children like to perform and brag about their ability to produce unintelligible sounds! Likewise the Christians in Corinth regarded the production of unintelligible sounds as something of the greatest importance and bragged about their ability. They looked down upon Christians who did not speak in unintelligible tongues. Therefore the apostle Paul *commands* them to *constantly* change their thinking and to be *constantly* transformed [present continuous tense] by the renewal of their mind<sup>121</sup> (Romans 12:1-2).

The Christians in the congregation of Corinth must stop their childlike (childish) behaviour and behave like mature adults in stead. They must be “unmixed” (figuratively: pure, innocent)<sup>122</sup> with regard to evil (Romans 16:19), especially with respect to all the evils mentioned in the first Letter to the Corinthians: disunity (chapter 1-3), going beyond what is written in the Bible (chapter 4), sexual immorality (chapter 5), lawsuits against one another before worldly judges (chapter 6), marriage problems (chapter 7), involvement in the religious meals of idolaters (chapter 8 and 10), not supporting the servants of the Lord (chapter 9), women prophesying as non-Christians (chapter 11), abuse of the Lord’s Supper (chapter 11), not acknowledging the great diversity in the congregation (chapter 12), a general lack of Christian love (chapter 13), abuse of the spiritual gift of speaking in tongues (chapter 14), ignorance about the resurrection from the dead (chapter 15) and neglecting the collection of money (chapter 16).

Paul commands them to be *constantly* mature in their thinking and *constantly* mature in their behaviour. This they would only be when all the communication in the congregation is done by means of intelligible words of the mind!

## **6. Not unintelligible tongues, but intelligible prophecy (preaching) in the meetings of the congregation will change the hearers (the contrast) (1 Corinthians 14:21-25).**

### **▪ 1 Corinthians 14:21.**

“In the Law is written: ‘Through men of other tongues (languages) and through the lips of foreigners I will speak to this people, but even then they will not listen to me’, says the Lord.”<sup>123</sup>

In the Old Testament period the prophet Isaiah prophesied that God would speak to the unbelieving Israelites by means of “foreign lips and strange tongues” (e.g. the language of the Assyrians). He also predicted that the Israelites would nevertheless not listen to this speaking in tongues (Isaiah 28:11-12). The Old Testament revelation already proved that the use of tongues did not bring people to God! In exactly the same way the New Testament revelation teaches that the speaking in tongues would repel non-members and unbelievers that come to the Christian meetings (1 Corinthians 14:21-23)!

### **▪ 1 Corinthians 14:22.**

“Tongues (other languages), then, are a sign, not for believers, but for unbelievers. Prophecy, however, is not for unbelievers, but for believers.”<sup>124</sup>

<sup>119</sup> With the signs of an apostle (2 Corinthians 12:12), with words taught by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:13) and with the purpose of persuading people (Acts 17:4).

<sup>120</sup> Greek: μη παιδια γινεσθε (imperative, present, active) ταις φρεσιν (φρην, plural, dative)

αλλα τη κακια νηπιαζετε (imperative, present, active), ταις δε φρεσιν τελειοι γινεσθε (imperative, present, middle)

<sup>121</sup> Greek: μεταμορφουσθε (imperative, present, passive) τη ανακαινωσει του νοου

<sup>122</sup> Greek: ακεραιουσ; literally: unmixed; figuratively: pure, innocent.

<sup>123</sup> Greek: εν τω νομω γεγραπται (indicative, perfect, passive) οτι εν ετερογλωσσοις και εν χειλεισιν ετερων λαλησω (indicative, future, active) τω λαω τουτω και ουδ ουτωσ εισακουσονται (indicative, future, deponent) μου, λεγει κυριος

The speaking of unintelligible words in tongues is a sign for unbelievers. However, it is not a sign that attracts the unbelievers, but rather a sign that repels unbelievers! Unbelievers can only be attracted by the Good News spoken in clear intelligible words (Romans 10:14-17)! Unbelievers are certainly repelled by the speaking in tongues, because they cannot understand what is said and consequently cannot be converted. The speaking in tongues is a sign for unbelievers that these Christians speaking in tongues are excluding them (the unbelievers) from the meeting and from the message of the Bible spoken there! The speaking in tongues in the meetings of the congregation is a sign that these Christians regard the unbelievers as outsiders with regard to God's people and God's message. The speaking in tongues by means of only the spirit may also repel the Christians in the meetings, because they cannot understand what is said in tongues!

While the speaking in tongues is a sign for unbelievers that repels them, prophecy is a sign for believers that attracts them! The gift of prophecy is a sign that ensures the believers that the Holy Spirit is living in them (Matthew 10:19-20; cf. 1 Corinthians 2:12; 1 Corinthians 3:16; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20; 1 Corinthians 12:3). Prophecy (i.e. proclamation, preaching) convinces Christians with or without the gift of prophecy that they are still standing in God's grace, because God is speaking to them by means of clear intelligible words.

Paul argues that during the meetings of the congregation prophecy in intelligible words has a far greater value than the speaking of unintelligible words in tongues, because it not only edifies, encourages and comforts the believers, but also attracts the unbelievers. It brings the unbelievers to conviction of the truth (verse 25)!

#### ▪ **1 Corinthians 14:23.**

“So if the whole congregation would come to one place and everyone would speak in other languages (unintelligible tongues), and some inquirers (non-members)<sup>125</sup> or unbelievers would come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind?”<sup>126</sup>

Paul makes use of a *hypothetical situation* during the meeting of the congregation at Corinth. Precisely the people that need to hear the intelligible message of the Bible would be excluded. The congregation would become guilty of repelling the people that need to be converted! The inquirers and interested unbelievers would be repelled by what they see and hear and would conclude that this congregation is mad! Thus, the speaking in tongues would harden the inquirers as well as unbelievers against God so that they would not be converted!

Therefore, even though the gift of tongues has value for a Christian who is *accustomed to* speak in tongues to himself and to God (verse 27), Christians should not seek or desire the gift of speaking in tongues (1 Corinthians 12:31; 1 Corinthians 14:1)! Christians may also not make use of the gift of speaking unintelligible tongues during the meetings of the congregation (verse 23)!

#### ▪ **1 Corinthians 14:24.**

“But if all would prophesy, and an unbeliever or non-member would come in, he is being exposed or convinced by all and he is being examined or called to account by all.”<sup>127</sup>

Paul continues *his hypothetical case* in the congregation of Corinth.

Because prophecy (the preaching of God's Word) edifies everyone present (verse 4 and 19), all Christians to whom the Spirit has given spiritual gifts must earnestly seek or desire the ability to prophecy (1 Corinthians 12:31; 1 Corinthians 14:1). And therefore all Christians should make use of prophecy (proclamation, preaching) during the meetings of the congregation (verse 24-25)!

So, *speaking hypothetically*, if an unbeliever or non-member comes in while the Christians are clearly proclaiming God's Word, he would be exposed and convinced by the words of all the Christians and he would be called to account to God.

The Greek word “*elengcho*”<sup>128</sup> is a word rich in significance. Through prophecy (the proclamation or preaching of God's Word) the Holy Spirit will:

- *expose* this person's sin (Ephesians 5:11)
- *rebuke* or *reprove* his precarious position (*show a person his fault*) (Matthew 18:15; 2 Timothy 4:2)
- *refute* his arguments against Christ (Titus 1:9)
- *convict* him of his sins (Jude 15) and *convince* him of the truth of the Bible (John 16:8-11).
- *punish* or *discipline* him (Hebrews 12:5)

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<sup>124</sup> Greek: ὥστε αἱ γλῶσσαι εἰς σημεῖον εἰσὶν (indicative, present, active) σὺ τοῖς πιστεύουσιν ἀλλὰ τοῖς ἀπίστοις, ἡ δὲ προφητεία οὐ τοῖς ἀπίστοις ἀλλὰ τοῖς πιστεύουσιν

<sup>125</sup> Greek: ἰδιῶται

<sup>126</sup> Greek: εἰάν οὖν συνελθῆ (subjunctive, aorist, active) ἡ ἐκκλησία ὅλη ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ (to the same place, together) καὶ πάντες λαλῶσιν (subjunctive, present, active) γλῶσσαις, εἰσελθῶσιν (subjunctive, aorist, active)

δὲ ἰδιῶται ἡ ἀπίστοι, οὐκ ἐροῦσιν (indicative, future, active) ὅτι μαίνεσθε (indicative, present, deponent)? λέγω—εἶπω

<sup>127</sup> Greek: εἰάν δε πάντες προφητεύωσιν (subjunctive, present, active), εἰσελθῆ (subjunctive, aorist, active) δε τις ἀπίστος ἡ ἰδιώτης, ἐλεγγεται (indicative, present, passive) ὑπο πάντων, ἀνακρίνεται (indicative, present, passive) ὑπο πάντων.

<sup>128</sup> Greek: ἐλεγχο

The Holy Spirit will use the intelligible words of prophecy (*preaching*) to urge him to repent (Acts 2:37; Acts 16:27-30).

▪ **1 Corinthians 14:25.**

“The secrets of his heart are *being* revealed. And thus *once for all* falling on his face he will worship God, confessing (that) ‘Really, God is among you!’”<sup>129</sup>.

The Holy Spirit will lay the hidden secrets of his heart bare. This is *the power of the intelligible words of the Bible*: it exposes hidden sin, it refutes arguments, it rebukes the sinner, it touches his heart, it convicts and convinces the sinner and if necessary it punishes him (Hebrews 12:5-6)<sup>130</sup>. “So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it” (Isaiah 55:10-11). “Is not my word like fire,” declares the LORD, “and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?” (Jeremiah 23:29) “The word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12).

God’s Word exposes the hidden things in the heart. This may mean that the speaker exposes the specific sin of a specific person to the whole congregation (Acts 5:3; Acts 8:20). These words may also mean that the unbeliever clearly sees the hidden sin in his own heart without public exposure and is cut to the heart (Acts 2:37).

“Falling with his face onto the ground” is the visible way in which someone humbles himself before God. He will repent and turn to God and confess the reality and presence of God (Daniel 2:47; Zachariah 8:23). This may happen during the meeting itself or this may happen some time after the meeting.

## **7. The rules to which Christians speaking in tongues or prophecy must at all times be subject (1 Corinthians 14:26-40; Romans 12:6).**

In 1 Corinthians 14:26-40 the apostle Paul gives very clear rules for the conduct of Christians at all times during the meetings of the congregation.

### **Rule 1: Every use of a spiritual gift during every meeting of the congregation must at all times be for edification.**

▪ **1 Corinthians 14:26.**

“What then, brothers, is (important)? [Put hypothetically] when you would come together, each (of those inspired by God’s Spirit) has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, another language (tongue) or a translation or interpretation (of spoken words). All of this *must at all times be done* for edification [this is a command in the present continuous tense].”<sup>131</sup>

Paul speaks about the meetings of the congregation: the worship service on the Lord’s Day and the small group meetings on the other days of the week.

The word “each” does not refer to each and everyone present, but to everyone the Holy Spirit has given either an office (e.g. a teacher or a shepherd/pastor) or a spiritual gift (e.g. prophecy or speaking a language or tongue).

The apostle Paul commands, “All things must *at all times* be done for edification” (verse 26). And, “All things must *at all times* be done decently (becomingly, properly) and in good order (in an orderly manner)” (verse 40)<sup>132</sup>. The Christians at Corinth do not have the freedom to use the spiritual gifts as they want during their meetings in the congregation, because the use of the spiritual gifts are bound to clear limiting rules. These rules are *commanded* by the Lord himself (verse 37)! That is why these rules for the Christian meetings are also commanded by the apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ (verse 26)! All Christians to whom the Holy Spirit has given spiritual gifts *must at all times* subject themselves to these limiting rules (commands) of the Lord!

The apostle Paul makes a clear distinction between the possession (verse 26) and the use of a spiritual gift (verse 30). Christians who possess spiritual gifts do not suddenly receive their spiritual gift as if they are unexpectedly being overwhelmed by the Holy Spirit and cannot help to give utterance to their gift. “To have”<sup>133</sup> spiritual gifts means “*continuity of possession rather than “the suddenness of origin”*”. These Christians “are *accustomed to have*”<sup>134</sup> their spiritual gift, that is, they have received from the Holy Spirit a spiritual gift which they use *again and again* [present iterative tense]! They have *the permanent ability* to use this spiritual gift! Paul would not have been able to give such

<sup>129</sup> Greek: τα κρυπτα της καρδιας αυτου φανερα γινεται (indicative, present, deponent), και ουτως (adv. really) πεσων (participle, aorist, active) επι προσωπον προσκυνησει (indicative, future, active) τω θεω, απαγγελων (participle, present, active) οτι οντως ο θεος εν υμιν εστιν (indicative, present, active).

<sup>130</sup> Hebrews 12:5-6. “My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline (παιδεια = upbringing or instruction chiefly attained by discipline and correction) and do not lose heart when he rebukes (ελεγχω = discipline, punish) you, because the Lord’s disciplines (παιδευω = discipline with punishment) those he loves and he punishes (μαστιγωω = punishes with a whip, chastise) everyone he accepts as a son.”

<sup>131</sup> Greek: οταν συνηρηθητε (subjunctive, present, middle), εκαστος ψαλμιον εχει (indicative, present, active), διδαχη εχει, αποκαλυψιν εχει, γλωσσαν εχει, ερμηνειαν εχει, παντα προς οικοδομην γινεσθω (imperative, present, middle)

<sup>132</sup> Greek: παντα δε ευσχημονως και κατα ταξιν γινεσθω (imperative, present, middle)

<sup>133</sup> Greek: εχει

<sup>134</sup> Greek: εχει (indicative, present, active)

limiting rules (commands) if the Holy Spirit had unexpectedly overwhelmed or overpowered these Christians with their spiritual gift!

It is clear that some Christians in the congregation of Corinth misused their spiritual gift in order to impress the people present or to rule the roost and be regarded as the most important believers present in the meetings. They were members of the congregation who possessed spiritual gifts, but abused the gatherings of the congregation to make themselves heard. Although the apostle has regard for spiritual gifts, he forbids the misuse of spiritual gifts that disturb the meetings of the congregation! In every meeting of the congregation the goal must to edify, encourage and comfort the people present! The freedom with which the use of the spiritual gifts may be used by Christians during the meetings of the congregation is subject to the commands of love, edification and to do everything in a fitting and orderly way.

Note that verse 26 is still part of *a hypothetical case in the congregation of Corinth* which Paul describes, because he employs the subjunctive case. The apostle does not prescribe that all these spiritual gifts ought to be employed the various elements that should be a part of every Christian meeting! He does not teach that every Christian meeting should have a revelation or a tongue or an interpretation. But he does command that everything during these meetings must be done according to God's set rules: it must be done in love (chapter 13), it must be done for edification (verse 26), it must be done in a fitting and orderly way (verse 40).

**Rule 2: Every use of a spiritual gift during every meeting of the congregation must be limited to a maximum of three people.**

▪ **1 Corinthians 14:27,29.**

"If someone speaks in a language (tongue), by twos or at most threes – one at a time, and one *must* translate (interpret)! [a command in the present continuous tense]"<sup>135</sup> (verse 27).

"Let two or three prophets speak [a command in the present continuous tense]"<sup>136</sup> (verse 29).

The same rule (command) applies to the use of the gift of tongues (verse 27) and to the use of the gift of prophecy (verse 29). Although the apostle recognizes both spiritual gifts, it is very clear that he did not want the use of spiritual gifts to dominate the meetings of the congregation.

What the human spirit wants to say must be expressed in clear intelligible words by means of the human mind (verse 13-17). Communication of God's message during the meetings of the congregation must be intelligible, because it must edify the people present!

According to the apostle is what a Christian says in a tongue or a prophecy not per se edifying for the congregation! The words spoken in prophecy may be an indication (clue) that may be useful for the congregation at that time, but the use of the gift of prophecy must always be made subject to the preaching and teaching of the apostles which must always and everywhere take precedence in the meetings of the congregation (Acts 2:42; Acts 6:4; Acts 20:20-21,25,27,31; 1 Corinthians 12:28). The Lord Jesus Christ gave his Holy Spirit to the apostles above all to remind them of Christ's words (John 14:26), to testify to Jesus Christ (John 15:26) and to finally explain and record the words of the Lord Jesus Christ (John 16:13-15) in the New Testament. Not the occasional prophesying of the New Testament prophets, but the permanent proclamation or preaching and teaching of the Word of God (the Bible) as recorded by the Old Testament prophets (1 Peter 1:10-12; 2 Peter 1:19-21) and the New Testament apostles (2 Peter 3:1-2,15-16) must be central during the meetings of every congregation! Christians may not neglect "to proclaim the whole will of God" (Acts 20:27).

"What you have heard from me (the apostle), keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you (i.e. the Word of God) – guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us" (2 Timothy 1:13-14). "Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage - with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths" (2 Timothy 4:2-4).

Even though the words of the New Testament prophets may edify the congregation (verse 3 and 12), all the words spoken in tongues or in prophecy must give way to the preaching of the gospel and the teaching of the apostles which have been recorded in the New Testament Scripture (Luke 24:47-48; Acts 2:42; Acts 6:4; Acts 20:20,27; Romans 16:25-26; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Timothy 4:2-5; Titus 1:9)! It is the Holy Spirit who gives the gift of speaking in tongues (1 Corinthians 12:10) or the gift of prophecy (Ephesians 4:7,11), but it also is the Holy Spirit who bids the use of these gifts during the meetings of the congregation to strict limiting rules (1 Corinthians 14:26-33)!

<sup>135</sup> Greek: ειτε (if...if; whether...or; here only once) γλωσση τις λαλει (indicative, present, active), κατα (distributive: in twos) δυο η το πλειστον τρεις, και ανα μερος (in turn), και εις διερμενευετω (imperative, present, active).

<sup>136</sup> Greek: προφηται δε δυο η τρεις λαλειτωσαν (imperative, present, active)

**Rule 3: Every use of a spiritual gift during every meeting of the congregation must be in turn, not all at the same time!**

▪ **1 Corinthians 14:27,29.**

“one at a time”<sup>137</sup>

The apostle Paul forbids Christians to all speak or pray in tongues at the same time. This would lead to the same chaos as the confusion that occurred at building the tower of Babylon – a lot of noise, but no communication (Genesis 11:7-9)!

All speaking and praying during the meetings of the congregation must be in turn so that everyone present would be able to say “Amen”. Praying together at the same time may only be allowed when it is done in absolute silence or when for example “the Lord’s Prayer” is prayed in unison, because real communication would then take place!

**Rule 4. Every use of a spiritual gift that does not communicate must at all times be forbidden!**

▪ **1 Corinthians 14:28.**

“If there is no interpreter, he *must at all times* keep quiet [a command in the present continuous tense] in the congregation and *must at all times* [a command in the present continuous tense] speak to himself and to God.”<sup>138</sup>

If a Christian who possesses the *permanent* gift of tongues wants to speak in the congregation, *he must at all times* choose one of the following ways:

- he *must at all times first* pray asking God to enable him to express in intelligible words of his mind what he wants to say by means of his human spirit (verse 15-17)
- or he *must at all times first* determine whether there is someone present who is able and willing to translate or interpret in intelligible words what he would like to say in unintelligible sounds of his spirit
- or when God does not hear his prayer (verse 13) and there is no interpreter present, he must at all times remain silent during the meetings of the congregation and only speak to himself and to God when he is alone with God or in a way that no-one notices that he is doing this (verse 28).

The rule is that whatever is said during the meetings of the congregation must at all times be a clear communication in intelligible words!

This Christian may not first speak unintelligible words by means of his spirit and thereafter *himself* interpret these unintelligible sounds into intelligible words. There are three reasons for this prohibition:

- God has commanded him to pray for the ability to express what he wants to say with his spirit in intelligible words by means of his mind (verse 13-15)
- God has given him full control over his human spirit so that he can immediately speak in intelligible words by means of his mind (verse 32)
- and God has given to other Christians the ability to interpret or the ability to distinguish between spirits (1 Corinthians 12:10)!

**Rule 5: The New Testament prophets and their prophecies must at all times be tested.**

▪ **1 Corinthians 14:29.**

“Let two or three prophets speak and the others (the other New Testament prophets) *must at all times* weigh carefully (discern, make a judgement)(about what is spoken)”<sup>139</sup>.

Also this is a command in the present continuous tense! Just as the gift of languages (tongues) *at all times* needs the complementary gift of translation (interpretation) of languages (tongues)(1 Corinthians 14:27-28), so the gift of prophecy *at all times* needs the complementary gift of weighing and evaluation by the other New Testament prophets (1 Corinthians 14:29-32)!

In the list of spiritual gifts, “the gift of prophecy” is followed by “the gift of the discernment of spirits” (1 Corinthians 12:10). The apostle John teaches, “Do not trust every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world and are now in the world [perfect tense]” (1 John 4:1)<sup>140</sup>. The apostle John says that there are evil and false spirits active even in the meetings of the congregation! Of course, genuine born-again Christians are never demon-possessed, because they can only confess Christ as Lord through the Holy Spirit living in them (1 Corinthians 12:3)! However, evil and false spirits can be active in people who are present but not yet born-again. These spirits may say or shout something during the meeting of the congregation that is true or genuine. That is why Christians must test the spirits and distinguish between truth and lies. Christians must put everything that is said during the meetings of the congregation to the test, whether it is the speaking in tongues, the utterance of

<sup>137</sup> Greek: και ανα μερος (one at a time)

<sup>138</sup> Greek: εαν δε μη η διερμενευτης, σιγατω (imperative, present, active) εν εκκλησια, εαυτω δε λαλειτω (imperative, present, active) και η θεω

<sup>139</sup> Greek: προφηται δε δυο, η τρεις λαλειτωσαν (imperative, present, active), και οι αλλοι διακρινετωσαν (imperative, present, active)

<sup>140</sup> Greek: μη παντι πνευματι πιστευετε (imperative, present, active), αλλα δοκιμαζετε (imperative, present, active) τα πνευματα ει εκ του θεου εστιν, οτι ψευδοπροφηται εξεληλυθασιν (indicative, perfect, active) εις τον κοσμον.

prophecies, the usual preaching or the regular teaching. They must discern whether what is said comes from God or not (Acts 17:11).

Also the apostle Paul alludes to the presence of these evil and false spirits during the meetings of the congregation. He says, “Since (some of) you are zealots striving or pushing to possess spirits (note that it does not say: “spiritual gifts”!), you must *at all times* strive to excel in building up the congregation (i.e. use the gift of prophecy or the preaching and teaching of the Word of God that builds up the congregation)(1 Corinthians 14:12).”<sup>141</sup> That is why Christians must test the spirits and distinguish between the Holy Spirit and false (evil) spirits!

The word “weigh carefully and discern” is used with regard to the possible presence of evil and false prophets. Already during the Old Testament period God said through the prophet Moses, “A prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded him to say, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods (e.g. evil spirits), must be put to death. You may say to yourselves, ‘How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the LORD?’ If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him” (Deuteronomy 18:20-22).

Read what the prophet Jeremiah teaches about false prophets in Israel (Jeremiah 23:9-40). “Therefore,” declares the LORD, “I am against the prophets who steal from one another words supposedly from me. Yes,” declares the LORD, “I am against the prophets who wag their own tongues and yet declare, ‘The LORD declares.’ Indeed, I am against those who prophesy false dreams,” declares the LORD. “They tell them and lead my people astray with their reckless lies, yet I did not send or appoint them. They do not benefit these people in the least,” declares the LORD (Jeremiah 23:30-32). “Every man’s own word becomes his oracle (a burden)<sup>142</sup> and so you distort the words of the living God, the LORD Almighty, our God” (Jeremiah 23:36).

Nevertheless, the word “weigh carefully and discern” in 1 Corinthians chapter 12 to 14 is not in the first place used against false prophets, but for Christians who are accustomed to prophesy (preach) during the meetings of the congregation. Even when a word of a New Testament prophet has been inspired by the Holy Spirit, the congregation must still weigh carefully and discern whether what has been said is applicable or not for the congregation and what action must be taken. See the examples under the New Testament prophets of Jerusalem.

**Rule 6: A New Testament prophet must stop speaking as soon as the Holy Spirit moves another New Testament prophet to speak.**

▪ **1 Corinthians 14:30.**

“If *at some time* [aorist tense](thus: this happens seldom) a revelation comes to another person sitting down, the first speaker must keep quiet.”<sup>143</sup>

The gift of revelation<sup>144</sup> and the gift of prophecy are related. First comes “the revelation” of a particular truth and then comes “the speaking” (prophesying) of this truth (verse 6 and 30). Some of these New Testament prophets were probably inclined to dwell too long on what they wanted to say or did not have the self-discipline to stop speaking. Therefore God introduced the rule of “setting a full stop”.

This rule also excludes the first two prophets from wanting to say something more after they have had their change to speak! The two prophets that have been interrupted by the third prophet must remain quiet. They can remain quiet, because the same Holy Spirit who gives the spiritual gifts has given the recipients the command to keep quiet and self-control as a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:23). They can exercise self-control in the use of all the spiritual gifts! What these prophets must do with their interrupted prophecies is not explained. The fact that it was God who interrupted their speaking must be sufficient.

▪ **1 Corinthians 14:31.**

“For you are all (maximum three) able to prophesy *again and again* [present iterative tense], in turn so that everyone may *continue* [present tense] *to be* instructed and encouraged.”<sup>145</sup>

God gives the ability to utter a prophecy (and of course also the ability to preach and teach God’s Word in the Bible) in such a way that it can be spoken in turn and for as long as God determines. In this way all people present receive instruction, exhortation and encouragement. While instruction touches more the mind, exhortation and encouragement touches more the emotions. The word “all (people)”<sup>146</sup> implies that the revelations prophesied by the second and third

<sup>141</sup> Greek: ουτως και υμεις, επει ζηλωται εστε (indicative, present, active)

πνευματεν, προς την οικοδομην της εκκλησιας ζητειτε (imperative, present, active) ινα περισσευητε (subjunctive, present, active)

<sup>142</sup> A word of God is laid on the prophet as “a burden”

<sup>143</sup> Greek: εαν δε αλλω αποκαλυφθη (subjunctive, aorist, passive) καθημενω (participle, present, dative) ο πρωτος σιγατω (imperative, present, active)

<sup>144</sup> Greek: αποκαλυψις

<sup>145</sup> Greek: δυνασθε (subjunctive, present, passive) γαρ καθ ενα παντες προφητευειν (subjunctive, present, passive), ινα παντες μανθανωσιν (subjunctive, present, active) και παντες παρακαλωνται (subjunctive, present, passive)

<sup>146</sup> Greek: παντες

person were destined and suitable for another group of listeners in the congregation than the revelation prophesied by the first person.

▪ **1 Corinthians 14:32.**

“The spirits of prophets are *continually* subject to (the control of) the prophets.”<sup>147</sup>

Here the word “spirits” does not refer to external (evil) spirits as in 1 John 4:1 and in 1 Corinthians 14:12, but to the human spirits (or souls) of the prophets which constitute their invisible human nature in contrast to their visible human body. God subjected the human spirits of the prophets to the control of the prophets themselves! These prophets may never claim that they were overwhelmed by the Holy Spirit beyond the control of their human will so that they could not stop prophesying (or stop speaking in tongues)<sup>148</sup>. *Every single spiritual gift is subject to the human will of the recipient and he is able and responsible to use this spiritual gift only when it would edify people and only when it would maintain the orderly course of the meeting of the congregation!* Every Christian remains accountable to God with respect to his abilities and responsibilities.

Christians are not allowed to behave like non-Christians who are overpowered by evil spirits and act as if they are in a trance (i.e. possessed by some evil spirit)! The fruit of the Holy Spirit is in every respect “self control” (Galatians 5:23)!

▪ **1 Corinthians 14:33a.**

“For God is not a God of disorder but of peace.”<sup>149</sup>

Because the use of the spiritual gifts (including the speaking in tongues and prophecy) are at all times subject to the human spirit, God commands that everything that happens during the meetings of the congregation must happen in a fitting and orderly way! The God who revealed himself in the Bible is not “a god of disorder” (i.e. a god without rules, a god of confusion and do as you please), but a God order! He is not “a god of destruction”, but a God of “peace”<sup>150</sup> (a God that makes whole what has been broken and who brings well-being).

**Rule 7: Women may not speak in tongues or prophecy during the meetings of the congregation.**

▪ **1 Corinthians 14:33b-34.**

“As in all the congregations of the saints, women *must at all times* remain silent in the churches [a command in the present tense]. They are *at no time* [present tense] permitted to speak. But they *must at all times* be in subjection [a command in the present tense], as the Law (Genesis 3:16) says.”<sup>151</sup>

God and his apostle Paul do not allow women to speak during the worship meetings of the congregation. This command is not only given to the congregation at Corinth, but to all congregations in the world (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:17)!

In 1 Corinthians chapter 11 the apostle Paul taught that Christian women may prophesy outside the meetings of the congregation – providing that they have a sign of authority on their heads. But in 1 Corinthians chapter 14 he does not allow Christian women to speak during the worship meetings of the congregation.

Because this commandment stands in the context of the previous two prohibitions that limit the speaking of unintelligible sounds by means of one’s spirit in tongues (verse 27-28) and the speaking of intelligible prophecies by means of one’s mind (verse 29-33) in the meetings of the congregation, this prohibition must be analogous. The apostle Paul prohibits Christian women to speak in tongues or to prophesy in all the meetings of the congregation! If a Christian woman has received the gift of tongues or the gift of prophecy, she is forbidden to make use of her authority (right or freedom) to speak in tongues or to prophesy *during the worship meetings of the congregation!*

▪ **1 Corinthians 14:35.**

“If they want to inquire about something, they *must at all times* ask their own husbands at home [a command in the present tense]. For it is disgraceful for a woman to speak [present tense] in the church.”<sup>152</sup>

Although one might be inclined to limit this prohibition for woman to the speaking in tongues and prophesying during the meetings of the congregation, verse 35 extends the prohibition to even the asking of questions during the meetings of the congregation. In stead Christian women must ask their own husbands at home! Thus, in the first place Paul has married Christian women in view.

*The married Christian women must set an example for all other Christian women with respect to the subjection of Christian women to Christian men. Married Christian women must set an example in being submissive (Ephesians*

<sup>147</sup> Greek: και πνευματα προφητων προφητεις υποτασσεται (indicative, present, passive)

<sup>148</sup> Only a person possessed by a demon is overwhelmed by the evil spirit and has no control over what the demon says through him. (Mark 5:6-13)!

<sup>149</sup> Greek: ου γαρ εστιν (indicative, present, active) ακαταστασιας ο θεος αλλα ειρηνης.

<sup>150</sup> Greek: ειρηνη

<sup>151</sup> Greek: ως εν πασεις ταις εκκλησιαις των αγιων αι γυναικες εν ταις εκκλησιαις σιγατωσαν (imperative, present, active), ου γαρ επιτρεπεται (indicative, present, passive) αυταις λαλειν (infinitive, present, active). αλλα υποτασσεσθωσαν (indicative, present, active), καθως και ο νομος λεγει (indicative, present, active).

<sup>152</sup> Greek: ει δε τι μαθειν (infinitive, aorist, active) θελουσιν (indicative, present, active), εν οικω του ιδιους ανδρας επερωτατωσαν (imperative, present, active), εις χρον γαρ εστιν, γυναικι λαλειν (infinitive, present, active) εν εκκλησια

5:22-24; 1 Peter 3:1-6), in not exercising authority over their husbands in any way and also in not teaching or preaching God's Word with authority to men in the worship meetings of the congregation (1 Timothy 2:11-12). The older Christian women must teach the younger Christian women (better: the new women who joined the Christian fellowship) in what is good and urge them to *continually* [present continuous tense] be sensible by loving their husbands and children, by being self-controlled, by being busy at home, by being kind and by being subject to the husbands. In this way other people would *never* [present continuous tense] be able to malign the Word of God (Titus 2:3-5).<sup>153</sup>

The apostle Paul motivates this command in three ways:

- (1) The biblical motivation.

The apostle Paul first appeals to the biblical motivation: “For Adam was formed (moulded from the clay) first, then Eve (out of the man). And Adam was not the one misled (deceived); it was the woman who was *once for all* [aorist tense] led astray in *having become* a transgressor *and now is* a transgressor [perfect tense]”<sup>154</sup> (1 Timothy 2:13-14).

After the fall of all people into sin, women became subjected to men. After the fall the man must work amidst setbacks. And the woman must give birth to children with pain and subject herself to her husband. “Your desire will be for your husband and he will rule over you” (Genesis 3:16).

This subjection of “women” to “men” is however not limited to the subjection of “wives” to their “husbands” in marriage and family life (Ephesians 5:22-24; Colossians 3:18; 1 Peter 3:1-6). This subjection of women to men is also extended to the relationship of men and women in the Christian Church. “A woman *must at all times* learn in quietness and in full submission [a command in the present tense]. I do not *at any time* [present continuous time] permit a woman to teach [present tense] or to exercise authority over (domineer)[present tense] a man, but (she must) *at all times* be silent” [present continuous tense](1 Timothy 2:11-12).<sup>155</sup>

According to the Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature by Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich the word “woman”<sup>156</sup> in 1 Corinthians 14:34f and 1 Timothy 2:11f refers to “any adult female” and in Ephesians 5:22f and Colossians 3:18f to “a wife”. This means that the command with respect to women’s subjection to men is an institution of God given to all women and throughout history since the fall into sin! This does not mean that men may rule over women in every respect, but does mean that women may not take over the responsibility of the man as head of the family and that women may not be appointed as elders in the congregation or act as such (for example, by preaching or teaching God’s Word in the worship services of the congregation).

- (2) The historical motivation.

Then the apostle Paul appeals to the historical motivation: The words: “As in all the churches”<sup>157</sup> of the saints (verse 33) included the Old Testament Church as well as the New Testament Church. In Psalm 107:32 God’s Old Testament people are called “the Church”<sup>158</sup> and their leaders are called “the council of elders”.<sup>159</sup> The leaders during the Old Testament period were experienced “men”. Thus, also during the Old Testament period women were submissive to men in marriage (1 Peter 3:1-6) and subject to men in the Church (Deuteronomy 1:15).

- (3) The cultural motivation.

Finally, the apostle Paul appeals to the cultural motivation: “It is *at all times* shameful for a woman to speak in the church” [present continuous tense].

Just as *in that time and in that culture almost everyone* regarded it as shameful when a woman prayed or spoke (prophesied) in public without a sign of authority on her head (1 Corinthians 11:5-6), so *in the Christian culture in that time almost everyone* regarded it as shameful when a woman preached or taught the Word of God with authority over men in the worship meetings of the congregation.

Paul said that all women *must* remain silent during the meetings (worship services) of the congregation. They were not even allowed to ask questions. But because the context is speaking about the speaking in tongues and in prophecy, we have to understand this injunction on women as limited to the speaking in tongues and in prophecy during the meetings of the congregation. *In the Christian culture of that time* it was regarded by *almost everyone* as disgraceful that a woman spoke in tongues or in prophecy during the meetings of the congregation.

<sup>153</sup> Greek: Πρεσβυτιδας ωσαυτως εν καταστηματι ιεροπρεπεις, μη διαβολους, μη οινω πολλω δεδουλωμενας (participle, perfect, passive), καλοδιδασκαλους, ινα σοφρονιζωσιν (subjunctive, present, active) τας νεας φιλανδρους ειναι (infinitive, present, active), φιλοτεκνους, σωφρονας, αγνας, οικουργους, αγαθας, υποτασσομενας τοις ιδιοις ανδρασιν, ινα μη ο λογος του θεου βλασφημηται (subjunctive, present, passive)

<sup>154</sup> Greek: Αδαμ γαρ πρωτος επλασθη (indicative, aorist, passive), ειτα Ευα. και Αδαμ ουκ ηπατηθη (indicative, aorist, passive), η δε γυνη εξαπατηθεισα (participle, aorist, passive) εν παραβασει γεγονεν (indicative, perfect, active)

<sup>155</sup> Greek: γυνη εν ησυχια μανθανετω (imperative, present, active) εν παση υποταγη. διδασκειν (infinitive, present, active) δε γυναικι ουκ επιτρεπω (indicative, present, active), ουδε αυθεντειν (infinitive, present, active) ανδρος, αλλ ειναι (infinitive, present, active) εν ησυχια

<sup>156</sup> Greek: γυναικος

<sup>157</sup> Greek: τα εκκλησια

<sup>158</sup> Hebrew: qahal am; Greek Septuagint: εκκλησια λαου

<sup>159</sup> Hebrew: moshab zekenim; Greek Septuagint: καθεδρα πρεσβυτερων

But because the women were allowed to speak (pray and prophecy) in public (1 Corinthians 11:5), it was not regarded as disgraceful if a woman spoke (sang, prayed) normally during the meetings of the congregation. Decisive was that a Christian woman was not allowed to preach or teach the Word of God with authority over men during the meetings of the congregation or exercise authority over men in the congregation (1 Timothy 2:11-12).

▪ **1 Corinthians 14:36.**

“Did the word of God *once for all in the past* [aorist tense] go out from you? Or has it *once for all* come to you alone?”<sup>160</sup>

The Corinthian congregation had their own custom, namely, the women of the congregation spoke in tongues and prophesied in the public meetings of the congregation. So Paul asks them whether they are an exception to God’s rule for women to remain silent “in all the churches” (verse 33)? The Word of God did not originate with the Corinthian church, because it went forth from Jerusalem. The Word of God also did not reach the Corinthian church alone, because it reached very many churches all over the world! Therefore, the church at Corinth must take the other churches in the world into account and submit to the current practices (practical customs) in all the churches in the world!

▪ **1 Corinthians 14:37.**

“If anybody *keeps on* thinking [present tense] that he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, he *must at all times* [a command in the present continuous tense] know through and through (i.e. acknowledge) that what I am writing to you is the Lord’s command.”<sup>161</sup>

Precisely those who are spiritually gifted (i.e. those who claim that they possess the gift of speaking in tongues or the gift of prophecy *permanently*) must know and acknowledge that the rules the apostle writes here are the Lord’s commands! Those who *customary* possess the charismata (the spiritual gifts) ought to be the first to obey the rules of the Lord with respect to the use of the charismatic gifts during the meetings of the congregation!

▪ **1 Corinthians 14:38.**

“If someone *continually* [present tense] disregards (God’s command), he himself is *constantly* disregarded (by God)(present tense)”<sup>162</sup>

“To be disregarded (ignored) by God” is the opposite of “to be known through and through by God” (1 Corinthians 13:12). Whoever ignores God’s commands will be ignored by God. And whoever obeys the commands of God will be acknowledged by God (cf. Acts 5:32). Someone who disobeys the instituted rules of God with respect to the exercise of spiritual gifts is in danger of being denied (disowned) by God (cf. Matthew 7:22-23; Matthew 10:33).

▪ **1 Corinthians 14:39.**

“Therefore, my brothers, you *must continually* [a command in the present tense] *and eagerly* strive (desire, exert oneself) to prophesy, and you must *never* [a command in the present tense] hinder (prevent, forbid) the speaking by means of tongues (clearly the intention is the speaking of tongues only in the way as is taught in verse 13-19).”<sup>163</sup>

This is almost a repetition of verse 1, but now carries more weight after Paul’s exposition on prophecy and the speaking in tongues. The words do not mean that those who are *accustomed to* prophesy in the meetings of the church should actually push to prophesy, because prophesying in the meetings of the church is strictly limited to the above mentioned command (rules) of God (verse 29-33).

The words also do not mean that the congregation is exhorted to promote the speaking in tongues, because also the exercise of speaking in tongues is strictly regulated by the above mentioned rules of God (verse 13-19 and verse 27-28).

▪ **1 Corinthians 14:40.**

“But everything *must at all times* [a command in the present continuous tense] be done in a fitting and orderly way.”<sup>164</sup>

The teaching about the gift of prophesying and the gift of speaking in tongues has the teaching of the spiritual gift of continence as its background (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:6,17,25,35,36). Charismatic activities may never disturb the good order in the services of the congregation. All the meetings of the congregation must serve to edify, exhort, encourage and comfort the congregation. Everything that conflicts with this command must be excluded!

1 Corinthians chapter 14 pointed out the significance, limitations and dangerous abuses of the charismatic gifts during the early New Testament period when the Canon of the Bible had not yet been completed. Because Christians today possess the complete revelation of God in the Bible, they already possess all they need to know.

<sup>160</sup> Greek: η αφ υμων ο λογος του θεου εξηλθεν (indicative, aorist, active), η εις υμας μονους κατηνητησεν (indicative, aorist, active)?

<sup>161</sup> Greek: ει τις δοκει (indicative, present, active) προφητης ειναι (infinitive, present, active) η πνευματικος, επιγινωσκειτω (imperative, present, active) α γραφω υμιν οτι κυριου εστιν (indicative, present, active) εντολη

<sup>162</sup> Greek: ει δε τις αγνει (indicative, present, active), αγνοειται (indicative, present, passive).

<sup>163</sup> Greek: ωστε, αδελφοι [μου], ζηλουτε (imperative, present, active) το προφητευσειν, και το λαλειν (infinitive, present, active) μη κωλυετε (imperative, present, active) γλωσσαις

<sup>164</sup> Greek: παντα δε ευσχημενωσ και κατα ταξιν γινεσθω (imperative, present, deponent)

After the completion of the New Testament Canon “prophecy” especially becomes proclamation or preaching of the Word of God that has already been revealed:

- by the prophets of the Old Testament (2 Peter 1:19-21)
- by the Great and Final Prophet, Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-2)
- and by the apostles of the New Testament (Ephesians 3:5; cf. Revelation 11:3)

**Rule 8: Every use of the gift of prophecy must be in accordance with someone’s faith.**

▪ **Romans 12:6.**

“We *continue* to have spiritual gifts, distinguished according to the grace *once for all* given to us. If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to (in accordance to the standard of) the faith.”<sup>165</sup>

As in Romans 12:3, the word “the faith” may be used in the subjective sense and indicate the person’s *trust* in God and his promises. The New Testament prophet must never say anything in opposition to *his personal faith* in Jesus Christ. If there would be the slightest doubt in his heart whether the revelation he received is really coming from God, he must not and may not utter his prophecy!

But the word “the faith” may be used in the objective sense and point to “*the Christian Faith*”, namely, the truth which God revealed in the Bible and which every Christian must believe and obey! The New Testament prophet must never say anything in opposition to the Christian Faith as already revealed by the apostles and is now recorded in the Bible!

## PART II. THE NATURE, PURPOSE AND USE OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS

### A. THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS

#### 1. The nature of a spiritual gift

▪ **A spiritual gift is a special ability or function given by God’s sovereign determination**

“A spiritual gift”<sup>166</sup> (a “charisma”) is a *special desire and ability* or a *function (sometimes: office)* which God gives by his grace and by his sovereign determination (1 Peter 4:10; Ephesians 4:7,11; 1 Corinthians 12:11). It is both the ordinary as well as extraordinary activity of the Holy Spirit in a Christian. It is not the product of the Christian’s skill or ingenuity. It is always an expression of God’s grace in a variety of forms through the stewardship of Christians.

▪ **A spiritual gift is a manifestation of God’s power, wisdom and knowledge in a Christian**

A “spiritual gift” (1 Corinthians 12:4) is a manifestation (revelation) of God’s power and wisdom, etc. (1 Corinthians 12:7) through the Christian (the believer) and expresses itself in different kinds of services (both ordinary and official ministries) (1 Corinthians 12:5) and workings (effects, products, results)(1 Corinthians 12:6).

▪ **A spiritual gift is always limited in size**

A “spiritual gift” is always “a measured gift”; limited in extent, “according to the measure of the gift”<sup>167</sup> Christ gives. No one gets everything a particular spiritual gift could possibly do within its specific area (Ephesians 4:7). No one gets all the spiritual gifts. And all Christians do not receive one particular spiritual gift (1 Corinthians 12:29-30).

▪ **A spiritual gift may be a special gift or an ordinary gift**

Because the word “gifts” (Greek: *charismata*) is more precisely *qualified in the plural* as “gifts of healing”<sup>168</sup>, “gifts of miracles”, “helpful deeds” and “administrations” (1 Corinthians 12:9,28,30), the word “gifts” is used in a general sense. The word “spiritual gifts”<sup>169</sup> is best taken in a general sense, as in 1 Corinthians 1:7, of all the gifts of the Holy Spirit, both *the extraordinary gifts* as well as *the ordinary gifts* of the Holy Spirit. An absolute distinction between the *extraordinary (special)* gifts and the *ordinary (permanent)* gifts of the Spirit cannot be made.

Ordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit are for example “the gift (charisma) of spiritually strengthening or encouraging the believer” (Romans 1:11), “the gift (charisma) of redemption” (Romans 5:15), “the gift (charisma) of eternal life” (Romans 6:23), or even the more ordinary sense of “serving”, “teaching”, “encouraging”, “giving”, etc. Both extraordinary as well as ordinary gifts descend from one and the same Spirit and the borderline between them is not clearly marked. Nevertheless, in 1 Corinthians chapters 12 to 14, Paul had particularly the special gifts such as prophecy and speaking in tongues in view.

#### 2. The different kinds of spiritual gifts mentioned in the New Testament

**Read** Romans 12:4-8, 1 Corinthians 7:1,7; 12:7-10,28-30; 14:6,26; Ephesians 4:11; 1 Peter 4:10-11.

<sup>165</sup> Greek: εχοντες (participle, present, active) δε χαρισματα κατα την χαριν την δοθεισαν (participle, aorist, passive) ημιν διαφορα, ειτε προφητειαν κατα την αναλογιαν της πιστεως

<sup>166</sup> Greek: χαρισμα

<sup>167</sup> Greek: το μετρον της δωρεας

<sup>168</sup> Greek: χαρισματα ιαματων

<sup>169</sup> Greek: χαρισματα

### ▪ Different spiritual gifts.

The New Testament mentions about 30 different spiritual gifts (spiritual abilities or spiritual functions and sometimes spiritual offices). But there are more. They are: (1) being apostles of Christ (a unique office); (2) being apostles of congregations (as an office); (3) prophets (a unique office); (4) prophecy or prophesying (as an activity); (5) teaching (as an activity); (6) teaching (as the content); (7) teachers (as an office or a function); (8) evangelists (as an office or a function); (9) shepherds or pastors (as an office or a function); (10) service (as an office: deacon or an ability); (11) ability to help; (12) encouragement; (13) contributing to needs; (14) giving; (15) leadership by walking in the front (as an office or a function); (16) leadership by steering from the back (as an office or a function); (17) showing mercy; (18) continence or celibate; (19) speaking words of wisdom; (20) speaking words of knowledge; (21) faith to move mountains; (22) various gifts of healing; (23) various abilities to work miracles; (24) various abilities to discern spirits (what is inspired by the Holy Spirit and what is not); (25) the ability to speak a language (tongue) of man; (26) the ability to speak a language (tongue) of angels; (27) the ability to translate a known language (tongue) or explain the meaning of what is said in that language; (28) the ability to interpret or explain what is said in a language of angels; (29) ability to receive revelations (dreams, visions); (30) ability to write, recite or sing psalms.

### ▪ Different offices.

Note that some of these spiritual gifts are not merely a *spiritual ability*, but a *spiritual function or office*. “Apostles”, “prophets” and “teachers” are *spiritual offices* – their spiritual gift is viewed in relationship to their office.

It is not true that the Church in the earliest period was governed by the Spirit apart from the church offices. In the earliest congregation of the Early Christian Church (the congregation of Jerusalem), the apostles of Jesus Christ also functioned as “elders” (Acts 2:42 and Acts 4:33 in A.D. 30, Acts 8:1 in A.D. 30-34, cf. Acts 11:30 in 46 A.D.). The apostles also functioned as “deacons” (Acts 4:34-35 in A.D. 30). Also in the first congregation among the heathen an apostle functioned as one of the “elders” (1 Peter 5:1 in 62-63 A.D.).

The congregation of Jerusalem also appointed others as “deacons” (Acts 6:3-4 in A.D. 30-34) and sent<sup>170</sup> Barnabas as “an apostle” (i.e. a missionary) to Antioch (Acts 11:19-26 in A.D. 44-46).

The congregation of Antioch had “prophets” and “teachers” (Acts 13:1 in A.D. 47-48). Paul and Barnabas appointed “elders” in each newly established congregation (Acts 14:23 in A.D. 47-48). The congregation in Corinth had “apostles”, “prophets” and “teachers” (1 Corinthians 12:28 in A.D. 56). The congregation in Ephesus had “apostles”, “prophets”, “evangelists”, “pastors” and “teachers” (Ephesians 4:11 in A.D. 60-61). The congregations in Crete had “elders” (Titus 1:5 in A.D. 62-63). The mainly Gentile Christian congregations spread all over Asia Minor had “elders” (1 Peter 5:1-4 in A.D. 62-63)!

It is an institution of God that a congregation should be led by “a council of elders” (Acts 14:23; 1 Timothy 4:14). Thus all other offices as apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers must subject themselves under the council of elders (Acts 20:17,28; 1 Peter 5:1-4)! Also the deacons were chosen by the congregation, but appointed by the apostles as the elders of the Jerusalem congregation (Acts 6:3-6).

### ▪ Different services (tasks).

These lists of the spiritual gifts include *services* or *tasks*, which are performed for the good of the Church, some of them are *ordinary* and others are *extraordinary* in nature. All these services or tasks may be performed by means of a special gift, but that is not at all necessary – they may also be performed without a special gift (cf. “teaching”, Colossians 3:16). Nevertheless, the ability to fulfil the several services or tasks (ordinary and extraordinary) comes from the Spirit. The point Paul makes is not that all these services or tasks require a special gift, but rather that there is a *great diversity* of services or tasks in the world wide Church!

### ▪ The lists of spiritual gifts are not exhaustive.

Some of these lists summarising the spiritual gifts mention the same gifts, but none of these lists intend to be exhaustive. The letter to the Corinthians mentions the spiritual gifts found in the congregation of Corinth at that particular time, while the letter to the Romans mentions the spiritual gifts that should be given a place in the local congregation.

The implication of these different lists is that there are other spiritual gifts, which are not mentioned in these lists. For example, the creative and musical gifts (cf. Exodus 28:3; Exodus 31:1-6; Exodus 35:10,25,35; Exodus 36:1; Psalm 33:2-3; Psalm 45:1; Psalm 78:72).

Moreover, each of the spiritual gifts has a variety of different ministries in which they are manifested. There are different kinds of “teaching”: for example: the gift to teach by means of words (Scripture exposition), drawings or acting. And there are spiritual gifts to teach different groups of people: for example: adults, children and the handicapped. Etc. Each of these gifts of teaching may require certain extraordinary abilities. Moreover, each of these teaching gifts is limited in extent (Ephesians 4:7).

<sup>170</sup> Greek: ἐξαπεστειλαν (indicative, aorist, active)

### 3. The purpose of spiritual gifts

The possession of spiritual gifts does not make a person “better” or “more spiritual”. The Corinthian Christians possessed all the spiritual gifts, both ordinary as well as extraordinary (1 Corinthians 1:7), and yet they remained “carnal”, “unspiritual” (1 Corinthians 3:1). The characteristics of being “spiritual” are: spiritual maturity (1 Corinthians 3:1-4) and the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-24).

The leading principle of the first letter to the Corinthians is that everything one possesses or is allowed to use must be used in such a manner that it is to the glory of God and the well-being of one’s fellowmen. “Everything is permissible – but not everything is beneficial. Everything is permissible – but not everything is constructive. Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others.” (1 Corinthians 10:23-24).

The four distinct purposes of spiritual gifts are:

- to serve one another (1 Peter 4:10-11)
- to build up the Church (1 Corinthians 12:17; 1 Corinthians 14:12)
- to equip Christians for works of service (Ephesians 4:11-13)
- and ultimately to glorify God in all things (1 Peter 4:11)!

To serve one another with one’s spiritual gift is another way to express love to one another! The service or spiritual gift of the one complements that of the other and so the Body of Christ is built up.

### 4. A spiritual gift to each Christian or not

God determines which spiritual gifts and functions he gives and to whom he gives them (1 Corinthians 12:7,11,18,28; 1 Corinthians 14:26; Ephesians 4:7; Hebrews 2:4; 1 Peter 4:10).

However, Christians differ with each other about the question whether each Christian in the world receives a spiritual gift or not. The word “each” or “each one”<sup>171</sup> in the Bible can have universal meaning as well as limited meaning.

#### ▪ The word “each” in the Bible can have universal meaning.

The universal sense of the word means: “every person that has ever lived” (Romans 2:6) or “every person that repents and believes” (Acts 2:38; Romans 12:3; Romans 14:12). Some Christians therefore believe that the word “each” in 1 Corinthians 7:7, 1 Corinthians 12:7, 1 Corinthians 14:26 and 1 Peter 4:10 means that each and every Christian without distinction has received a spiritual gift.

However, when the Bible wants to stress “each single person without exception”, then it does not use the phrase “each”, but the phrase “each one”<sup>172</sup> (Acts 20:31; 1 Thessalonians 2:11).

#### ▪ The word “each” can have limited meaning.

The limited sense of the word means: “every one belonging to a particular group”: every hypocrite (Luke 13:15); everyone in the crowd (John 6:7); or every Christian that had need (Acts 4:35). Therefore the word “each” in 1 Corinthians 7:7, 1 Corinthians 12:7, 1 Corinthians 14:26 and 1 Peter 4:10 is better regarded as limited in the sense of “every Christian in the Body of Christ to whom the Spirit with sovereignty has given an ordinary or special spiritual gift” (1 Corinthians 12:11,28-30). Therefore it is not absolutely necessary that the Holy Spirit gives a spiritual gift in the sense of “a charisma” to “each” Christian in the world! God, his Word and his Church do not constitute a democracy!

**Conclusion.** God does not necessarily give a special spiritual ability or a special spiritual office to “each” Christian that has ever lived, but sees to it that each Christian receives a place and task in the Body of Christ.

Although not every Christian necessarily receives a gift (charisma), every Christian must love! And although not every Christian necessarily receives a specific ministry, every Christian must serve!

### 5. Grace is more wide-spread than spiritual gifts!

Ephesians 4:7 says, “But to each one of us (i.e. to each single Christian) grace (not: “charisma” = a spiritual gift)<sup>173</sup> has *once for all* been given as Christ apportioned it.”<sup>174</sup> By comparing Ephesians 4:7 with Ephesians 4:11 the word “grace”<sup>175</sup> seems to have a wider content than the word “spiritual gift”<sup>176</sup>. Each single Christian in the world receives a special measure of the extraordinary effects of God’s grace (Ephesians 4:7), but not each Christian in the world necessarily receives a spiritual gift (Ephesians 4:11).

Examples of “grace” are: the God-given *undeserved gift* of salvation (Ephesians 2:8-9), a God-given *ability* to lay a spiritual foundation (1 Corinthians 3:10), a God-given *power* to work hard (1 Corinthians 15:10), a God-given

<sup>171</sup> Greek: *εκαστος*

<sup>172</sup> Greek: *εις εκαστος* or *εν εκαστος*

<sup>173</sup> Greek: *χαρις*, not: *χαρισμα*

<sup>174</sup> Greek: *ενι δε εκαστω* ημων εδοθη (indicative, *arist*, passive) *η χαρις* κατα το μετρον τη δωρεας του χριστου

<sup>175</sup> Greek: *χαρις*

<sup>176</sup> Greek: *χαρισμα*

*endurance* to persevere in situations of weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9) or a God-given *task* to do missionary work among the heathen (Galatians 2:9).

But “grace” may also be a God-given spiritual gift (ability or function)( a charisma)(Ephesians 4:11; 1 Peter 4:10-11). Although the word “grace” includes all the spiritual gifts (Ephesians 4:7,11), the lists of spiritual gifts in the Bible do not include all these other examples of God’s grace!

## 6. Love is more important than spiritual gifts!

1 Corinthians 12:31 says, “I will show you the most excellent way” (i.e. more excellent than the greater spiritual gifts or all the spiritual gifts combined! By comparing 1 Corinthians 12:31a with 1 Corinthians 31b Paul shows that practising love is a more excellent way than desiring a spiritual gift. This means that *if a specific spiritual gift is lacking in a particular Christian’s life or even in a particular Christian congregation, love may never be lacking!*

It is however possible to exercise spiritual gifts without love (1 Corinthians 13:1-3)! It is also possible that a particular congregation possesses all the spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 1:7), but still remains very carnal (1 Corinthians 3:1-4)!

Specific spiritual gifts (ordinary or extraordinary)(abilities or functions or offices) of the Holy Spirit is given in a sovereign way to certain individual Christians within the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:11)! But “love” is a gift of the Holy Spirit given to all Christians without exception (Romans 5:5; Titus 3:5-6)

Because spiritual gifts are not given to each Christian, Paul says that the effects of grace and love in a Christian’s life are more important than having specific spiritual gifts.

## B. THE SEEKING, RECEIVING, RECOGNISING AND ASSESSING OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS.

### 1. The seeking of spiritual gifts

In 1 Corinthians chapters 12 to 14, the apostle Paul combats the abuse of the gift of speaking in tongues during the meetings of the congregation at Corinth. He speaks about *what must happen* in the meetings of the congregation at Corinth and at all other congregations. Three things were needed in this congregation: a change of desire, a continual following of love and an emphasis on building others up.

#### ▪ **The Corinthian congregation needed to change their desire to speak in tongues.**

The Corinthian church (1 Corinthians 12:27) valued the gift of speaking in unintelligible tongues very highly, that is, it desired and hoped that the gift of speaking in unintelligible tongues would be given to it abundantly. The apostle Paul says that *this “desire” must be changed*, because it was wrong to put the speaking of unintelligible tongues above the other spiritual gifts.

**Paul refers to some Christians who possess spiritual gifts.** 1 Corinthians 13:1-13 says that all people in the universe must love, but 1 Corinthians 14:2-3 says that only some Christians have received the special gift of prophecy or speaking in tongues. Therefore the conclusion may be warranted that “to pursue” love is a commandment to the entire congregation, whereas “to desire” a special gift is a commandment to those Christians who have received specific spiritual gifts. While all Christians must constantly pursue love, those Christians who possess spiritual gifts must desire to use the gift of intelligible prophecy and not the gift of speaking in unintelligible tongues!

**Paul distinguishes between the possession and the use of spiritual gifts.** Because we must distinguish between the possession of spiritual gifts and the giving utterance to them (1 Corinthians 14:26-33), the commandment “to desire” has special reference, not to *the acquiring and possession* of certain spiritual gifts, but to *the giving utterance or use of* spiritual gifts in the congregation. What 1 Corinthians 12:31a means is that those Christians who have received spiritual gifts in a sovereign way from the Holy Spirit must strive towards the use of the gift of prophecy (intelligible communication) rather than the use of gift of speaking in tongues (unintelligible communication)!

**Paul assigns greater importance to the gift of prophecy.** 1 Corinthians 12:31 says, “Eagerly desire the greater gifts”<sup>177</sup>. Like the Corinthians, Paul makes a distinction in the enumeration of the gifts. However, this distinction must be made in accordance with the standard of God in heaven and not in accordance with the standard of the people of a particular denomination on earth! The word “especially” or “rather”<sup>178</sup> (1 Corinthians 14:1) shows that there is apparently a difference in degree between the spiritual gifts (note the “greater” spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:31).

Twice in his enumeration of the gifts, Paul gave the lowest place to the gift of speaking in tongues. In 1 Corinthians 12:28 Paul assigns the highest place to the “apostles”, “prophets” and “teachers”. In Romans 12:6-7 and in 1 Corinthians 14:1-3 Paul regards the gift of “prophecy” as most important. The Corinthians, to whom the Holy Spirit has given spiritual gifts, must “eagerly desire”<sup>179</sup> to use prophecy, because it speaks clearly and intelligibly to men for

<sup>177</sup> Greek: ζηλουτε δε τα χαρισματα τα μειζονα

<sup>178</sup> Greek: μαλλον δε

<sup>179</sup> Greek: ζηλουτε

their edification, encouragement and comfort (in adversity)<sup>180</sup>. Paul assigns the highest place to prophecy, which indicates that the Corinthian church was wrong in giving the highest place to speaking in tongues.

**Finally, Paul shows them the most excellent way – the way of love!** The context (1 Corinthians 12:28-30 and 1 Corinthians 14:1-3) forbids us to take 1 Corinthians 12:31 as an exhortation aimed at stimulating individual Corinthian Christians to desire earnestly or strive for the possession of one or another (extraordinary or ordinary) spiritual gifts (especially to strive for the possession of the gift of speaking in unintelligible tongues).

Instead, Paul shows them the way of love, which surpasses all the spiritual gifts and exhorts them to pursue the way of love (1 Corinthians 12:31b-14:1)! It is his intention to show very clearly that love surpasses all the spiritual gifts! Love makes people the people of God and teaches them to live to the glory of God and the well being of other people.

- **The Corinthian congregation needed to change their emphasis on striving after spiritual gifts.**

The word “pursue (follow after)”<sup>181</sup> (1 Corinthians 14:1) is much stronger than the word “desire (strive earnestly)”<sup>182</sup> (1 Corinthians 12:31; 1 Corinthians 14:1). “To pursue” emphasises continuity: a *never-ending action*. “To desire” stresses the *intensity* of the action. The most excellent way is always the way of love.

- **The Corinthian congregation needed to change their selfishness.**

**Paul speaks of spiritual gifts, not of spirits.** 1 Corinthians 14:12 literally says, “Since you are zealots of spirits (sic! not: “zealots of spiritual gifts”), strive that you may abound in the edification of the church”.<sup>183</sup>

It is not impossible that the Corinthians attributed each specific (extraordinary) spiritual gift to “a special (non-Christian) spirit”. But Paul helps them to understand that all spiritual gifts come from one and the same Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:4,11). While the Corinthian congregation was striving after (*evil*) spirits, Paul assumes that the Corinthian Christians had received *the Holy Spirit* (1 Corinthians 2:12; 1 Corinthians 12:3) and that the Holy Spirit can give special gifts to their human spirits (1 Corinthians 12:11). While the Corinthian Christians were striving after spirits that caused people to speak in unintelligible tongues which caused confusion and disorder, Paul urged them to desire the gift of prophecy which communicates a message in intelligible words and consequently builds up people.

**Paul speaks of building others instead of oneself up.** While the Corinthians were striving to possess the extraordinary gift of tongues for their own enhancement, Paul exhorts the Christians who possess specific spiritual gifts to strive to abound in the use of those spiritual gifts that build up others in the congregation. Spiritual gifts that build up other people make use of intelligible words and not of unintelligible sounds (1 Corinthians 14:8).

- **The Corinthian congregation needed to strive after the intelligible gifts.**

The following context (1 Corinthians 14:13-19) shows that the Corinthian Christians should have a higher regard for the intelligible gifts that proceed with regularity (e.g. prophecy, preaching) than for the sudden outbursts of unintelligible gifts (e.g. the speaking of tongues).

Paul has in view, not what happened in the congregation of Corinth (because that was not good), but what must happen in the meetings of the congregation of Corinth and of all other congregations.

## 2. The receiving, recognition and assessing of spiritual gifts

- **Receiving spiritual gifts.**

Who determines which spiritual gift someone receives? The Triune God (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit) gives in a sovereign and undeserved gracious way spiritual gifts (abilities), appoints special functions or offices to particular Christians and assigns a place and task to each Christian in the congregation (1 Corinthians 12:11,18,28; Ephesians 4:7; Hebrews 2:4; 1 Peter 4:10). He ultimately determines which spiritual gifts and functions he gives and to whom he gives them. And the Christians, to whom spiritual gifts have been given, are exhorted to eagerly desire to use those spiritual gifts that build up the congregation. God arranges a specific place for each Christian in the Body of Christ.

Although he does not necessarily assign to each Christian *a specific service or ministry*, each and every Christian must *serve!* And although he does not give each and every Christian *a specific spiritual gift*, each and every Christian must *love!*

- **Recognising spiritual gifts.**

How do Christians discover whether God has given them a spiritual gift(s)? It does not matter whether they are ordinary or extraordinary gifts, or whether they are abilities or functions (offices).

<sup>180</sup> Greek: παραμυθια = comfort in distress, discouragement and adversity

<sup>181</sup> Greek: διωκετε (imperative, present, active)

<sup>182</sup> Greek: ζηλουτε (imperative, present, active)

<sup>183</sup> Greek: ουτως και υμεις, επει ζηλωται εστε (indicative, present, active) πνευματων, προς την οικοδομην της εκκλησια ζητειτε (imperative, present, active) ινα περισσευητε (subjunctive, present, active)

**Christians discover their spiritual gift by studying the Bible and by prayer.** Study the Bible and learn what it teaches about specific spiritual gifts, their characteristics and their functions.

**Christians discover their spiritual gift by serving.** Get involved in different kinds of services, like teaching children, leading youth, showing mercy to the helpless, helping the needy, encouraging people with problems, preaching the gospel, making disciples of believers, etc. If God has given you a specific spiritual gift, this *will only begin to be manifested as you serve others in the congregation and in the community*. God does not give spiritual gifts as an ornament to display and to brag about, but as an ability to serve others. A Christian, who does not serve, cannot discover whether God has given him a spiritual gift or not.

**Christians discover their spiritual gifts, not by discovering their aptitude, but by evaluating their actual service.**

A spiritual gift is an ability that provokes you to serve in the area of that gift. It expresses itself in *the desire* to serve in that area. Because **spiritual gifts are inseparable from serving others and building others up**, *the effect* your service(s) has on others is a good indication of your spiritual gift(s). Ask yourself:

- “How do other Christians evaluate my service and endeavours?”
- “What do other people often ask me to do?”
- “What do they say that I can do well?”
- “What do they say that I did that benefited them?”

Then ask yourself:

- “How do I myself evaluate my service?”
- “What do I enjoy doing?”
- “What things do I do well?”
- “What things do I do that build others up?”

#### ▪ **Assessing spiritual gifts.**

**God determines the great diversity.** How should a Christian view himself in the congregation? Among Christians there exist differences which God in his sovereign providence and distributions of his grace has caused to exist. There are differences in “the spiritual gifts”, differences in “the ministries” in the Body of Christ; differences in “the grace which God gives” to each one and differences in “the measure of faith” (1 Corinthians 12:4-7,14-27; Ephesians 4:7; Romans 12:3-6). The will of God takes account of the diversity among Christians and determines the direction of each one’s life.

**Humility is needed.** “Thinking of oneself more highly than he ought”<sup>184</sup> is pride. Pride consists in coveting or exercising a prerogative that does not belong to one. No one is immune to exaggerated self-esteem. A Christian who covets or who claims to possess a higher or another spiritual gift, office or function (task) in the Church than what God has graciously given to him, is engaged in wilful self-exaltation. This is also true of the desire to speak in unintelligible tongues.

“Thinking of oneself with sober judgement”<sup>185</sup> is humility. A Christian should not claim to possess a spiritual gift which he does not have. And he should also not refuse to acknowledge the spiritual gift which God has graciously given to him or to another person. Both exaggerated (blown up) self-esteem and false (pretended) humility are wrong. A Christian should evaluate himself not by measuring himself with his own yardstick, but with the measure of faith God has apportioned to him in a sovereign and gracious way.

**Faith is needed.** “The faith” in Romans 12:3 refers to faith in its ordinary subjective sense, namely, “to trust in” or “to lay hold of” God and God’s promises. However, with the words, “the measure of faith God has measured to each”, Paul is not thinking in terms of *the quantity of faith*, but rather of *the kind of faith*. He is thinking of the various ways in which each Christian is able to be a blessing to other Christians and to the congregation in general by using his particular gift, office or function (task) in combination with his faith. The many different measures of faith reflect the many different ways in which “faith” is to be exercised in view of the diversity of gifts, ministries (tasks) and offices which exist in the Church.

By God’s sovereign grace (Romans 12:6), each Christian receives his “measure of faith”, that is, as a member of Christ’s Body, he receives his place in the Body, he receives either some extraordinary or some ordinary spiritual gift (ability) of the Holy Spirit, he receives one or another task and he receives the corresponding kind of faith by which and within the limits of which he should exercise his spiritual gift, function (office) and task. Faith is not only needed when we become members of the Church. Faith is also needed to perform our different spiritual gifts (abilities), ministries or tasks, and functions (offices) as members of the Church.

**Love is needed.** All spiritual gifts can only be exercised properly *by faith* in Christ as also only *by love* (Corinthians 13).

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<sup>184</sup> Greek: υπερφρονειν

<sup>185</sup> Greek: σωφρονειν

Thus every spiritual gift (ability), function (office) and ministry (task) has its limits:

- as to the type of spiritual gift (1 Corinthians 12:4)
- as to the area in which the spiritual gift should be exercised (1 Corinthians 12:5,18)
- as to the kind of faith needed to exercise the spiritual gift (Romans 12:3,6)
- and as to the manner in which the spiritual gift is exercised (1 Corinthians 12:6-7)

### C. THE USING OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS

#### ▪ **How a Christian uses his spiritual gift for the common good of all other Christians.**

**The spiritual gift of “teaching” as an example.** Let us use the spiritual gift of teaching as an example. All Christians, should be involved in the ordinary ministry of teaching one another, whether they have the spiritual gift of teaching or not (Matthew 28:20; Colossians 3:16). All Christians should teach, but only some Christians have received *the spiritual gift of teaching* (1 Corinthians 12:29).

Those who have received the gift of teaching have the responsibility to use their gift to do three things:

- They should *serve* other Christians by teaching them.
- They should *set an example* for other Christians how to teach.
- they should *equip or train* other Christians how to teach.

In the same way, Christians should use the other spiritual gifts they have received *to serve, to set an example and to equip* other Christians in the area of their spiritual gift.

**The spiritual gift of “giving” as an example.** All Christians should be involved in the ministry of giving, whether they possess the gift of giving or not. They are called to share with God’s people who are in need and they are called to practise hospitality (Romans 12:13). All Christians should give, but only some Christians have received *the spiritual gift of giving*. These Christians should give, set an example in the area of giving and equip others how to give.

**The spiritual gift of “showing mercy” as an example.** All Christians should be involved in the ministry of showing mercy, whether they possess the gift of mercy or not. They are called to be a Good Samaritan and help people in need (Luke 10:37). All Christians should show mercy, but only some Christians have received *the spiritual gift of showing mercy*. These Christians should show mercy, set an example of showing mercy and equip others how to show mercy.

Christians must use the spiritual gifts they have received: to serve, to set a good example and to equip other Christians in the area of their gift.

**The gift of speaking in tongues is an exception.** The Letter to the Corinthians teaches that the speaking in unintelligible tongues is an exception: when a person wants to say something by means of his spirit and does not at the same time say this in intelligible words by means of his mind, he must remain silent during the meetings of the congregation (1 Corinthians 14:28). The speaking in unintelligible tongues is NOT edifying!

Women may not teach during the meetings of the congregation (1 Timothy 2:12), nor prophecy, nor speak in tongues (1 Corinthians 14:34-38).

It is unbiblical to regard the speaking in unintelligible tongues as “a proof of being baptised with the Spirit”! Modern manipulation of Christians to speak in unintelligible tongues is an un-Christian practice!

#### ▪ **Why a Christian needs the service of other Christians.**

Each member of the Body of Christ (the Church) is needed to serve the other members. And each member needs the service of the other members. Romans 12:4-8 teaches which spiritual gifts need to function in the congregation. Serving one another with the extraordinary or ordinary gift(s) of the Holy Spirit is therefore another expression of loving one another! As the hand cannot do without the foot and the foot without the eye, so each member cannot do without the other’s service and abilities. Each member’s service and ability complements that of another. In this way, the Church of Christ is being built up in the best way.

### D. THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT AND THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

The possession and use of the gifts of the Holy Spirit (e.g. the spiritual gifts) does not prove that a person is “mature” or “spiritual”. The Corinthian church possessed all the spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 1:7) and yet the Christian members were “immature” and “carnal”. They were mere infant Christians and behaved child-like (childish) and like non-Christians (1 Corinthians 3:1-4).

The exercise of spiritual gifts without love for other Christians is quite possible, but completely useless in God’s eyes (1 Corinthians 13:1-3)!

The genuine proof that a Christian is living under the control and guidance of the Holy Spirit, is NOT the exercise of the gifts of the Spirit, but IS the manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit. And the fruit of the Holy Spirit is” love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).

Even though the gifts of the Spirit may be lacking in an individual Christian's life or even in a Christian congregation, the fruit of the Spirit, especially love, may never be lacking!

## PART III. EXPANDED EXPLANATION OF THE SPIRITUAL GIFTS

### (1) APOSTLES

The word "apostle" means "one sent with a commission". It is a special function or office (based on a calling) or a special ability (based on a spiritual gift). It is used in two senses in the Bible and these terms are used here to make a practical distinction:

- The word is used in a unique sense of the office of being "one sent out by Jesus Christ with the unique historical task to be the foundation of the worldwide Christian Church". "The apostles of Christ" are the foundation of the historical Church (Efeziërs 2:20) and consisted of the eleven disciples of Jesus Christ on earth (Mark 3:14-19) and Paul (Acts 8:1-31; 1 Corinthians 9:1-2; Galatians 1:1; Galatians 2:8-9). These twelve apostles of Jesus Christ have no successors!<sup>186</sup> There are no more apostles of Christ (but there still are apostles of the churches).
- The word is used in a general sense of the office of being "one sent out by a local church most often with the task to found (plant) a new congregation and build it up. "The apostles of the churches" consist of representatives or missionaries sent out by a local congregation. This is still a function today.

#### 1. The unique sense: the apostles of Jesus Christ.

##### ▪ **Unique.**

The "apostles of Jesus Christ" were a unique group of men. They were unique in history, because they were personally chosen, called, equipped and sent forth by Christ Himself and not by any Christian denomination or organisation (Mark 3:13-19; for Paul: Acts 26:16-20; Romans 1:1; Galatians 1:15). They have no successors!

##### ▪ **Task.**

During the first century A.D. the apostles of Jesus Christ were the instruments of the Lord Jesus Christ:

- To preach the gospel worldwide (Hebrews 2:3; John 15:26-27; Acts 1:2,3,8; for Paul: 1 Corinthians 15:1-2;5-10; Galatians 2:7-9) and to lay the foundation of the worldwide Church (Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:47; Ephesians 2:20; for Paul: 2 Corinthians 11:28). The foundation has been laid and no "new apostles" can add something to that!
- To be the eye- and ear-witnesses of Jesus Christ (John 15:26-27; Acts 1:8), especially of his resurrection (that he lives!) (Luke 1:2; Acts 1:21-22; 1 Corinthians 15:5-7; 2 Peter 1:16-18; for Paul: 1 Corinthians 9:1; 1 Corinthians 15:8-10). There are no more eye- and ear-witnesses of his life on earth, his death on the cross and his resurrection any more!
- To complete God's revelation written in the New Testament (John 14:26; John 16:13-15; 2 Peter 3:2; for Paul: 2 Peter 3:15-16). No "new prophet" or "new apostle" or "new bishop", etc has the authority to add anything to the Bible!

The apostles of Jesus Christ only had these tasks only during the first period of the New Testament Church.

##### ▪ **Gifted.**

The apostles of Jesus Christ were endowed with a special measure of the Holy Spirit, in order to proclaim the truth in *the beginning of the Church History* and to record this truth in *the Bible Books* (John 20:21-22; John 14:26; John 16:7-15; and for Paul: 1 Corinthians 2:1-14).

##### ▪ **Foundational leaders.**

Thus, the apostles of Jesus Christ (including Paul) laid *the foundation* of the historic worldwide Christian Church (Matthew 16:18; Galatians 2:7-9; Ephesians 2:20). Through their ministry the three groups of people mentioned in the Book of Acts (namely, the Jews, the Samaritans and the Gentiles) became a part of God's people (Acts chapters 2, 8 and 10).

##### ▪ **Signs.**

God confirmed the calling of the apostles of Jesus Christ and blessed their work by means of signs and miracles (Mark 16:20; Acts 2:43; Hebrews 2:3-4; and Paul: 2 Corinthians 12:12) and by giving them much fruit on their labours (Acts 2:47). The miraculous signs and wonders helped people to believe the apostolic message (John 4:48).

##### ▪ **Authority.**

The apostles of Jesus Christ were given special authority (Matthew 16:19; Matthew 18:18; John 20:23; and Paul: Galatians 1:6-9)

<sup>186</sup> The so-called "Apostolic Succession" or "succession of the apostleship of Peter" is unbiblical! "Bishop" or "supervisor" (Greek: επισκοπος) in the Bible is the task of an elder and NOT a church office (certainly not above the elders) (Acts 20:17,28; Titus 1:5,7). The word "bishop" only became an office or position above the elders in Church History during the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D.!

- They included or excluded people from God’s kingdom (John 20:23; Acts 6:1-7; Acts 8:18; for Paul: Acts 13:8-12; Galatians 1:6-9)
- They established Christian doctrine and practice through their teaching (Acts 2:42; Acts chapter 15; 2 Peter 3:2; Jude 17; for Paul: 2 Timothy 1:13);
- They commanded Christians to obey and to put their teaching into practice (Acts 16:4; for Paul: Philippians 4:9)
- They appointed the first elders in newly established congregations (Acts 14:23)
- Their task and office were not restricted to a local congregation, but were for the entire world-wide Church and throughout the centuries (Acts 1:8; Acts 26:16-20).

#### ▪ **Position.**

The apostles of Jesus Christ, together with the prophets, form the foundation of the historical Church, consisting of Jewish and Gentile believers (Ephesians 2:14-20; Revelation 21:14). God’s eternal plan, namely to make the Gentiles heirs together with Israel on completely equal terms through the preaching of the gospel, had been revealed to them (Ephesians 3:4-6). The apostles head two of the lists of the spiritual gifts in the Bible (1 Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 4:11). They possess much more than an extraordinary spiritual ability. They are also an extraordinary spiritual function or office in the Church worldwide.

They were limited to “the Twelve” (eleven, without Judas) disciples of Jesus Christ (Mark 3:13-19; Acts 1:13) and the apostle Paul (1 Corinthians 9:1; 1 Corinthians 15:8). Although Matthias was elected by people on earth to fill the place of Judas, there was no official calling of appointment of Matthias from God in heaven (Acts 1:15-26)! The twelve apostles of Christ have no successors, because no one would later qualify according to the requirements for an apostle of Jesus Christ (Acts 1:21-26).

#### ▪ **Unmasking false apostles.**

Christians must test people who claim to be “apostles”, people who and who claim for themselves the same authority as the apostles of Christ (2 Corinthians 11:5,12-15; Revelation 2:2). They must expose those who masquerade as “apostles of Christ”, as false apostles. Christians must distinguish between “the apostles of Jesus Christ” and “the apostles of the churches”.

## 2. The general sense: the apostles of the churches.

#### ▪ **Apostles are delegates.**

The “apostles of the churches”<sup>187</sup> are messengers, delegates or representatives of local churches, sent to accomplish a specific task under the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit (Acts 14:4; 2 Corinthians 8:23; Philippians 2:25; 1 Thessalonians 2:6-7).

#### ▪ **Apostles are missionaries.**

The word “apostle” is used of Barnabas and Paul (Acts 14:4) and again of Paul, Silvanus and Timothy (1 Thessalonians 2:6-7) when they were sent out as missionaries with the special task to plant and build up new churches. They were *called* by Christ or the Holy Spirit, but *sent out* by the local church (Acts 13:1-4). Their activities were exercised throughout the whole Christian Church. Note the missionary-apostle Barnabas in Acts 9:27; Acts 11:22-26,30; Acts 12:25; Acts chapters 13 and 14; Acts 15:12,22; and Acts 15:39. They reported back to the local church that had sent them out (Acts 14:26-28; Acts 18:22-23).

#### ▪ **They must be distinguished from the apostles of Christ.**

The word “apostle” may be applied to present day Christians, who are *sent out* by the local church to accomplish a special task, especially the task of planting and building up other churches. Thus the word may be applied to present day “missionaries”, “church planters” or “church builders”. This spiritual gift may be called “the apostolic gift”, but this term may cause misunderstanding as if the term implied “Apostolic Succession”. Therefore it is better to call this *spiritual gift* “an apostle or representative of a congregation”. Nevertheless, “the apostles of the churches” must be distinguished from “the apostles of Christ”, because the first mentioned are not unique! Note what Christians must do with regard to the “false apostles” (2 Corinthians 11:13; Revelation 2:2).

## 3. The task of all Christians.

While some Christians are called and appointed to the office of missionary or sent-out to plant and build up new congregations (Acts 13:1-4) and other Christians have received the spiritual gift of being a missionary or sent-out one (Ephesians 4:11), all Christians are commanded to be actively involved in the missionary ministry (i.e. making people of all nations into disciples of Jesus Christ). A “disciple” is a follower-learner of Jesus Christ with specific characteristics. He is a mature and functioning Christian. (Matthew 28:18-20).

<sup>187</sup> Greek: αποστολοι εκκλησιων

## (2) REVELATIONS, PROPHETS AND PROPHECY

### The nature of prophecy.

“A revelation”<sup>188</sup> means a new revelation which was given to especially the apostles of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 14:6) and sometimes to a New Testament prophet (1 Corinthians 14:26). These revelations were consequently proclaimed (prophesied) above all in the preaching and teaching of the apostles and sometimes in the prophecies uttered by the New Testament prophets. And these revelations were finally recorded in the New Testament.

“A prophesy”<sup>189</sup> is a proclamation or preaching of what God has revealed. It is speaking by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The word “to prophesy”<sup>190</sup> means “to give utterance to” the things which God has revealed, “to speak out”, “to proclaim”, “to preach”. It is used in three senses in the Bible:

- (1) **Biblical prophecy.** It is used *in the unique sense* of the gift of prophecy of the Old Testament prophets who revealed and recorded God’s Old Testament revelation and the gift of prophecy of the New Testament apostles who revealed and recorded God’s New Testament revelation. This was a spiritual gift and an office during the Old Testament period and the New Testament period.
- (2) **The spiritual gift of prophecy during the early period of the Christian Church.** It is used *in the unique sense* of the gift of prophecy of the New Testament prophets as revealers of God’s intentions in specific circumstances. This was a spiritual gift and an office especially during the early Christian Church period. Only a few of their sayings have been recorded in the Bible.
- (3) **Prophecy as preaching.** It is used *in the general sense* of the gift of prophecy in the sense of preaching (proclaiming) what the Holy Spirit has already revealed in the Bible. This is either an extraordinary or an ordinary gift.

### (A) THE UNIQUE SENSE:

#### THE GIFT OF PROPHECY DURING THE OLD TESTAMENT AND THE NEW TESTAMENT PERIOD. THE OLD TESTAMENT PROPHETS AS REVEALERS OF GOD’S OLD TESTAMENT REVELATION AND THE APOSTLES OF JESUS CHRIST AS THE REVEALERS OF GOD’S NEW TESTAMENT REVELATION.

#### 1. The Old Testament prophets possessed the gift of prophecy.

##### ▪ The nature of the Old Testament prophets.

The Old Testament prophets were unique. Their prophesying was a spiritual gift and an office only during the Old Testament period. They received their words from the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20-21; cf. Numbers 11:17,25), that is, from the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:10-12). They stood as it were in the council meeting of the LORD and heard his words (Jeremiah 23:18). The LORD revealed himself to them in visions and spoke to them in dreams (Numbers 12:6).

The Old Testament prophets revealed the Word of the Lord contained in the Old Testament. The words “Thus says the Lord” (Jeremiah 2:1) are pre-fixed 359 times to individual prophecies in the Old Testament. The Old Testament prophets spoke the very words of God and were therefore the mouthpieces of God, God’s instruments of fresh revelation! All their words were inspired by God and were absolutely authoritative for doctrine and life.

Their proclamations revealed who God was (Isaiah 40:11-31) and what God’s will was in specific spiritual, moral and social matters (Isaiah 1:2-4,10-20). They turned people away from their evil ways back to the LORD (Jeremiah 23:22). Thus, during the Old Testament period, God spoke to people through the prophets (Hebrews 1:1).

The Old Testament prophets were not afraid of the stubborn and rebellious people of Israel (Ezekiel 2:4-7). The Old Testament prophets must be carefully distinguished from the false prophets who spoke visions, dreams and delusions from their own minds and made people forget the Lord (Jeremiah 23:16-29).

##### ▪ The contents of the Old Testament prophecies.

The proclamations of the Old Testament prophets were not simply future predictions that may be interesting to certain individuals today. Their prophecies served:

- to explain the past of God’s plan (God’s history of salvation with respect to the past)(Isaiah 48:3-6a; Jeremiah 2:1-13)
- to throw light on the present of God’s plan (God’s history of salvation with respect to the present)(Isaiah 48:17-18; Jeremiah 23:16-32)
- and to disclose the future of God’s plan (God’s history of salvation with respect to the future) (Isaiah 48:6b-7; Jeremiah 23:2-8; Jeremiah 29:10-11).

<sup>188</sup> Greek: αποκαλυψις

<sup>189</sup> Greek: προφητεια

<sup>190</sup> Greek: προφημι

### ▪ **The audience of the Old Testament prophets.**

The Old Testament prophets in general revealed God's revelation:

- to specific nations: to all the people in Israel, but in some cases to the surrounding nations (Isaiah chapter 13-23; Jeremiah chapter 36-51)
- to specific cities: to Jerusalem and sometimes other cities (2 Chronicles 36:15-16; Isaiah 3:1,8-9)
- to specific groups: the elders and the leaders (Isaiah 3:14,16)
- to specific individuals: king Ahaz (Isaiah 7:3-4; king Hezekiah (Isaiah 38:1)

### ▪ **The warning against false prophets.**

God taught his Old Testament people to put people who claim to be "prophets" to the test. If they prophesied things that did not come out, they were false prophets and the believers should not be afraid of them (Deuteronomy 18:10-22). And if people prophesied things that were against what the Law and the Prophets (i.e. the Old Testament Bible), they were false prophets and believers must not listen to them (Jeremiah 23:9-40).

### ▪ **The culmination of the Old Testament prophets.**

#### The Final Great Prophet in the sense of the Mouthpiece of God.

The Old Testament prophets were "the mouthpieces of God during the Old Testament period". The prophesying of the Old Testament prophets terminated with the first coming of Jesus Christ. After Jesus Christ, no one may pretend to be an Old Testament prophet and say: "Thus says the LORD" anymore, because the Old Testament prophets only prophesied until John the Baptist (Matthew 11:13). Jesus Christ is the Great Prophet with whom the prophets as mouthpieces of God terminated (Acts 3:22-26; Hebrews 1:1-2). There are no longer prophets like the Old Testament prophets!

#### There are no more additions to the Old Testament possible.

The revelations of the Old Testament prophets have been recorded in the Old Testament. The Old Testament Canon" or list of 39 books had been closed after 420 B.C. The Old Testament prophets as mouthpieces of God or revealers of new revelations for all mankind have no successors.

"The apocryphal books"<sup>191</sup> were written during last two centuries before Christ and are thus not a part of the Old Testament Canon!

#### Jesus Christ fulfilled the revelation given in the Old Testament.

The heart of the Old Testament prophecies is "the first coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ" (Deuteronomy 18:15-19). Jesus Christ came to fulfil the Law and the Prophets of the Old Testament revelation (Matthew 5:17; Acts 3:17-24; Acts 10:43; Acts 26:22-23; Romans 10:4; 2 Corinthians 3:14-17; 1 Peter 1:10-11).

Jesus Christ opened the mind of his disciples in order to understand and believe the prophecies in the Old Testament (Luke 24:25-27,44-45). That is why all the prophecies in the Old Testament must be explained in the light of the New Testament revelation!

## **2. The New Testament apostles of Jesus Christ possessed the gift of prophecy**

### ▪ **The apostles of Jesus Christ received the mysteries.**

"A mystery"<sup>192</sup> is a truth which was hidden before, but has now been revealed. The Greatest and Final Prophet, Jesus Christ, has completed his prophesying by means of the proclamations of his apostles! The apostles of Jesus Christ received the ability to understand the mysteries about the Kingdom of God" (Matthew 13:11; Matthew 16:17) among others the mystery that the believers from among the heathen have become heirs on an equal foot with the believers from among Israel (Ephesians 3:3-6).

Jesus Christ said to his apostles, "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of Truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you" (John 16:12-14).

### ▪ **The apostles of Jesus Christ received the revelations.**

"A revelation"<sup>193</sup> is a disclosure or announcement of a mystery or a truth especially by means of a vision (2 Corinthians 12:1; Revelation 1:1,10,12) or a dream (Genesis 28:12-15) that has been given to the Old Testament prophets (Ezekiel 1:1), the New Testament apostles (1 Corinthians 14:6) and the New Testament prophets (1 Corinthians 14:26).

<sup>191</sup> The apocryphal books may not be called "deuterocanonical books" as if these books are part of the Canon of the Bible! The apocryphal books do not belong to the Canon of the Bible! The apocryphal books are the books which the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint) and the Latin translation of the Old Testament (the Vulgate) possess above that of the Hebrew Old Testament (Masoretic text). They have later been added unlawfully to the Old Testament. They are: 1 Esdras, 2 Esdras, Tobit, Judith, Additions to Daniel (the prayer of Azariah, the Song of the three children, Susanna, Bel and the Dragon), six additions to Esther, the Prayer of Manasses, the Epistle of Jeremiah, the Book of Baruch, Ecclesiasticus (the Wisdom of Joshua ben-Sira), the Wisdom of Solomon, 1 Maccabees, 2 Maccabees, 3 Maccabees, 4 Maccabees.

<sup>192</sup> Greek: μυστηριον

<sup>193</sup> Greek: αποκάλυψις

Jesus Christ completed his revelation through his apostles. The Letters of the apostles reminded people of the words spoken by the Old Testament prophets and of the words and commandments of Jesus Christ in the New Testament (2 Peter 3:1-2,15-16).

▪ **The apostles of Jesus Christ wrote Bible Books.**

The apostles of Jesus Christ were the eye-and ear-witnesses of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (John 15:26-27; Acts 1:21-22). They possessed the gift of prophecy and many other qualifications which secures their place above all the other spiritual gifts and offices. The apostles of Jesus Christ and their co-workers (Mark, Luke, James, Jude and the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews) wrote the Books of the New Testament (John 14:26; John 15:26-27; John 16:13-15; John 20:31; 2 Peter 3:1-2,15-16).

▪ **The apostles of Jesus Christ spoke words that have universal and permanent significance.**

The apostles of Jesus Christ received revelations from Jesus Christ that are of fundamental importance to the whole Church during the whole New Testament period from the first coming of Jesus Christ to the second coming of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:3; Galatians 1:11-12,16). They received revelations that are essential for all people at all times about things that must know, believe and do under all circumstances.

▪ **The apostles of Jesus Christ are infallible and authoritative.**

The preaching and teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ and the apostles of Jesus Christ are infallible and authoritative for doctrine and life for all people between the first and second coming of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:42; Acts 16:4; Philippians 4:9; 2 Timothy 1:13). The apostles of Jesus Christ possessed many characteristics that make them the most important of all the spiritual gifts and offices.

**(B) THE UNIQUE SENSE:**

**THE GIFT OF PROPHECY DURING THE EARLY NEW TESTAMENT PERIOD. THE NEW TESTAMENT PROPHETS WERE THE REVEALERS OF GOD'S INTENTIONS IN SPECIFIC CIRCUMSTANCES.**

**1. The Old Testament prophesied the coming of New Testament prophets.**

The prophet Joel (500-400 B.C.) already prophesied the coming of the New Testament period (Joel 2:28-29). "In the last days" the servants of God would prophesy, that is, they would speak about the great deeds of God (Acts 2:11,17).

His prophecy went into fulfilment at the beginning of the New Testament period (Acts 2:11<16-18). The whole New Testament period between the first and the second coming of Christ is called "the last days" (Hebrews 9:26; Hebrews 1:1-2) and began with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost.

The important place occupied by the gift of prophecy in the New Testament Church is indicated by the following:

- the prophecy of Joel was fulfilled at Pentecost in May 30 A.D. and the servants of God began to prophesy (Acts 2:11)
- the prophets are next in rank to apostles in the lists of spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 4:11)
- the New Testament Church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets (Ephesians 2:20)

**2. The function of the New Testament prophets.**

At the beginning of the New Testament period of time, the early Christian Church only possessed the Old Testament Books which recorded the revelations of the Holy Spirit to God's Old Testament people, Israel. It did not yet possess the New Testament Books. Therefore the early Christian Church needed the revelations of the Holy Spirit and the preaching and teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ, of the apostles of Jesus Christ and their co-workers and finally *occasionally* of some New Testament prophets until the recording of the New Testament was completed..

Little by little, over a period of about 55 years from about A.D. 42 to A.D. 97, the early Christian Church came into possession of the New Testament Scriptures which made God's revelations to all the nations known.

The New Testament Scriptures recorded the following:

- the revelations and preaching of Jesus Christ (26-30 A.D.)
- the revelations and preaching of the apostles of Jesus Christ: Matthew (63-66 A.D.), John (70-98 A.D.), Paul (50-64/65 A.D.) and Peter (62-64 A.D.)
- the revelations and preaching of the co-workers of the apostles: Mark (44-46 A.D.) and Luke (60-61 A.D.)
- the revelations and preaching of the two brothers of Jesus: James (before 43 A.D.) and Jude (64-68 A.D.)
- and the revelation and preaching of the unknown writer to the Hebrews (before 64 A.D.).

Although both the apostles of Christ and the New Testament prophets exercised their gifts throughout the Church, we only read a few times about the activity of the New Testament prophets. Precisely in the earliest New Testament period, when the New Testament Books had not yet been completed, the Holy Spirit gave the gift of receiving

revelations and the gift of prophecy to certain people in the early Christian Church, so that they might reveal to people what they had to know or do under certain circumstances. The New Testament prophets Agabus, Judas and Silas belonged to the earliest congregation of Jerusalem (Acts 11:27; Acts 15:22,32-34). The New Testament prophets and teachers Barnabas, Simeon Niger, Lucius, Manaen and Saul (Paul) served in the earliest congregation of Antioch (in Syria)(Acts 13:1). There were probably just a few New Testament prophets in the earliest congregations of Corinth (Greece)(1 Corinthians 14:29-33) and of Ephesus (Turkey) (Ephesians 4:11).

### 3. The purpose of the New Testament prophets.

The New Testament prophets stand in the second place in the list of spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 4:11). Together with the apostles of Jesus Christ they form “the historical foundation of the New Testament Church” (Ephesians 2:20)<sup>194</sup> and revealed together with the apostles of Jesus Christ God’s mystery concerning the believers coming from the Gentiles nations. What was unknown during the Old Testament period was made known, namely, that God would make the Gentile Christians heirs *on an equal footing with the Jewish Christians* (Ephesians 3:5)!

The New Testament prophets also spoke to people for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort (1 Corinthians 14:3; Acts 15:30-32) and for their warning (1 Corinthians 14:8; Acts 11:27-28; Acts 21:10-11). Thus, perhaps “prophecy” *primarily* means “speaking with a view to edify, exhort and console” (1 Corinthians 14:3) and not primarily “speaking new revelations” (Acts 13:1-4).

While the 27 Bible Books of the apostles of Jesus Christ and their co-workers have been recorded, only a few prophecies of the New Testament prophets has been recorded (Acts 11:28; Acts 13:2; Acts 21:11). This proves that the New Testament prophets did not receive the same kind of revelations as the apostles of Christ received.

The Canon of 39 Old Testament Bible books remained closed from the last prophet Malachi in 420 B.C. onwards. Prophesying during the Old Testament period stopped with the addition of Daniel 7-12 to Daniel 1-6 in about 150 B.C. and finally with the message of John the Baptist (Matthew 11:13).

The Canon of the 27 New Testament Bible books remained closed from the last apostle John in about 97 A.D. onwards. After this the necessity for prophecy ceased! The foundation of the New Testament Church had been laid (Ephesians 2:20) and the Canon of the whole Bible had been completed! No more prophecies were added to the Bible. Prophecy as proclaiming and recording the revelation of God in the Bible to all people has been completed and closed. 1 Corinthians 13:8 went into fulfilment: “Prophecies will *surely* cease *with absolute certainty*” (1 Corinthians 13:8)<sup>195</sup>

### 4. Example of the New Testament prophets in the congregation of Jerusalem.

When the writing of the New Testament was not yet completed (cf. John 14:26; John 16:13-15; 1 Corinthians 15:1-4; 2 Peter 3:1-2,15-16; 1 John 5:13; Revelation 1:1) Jesus Christ made use of his apostles as his eye- and ear-witnesses to complete God’s revelation of the truth. In the early Church he occasionally made use of New Testament prophets to reveal to Christians what they needed to know or do in certain circumstances. The Holy Spirit revealed this to them and the prophets made it known by prophesying.

#### ▪ **A prophecy about a great famine (Acts 11:27-30)(44-46 A.D.).**

Several prophets travelled from Jerusalem in Judea to Antioch in Syria. One of them, named Agabus, predicted that a great famine would come over the whole Roman Empire. And this really happened. Nevertheless, *the congregation in Antioch and the Christians separately had to carefully weigh, evaluate and decide what the Holy Spirit wanted them to do about this famine* – whether to help the people affected or not. In this case they decided to help their suffering brothers in Judea according to their means.

#### ▪ **Prophets encouraged and strengthened Christians (Acts 15:22,32-34)(50 A.D.).**

Judas and Silas (Silvanus) were New Testament prophets in the congregation of Jerusalem who encouraged and strengthened other Christians.

#### ▪ **A prophecy about imprisonment and suffering (Acts 21:10-14)(57 A.D.).**

The Holy Spirit clearly led the apostle Paul to go to Jerusalem and complete his assigned task (Acts 20:22-24). Several times in different cities the Holy Spirit warned the apostle Paul that he would be arrested and suffer hardship in Jerusalem. Moved by the Holy Spirit, the disciples at Tyre urged the apostle Paul not to go to Jerusalem (Acts 21:4-5). Finally, a New Testament prophet, Agabus, travelled from Jerusalem to Caesarea and moved by the Holy Spirit predicted that the Jews would arrest Paul and hand him over to the Gentiles (the Romans). Even Paul’s own co-workers and the disciples at Caesarea urged Paul not to go to Jerusalem (Acts 21:10-14).

These examples in the Bible clearly show that what these New Testament prophets said was a revelation from the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, it was *not a command* of the Lord telling the receiver what he must do. These examples in the Bible show that the revelations via the New Testament prophets were not necessarily commands of God what to do. The receiver of the prophecy remains responsible for the decision he makes after he had heard the prophecy. The apostle

<sup>194</sup> The spiritual foundation of the Church is only Jesus Christ (Isaiah 28:16; 1 Corinthians 3:11).

<sup>195</sup> Greek: *παύσονται* (indicative, future, middle). The future tense expresses absolute certainty!

Paul had to carefully weigh, evaluate these predictions and make his own decision what the Holy Spirit would want him to do about this future event. Paul remained responsible for whatever decision he made after hearing the prophecy. Paul knew that he would be arrested and suffer for the cause of Christ (Acts 9:15-16), but he was nevertheless willing to die for the cause of Jesus Christ (Acts 21:13). Finally, his co-workers and the other disciples were resigned that this was God's will for Paul and so they travelled with him to Jerusalem (Acts 21:14).

## 5. Example of the New Testament prophets in the congregation of Antioch.

### ▪ **Men with the gift of prophecy and the gift of teaching (Acts 13:1-4)(47 A.D.).**

The “prophets and teachers” at Antioch were mentioned by name and Barnabas and Paul was among them. The word “prophet” and “teacher” indicate that they had authority to preach and teach God's Word and here that they revealed to the congregation what God wanted them to know and do.

### ▪ **A prophecy about setting certain persons apart for a special task.**

How the Holy Spirit spoke to them is not mentioned. But the congregation had “to *once for all* set apart”<sup>196</sup> or “release” Barnabas and Paul from their present ordinary responsibilities of preaching and teaching in the local congregation of Antioch in order to dedicate themselves to the new responsibility to which the Holy Spirit had called<sup>197</sup> them. The perfect tense emphasises that God had made this decision long before he revealed it to these prophets!

Although this revelation was a direct command of the Lord, the congregation was still responsible to carefully weigh, evaluate and decide whether this revelation given to the New Testament prophets was in full agreement with the whole revelation in the Bible. This was so, because Jesus Christ had called Paul many years before to be his apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9:5-6,15; Acts 26:15-20). *The inward call* of the Holy Spirit in Paul's heart was now confirmed by *the outward call* of the local congregation of Antioch with respect to Paul.

This passage does not describe “the church blessing a particular ministry”. It does not describe “the ordination to a church office” or “the elevation of someone to the office of an apostle”! This was not the description of the reception of a new position or office, but the description of a call to a very specific task, namely the task of conducting missionary work abroad. With this calling Barnabas and Paul began their first missionary journey (47-48 A.D.).

## 6. Example of the New Testament prophets in the congregation of Corinth.

The New Testament prophets were Christians to whom the Holy Spirit had given the spiritual gift of prophecy. “Prophecy” (1 Corinthians 12:10a,28a,29a; 1 Corinthians 14:1,3,8) is that gift of the Spirit whereby that which believers need to know and do at a certain moment is revealed to them and is uttered by them. Like every other spiritual gift, the gift of prophecy is not given to each and every Christian (1 Corinthians 12:29-30).

Perhaps “New Testament prophecy” primarily means “words of edification, exhortation and consolation” (1 Corinthians 14:3,12; Acts 15:28-32) and not primarily “words containing a new revelation” (Acts 13:1-4). That is why it is understandable why this ability could be postponed (1 Corinthians 14:30) or could be repeated several times at several different places (Acts 15:28-32).

In his First Letter to the Corinthians the apostle Paul combats the wrong estimation and the wrong use of the gift of tongues in the Corinthian church and speaks about the proper use of the spiritual gifts. He battles on two fronts: he warns against an overestimation of the gift of tongues, but must also assign the gift of tongues to its rightful place. So he acknowledges tongues as a gift, but immediately places prophecy above it.

He deals with hypothetical cases in the meetings of the congregation in order to show why the gift of prophecy has greater value than the gift of speaking in tongues. Paul speaks about the uselessness of speaking in tongues in the meetings of the congregation as was done in Corinth (1 Corinthians 14:1-19). He issues a general admonition concerning the motives that should lead the Corinthians to speak in tongues or refrain from doing so (1 Corinthians 14:20-21). In the light of a quotation from the Old Testament he sets forth the distinction between the gift of tongues and the gift of prophecy (1 Corinthians 14:22-25).

### ▪ **Love is always more important than the exercise of spiritual gifts and the gift of prophecy is more important than the gift of tongues (1 Corinthians 14:1-5).**

14:1. The biblical order of importance of spiritual gifts for every Christian is: first prophesying and last speaking in tongues. Paul places the gift of prophecy near the top of the list of spiritual gifts (Romans 12:6; 1 Corinthians 14:1; Ephesians 4:11; 1 Peter 4:11), but places the gift of tongues at the bottom of the list (1 Corinthians 12:10,30)!

14:2. Paul clearly refers to those Christians who are *accustomed to* speak in unintelligible tongues. They edify no one, because they themselves and other people do not understand what they are saying!

14:3. But those Christians who are *accustomed to* prophesy (preach) in intelligible words edify, encourage and comfort everyone present.

<sup>196</sup> Greek: ἀφορμισατε (imperative, aorist, active)

<sup>197</sup> Greek: προσκεκλημαι (indicative, perfect, passive)

14:4. Those Christians who speak unintelligible words in tongues edify themselves, not because they understand what they are saying, but because they are assured that they also possess the Holy Spirit.

14:5. Paul desires a different situation for the Christians in the congregation at Corinth, namely, that they would all be able to express with intelligible words by means of their minds what they wanted to say by means of their human spirit. But because this did not happen in the congregation of Corinth, Paul desires that they would all at all times prophesy. The gift of prophecy is of greater value than the gift of tongues, because it is not only an indication for the possessor that the Holy Spirit is present, but at the same time edifies the whole congregation!

▪ **Genuine communication is very important in the meetings of the congregation (the conclusion) (1 Corinthians 14:6-11).**

14:6. Paul employs *hypothetical examples* in his attempt to show the much greater value of the gift of prophecy than the gift of tongues.

The first hypothetical example. If Paul would only speak in unintelligible tongues to the Corinthians, it would not benefit anyone. They would only receive benefit when he speak to them a revelation, or knowledge or prophecy or a word of instruction in clear intelligible words! The utterance of merely unintelligible sounds in tongues would benefit no one!

14:7-9. Music instruments must play a tune in order to be appreciated. A trumpet must sound a clear call in order to make people ready for battle. Likewise, a speaker must use intelligible words in order to be understood. Otherwise he would simply speak into the air.

14:10-11. Every existing language in the world has meaning. But if the meaning is not grasped, the speaker and listener would remain complete strangers to one another. In a normal conversation there must always be one who speaks and one who understands what is said. Both of them must get the drift of what is said or the conversation would be impossible. This means that *sounds* by themselves are insufficient. *In order to be sufficient, sounds must communicate meaning.* Likewise, the sounds of a tongue will remain insufficient, unless it conveys a revelation, knowledge, a prophecy or a word of instruction in intelligible words.

▪ **Christians may only use spiritual gifts when what they communicate is intelligible and thus edifies other people present (the application) (1 Corinthians 14:12-17).**

14:12. There were people in the congregation at Corinth who pushed for spirits (not: spiritual gifts)! Thus, non-Christian spirits were operating during the meetings of the congregation that enabled people to speak in strange tongues and this caused great confusion in the congregation! There were also spirits (demons) that spread lies (1 John 4:1)! Paul commanded the Christians to continually strive to excel in spiritual gifts that edify the Church.

14:13. Paul commands those Christians who are accustomed to speak in unintelligible tongues in the congregation to pray that they may be able to say what they want to say with their human spirit by means of intelligible words of the mind. He does not teach any Christian to pray to receive a particular spiritual gift!

14:14. The second hypothetical example. If Paul or anyone else would pray with his spirit in unintelligible sounds, he would switch off his mind! Because no one is edified by his speaking in unintelligible tongues, he would show a lack of love, because Jesus Christ commanded, "Love the Lord your God with all your mind (Mark 12:30).

14:15-17. But if Paul or anyone else would pray, sing, praise, thank or speak what he wants to say with his spirit by means of intelligible words of his mind, everyone present (whether non-member or member) would understand what is said, would be edified, would experience being loved and could consequently say "Amen"!

Conclusion. During the meetings in the congregation people are not allowed to speak in tongues if it is done by means of unintelligible sounds or words of the spirit only, because the majority of members who do not have the gift of interpretation and the non-members present would not understand what the speaker is saying. They would not be edified in their faith. In the meetings of the congregation the person accustomed to speak in tongues must express what he wants to say in his spirit by means of intelligible words of his mind, so that everyone present may understand and be edified! He is exhorted to pray that in the future his speaking in tongues will operate not only through his spirit, but simultaneously through his understanding. He must pray that his speaking, praying, singing, praising and thanking in tongues is expressed, not by unintelligible sounds, but only by intelligible words! There must be a clear communication of the message!

This is not the same as praying for the gift of interpretation *after* the speaking in tongues! The Christian speaking by means of his mind is not less inspired than the Christian speaking by means of his spirit. The only difference is that the first person communicates and edifies (i.e. he loves), while the second person does not do so!

▪ **Christians ought to follow the example of the apostle Paul in the matter of expressing spiritual gifts (the recommendation) (1 Corinthians 14:18-19).**

14:18. Although Paul says that he speaks with the full force of his inspired human spirit in more languages than the Christians in Corinth, he nevertheless never makes use of this ability in any meeting of the congregation! He never speaks with his spirit without at the same time expressing what his spirit wants to say in intelligible words of his mind! He *always* speaks (prays, sings, praises, thanks) with his whole inspired spirit (heart) by means of clearly intelligible words of his inspired mind (verse 15)!

14:19. “In the congregation” where people meet together to be edified Paul says that he rather speaks only five intelligible words with his mind in Aramaic or Greek than thousand unintelligible sounds with his spirit in an unintelligible language or tongue. There is no evidence that Paul ever spoke in unintelligible tongues in any meeting of any congregation! Nevertheless, there is much evidence that Paul spoke greatly inspired messages during meetings of people!

▪ **Christians must become adults in their thinking (the commands) (1 Corinthians 14:20; cf. 1 Corinthians 13:9-11).**

14:20. Because the Christians in Corinth laid all emphasis on the speaking of unintelligible tongues, they behaved like immature children who produce strange and unintelligible sounds which no one can understand. Children look towards outward things and like to brag about their childish behaviour. Likewise the Christians in Corinth regarded the production of unintelligible sounds as something of the greatest importance and bragged about their ability. They even looked down upon Christians who did not speak in tongues. Paul commands them to stop their immature (childish) behaviour and behave like mature adults instead!

▪ **Not unintelligible tongues, but intelligible prophecy (preaching) in the meetings of the congregation will change the hearers (the contrast) (1 Corinthians 14:21-25).**

14:21. In the Old Testament period the prophet Isaiah prophesied that God would speak to the unbelieving Israelites by means of laughable sounds and “men of other tongues and other lips” (e.g. the Assyrians).<sup>198</sup> He also predicted that the Israelites would nevertheless not listen to this speaking in tongues (Isaiah 28:10-12)! The Old Testament revelation already proved that the use of unintelligible tongues did not bring people to God! In exactly the same way the New Testament revelation teaches that the speaking in unintelligible tongues would repel non-members and unbelievers (1 Corinthians 14:21-23)!

14:22. The speaking in unintelligible sounds of tongues during the meetings of the congregation is *a sign for unbelievers that repels interested inquirers (non-members) and unbelievers present!* But prophesying in intelligible words during the meetings of the congregation is *a sign for believers that attracts*, because it assures the believers that the Holy Spirit dwells in them (cf. 1 Corinthians 2:12; 1 Corinthians 3:16; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20; 1 Corinthians 12:3).

14:23. The third hypothetical example. The speaking in unintelligible tongues during the meetings of the congregation would cause inquirers and non-believers to say that the Christians are mad.

14:24-25. But prophesying in intelligible words during the meetings of the congregation would touch their hearts and convince (convict) them of their sins and cause them to turn to God (cf. Romans 10:14-17).

▪ **The rules to which Christians speaking in tongues or prophecy must at all times be subject (1 Corinthians 14:26-40; Romans 12:6).**

14:26-40. The apostle Paul gives eight very clear rules for the conduct of Christians at all times during the meetings of the congregation. See the explanation in the exposition of 1 Corinthians chapter 14 above.

- **Rule 1:** Every use of a spiritual gift (a charisma) during any meeting of the congregation must at all times be for edification (1 Corinthians 14:26).
- **Rule 2:** Every use of a spiritual gift during any meeting of the congregation must be limited to a maximum of three people (1 Corinthians 14:27,29).
- **Rule 3:** Every use of a spiritual gift during any meeting of the congregation must be in turn, never all at the same time (1 Corinthians 14:27,29)!
- **Rule 4:** Every use of a spiritual gift that does not communicate with intelligible words must at all times be forbidden (1 Corinthians 14:28)!
- **Rule 5:** All prophets and their prophecies must at all times be tested (1 Corinthians 14:29).
- **Rule 6:** All prophets (preachers) must stop speaking as soon as the Holy Spirit moves another prophet to speak (1 Corinthians 14:30-32a).
- **Rule 7:** Women may not speak in tongues or prophecy (preach) during the meetings of the congregation (1 Corinthians 14:33b-40).
- **Rule 8:** Every use of the gift of prophecy must be in accordance with the speaker’s faith (Romans 12:6).

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<sup>198</sup> Hebrew in verse 10 and 13: “sav lasav sav lasav, kav lakav kav lakav” (meaningless sounds, perhaps what Assyrian sounds like or a mimicking of the prophet’s words).

## 7. Teaching about the New Testament prophets in the Church of Jesus Christ.

### ▪ Ephesians 3:2-6.

The letter to the Ephesians was a circular letter and was written in 60 A.D. God's eternal plan with regard to the relationship between the believers coming from the Gentile nations and the believers coming from the nation of Israel had been revealed to the apostles of Christ and to the New Testament prophets.

God's plan was to abolish the Old Testament theocracy of Israel and replace it with the New Testament theocracy (e.g. the kingdom of God) at the first coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. This New Testament Kingdom of God would become visible in the New Testament Church (the Body of Christ). In this New Testament Church, the believers coming from the non-Jewish nations would be heirs of God's inheritance to his people together with the believers coming from the Jewish nation on a complete equal footing (Matthew 8:10-12; Matthew 21:42-44; Galatians 3:28-29; Romans 10:12; Ephesians 2:11-22; 1 Peter 2:4-10).

This "mystery" was formerly hidden from Israel, but was revealed to the apostles of Jesus Christ and the New Testament prophets. They proclaimed this good news to the Gentiles (Ephesians 2:11 to 3:13) and also to the Jews. Therefore the Jews became hostile against the Christians (Acts 13:42-52). Thus the apostles of Jesus Christ and the New Testament prophets were called "the foundation of the New Testament Church" (Ephesians 2:20)<sup>199</sup>.

## 8. The importance of the New Testament prophets.

The gift of prophecy had an important place in the early New Testament Church.

### ▪ The New Testament prophets in the list of spiritual gifts.

In the list of New Testament spiritual gifts and offices the gift of prophets followed the gift of apostles (Romans 12:6; 1 Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 4:11).

### ▪ The New Testament prophets as part of the foundation of the New Testament Church.

The New Testament Church has been built on "the foundation of the apostles and prophets" (Ephesians 2:20). This may be a reference to the Old Testament prophets, but then they would have been mentioned first. They are more likely a reference to the New Testament prophets and the place of prophecy in the early New Testament Church.

## 9. The difference between the Old Testament prophets, the New Testament prophets and the apostles of Christ.

### ▪ The Old Testament prophets as the mouthpieces of God have been terminated.

The Old Testament prophets in the sense of "the Old Testament mouthpieces of God" or as "the people who revealed God's revelations during the Old Testament period" were definitely terminated at the beginning of the New Testament with the coming of John the Baptist and Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "For all the Prophets and the Law *once for all in the past* prophesied<sup>200</sup> until John" (Matthew 11:13). The Old Testament Canon of 39 Books had been completed by 420 B.C. with the exception of Daniel chapters 7 to 12 which were added to Daniel 1 to 6 in about 150 B.C. (the period of Antiochus Epiphanes).

### ▪ The New Testament prophets functioned when there was no New Testament yet.

At the beginning of the New Testament period the early Church only possessed the Old Testament revelation and not yet the New Testament revelation. That is why the early Church needed the apostles of Jesus Christ and some New Testament prophets until the recording of the New Testament was completed.

### ▪ The New Testament prophets were not apostles of Jesus Christ.

The apostles and not the New Testament prophets were chosen to be the witnesses of Jesus Christ. The apostles of Jesus Christ were the eye- and ear-witnesses of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (John 15:16,26-27; Acts 1:21-22). They possessed the gift of prophecy (1 Corinthians 14:19) many other qualifications, which gave them pre-eminence among all the spiritual gifts and functions (offices).

But the New Testament prophets were not apostles of Jesus Christ. They sometimes received temporary revelations from God about what God wanted a person or a congregation to know and to do.

### The New Testament prophets did not write any Bible Book.

The apostles of Jesus Christ and their co-workers wrote the New Testament Books. They were the instruments of Jesus Christ that received and recorded the greatest part of the New Testament revelation (John 14:26; John 15:26-27; John 16:13-15; John 20:31).

<sup>199</sup> Remember that God's people during the Old Testament period (the believers in Israel) was not terminated or replaced by the Church, but was continued and enlarged to include the believers from the Gentile nations (John 10:16; Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:11)! Like God's New Testament people God's Old Testament people was called "the Church" (Greek: ekklesia)(Psalm 107:32)!

<sup>200</sup> Greek: ἐπροφητεύσαν (indicative, aorist, active)

But the New Testament prophets did not write a single Book of the Bible. Only a few of their prophecies has been recorded in the New Testament (Acts 11:28; Acts 13:2; Acts 21:11). This proves that the New Testament prophets did not receive the same kind of revelations as the apostles of Jesus Christ.

▪ **The New Testament prophets did not speak words of universal and permanent importance.**

The apostles of Jesus Christ received revelations which are of fundamental importance to the whole Church throughout the whole New Testament period from the first coming of Christ to even after the second coming of Christ (Johannes 16:13-15; 1 Corinthians 15:3; Galatians 1:11-12,16). They received revelations which are essential for all people and for all time and about things people had to know, believe and do under all circumstances.

But the New Testament prophets did not receive new revelations in the sense of the prophecies of the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament apostles. They received revelations which were significant only to specific people during a very short period of time (Acts 11:27-28; Acts 13:1-4; Acts 21:10-11). They received limited revelations about events certain people had to know or do under special circumstances within the early Church. They usually spoke to edify, encourage and comfort people (1 Corinthians 14:3; Acts 15:30-32) or words that gave warning (1 Corinthians 14:8; Acts 11:27-28; Acts 21:10-11).

▪ **The New Testament prophets had to be tested.**

The preaching and teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ and his apostles are infallible and authoritative for the doctrine and life of people during the whole New Testament period from the first to the second coming of Christ (Acts 2:42; Acts 16:4; Philippians 4:9; 2 Timothy 1:13). The apostles of Jesus Christ possessed many characteristics that gave them the precedence above all the spiritual gifts and offices.

But all the utterances of the New Testament prophets had to be tested and weighed even by the ordinary Christians in the congregation (1 Corinthians 14:29-33).

## **10. The termination of biblical prophets as the mouthpieces of God.**

The Old Testament prophets were “the mouthpieces of God” during the Old Testament period (Hebrews 1:1-2). The New Testament prophets, their prophesying and their prophecies fulfilled a necessary function during the early Christian Church period. The New Testament prophets take the second place in the lists of spiritual gifts, because together with the apostles of Christ, they form *the foundation of the historical Christian Church*. As such, they proclaimed God’s plan to establish the Christian Church, in which the Gentiles and the Jews would be placed on a footing of perfect equality, something the Jews had never expected.

Because the foundation of the Christian Church has already been laid and the Canon of 66 books in the Bible has been closed, *the foundation of the Christian Church cannot be laid again!* There are no longer prophets like the Old Testament prophets, because God’s revelation of himself and of his plan, which was begun by the Old Testament prophets, has been completed in the preaching and teaching of Jesus Christ (John 1:18; Hebrews 1:1-2) and of the apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ (John 16:13-15).

Prophesying in the sense of the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament apostles has “ceased”. “In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways. But in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son” (Hebrews 1:1-2). Also prophesying in the sense of the New Testament prophets has “ceased”. “Prophecies will *certainly* cease”<sup>201</sup> (1 Corinthians 13:8).

Christ warns not to add more prophecies to the Bible (cf. Revelation 22:18-19). We may not expect that new so-called “apostles” or “prophets” will arise and claim that they are equal to the prophets in the Bible or the apostles of Jesus Christ or claim that their prophecies are equal to what has been recorded in the Bible.

## **11. The third century attempt to blow new life into prophets and prophesying.**

As soon as the Canon of 66 books in the Bible had been completed by the end of the first century A.D., the New Testament prophets and their significance ceased to exist (cf. 1 Corinthians 13:8).

But about one century later (200 A.D.) the Montanist movement with their prophesying tried to blow new life artificially into the Church. Nevertheless the movement died soon until it was once more revived in recent times<sup>202</sup>.

## **12. The utterances of post-biblical prophets may never be added to the Bible.**

Jesus Christ has forbidden any addition or subtraction from his revelation like those in the last Bible Book (Revelation 22:18-19). Besides the Bible there are no more “words of God”! We should not expect that genuine new “apostles” or

<sup>201</sup> Greek: *παύσονται* (indicative, future, middle)

<sup>202</sup> Muhammad (founder of Islam) proclaimed in about 627 in Medina that he was the last prophet (“the seal of the prophets”) (Sura 33:40). Joseph Smith (founder of Mormonism) wrote after 1920, “No salvation without accepting Joseph Smith ... If Joseph Smith was verily a prophet, and if he told the truth ... then this knowledge is of the most vital importance to the entire world. No man can reject that testimony without incurring the most dreadful consequences, for he can not enter the Kingdom of God.” (Doctrines of Salvation, pp 189-190).

“prophets” would arise who would claim that they are equal to the Old Testament prophets or New Testament apostles and that their utterances have the same authority and infallibility as that of the Old Testament prophets and New Testament apostles!

However, false apostles and false prophets already arose during the writing of the New Testament (2 Corinthians 11:1-15; Revelation 2:2; 2 Peter 2:1-22). And such false apostles and false prophets will continue to arise right up to the second coming of Jesus Christ (Matthew 24:11)!

Therefore, the utterances of post-biblical prophets may definitely not be added to the Bible as the infallible Word of God! Neither is any religious book of any other religion or cult a continuation or even a correction and replacement of the revelation of God in the Bible, as some false religions and cults are claiming today.

### **13. The warning against false prophets.**

Other religions and cults also claim to have “a prophet”. The apostle Paul warned against people who “preach a *Jesus other than the Jesus we preached*” (i.e. the Jesus as he is revealed in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John)<sup>203</sup>.

Christians must refuse to “receive a *different spirit* (e.g. an evil spirit) from the one they received” (e.g. the Holy Spirit). Christians must not “accept a *different gospel* from the one they accepted” (2 Corinthians 11:4; Galatians 1:6-9). Paul is referring to the lies which religions and cults spread about Jesus Christ in their holy books and preaching. Such people “are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness (John 8:44). False prophets are known by the fruit they bear: in their personal life, in their marriage and in their relationships to others (Matthew 7:15-20). Their end will be what their actions deserve” (2 Corinthians 11:13-15; Romans 2:5-6).

Therefore all people who claim to be “prophets” (preachers) or “apostles” (missionaries) (cf. Ephesians 4:7,11) and their proclamations must be tested to determine whether they have been spoken on the authority of the God of the Bible or of some other source (1 John 4:1).

God’s people are even forbidden to listen to the words of false prophets and false apostles. God is against the false prophets and against everyone listening to their words (Deuteronomy 18:20-22; Jeremiah 23:16-40).

### **(C) THE GENERAL SENSE:**

#### **THE GIFT OF PROPHECY TODAY IS TO SPEAK FORTH OR PROCLAIM WITH THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT WHAT GOD HAS ALREADY REVEALED IN THE BIBLE.**

**Summary.** “Prophecy” (Romans 12:7) is a special ability or a special function (office) to proclaim the biblical truth to build up (strengthen, encourage, comfort) Christians (1 Corinthians 14:3; Acts 15:32) and to build up congregations (by equipping Christians for their works of service) (Ephesians 4:12). Christians with this spiritual gift openly proclaim God’s Word which has already been revealed in the Bible in a very persuasive way, with intelligible words (1 Corinthians 14:8) and with power (Acts 6:10; 1 Thessalonians 1:5). This is the general meaning of the word “prophecy”.

“Prophesying” in our time may also consist of speaking revelations with respect to the thoughts, motives, attitudes, words and deeds of people that were previously hidden. The words (preaching, teaching, sharing, advising) of Christians with the gift of prophecy is used by the Holy Spirit to reveal things in lives, to call a non-Christian to repent, or to urge a Christian to change something in his life. The effect of prophecy is that someone’s sins are irrefutably exposed (1 Corinthians 14:24-25). Someone’s specific sin may be exposed in the midst of the meeting of the congregation (Acts 5:3-4). Or he comes to acknowledge his sin and lost condition without exposing this in the meeting of the congregation (Acts 2:37; cf. John 16:8)!

The word “prophesying” generally means “to proclaim (preach)” in words inspired by the Holy Spirit what God has already revealed in the past in the proclamation of the Old Testament prophets, Jesus Christ and the New Testament apostles and their co-workers, e.g. what is written in the Bible. In the present day “prophesying” is usually an ordinary spiritual gift and seldom an extraordinary spiritual gift as existed when the Bible came into being.

<sup>203</sup> “A different Jesus” is preached in the following books:

- the gospel of Thomas (2nd century A.D., about the infancy of Jesus)
- the gospel of Judas (late 2nd century A.D., a Gnostic gospel)
- the Qur’an (first Sura recorded in 609 n.C., the present recension was established in 652 A.D. when the third caliph (Othman) ordered the destruction of all alternative readings of the Qur’an)
- the gospel of Barnabas (14th century A.D., an Islamic forgery of a gospel)
- the Book of Mormon (from the first version written by Joseph Smith in 1830 until the modern version it has undergone 3000 changes!)
- the books of the Jehovah Witnesses (founder Russell lived from 1852-1916)
- the books of modern liberal theologians

## 1. The ordinary gift of prophecy. The word “prophesying” means to utter, proclaim, preach what God has already revealed in the 66 books of the Bible.

### ▪ The word “to prophesy”.

In so far the gift of prophecy (i.e. the ability to proclaim or preach)<sup>204</sup> continues in congregations in our day, she does not bring new revelations from God about God’s will for all Christians, but consists of the proclamation of the revelation that already exists within the Bible (Revelation 19:10)!

“To prophesy” literally means “to speak forth”, “to proclaim” or “to preach”. The Old Testament warns against so-called prophets who speak visions from their own minds and not from the mouth of God (Jeremiah 23:16-32)!

The New Testament warns against the many false prophets (Matthew 24:24). Real prophecy is proclaiming Jesus Christ and the contents of the Bible! That is what Christian should proclaim! Christians may not go beyond what is written in the Bible (1 Corinthians 4:6; cf. Revelation 22:18-19)!

### ▪ The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

“For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy”<sup>205</sup> (Revelation 19:10).

- “The testimony of Jesus” is whatever Jesus Christ has said in the Old Testament through his Spirit in the Old Testament prophets and that is now written in the Old Testament (1 Peter 1:9-12). It is thus more than what is written *about* Jesus Christ himself in the Old Testament (Luke 24:25-27,44-47)!
- “The testimony of Jesus” is also whatever Jesus Christ has said in the New Testament through his Spirit in the apostles of Christ and that is now written in the New Testament (John 16:13-15).

The Author of the Old Testament and the New Testament is no one less than the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:9-12), the Spirit of God (2 Timothy 3:16, cf. Romans 8:9-10).

The Author of the Bible is not any human being (Jeremiah 23:16,22). The Author of the Bible is also not any angel (e.g. the angel Jibril or Gabriel), because the angels long to look into the things the apostles of Christ revealed (1 Peter 1:12)!

The emphasis of Revelation 19:10 is that “the spirit or real content of prophecy” is whatever Jesus Christ Himself said, i.e. “the testimony of Jesus”. The essential content of prophecy is the Bible (the revelation of Jesus Christ in the Old Testament and in the New Testament)! “The genuine spirit or inner content of all biblical prophecy” is whatever Jesus Christ said about God, about himself as the Messiah that was coming and has come, as the visible image of the invisible God, about God’s Old Testament people Israel, about Israel’s continuation and extension to include believers in him from all the nations in the world (Genesis 22:18; Isaiah 56:3-8; Matthew 28:19), about the kingdom of God and the Church, about sin, salvation and judgement. That is what biblical prophecy is all about! That is what all Christians must preach!

People who prophesy are inspired by either the True Spirit or a false spirit! The teachings of other religions and ideologies are taught by deceiving spirits or demons (1 Timothy 4:1-2). They enforce all kinds of religious laws onto religious people (1 Timothy 4:3-5). But the teachings in the Bible “are trustworthy and true” because they are revealed by the LORD. He is the God who has revealed himself in the Bible. He is “the God of the spirits of the true prophets” (Revelation 22:6)!

### ▪ The gift of prophecy in ordinary sense.

“The spiritual gift of prophecy”<sup>206</sup> in ordinary sense is to proclaim what Jesus Christ has revealed about himself, his words and works in the Bible. Biblical prophecy in general sense is therefore not making arbitrary predictions about the future of people and nations (e.g. about Israel and the Gentile nations), but proclaims Jesus Christ and his message! The genuine content of the Old Testament prophets is revealed in the testimony of Jesus Christ in the New Testament! Whoever Jesus Christ is, what he said and did is the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy (Matthew 5:17). All Jesus Christ revealed, taught and commanded and that is now written in the New Testament is what the Old Testament prophets intended to say in their shadowy and preparatory proclamations (Matthew 5:17; Acts 3:18; Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 8:6; 10:1; 1 Peter 1:10-12).

That is why the Old Testament (revelation) must be interpreted only in the light of the New Testament (revelation)! And all Scripture (for example: the Book of Revelation) must ultimately be interpreted in the light of the New Testament (revelation).

### ▪ Christians with the gift of prophecy.

Christians with the gift of prophecy in the ordinary sense of the word are inspired by the Holy Spirit to proclaim the truths of the Bible in order to edify, to encourage and to comfort other Christians (1 Corinthians 14:3; Acts 15:32) and to build up the Christian Church (Body of Christ world wide) by equipping individual Christians for their works of service (Ephesians 4:11-12).

<sup>204</sup> Greek: προφητεω

<sup>205</sup> η γαρ μαρτυρια Ιησου εστιν (indicative, present, active) το πνευμα της προφητειας

<sup>206</sup> A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich. p.730

The Christians with the gift of prophecy proclaim God's revelation contained in the Bible with intelligible words in a persuasive and convincing manner (1 Corinthians 14:8) and with power (Acts 6:10; 1 Thessalonians 1:5). Their prophesying is like a trumpet sounding a clear call. Their speaking is "Holy Spirit inspired speaking". The Christians who have received specific spiritual gifts and are accustomed to use their spiritual gifts in the meetings of the congregation must eagerly desire to possess and to use the spiritual gift to prophesy, that is, to proclaim God's Word in the Bible with the power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 14:1).

## **2. The special gift of prophecy. The word "prophesying" may consist of speaking a revelation concerning the hidden thoughts, motives, attitudes, words or deeds of people.**

The words (preaching, teaching, sharing, advising, counselling) of Christians with the gift of prophecy are used by the Holy Spirit to reveal hidden things, to call non-Christians to repentance and to call Christians to change things in their lives. The effect of prophecy is that some sin is irrefutably brought into the light (1 Corinthians 14:24-25). This may refer to making a specific sin known in the midst of the meeting of the congregation (Acts 5:3-4). Or this may refer to making a hidden issue known only to the soul of an individual without anyone else in the congregation knowing about it (Acts 2:37; cf. John 16:8)!

## **3. The task of all Christians.**

While some Christians are called and appointed to the office of preacher with the task to proclaim the revealed Word of God and other Christians receive the spiritual gift of preaching (prophesying) Ephesians 4:11), all Christians are commanded to be actively involved in the proclamation of God's Word, either by supporting preachers financially (1 Corinthians 9:14; 1 Timothy 5:17-18), or by giving testimony of their faith (1 Peter 3:15).

### **▪ The gift of prophecy in our day may only be exercised within the limits of the biblical revelation.**

**Faith in subjective sense.** The apostle Paul teaches Christians who possess the gift of prophecy to use it "in proportion to the faith" as God has given to each (Romans 12:3,6). The word "faith" is used here in *the subjective sense*, indicating trust in God and laying hold of God's promises.

"The measure of faith" does *not refer to the quantity of faith, but to the kind of faith*. It refers to his place in the Body of Christ, to his particular gift or function (office), and to the kind of faith he needs to exercise his particular gift or function. A Christian should exercise his spiritual gift with sober judgement, which means within the limits of his personal (subjective) faith and restricted to the sphere and purpose of his personal gift or function. The prophet must say nothing that is in conflict with his personal faith in Jesus Christ. When there is the least doubt in his heart concerning the revelation he has received, he must refrain from uttering it.

**Faith in objective sense.** But the word "faith" may also be taken in *the objective sense*: prophesying in accordance with the Christian Faith.", the truth which God revealed in the Bible and which all Christians must believe. The prophet may say nothing that is in conflict with the Christian Faith as already revealed by the Old Testament prophets and the apostles of Christ. There are good Scriptural reasons why a prophet should be reminded that a revelation he receives (through a vision or dream) can only be genuine when it never conflicts with existing revelation in the Bible! The mark of a true prophet is that he acknowledges the existing revelation of God in the Bible as the absolute standard of truth and behaviour. The greatest danger in the church is when a prophet should presume to speak on his own authority. The criterion by which Christians should judge the claims of a prophet is the Canon of revelation which they already possess (John 17:17; Acts 17:11). When the prophet speaks, he may not go beyond anything written (in the Bible, correctly interpreted) (cf. 1 Corinthians 4:6).

The Christian with the gift of prophecy may not proclaim anything that is against his own faith in Jesus Christ or against the revelation in the Bible (cf. Deuteronomy 13:1-5; Deuteronomy 18:20-22; John 17:17; Acts 17:11; Acts 26:22; 1 Corinthians 14:37). The greatest danger in the congregation is when a Christian dares to speak on his own authority.

The criterion which Christians must use in order to evaluate another Christian's prophesying (preaching) is the Bible (John 17:17). "They examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true" (Acts 17:11). Christians with or without the gift of prophecy may never go beyond what is written (in the Bible) (1 Corinthians 4:6).

All Christians that prophesy must study, teach and preach *the whole* Bible. They should proclaim the whole plan and will of God to people (Acts 20:27) and not just a selective part of it. And they should correctly interpret the Bible (2 Timothy 2:15)! They may not deliberately add words to the Bible or deliberately take words away from the Bible (cf. Revelation 22:18-19).

### **▪ The gift of prophecy may only be exercised in love.**

The exercise of the gift of prophecy without love has absolutely no value in God's eyes (1 Corinthians 13:2)! Love means "to be patient", that is, to be able to wait for God's appropriate time to say or do something. Love means to only say something when it edifies and gives grace to the listener (Ephesians 4:15,29).

- **The gift of prophecy may only be exercised in submission to the biblical rules for prophecy in the meetings of the congregation.**

See above the example of the New Testament prophets in Corinth (1 Corinthians 14:29-33; cf. Romans 12:3,6; 1 Corinthians 4:6; 1 Corinthians 14:37; 1 John 4:1-6).

- **The gift of prophecy in our day may only be exercised when it is tested.**

Although the preaching of teaching of a Christian with the gift of prophecy has authority, other Christians are not allowed to follow his prophesying (preaching and teaching) without reserve. All prophets, their preaching, teaching and behaviour must be tested to see whether their prophecies (preaching and teaching) are genuine or false. All preachers must give an account of their responsibility to proclaim the Word of God.

Even when their prophecies (preaching and teaching) are true the Christians must still carefully weigh (evaluate) what the Holy Spirit would want them to do with the truth they heard. All prophecies (preaching and teaching) must be checked:

- with the objective truth and teachings of the Bible correctly interpreted (1 Corinthians 4:6)
- by others in the congregation who have the gift of prophecy (1 Corinthians 14:29)
- by others in the congregation who have the gift of discernment of spirits (1 Corinthians 12:10; 1 John 4:1-3)
- and by the other Christians within the congregation without any specific spiritual gift (1 Thessalonians 5:20-21)

in order to ensure that the opinion of one person (i.e. the person prophesying or preaching) is not being proclaimed as the Word of God.

Some people claim that they have the gift of prophecy, the gift of driving out demons or the gift of performing many miracles even by using the name of Jesus Christ. However, the true test is not their performance, but whether Jesus Christ “knows” them, that is, whether Jesus Christ has a personal relationship with them (Matthew 7:15-23). Jesus warned, “False Christs (i.e. people who claim to be the Messiah) and false prophets (i.e. people who claim to speak the words of God) will appear and perform many miracles to deceive the elect – if that were possible” (Mark 13:22). Thank God that it is not possible to deceive the elect (cf. John 5:24; John 10:28; Philippians 1:6; Revelation 17:14)! Nevertheless, false prophets are ferocious wolves and they will lead very many unbelievers and very many believers in the non-Christian religions through the wide gate and onto the broad road that leads to destruction (Matthew 7:13-15).

Christians must especially *test the doctrine* of Christians prophesying (1 Corinthians 12:3; 1 John 4:2-3). Also their behaviour must be observed critically (Matthew 7:15-20). Both their preaching and their life must be in accordance with God’s revelation in the whole Bible (Matthew 7:21-22; 1 Timothy 4:16).

### (3) TEACHERS AND INSTRUCTION

#### 1. The ability (gift) of teaching or the function (office) of a teacher.

- **Teachers.**

“A teacher”<sup>207</sup> (Acts 13:1; 1 Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 4:11-13; 2 Timothy 1:11; James 3:1) is a *special ability* (based on a special spiritual gift)(Ephesians 4:11) or an *ordinary office (function)* in the congregation (based on a calling and appointment)(1 Timothy 4:13).

While the prophet received his message by direct revelation, the teacher derived his knowledge from the study of the Old Testament Books and the New Testament Books. Teachers are people who teach the revelation which was once received by the Old Testament prophets and the apostles of Jesus Christ and is now recorded in the 66 canonical books of the Bible.

In the early New Testament period, this teaching may have been based on a special gift, like “a word of wisdom” or “a word of knowledge” (1 Corinthians 12:8), but it must have been done without such a special gift of the Spirit as well (Matthew 28:19; Colossians 3:16). The New Testament indicates that teachers exercised their office on the local level (Acts 13:1; Ephesians 4:11). The office of teacher was open to everyone who desired it and the requirement of a special spiritual gift of teaching for the teacher is not mentioned (James 3:1).

- **Teaching.**

“Teaching”<sup>208</sup> is the act of teaching or instruction or the special ability to pass on (communicate) the truth of the Bible to Christians (Romans 12:7; 1 Corinthians 14:6,26). Likewise, “teaching”<sup>209</sup> is the act of teaching or instruction, the means of communicating the knowledge which is at hand (1 Corinthians 14:6) or it is the actual contents of the teaching (1 Corinthians 14:26; cf. Acts 2:42).

<sup>207</sup> Greek: διδασκαλος

<sup>208</sup> Greek: διδασκαλια

<sup>209</sup> Greek: διδαχη

### ▪ **The tasks of a teacher.**

“Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the LORD, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel” (Ezra 7:10).

- The first task of teachers is *to study* the Bible in detail in order to validate the truth, to dig out the facts and to gather and systematise the biblical truth (Acts 17:11).
- The second task of teachers is *to practise* what the Bible teaches. Teachers set an example of living out the truth (Matthew 23:2-4; Romans 2:21; 1 Timothy 4:12; Titus 2:7-8).
- The third task of teachers is *to teach* the truth of the Bible with authority and without loss of meaning or the original intention, in order to make the truth understandable and practical (Mark 1:22; Acts 8:30-31; Acts 20:20,27; 2 Timothy 2:15).

Teaching is directed to new Christians in order to make them disciples of Jesus Christ who follow him and obey him (Matthew 28:20). And teaching is directed to Christians who are teachable, faithful and able to later teach others (Luke 6:40; 2 Timothy 2:2).

## **2. The position of teachers in the Church.**

“Prophecy” and “teaching” are the two most senior grades of ministry under the “apostles of Christ” (1 Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 4:11). Because both “the apostles of Christ” and “the New Testament prophets” only had a task to perform in the first period of the New Testament Church, the “office of teacher”, “the function or task of teaching” and “the gift of teaching” should have a very high priority in the Christian Church worldwide! Nothing builds up Christians like God’s truth!

## **3. The task of all Christians.**

While some Christians are called and appointed to the office of teacher with the task of teaching (1 Timothy 3:2; 1 Timothy 5:17) and other Christians receive the spiritual gift of teaching (Ephesians 4:11), all Christians are commanded to teach one another (Matthew 28:20; Colossians 3:16). Christians are cautioned to consider “the office of teacher” is a great responsibility (James 3:1; cf. Matthew 23:10,34; 2 Peter 2:1).

## **(4) EVANGELISTS**

### **1. The ability (gift) of evangelising or the function (office) of an evangelist.**

“An evangelist”<sup>210</sup> is *a special ability* (based on a special spiritual gift)(Ephesians 4:11) or *an ordinary office (function)* in the congregation (based on a calling and appointment)(2 Timothy 4:5). The word “evangelist” means “a person who proclaims the Good News”.

Evangelists proclaim the Good News of salvation (purification from impurity, liberation from guilt and shame and restoration of honour) in Jesus Christ to unbelievers so effectively that people are being saved and the number of Christians in the Church is increased. Evangelising was particularly the task of the apostles (Mark 16:14-15). Evangelising was also done by the deacons (Acts 8:4,26-40; Acts 11:19-21; Acts 21:8) and by some ordinary Christians (Acts 11:19-21). And evangelising was done by Timothy as one of the duties of his ministry (2 Timothy 4:5).

### **2. The Christians who sow and the Christians who reap.**

In the spiritual realm the usual pattern is that “a person reaps where another person has sown” and “he sows where another person will reap”. In John 4:35-37, Jesus says, “The saying, ‘One sows and another reaps’ is true. I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labour.” Each worker in the kingdom of God is at the same time “a person who sows” and “a person who reaps”. He reaps that which has been sown by others. And he sows the seed that brings forth a harvest that will be gathered by others. Therefore, in God’s sovereign plan, there will always be a harvest to reap! Either you yourself may have the joy of reaping a harvest where another person has sown, or you may have the joy of knowing that another worker will harvest where you have sown! Remember what God said, “So is my Word that goes out from my mouth: it will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it” (Isaiah 55:11)! In this way, the sower and the reaper will be glad together. The work of Christian workers is never in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58)!

### **3. The task of all Christians.**

In the early Church, the apostles founded the churches and recorded God’s revelation in the New Testament, the prophets revealed or preached the will of God in specific matters, the teachers taught the whole revealed will of God and the evangelists increased the number of believers in the churches.

While some Christians are called and appointed to the office of evangelist (2 Timothy 4:5) and some Christians receive the spiritual gift of evangelism (Ephesians 4:11), all Christians are called to participate in the spread of the gospel (Matthew 5:16; Matthew 10:32; 1 Peter 3:15-16).

<sup>210</sup> Greek: εὐαγγελιστής

## (5) SHEPHERDS

### 1. The ability (gift) of shepherding or the function (office) of a pastor.

**Read** Psalm 23; Isaiah 40:11; Ezekiel 34:1-6,10,16; John 10:1-16; John 21:15-17; Acts 20:29-31.

“A shepherd”<sup>211</sup> is a *special ability* (based on a special spiritual gift)(Ephesians 4:11) or an *ordinary office (function)* in the congregation (based on a calling and appointment)(Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2). The word “shepherd” means “to care like a shepherd or pastor”. Shepherds feed, protect, care and guide Christians towards spiritual growth and well being. They search for the lost and bring back the strays. They especially show concern and loving care to the small, the weak and the needy.

### 2. The task of all Christians.

#### ▪ The task of all elders of a congregation.

All the elders of a congregation are called and appointed to the office of shepherd (pastor) with the task to shepherd (i.e. to be pastors of) the members of their church (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-4). The Bible does not teach that a church has but one “pastor” (minister or leader). Elders are appointed in a plural number (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). Leadership in the Bible is shared leadership.

#### ▪ The task of all Christians.

While some Christians are called and appointed to *the office* of shepherding (i.e. to be “pastors”)(Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2) and some Christians receive *the spiritual gift* of shepherding (Ephesians 4:11), all Christians are called to participate in caring for one another (1 Corinthians 12:24-26).

## (6) LEADERS AND ADMINISTRATORS

### 1. The ability (gift) of leading or the function (office) of a leader.

There are two kinds of leadership gifts: leading by walking in front and leading by steering from behind.

#### ▪ Leading by walking in front.

“A leader” (Acts 13:1; 1 Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 4:11-13; 2 Timothy 1:11; James 3:1) is a *special ability* (based a special spiritual gift)(Romans 12:8) or an *ordinary office (function)* in the congregation (based on a calling and appointment)(1 Thessalonians 5:12; 1 Timothy 5:17).

Because the words “elders”<sup>212</sup> (Acts 14:23; Acts 15:22; 1 Timothy 5:17; 1 Peter 5:5) i and “leaders”<sup>213</sup> (1 Thessalonians 5:12; Hebrews 13:7,17,24) are being used in the plural, biblical leadership is *always* “shared leadership” and *never* “authoritarian leadership by one person”! Christian leadership in the Bible is *always* “servant leadership” (Matthew 20:25-28; 1 Peter 5:3) and *never* leadership that lords it over those entrusted to them!

The first kind of leadership is the ability “to lead by walking in front”<sup>214</sup>. It is the ability “to give direction to specific matters by example”. The reference is to the elders in the church. With respect to their age and dignity, these men are called “elders”<sup>215</sup> (Acts 20:17; 1 Timothy 5:17; Titus 1:5; 1 Peter 5:1) and with respect to their functions or the nature of their tasks, they are called “overseers” or “superintendents”<sup>216</sup> (Acts 20:28; Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:7), “leaders” or “managers” or “directors”<sup>217</sup> (Romans 12:8; 1 Thessalonians 5:12; 1 Timothy 3:4-5; 1 Timothy 5:17) or “shepherds”<sup>218</sup> (Acts 20:28; Ephesians 4:11; 1 Peter 5:2).

Leaders may not be called “prophet”, “apostle”, “bishop”, “pastor”, “master (rabbi)”, “father” or “teacher”, because these names change the functions of the elders into positions! With regard to position, all Christians are “brothers” (Matthew 23:8-12).

Because the responsibility of leaders is great and their burden heavy, leaders are admonished to exercise their leadership “with diligence” (Romans 12:8). The men chosen to be elders in the local church should be an example of this kind of leadership in their own families (1 Timothy 3:4-5) as well as in the local congregation (1 Thessalonians 5:12; 1 Timothy 5:17).

#### ▪ Leading by steering from behind.

<sup>211</sup> Greek: ποιμην; Latin: pastor

<sup>212</sup> Greek: πρεσβυτερος

<sup>213</sup> Greek: προϊσταμενος and ηγουμενος

<sup>214</sup> Greek: προϊσταμενος

<sup>215</sup> Greek: πρεσβυτεροι

<sup>216</sup> Greek: επισκοποι (the same word for “bishop”, which is never a position or an office, but always a task or function of the elders in the New Testament Church!)

<sup>217</sup> Greek: προϊσταμενοι

<sup>218</sup> Greek: ποιμενοι; Latin and English: pastors

“An administrator” (1 Corinthians 12:28) is a *special ability* (based on a special spiritual gift) or an *ordinary office (function)* in the congregation (based on a calling and appointment) (cf. Proverbs 11:14; Proverbs 24:6).

The second kind of leadership is the ability “to lead by steering (or guiding) from behind as a pilot<sup>219</sup> steers a ship through storms. The word means “pilot” in Acts 27:10-11. Like a steersman or pilot of a ship in turbulent waters those who possess this gift or office guide the local congregation through turbulent and problematic situations. The word means “wise guidance” in Proverbs (Proverbs 1:5; Proverbs 11:14; Proverbs 24:6). These men steer or manage the congregation with practical wisdom. The plural refers to various administrative or managerial gifts. In the congregation, there were also elders who ruled, not so much by preaching or teaching (1 Timothy 5:17), but more by wise management, even if the emphasis was more on spiritual management than organisational management.

## 2. The task of all Christians.

While some Christians are called, chosen and appointed to *the office* of leadership (i.e. to be elders of a Christian church or a Christian organisation)(1 Thessalonians 5:12; Hebrews 13:7,17) and other Christians receive *the spiritual gift* of leadership (Romans 12:8), all Christian husbands and fathers are called to lead their families (Ephesians 5:23; 1 Timothy 3:4-5) and all Christians with a specific leadership responsibility are called to exercise their responsibility by walking in front or by steering from behind. Never forget that Christian leadership in contrast to worldly leadership is “servant leadership” and “shared leadership”.

## (7) SERVANTS, SERVING AND HELPING

### 1. The ability (gift) of serving (helping) or the function (office) of deacon.

“Serving”<sup>220</sup> is a *special ability* (based on a special spiritual gift)(Romans 12:7) or an *ordinary office (function)* in the congregation (based on a calling and appointment) called “a deacon”<sup>221</sup> (Acts 6:1-7).

“Serving” is the desire and ability to detect and meet needs. Those who possess this gift are able to observe needs quickly, usually more quickly than other Christians (John 13:3-17). They are willing to bring personal sacrifices in order to serve. They are practical in their approach.

#### ▪ Service.

“Service” (Romans 12:7; Ephesians 4:12) is practical service, the ministry of ordinary Christians or of Christian offices. There are different kinds of service (1 Corinthians 12:5):

- To give food or other material help generously to needy believers, the special service of deacons (Acts 6:1; 2 Corinthians 8:1-4).
- To give material and spiritual food in the proper time to people in the household (congregation) (Matthew 24:45-51; Luke 10:40).
- To proclaim the Gospel to non-believers, called “a service or ministry of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:18-21).
- To teach and build up believers through the Word and prayer (Acts 6:1-4).
- To serve the Lord spiritually (without fear, in holiness and righteousness throughout one’s lifetime)(Luke 1:74-75).
- To put to work the talents entrusted and gain more talents (Matthew 25:14-30). The “talents” do not only refer to spiritual abilities, but also to “opportunities” given to each according to his ability (verse 15).
- To use whatever spiritual gifts one has received to serve others (1 Peter 4:10-11).
- To serve one another in love (Galatians 5:13).

#### ▪ Helpful deeds.

“Helpful deeds”<sup>222</sup> (1 Corinthians 12:28)(plural) are *desires and various different abilities* (based on special spiritual gifts) to render aid or assist in tasks. Without holding a particular office, Christians render many different kinds of services to the local congregation, the worldwide Church and in society. For example, they built a place to meet, care for the congregation’s finances, arrange the divine services, sing and make music, wash up and clean up, etc.

## 2. The task of all Christians.

While some Christians are called, chosen and appointed to *the function (office)* of deacon (1 Timothy 3:8-10) and other Christians receive a *spiritual gift* of serving or helping, all Christians are called to serve and help one another (Galatians 5:13; Galatians 6:2).

<sup>219</sup> Greek: κυβερνησις

<sup>220</sup> Greek: διακονια

<sup>221</sup> Greek: διακονος

<sup>222</sup> Greek: αντιλημψεις

## (8) SPEAKING WISDOM, KNOWLEDGE AND EXHORTATION

### 1. The ability or function to speak wisdom, knowledge, psalms or encouragements.

Read 1 Peter 4:10-11

#### ▪ **Wisdom.**

“Wisdom” (1 Corinthians 12:8) is *the desire and special ability* (based on a special spiritual gift) to communicate to people the best means to attain the highest goals. Christians who possess this gift advise people how they could live in the best way to do God’s will and please him. Their wisdom is in proportion to the depth of their relationship with God.

“A word of wisdom”<sup>223</sup> through the Spirit” is not a word spoken with wisdom, but a word that has *wisdom as its contents*. Wisdom is primarily a virtue and the emphasis is on *how it is effected*, namely, “through the Spirit”. It is not just the virtue of the right intuition, the right insight, but also the result that is acquired through practising this virtue. “Wisdom that comes from heaven” is first of all pure; then peace loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere (James 3:17). And the wisdom God gave to Solomon consisted of a depth of insight and a breadth of understanding. His wisdom was greater than the wisdom found in the other nations. His wisdom produced 3000 proverbs, 1005 songs, the descriptions of plant life and the teaching about all kinds of animals (1 Kings 4:29-34).

#### ▪ **Knowledge.**

“A word of knowledge” (1 Corinthians 12:8) is *the desire and special ability* (based on a spiritual gift) to communicate to people the meaning of formerly hidden or difficult things. Christians who possess this gift discern whether certain knowledge is in accordance with the Bible or not (thus, good and valid).

Paul places “receiving a revelation from God that is spoken out in a prophecy”<sup>224</sup> and “knowing or fathoming all mysteries”<sup>225</sup> before “knowing or fathoming all knowledge”<sup>226</sup> (1 Corinthians 13:2). They must obviously be distinguished from one another:

- “A mystery” in the New Testament is generally speaking something that was hidden before, but revealed afterwards (Matthew 13:11; Matthew 16:17; Ephesians 3:3-6).
- “A revelation” is “a disclosure”, especially through visions (2 Corinthians 12:1; Revelation 1:1,10,12) given especially to the apostles of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 14:6) and the New Testament prophets (1 Corinthians 14:26) and consequently uttered in the preaching and teaching of the apostles or in the prophecies of the New Testament prophets.
- “A prophecy” is “a speaking forth, utterance or proclamation” of that which God has revealed and what people must know and do. In the New Testament this was the main task of the apostles of Christ (John 14:26; John 15:26-27; John 16:13-15), but occasionally the privilege of the New Testament prophets during the early Christian Church period.
- “Knowledge” is specific *Christian* knowledge, knowledge of salvation, knowledge of Christ and knowledge of God, which God originally revealed (Luke 1:77; 2 Corinthians 10:5; 2 Corinthians 2:14; 2 Corinthians 4:6), even “a personal knowledge or acquaintance” with Christ (John 17:3). “Knowledge” must not be taken in a purely intellectual sense as “knowledge that has been acquired only by the thinking of man”. In the Bible “knowledge” nevertheless is primarily acquired by research and investigation of that which God already revealed beforehand.

A person receives “a revelation”<sup>227</sup> and thereafter speaks it as “a prophecy”<sup>228</sup>. Likewise, a person acquires “knowledge”<sup>229</sup> through Bible study and thereafter speaks it as “a teaching”<sup>230</sup> (1 Corinthians 14:6). While “prophesying” is the means to communicate new truth which God has given as a revelation, “teaching” or “speaking a word of instruction” is the means to communicate knowledge that is already at hand (Mark 4:2; 2 Timothy 4:2), even though this knowledge was originally revealed by God supernaturally.

“A word of knowledge”<sup>231</sup> (1 Corinthians 12:8) is not a word spoken with knowledge, but a word that has *knowledge as its contents*. Not only the words, but their contents are gifts of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:12-13). The words “according to the same Spirit”<sup>232</sup> carry not only the idea of “through the Spirit”, but also the idea of “agreeing with the Spirit”.

The standard that determines whether knowledge is good and valid is the words of the Bible, “the sword of the Spirit” (Ephesians 6:17) and the testimony of the Spirit to those words (John 14:26; John 16:13-15). All knowledge acquired by

<sup>223</sup> Greek: λογος σοφιας

<sup>224</sup> Greek: εχω προφητειαν

<sup>225</sup> Greek: ειδω τα μυστηρια παντα

<sup>226</sup> Greek: ειδω πασαν την γνωσιν

<sup>227</sup> Greek: αποκαλυψις

<sup>228</sup> Greek: προφητεια

<sup>229</sup> Greek: γνωσις

<sup>230</sup> Greek: διδαχη

<sup>231</sup> Greek: λογος γνωσεως

<sup>232</sup> Greek: κατα το αυτο πνευμα

research and investigation, yet spoken without meeting the standard of the Holy Spirit and his sword (the Bible) (1 Corinthians 12:8) or spoken without love (1 Corinthians 13:2), makes a person “a nothing”.

Thus, while the truth contained in “a revelation” or “mystery” rests upon a revelation of a new truth from God, the truth contained in “a word of knowledge” rests primarily upon research and investigation by man of truth that God has already revealed previously (i.e. truth in the Bible).

#### ▪ **Psalm.**

“A psalm” is *the desire and ability* (based on a special spiritual gift) to speak to others by means of psalms, hymns or spiritual songs (Ephesians 5:18-21; Colossians 3:16), that is, to communicate God’s Word by means of poetry, songs and music. A “psalm”<sup>233</sup> (1 Corinthians 14:26) is the gift of singing or reciting a psalm in a Holy Spirit inspired and appropriate manner. The person may be able to compose a psalm or Christian hymn or set it to music or perform it by way of a musical instrument.

Corinth was a congregation of Gentile Christians, which for the first time came into contact with the Old Testament (including the Book of Psalms). Hymnbooks did not yet exist and new spiritual songs had to be composed. The recitation or singing of a Psalm from the Bible in an appropriate manner was regarded as a spiritual gift. Whether it should be regarded as an ordinary or extraordinary gift cannot be determined. There is no hard and fast distinction between the ordinary and extraordinary gifts of the Spirit!

#### ▪ **Encouragement or exhortation.**

“An encouragement” (Romans 12:8) is *the desire and ability* (based on a spiritual gift) to stimulate Christians to put God’s Word into practice (e.g. to actually do what the Bible says), either by way of a public sermon or by way of a personal talk.

On the one hand, the custom in the Jewish synagogues was that after a portion of the Law and of the Prophets had been read, the ruler of the synagogue invited Paul and Barnabas to speak “a word of exhortation”<sup>234</sup>, that is, to give a public sermon (Acts 13:15).

On the other hand, all Christians are exhorted to encourage or exhort one another (Hebrews 3:12-13; Hebrews 10:24-25; 1 Thessalonians 5:14). Christians who possess “the gift of encouragement or exhortation”<sup>235</sup> counsel and guide Christians in the area of personal growth and service. They show how the teachings in the Bible should be applied to daily living and character development. They urge Christians to pursue a particular course of action or encourage them to take steps in faith.

## **2. The task of all Christians.**

While some Christians receive one of the spiritual gifts of “speaking”, all Christians are called to speak wisdom, research and communicate knowledge, sing psalms and encourage or exhort one another (Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 3:13; Hebrews 10:25).

## **(9) GIVING OR CONTRIBUTING TO NEEDS**

### **1. The ability or function (gift) of giving.**

“Giving” (Romans 12:8) is *the desire and ability* (based on a spiritual gift) to use temporal possessions for the highest good of people and the greater glory of God. Christians who possess this gift plan their personal business in order to gain assets. Then they entrust their assets to other Christians (the congregation, a Christian organisation, a particular missionary, etc.) for the furtherance of God’s kingdom.

Paul most strikingly connects “the grace (of giving)”<sup>236</sup> to supply the needs of the poor with “the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ”, who gave Himself! This is a central doctrine of the Christian faith, namely, that Christ, though he was rich, voluntarily humbled himself and became poor, so that we through his poverty might become rich (2 Corinthians 8:7-9).

People with “the gift or function of giving or contributing to the needs of others”<sup>237</sup>, should do so “with sincerity” (i.e. without ulterior motives) and “with generosity” (better: with liberality)<sup>238</sup> (Romans 12:8; 2 Corinthians 9:6-7). Examples of giving with ulterior motive were the Jews in Malachi 1:13-14 and Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:1-11.

### **2. The task of all Christians.**

While some Christians receive the spiritual gift of giving or contributing, all Christians are called to share in the ministry of giving. “Give and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over,

<sup>233</sup> Greek: ψαλμον

<sup>234</sup> Greek: λογος παρακλησεως

<sup>235</sup> Greek: παρακλησις

<sup>236</sup> Greek: χαρις

<sup>237</sup> Greek: ο μεταδιδους

<sup>238</sup> Greek: εν απλοτητι

will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you” (Luke 6:38). “it is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).

#### ▪ **Collective giving.**

“Giving” is first of all the responsibility of the whole congregation to supply in the needs of the poor in the congregation. In the early Christian Church the deacons cared for “the service of the tables”<sup>239</sup>, that is, by providing them with daily meals (Acts 6:1-7).

When drought and poverty struck the churches in Judea, the churches in Macedonia “shared in the ministry”<sup>240</sup> of giving by means of collecting money and sending it to those churches (2 Corinthians 8:1 – 9:15).

#### ▪ **Personal giving.**

This is “charitable giving” or “the doing of kind deeds”<sup>241</sup> (Matthew 6:1-4), especially to the poor and needy (Proverbs 19:17; Proverbs 21:13). Especially the rich are commanded to be “generous”<sup>242</sup> and “liberal in sharing”<sup>243</sup> (1 Timothy 6:17-19).

#### ▪ **Sharing.**

“Take an interest” or “share”<sup>244</sup> *again and again* with God’s people who are in need (Romans 12:13)[present iterative tense]. And anyone who receives instruction in the word *must again and again* “give” or “contribute a share”<sup>245</sup> [a command in the present tense] of all good things with his instructor (Galatians 6:6; Philippians 4:15).

## (10) SHOWING MERCY

### 1. The ability or function (gift) of showing mercy.

“Showing mercy” (Romans 12:8) is *the desire and ability* (based on a spiritual gift) to empathise with the needs of others and then to comfort and help them. Christians who possess this gift are usually good observers and listeners. They are able to quickly discern the situation and picture the thoughts and feelings of needy people: the discouraged, the vulnerable, the hurt, the abused, the oppressed, the handicapped, the sick, the bereaved, the aged, the dying, etc. They are able to empathise and sympathise with their misfortunes and misery (Luke 10:36-37; 1 Thessalonians 5:14).

Christians with “the gift or function of showing mercy”<sup>246</sup> should do so “with cheerfulness”<sup>247</sup> (Romans 12:8). Instead of rehashing all the details of the sickness, operation, accident, misfortune, etc. “a cheerful heart is good medicine” (Proverbs 17:22). And instead of criticising and judging the wrongdoer, “mercy will triumph (exult)<sup>248</sup> over judgement” (James 2:13).

### 2. The task of all Christians.

While some Christians receive the spiritual gift of mercy, all Christians are called to show mercy. “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy” (Matthew 5:7).

## (11) FAITH

### 1. The ability or function (gift) of faith.

“Faith” (1 Corinthians 12:9) is *the desire and ability* (based on a spiritual gift) to carry out a special ministry. Christians who possess this gift trust God to enable them to carry out a difficult task or to perform great things, even miracles for God. Examples: By faith he tackles a task which seems impossible for other people. By faith he lives in a foreign country. By faith he administers justice in an unjust world. By faith he does missionary work in a third world country. By faith he perseveres under persecution.

Christians with the gift of faith trust God to move any difficulty, even if it is as big as a mountain (Zechariah 4:6-8; Matthew 17:20; Luke 17:6; 1 Corinthians 13:2). They believe that God is able to bring about something which humanly speaking seems impossible (Romans 4:17; 1 Corinthians 1:26-28). Like Noah, Abraham and Moses, Christians with the gift of faith turn God’s purposes into realities (Hebrews 11:6-27).

<sup>239</sup> Greek: διακονια τραπεζαις

<sup>240</sup> Greek: κοινωνια της διακονιας

<sup>241</sup> Greek: ποιω ελεημοσυνην

<sup>242</sup> Greek: ευμεταδοτος

<sup>243</sup> Greek: κοινωνικος

<sup>244</sup> Greek: κοινωνουντες (participle, present, active)

<sup>245</sup> Greek: κοινωνειτω (imperative, present, active)

<sup>246</sup> Greek: ο ελεων (participle, present, active)

<sup>247</sup> Greek: εν ιλαροτητι

<sup>248</sup> Greek: κατακαυχεται (indicative, present, passive)

Because all believers are justified by “faith”<sup>249</sup> (Romans 1:17; Romans 3:22), the “faith by the same Spirit”<sup>250</sup> (1 Corinthians 12:9) has a special meaning. It is the faith that under normal circumstances seems impossible, and yet has visible results. It is a faith that enables one to attempt great things for God and to expect great things from God by means of the active working of the Holy Spirit.

## 2. The task of all Christians.

While some Christians receive the spiritual gift of faith, all Christians are called to exercise faith, especially faith in God’s attributes (Hebrews 11:6) and in God’s promises (Romans 4:20-21; Hebrews 10:36).

## (12) GIFTS OF HEALING

### 1. The abilities or functions (gifts) of healings.

“The gifts of healing”<sup>251</sup> (1 Corinthians 12:9,30)(plural) are *a variety of special desires and abilities* (based on spiritual gifts) or *ordinary offices (functions)* in society (based on a calling, education and appointment as a doctor or specialist)(Luke 5:31) to restore health to the body, soul or spirit of other people. God uses Christians who possess one of these gifts as a human instrument to heal people by natural or supernatural means. All healing regardless the method is accomplished by God!

The following may not be forgotten:

- There are different kinds of “desires and abilities to heal” people (plural): medical and therapeutic means or counselling techniques and prayer may be used, but *all healing is ultimately divine healing!*
- There are various reasons why people get sick (natural reasons, sin, the evil or broken world, Satan or demons) and therefore there are different ways God uses to heal people.
- But God does not always heal people. Sometimes he tells them why he does not heal them (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). Most often he does not tell them why he does not heal them (1 Timothy 5:23; 2 Timothy 4:20). Nevertheless, Christians “know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28). Thus, for a genuine Christian there is a good purpose behind every sickness and calamity!
- All healing on earth is temporary healing, because eventually all people die. “Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Corinthians 15:50). The reality of the resurrection of the dead far surpasses the limitations of the spiritual gifts of healings (Psalm 103:3; Isaiah 53:5b). At the resurrection of the dead all Christians will be perfectly healed as no one was ever before (Revelation 21:4)!

## 2. The task of all Christians.

While some Christians receive a spiritual gift of healing, all Christians are called to pray and care for the sick (1 Thessalonians 5:14).

## (13) WORKINGS OF POWERS OR MIRACLES

### 1. The abilities (gifts) to work powers or do miracles.

“Workings of powers”<sup>252</sup> or “workings of miracles” (1 Corinthians 12:10,28-29)(plural) are *desires and special abilities* (based on spiritual gifts) to perform supernatural deeds (2 Corinthians 11:23-28) or unusual signs and wonders. God uses Christians who possess one or more of these gifts as his human instrument to perform supernatural deeds, unusual signs or miracles. The purpose of signs and wonders is especially to strengthen faith in Jesus Christ (John 20:30-31), but also to kindle faith in the reality of God (John 4:48).

#### ▪ Extraordinary ministry.

At the beginning of his public ministry, Jesus Christ gave to his disciples (the apostles) special authority (power) to perform miracles as for example: driving out evil spirits, healing every disease and sickness, cleansing lepers and raising the dead (Matthew 10:1,8). At the end of his public ministry Jesus Christ gave to his disciples (the apostles) special authority (power) to “bind” and to “loosen” (Matthew 16:18; Matthew 18:18; John 20:21-23; Acts 1:8), that is, to lay the foundation of the historical Christian Church by opening the door for the three major people groups: the Jews (Acts 2), the half-Jews (Samaritans)(Acts 8) and the non-Jews (Gentiles)(Acts 10 and 11). The New Testament calls this authority to perform signs, wonders and miracles “the marks of an apostle” (Mark 16:20; Luke 10:18-20; Acts 2:43; 2 Corinthians 12:12; Hebrews 2:3-4).

There is no evidence in Scripture that some believers today are not given some of such “workings of powers” or “working of miracles”. There is certainly evidence that certain Christians are given special spiritual gifts to conduct

<sup>249</sup> Greek: πιστις

<sup>250</sup> Greek: πιστις εν τω αυτω πνευματι (“The word “by / in” the Spirit has instrumental sense).

<sup>251</sup> Greek: χαρισματα ιαματων

<sup>252</sup> Greek: ενεργηματα δυναμεων

extraordinary ministries. There is also evidence of certain Christians enduring extraordinary exertion as we witness in the life of Paul and his companions (2 Corinthians 11:23-28). Just read some biographies of missionaries during the centuries. But such signs, wonders and miracles do not make these Christians “apostles of Jesus Christ”!

### ▪ **Miracles.**

There is evidence that certain Christians are given spiritual gifts of performing signs and miracles.

The purpose of miracles is to point to the reality of God and his revelation, and especially to evoke faith in Jesus Christ (John 4:48) or to strengthen it (John 20:30-31).

In the Bible, miracles occurred especially when God revealed himself and his truth in his history of salvation and judgement:

- In the LAW through the law-giver prophet Moses
- In the PROPHETS through the Old Testament prophets (especially Elijah and Elisha)
- In the GOSPELS through the Lord Jesus Christ
- In the LETTERS through the apostles of Jesus Christ (Matthew 10:1,8; Luke 10:18-20; Acts 2:43; 2 Corinthians 12:12; Hebrews 2:4).

### **The purpose of miracles.**

- A sign<sup>253</sup> is an unexpected mighty work of God within the physical world that points to and illustrates a principle or truth in the spiritual world. The sign occurs within the creation, but illustrates salvation! *The sign is the proof that God acts with power, authority and majesty whenever he reveals himself or his message to people.*

Modern people who do not believe in miracles are blind to the miracles that happen in their own lives. Their own development from conception to birth is a miracle which they did not see. The intricate process of the clotting of blood after a cut in their finger is a miracle which they cannot observe. But the fact that they do not acknowledge such things as “a miracle” does not prove that miracles do not happen! One need not first see something before one believes it exists!

In John 12:37-46 people *saw* the miracles of Jesus Christ and yet did not believe in him. Their eyes were blinded, so that they could not see. Their hearts were hardened, so that they could not believe. The problem was not the reality of the miracle, but *the terrible condition of the eyes and hearts of the observers!*

In Luke 11:29-32 Jesus says that the only sign that is given to a wicked generation is the historical sign of Jonah. He was called to preach repentance (i.e. a change of thinking and an about turn to God) to the great wicked city of Nineveh. But in the *Book of Jonah the theme is not so much the change of thinking of the people of Nineveh, but rather the change of thinking that had to take place in the prophet Jonah!* Only repentance (a change of thinking) and an about turn to Jesus Christ will cause stubborn wicked hearts to experience the miracles of God (Ezekiel 36:25-27)!

In Mark 6:5-6 only some people in Nazareth believed in Jesus Christ and saw his miracles. The unbelievers did not see his miracles. *Faith in Jesus Christ will open up blind eyes so that people can and will see the miracles of God!*

By faith Moses saw God who is invisible (Hebrews 11:27). Jesus Christ had to open the minds of his own disciples so that they were able to understand and believe the Scriptures (Luke 24:25-27,44-45). Jesus Christ had to first blind Paul before he could see the Righteous One (Acts 22:6-15). From then onwards Paul could fix his eyes on what other people could not see (2 Corinthians 4:18).

- The signs in the Gospel of John were the following: Jesus changed water into wine (John 2:7-11). He healed the royal official’s son (John 4:46-54). He healed the paralysed invalid at Bethesda (John 5:1-15). He fed the five thousand men (John 6:1-15). He opened the eyes of the man born blind (John 9:1-7). And he raised Lazarus from the dead (John 11:35-44).

But also the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ (John 1:1-14), the cleansing of the temple (John 2:13-22), the great harvest of believers in Samaria (John 4:28-38), the walking on water, the calming of the storm and the bringing of the boat to the shore (John 6:16-21), the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem (John 12:12-19), the washing of the feet (John 13:1-17) and the crucifixion of Jesus Christ (John 19:17-30) were “signs”!

The greatest signs in human history are: the incarnation of God into Jesus Christ and the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (John 20:1-31)!

- Jesus performed these signs before the eyes of his disciples so that they could be his witnesses. They could witness with authority about what they had seen, heard and experienced. “We proclaim to you what we have seen (and the images are constantly before our eyes) and heard (and his words keep on ringing in our ears), so that you also may have fellowship with us, ... with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3). The

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<sup>253</sup> Greek: σημειον

Gospel of John is the Gospel of signs: the written record of the wonderful deeds of Jesus Christ within the physical reality and their significance within the spiritual reality. John was selective in his choice of recording these signs (cf. John 21:25).

- **Jesus' purpose with performing these signs** was not in the first place to evoke faith in non-Christians, but to strengthen the faith in Christians (his disciples), so that they would persevere in their faith that the Jesus Christ who lived on earth as Man was really Jesus Christ (the Messiah), the Son of God! Without laying down his divine nature, Jesus Christ took on the human nature as well (John 20:19b-20).
- Against the false teaching of Cerinthus, the apostle John taught that Jesus Christ is really Man and really God. He is the promised Messiah (Anointed One) that fulfilled all the Old Testament promises. He is the Son of God, not in physical or spiritual or symbolic sense, but is ontological, eternal and Trinitarian sense. He is the visible radiance of God's glory (divine attributes) and the visible exact representation or stamp of God's being (essence, nature) (cf. Colossians 1:15,19; Colossians 2:9).

## 2. The task of all Christians.

While some Christians receive a spiritual gift of supernatural acts or unusual signs or miracles, all Christians may expect God to do immeasurably more than all they ask or can imagine (Ephesians 3:20-21). Nevertheless, all Christians should summarise their prayer requests with the words, "Not my will, but yours be done" (Luke 22:42)!

## (14) DISCERNMENTS OF SPIRITS

### 1. The ability or function (gift) to discern spirits.

The discernment of spirits"<sup>254</sup> (1 Corinthians 12:10)(plural) is *the desire and special ability* (based on a spiritual gift) or *an ordinary function and calling* to discern different kinds of spirits. As long as there was no written New Testament, Christians with this gift could *distinguish*:

- *between the divine and the demonic*
- *between the spiritual and the psychological*
- *between the true and the false teachings*
- *and between the constructive and destructive.*

They could "test the spirits" whether they are from God or from another source (1 John 4:1-6; Acts 13:6-12). They could distinguish whether what the prophets prophesied was true or not, or whether the congregation should apply what the prophets said or not" (1 Corinthians 14:29). They could tell whether the professed spiritual gifts in the church were really from God or merely strange, pretended, false or even diabolical.

Evil spirits were at work in the demon-possessed and in people occupied with occultism. There were also evil spirits at work within the non-Christians present in the congregation (1 Corinthians 14:12; 1 John 4:1). Such evil spirits may have manifested themselves in false prophecies and in the performance of miracles (Acts 19:13f). In short, there existed a devilish imitation of the special gifts and of the work of Christ (Matthew 24:23-24; Acts 20:29-31; 2 Corinthians 11:13-15). A New Testament prophet had the gift of discerning spirits (1 Corinthians 14:29,37).

### 2. The task of all Christians.

While some Christians receive one of the different spiritual gifts of discernment of spirits, all Christians are called to test the spirits (Matthew 7:15-20; Hebrews 5:14; 1 John 4:1-4; 2 John 1:9-11), that is, are called to distinguish between true and false teachers and their teachings.

## (15) DIFFERENT KINDS OF LANGUAGES AND TONGUES

### 1. The gift (ability) to speak in languages of men, that is, in other known and *intelligible* languages in the world (the Book of Acts).

In the Book of Acts (Acts 2:4-12) "the speaking in tongues (languages)" was *the desire and special ability* (based on a spiritual gift) to speak in another known language in the world. The purpose of speaking in languages (tongues) was above all to prove the outpouring and presence of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost and to declare God's wonderful character and deeds by means of intelligible words.

#### ▪ The Book of Acts

Christ built his Church on the foundation of the apostles (Ephesians 2:20). Luke wrote the Book of Acts and compared in it the ministries and miracles of the two great apostles, the apostle Peter and the apostle Paul. In the first 12 chapters Luke wrote how Jesus Christ continued his ministry through the eleven disciples and especially through the apostle Peter. In the final 12 chapters Luke wrote how Jesus Christ continued his ministry especially through the apostle Paul.

<sup>254</sup> Greek: διακρίσεις πνευμάτων

Peter (Acts 2:17-36) and Paul (Acts 13:14-41) were great preachers to the Jews. Peter established the first church among the Jews (Acts 2:14,42) and the first church among the Gentiles (Acts 10:1 to 11:18) and Paul established several churches among the Gentiles in Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe (Acts 13:1 to 14:25). Peter appointed the first deacons in the Jewish Jerusalem church (Acts 6:1-7) and Paul appointed the first elders in the Gentiles churches of Antioch, Iconium and Lystra (Acts 14:21-23). Peter (Acts 5:12-16) and Paul (Acts 19:11-12) healed the sick. Peter (Acts 5:12-42 and Acts 12:1-17) and Paul (Acts 23:1-11 and Acts 24:11-27) were persecuted by the Jewish and Roman authorities.

Peter had authority to exclude people from the Christian Community (Acts 5:1-11) and Paul had authority to exclude the sorcerer Elymas out of the Christian Community (Acts 13:4-12). Christ gave Peter the ability to raise Dorcas from the dead (Acts 9:36-42), and he gave Paul the ability to raise Eutychus from the dead (Acts 20:9-12). Just as Christ gave his Holy Spirit to the believers among the Samaritans by way of the laying on of the hands of Peter (and John)(Acts 8:17), so Christ gave his Holy Spirit to a few disciples of John the Baptist among the Jewish proselytes by way of the laying on of hands of the apostle Paul (Acts 19:1-6). Both groups spoke in tongues (languages), that is, they prophesied in intelligible words of a known language. People “saw” (Acts 8:18) and “heard” (Acts 19:6) how they had received the Holy Spirit. This is an irrefutable proof that Jesus Christ gave to both the apostles Peter and Paul the same ability “to bind or to loose on earth”. In this way these apostles opened the door of the Kingdom of God (the historical Church) for these two special groups of people (the despised half-Jews and the ignorant followers of John the Baptist). Jesus Christ built his Church on “the rock” (Peter)(Matthew 16:18) and on “the foundation-builder” (Paul) (1 Corinthians 3:10-11; cf. Ephesians 2:20; Revelation 21:14).

#### ▪ **The prediction about the speaking in tongues.**

Between 500 to 400 years B.C. the prophet Joel prophesied the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the accompanying ability to prophesy (Joel 2:28-29). Before his ascension, Jesus Christ promised the gift of the Holy Spirit (John 7:37-39; Luke 24:49) and possibly the accompanying gift of “speaking in *new* tongues” (that is, in languages not previously known to the speaker (Mark 16:17)<sup>255</sup>.

The expression “the baptism with the Spirit”<sup>256</sup> is mentioned only seven times in the New Testament<sup>257</sup> and all refer to the *once for all* regeneration (the new birth from above)<sup>258</sup> of Christians. The expression “the filling with the Spirit”<sup>259</sup> refers to the *recurring* submission to the complete control of the Holy Spirit and it is an event which should (and did) occur again and again.<sup>260</sup>

On three separate and unique times in the history of salvation the Holy Spirit was poured out from above on the three unique groups of people in the Bible:

- the first Jews who became Christians (Acts 2:4)
- the first half-Jews (Samaritans) who became Christians (Acts 8:14-18)
- and the first non-Jews (Gentiles) who became Christians (Acts 10:46; Acts 11:14-18; Acts 15:7-11).

These three groups (Acts 1:8) were “baptised with the same Holy Spirit” into the one Body of Christ (the world wide Church)(1 Corinthians 12:13). As an irrefutable proof that the Holy Spirit had been poured out on these three groups of people, God gave them *the ability to prophesy in other known languages (tongues)* of the world.

#### ▪ **The Pentecost of the Jews (Acts 2:1-16).**

The prophesying in tongues was fulfilled in the last days. This prophecy of Joel went into fulfilment “in the last days”<sup>261</sup> which refers to the last days of the Old Testament period or to the beginning of the whole New Testament period, that is, to the first coming of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 9:26) and to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:17).

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<sup>255</sup> **Mark 16:9-20.** According to the oldest Greek, Latin and Syrian manuscripts of the New Testament and the ancient church fathers, the Gospel of Mark ended with Mark 16:8. Also the contents of Mark 16:9-20 show it did not form a part of the original Gospel of Mark. Jesus said that he would meet his disciples in Galilee (Mark 16:7), but then in Mark 16:9-20 he appeared to different people in different places without mentioning Galilee! In Mark 16:4-7 Mary Magdalene is mentioned, but in Mark 16:9 she is introduced as if she had not been mentioned at all! Mark probably did not intend to end his Gospel with Mark 16:8. It ends abruptly, but why is not known. Mark 16:9-20 is an interesting summary of the appearances of Jesus Christ after the resurrection and his continuing work through the apostles.

\*Mark 16:9-11 is a summary of John 20:11-18, describing the appearance of Jesus to Mary Magdalene.

\*Mark 16:12-12 is a summary of Luke 24:13-35, describing the appearance of Jesus to the two men travelling to Emmaus.

\*Mark 16:14-18 is a summary of Matthew 28:16-20, describing the appearance of Jesus to the eleven disciples on the mountain in Galilee.

\*And Mark 16:19-20 is a summary of Acts 1:9-11 and the rest of the book of Acts, describing the ascension of Jesus into heaven and his continuing work through the apostles.

\*Mark 16:9-20 is binding for faith and practice only to the extent in which its teachings are supported by the Bible in general. Because “the picking up of poisonous snakes” and “the drinking of deadly poison” are not supported by any other passage in the Bible, they should not be considered as part of inspired Scripture, but rather as *apocryphal material*, i.e. material of doubtful authenticity invented to resemble the words in Scripture. They were added to the Gospel of Mark at a later date. The other signs are *the signs of the apostles* of Christ (Matthew 10:1,8; Luke 10:18-20; 2 Corinthians 12:12; Hebrews 2:3-4).

<sup>256</sup> Greek: βαπτίζω εν πνευματι

<sup>257</sup> Matthew 3:11-12, Mark 1:8, Luke 3:16-17; John 1:33, Acts 1:5; Acts 11:16-17, 1 Corinthians 12:12-13.

<sup>258</sup> John 1:12-13, John 3:3-8, Titus 3:4-8

<sup>259</sup> Greek: πληροομαι εν πνευματι

<sup>260</sup> Ephesians 5:18

<sup>261</sup> Greek: εν ταις εσχαταις ημεραις

“They were all *once for all* filled with the Spirit and *once for all* began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit was enabling them to declare”<sup>262</sup> (Acts 2:4).

**The prophesying in tongues was a speaking in intelligible words of existing and known languages.** The word “declare” is used of the speech of the wise man and also of the speech of an inspired person (oracle giver or prophet) and means that those on whom the Holy Spirit had been poured out “spoke out clearly, loudly and boldly something pithy, weighty and authoritative”<sup>263</sup>. They *declared* “the wonders”<sup>264</sup> of God – a reference to God’s attributes and acts – something clearly understood by everyone (Acts 2:11b). Thus, they spoke in intelligible languages!

Then Peter stood up and *declared* his speech in his own language (Acts 2:14). The same word “declared” is used in both cases in the same context. The people said, “How is it that each of us hears them in his own dialect (language) in which he was born”<sup>265</sup> (Acts 2:8)? “We hear them *continually* speaking in our tongues (that is, in the languages or dialects which we speak) the wonders of God”<sup>266</sup> (Acts 2:11). **The prophesying in tongues was a speaking in intelligible words of existing and known languages in the world.** The word “prophecy” (Acts 2:17) literally means “to speak forth” or “to proclaim” Gods message with regard to the past, the present or the future.

The gift of tongues in the Book of Acts was not “some kind of communication by means of unintelligible sounds” as in the congregation at Corinth. It was speaking intelligible words in a foreign language under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

**The prophesying in tongues was a unique event in the history of salvation.** Acts 2:1-13 describes the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the about 120 believers in Christ (Acts 1:15-16). At this unique beginning of the New Testament history of salvation of the Jews, they were filled with (i.e. they were fully submitted to the reign of) the Spirit and spoke in tongues (Acts 2:4) about the wonders of God (Acts 2:8-11). This event (namely the filling with the Spirit and the accompanying speaking in known languages) was a unique once for all event in the history of salvation of the Jews. The speaking in tongues in the Book of Acts was the extraordinary ability to speak in a foreign language in this world that was hitherto unknown to them!

**The prophesying in tongues was a miracle of speaking.** Acts 2:11 says, “We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues.” An unbiased reader would not understand these words as a miracle happening in the ears of the listeners rather than the tongues of the speakers. It is not true that the disciples spoke in Aramaic or even in a tongue of angels, but that each listener supposed what he heard to be uttered in his own foreign language or dialect. The disciples spoke in the known human languages of the nations along the Caspian Sea (Parthians, Medes, Elamites), of the nations between the great rivers (Mesopotamia), of the nations in the provinces of Asia Minor (Pontus, Cappadocia, Phrygia, Pamphylia and Asia), of the nations in North Africa along the Mediterranean Sea (Egypt, Cyrene, Libya) and of the nations residing in Rome, Crete and Arabia. These known languages belonged to the nations to which Jews had immigrated and from where these Jews and other converts to Judaism (Gods people during the Old Testament period) had come to celebrate Pentecost in Jerusalem (called “the feast of weeks”, Leviticus 23:15-21; Deuteronomy 16:9-12). Their speaking in tongues served, like any other miracle, to prove the reality and presence of an extraordinary spiritual power (i.e. the Holy Spirit) which otherwise might have been denied or doubted.

**The prophesying in tongues was not a prediction.** The notion of “a future prediction or foretelling” is neither the primary sense, nor even the prevailing sense of the word “to prophesy” in the Bible. Their “prophesying” was “a declaration of the past and present wonders of God” (Acts 2:11).

**The prophesying in tongues affected the contents.** The prophesying in tongues in the Book of Acts was not simply “a linguistic means enabling the speakers to speak by means of foreign languages in public”. The genuine inspiration by the Holy Spirit affected the contents as well as the expression of the contents. The people could hear them “declaring (prophesying) *the great deeds of God* (i.e. God’s wonderful attributes and acts) in our own languages”<sup>267</sup>!

**The prophesying in tongues was also done by women.** On the Day of Pentecost the about 120 Christian men and women gathered together in Jerusalem were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them (Acts 2:4). The speaking of tongues in the Book of Acts was done by men and women of the first group of Christians.

Some Christians object and say that the gift of prophecy could not have been exercised by *women*, because women were forbidden to speak in the official meetings of the congregation (1 Corinthians 14:34-35; cf. 1 Timothy 2:11-12). However, this prohibition with regard to women speaking in the meetings of the congregation in the First Letter to the Corinthians does not apply to the unique historical outpouring of the Spirit in the Book of Acts, but applies only to the

<sup>262</sup> Greek: και επλησθησαν (indicative, aorist, passive) παντες πνευματος αγιου και ηρξαντο (indicative, aorist, middle)

λαλειν ετεραις γλωσσαις καθως το πνευμα εδιδου (indicative, imperfect, active) αποθθεγγεσθαι (infinitive, present, deponent) αυτοις

<sup>263</sup> Greek: αποθθεγγομαι (infinitive, present, deponent)

<sup>264</sup> Greek: τα μεγαλεια

<sup>265</sup> Greek: πως ημεις ακουομεν (indicative, present, active) εκαστος τη ιδια διαλεκτω ημων εν η εγεννηθημεν (indicative, aorist, passive)

<sup>266</sup> Greek: ακουομεν (indicative, present, active) λαλουντεν (participle, present, active) αυτων ταις ημετεραις γλωσσαις τα μεγαλεια του θεου

<sup>267</sup> Greek: ακουομεν (indicative, present, active) λαλουντων (participle, present, active)

αυτων ταις ημετεραις γλωσσαις τα μεγαλεια του θεου

*permanent* or *accustomed* use of the gift of *unintelligible* tongues in the meetings of all Christian congregations (1 Corinthians 14:33b-34).

**The prophesying in tongues in the Book of Acts was the reverse symbol of the confusion of languages in Babel.** The confusion of languages in Babel (Genesis 11:1-9) served as the general exclusion of the Gentile nations from God's Old Testament people. Likewise the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the accompanying sign of speaking in foreign Gentile languages served as the sign that foreshadowed the calling and inclusion of the believers from all the nations into God's plan and God's people. The speaking of these foreign languages served as a proof of the reality and presence of the Holy Spirit, a unique spiritual reality which might otherwise have been denied by people.

The moral unity of the human race which was lost at the Babylonian confusion of languages was restored at Pentecost by means of the proclamation of the Gospel, the once for all outpouring of the Holy Spirit on each of the three unique groups of people in the Bible and the accompanying sign of the speaking in the foreign languages of the Gentile nations. God's plan was to gather a people for himself from every nation on earth (Matthew 24:14; Matthew 28:19; Acts 15:14-19; Revelation 5:9)!

This Pentecost of the Jews was the first step towards the general and unrestricted preaching of the gospel to all nations and languages.

▪ **The Pentecost of the Samaritans (the half-Jews) (Acts 8:14-18).**

A deacon of the congregation of Jerusalem who became an evangelist went and preached the gospel to the Samaritans. They believed the gospel and were baptised with water. But they did not receive the Holy Spirit! The Samaritan believers had to wait until the apostles of Jesus Christ had opened the door to the worldwide Church for them. Also these half-Jews had to acknowledge that Jesus Christ had given "the keys of the Kingdom" to his own apostles (Matthew 16:18-19; Matthew 18:18-19) and that his apostles were "the historical foundation of the worldwide Church (Ephesians 2:20). So the apostles Peter and John came and laid their hands on the believers and "*once for all* prayed for them that they too may *once for all* receive the Holy Spirit"<sup>268</sup> (Acts 8:15). Thus also the Samaritans (the half-Jews) were baptised by one Spirit into the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13).

This Pentecost of the half-Jews was the second step towards the general and unrestricted preaching of the gospel to all nations and languages.

It is not stated that the Samaritan believers in Christ also "spoke in tongues". But because Simon could "see" that the Spirit had been given at the prayer of the apostles in Jerusalem, the reception of the Spirit was accompanied by the extraordinary influences of the Spirit, which could have been the prophesying in other languages (the speaking in tongues) or the expression of any of the spiritual gifts or fruit of the Spirit.

▪ **The Pentecost of the Gentiles (the non-Jews) (Acts 10:46)**

God had to use two visions to cause the *Jewish* apostle Peter to proclaim the gospel also to the *Gentiles* (Acts 10:1-23)! While the apostle Peter was still occupied with preaching the gospel, the Holy Spirit saw faith in their hearts and "*once for all* fell from above upon all who were hearing the message"<sup>269</sup> (Acts 10:45). The Jews "were astonished that even on the Gentiles the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out (*and was now a present reality*)[perfect tense]. Thus also the Gentiles (non-Jews) were baptised by one Spirit into the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13).

This Pentecost of the non-Jews was the third step towards the general and unrestricted preaching of the gospel to all nations and languages.

As an undeniable proof of this, they too prophesied in other languages. "For they were hearing them *continually* speaking in tongues and magnifying God"<sup>270</sup> (Acts 10:46). There was no room for doubt as to the fact that the Spirit had also been given to the formerly despised Gentiles, as there might have been in the case of mere internal, spiritual changes!

Also here "the gift of tongues" (i.e. the prophesying in different known languages) was not intended merely as a practical convenience in this missionary situation, but as a miraculous token of God's presence, and as a type of *the permanent reconciliation* between Jews and Gentiles, whose alienation had for ages been secured and symbolised by difference of language. The Jewish believers in Christ did not merely hear the new Gentile believers in Christ say that they had received the Spirit. They actually heard them speak in other known foreign languages. They did not hear them speak unintelligible sounds or speak at random, but, like the first Jewish believers in Christ on the day of Pentecost (Acts 11:15), magnifying God in intelligible words (Acts 10:46).

<sup>268</sup> Greek: προσηύξαντο (indicative, aorist, middle) περι αυτων οπως λαβωσιν (subjunctive, aorist, active) πνευμα αγιον

<sup>269</sup> Greek: επι λαλουντες (participle, present, active) του Πετρου τα ρηματα ταυτα επεπεσον (indicative, aorist, active) το πνευμα το αγιον επι παντας τους ακουοντας (participle, present active) τον λογον

<sup>270</sup> Greek: οτι και επι τα εθνη η δωρεα του αγιου πνευματος εκκεχυται (indicative, perfect, passive), ηκουον (indicative, imperfect, active) γαρ αυτων λαλουντων (participle, present, active) γλωσσαις και μεγαλυνοντων (participle, present, active) τον θεον

▪ **The difference between the historical description on the one hand and the authoritative teaching on the other hand about the signs at the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.**

In the book of Acts, “the speaking of tongues” was *the extraordinary ability to speak intelligible words in other known languages of people in the world*. The purpose was primarily to prove the presence of the Holy Spirit and to magnify God’s attributes and acts in intelligible language before people.

Christians need to note the difference between what the Bible describes or relates as the unique history of salvation in the Book of Acts and what the Bible teaches and commands to all Christians in the New Testament.

**What the Bible DESCRIBES or RELATES about the unique signs of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.** The three *unique* signs at the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (i.e. the baptism with the Spirit) were:

- The *audible* sound like the blowing of a mighty wind that came from heaven and filled the whole house (Acts 2:2). This occurred only once in the history of salvation!
- The *visible* sight of what seemed like tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each Christian (Acts 2:3). This occurred only once in the history of salvation!
- The *audible* prophesying in intelligible words in other known languages of the world (the speaking in tongues). This occurred only at the outpouring of the Spirit on the first Jews, the first Samaritans, the first Gentiles and the first group of followers of John the Baptist in the Book of Acts and nowhere else in the whole New Testament!

The book of Acts does not teach what should happen in congregations today. The Book of Acts relates that the speaking in tongues was *the accompanying sign of the initial outpouring* of the Holy Spirit on the various groups of people that formed part of the history of salvation in the New Testament. After recording that Christ used both the apostles Peter and Paul in laying the foundation of the historical Christian Church (Acts 8:17; Acts 19:6; Ephesians 2:20; Revelation 21:14), this accompanying sign of the reception of the Holy Spirit is no longer mentioned in the history of the early Christian Church!

From then onwards, people heard the gospel, believed in Christ and received the Holy Spirit without the mentioning of the prophesying in foreign languages (the speaking in tongues) (Ephesians 1:13)!

The continuing and most frequent sign of the reception of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament and in the History of the Church is the coming into existence of new functioning congregations everywhere: in Jerusalem (Acts 2:41-47), Judea, Galilee and Samaria (Acts 9:31), in Antioch in Syria (Acts 11:19-24), in Iconium, Lystra and Antioch in Galatia (Turkey) (Acts 14:21-23), in Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea in Macedonia (Acts 16 and 17), in Athens and Corinth in Achaia (Greece) (Acts 17 and 18), in Ephesus and the surrounding cities in Asia (Turkey)(Acts 19) and finally in Rome in Italy (Acts 28)!

The prophesying in foreign languages was the unique historical sign of receiving the Holy Spirit. But the coming into existence of a new functioning Christian congregation is the permanent and recurring sign of receiving the Holy Spirit.

**What the Bible TEACHES or COMMANDS about the lasting signs of the baptism with the Spirit.** The unmistakable visible sign of the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the lives of new Christians is the fruit of the Holy Spirit, especially love (Galatians 5:22-23)!

**Conclusion.** After Christ had laid the foundation of the Christian Church through especially the apostles Peter and Paul, these accompanying signs of the historical outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the three unique groups of people are no longer mentioned. The three unique events in the history of salvation were:

- the Pentecost of the Jews (including the Jews who became followers of John the Baptist)
- the Pentecost of the half-Jews (Samaritans)
- and the Pentecost of the non-Jews (Gentiles).

The foundation of the historical Church (Ephesians 2:20) had been laid. It does not have to be laid again!

From then on in the history of salvation in the whole New Testament and in Church History the most common signs of the baptism with the Holy Spirit were and still are:

- the coming into existence of a functioning local congregation (cf. Acts 9:31; Ephesians 1:13)
- and the manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit (especially: love) in the lives of Christians (Galatians 5:22-23)!

The Bible nowhere teaches that the prophesying in other languages (the speaking in tongues) must be the accompanying sign of the baptism with (the reception of) the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:28-31). The Bible clearly teaches that even if the spiritual gifts are lacking in certain Christians or even in certain Christian churches, love may never be lacking (1 Corinthians chapter 13:1-13)! This is also the distinct teaching of Jesus Christ (Mark 12:30-31; John 13:34-35) and the apostles of Jesus Christ (Galatians 5:22-23; 2 Peter 1:5-7; 1 John 2:9-11).

## 2. The gift (ability) to speak in the unknown tongues of angels, that is, to speak in unintelligible sounds (the First Letter to the Corinthians).

### ▪ The phenomenon of speaking in unintelligible sounds in the congregation at Corinth.

**The phenomenon is heard, but not understood.** The speaking of unintelligible words in the gift of tongues in the Letter to the Corinthians was *the peculiar desire and ability* to speak a language that had no resemblance to any existing human language and was completely unintelligible to ordinary people. It was a peculiar language taught by the Spirit and spoken to the glory of God.

It is not possible to determine whether the words “different kinds of tongues” or “different kinds of language sounds”<sup>271</sup> (1 Corinthians 12:10) is a reference to the contents of that language besides the sounds of that language.

**The phenomenon belonged to certain Christians who were accustomed to manifest it.** Paul is not speaking about the sudden outburst of speaking in unintelligible tongues as if people were overwhelmed by the Holy Spirit and could not help but to speak in tongues. He is speaking of people who *were accustomed to* speak in tongues during the meetings of the congregation. The words “he who speaks in a tongue”<sup>272</sup> refers to a person who is accustomed or has the permanent ability to speak in tongues during the meetings of the congregation (1 Corinthians 14:13). [The verb is in the present iterative time].

**The phenomenon must remain subjected to certain prescribed limitations.** Paul makes a clear distinction between “the possession” of a spiritual gift and “the use” of a spiritual gift. He differentiates between “having”<sup>273</sup> a spiritual gift (1 Corinthians 14:26) and “speaking”<sup>274</sup> that spiritual gift (1 Corinthians 14:27-28). “Having” the gift of tongues means “continuity of possession of” the gift of tongues rather than “the suddenness of origin” (its sudden springing up). It is not the sudden reception of the ability to speak in tongues, but *the permanent ability and continuous habit of speaking* in tongues.

That is also why the apostle Paul with apostolic authority can prescribe certain limits to the exercise of the gift of unintelligible sounds (tongues) during the meetings of the congregation. This would not have been possible if Christians were suddenly overwhelmed by the Spirit.

### ▪ The problem in the congregation at Corinth.

**The Corinthians were zealots or fanatics with respect to “spirits”.** This manifestation of the spiritual gifts took place in the early Christian congregation at Corinth (before 56 A.D.) when most of the New Testament did not yet exist. In that period there existed much more room for error.

The congregation of Corinth came into existence from people who lived in complete heathenism and it struggled with many problems that also occurred in their non-Christian society: breaking up into parties, immaturity, jealousy and quarrelling (chapter 3), harbouring false apostles (chapter 4), serious sexual immorality (chapter 5), dragging one another to lawsuits before non-Christian judges (chapter 6), marriage and divorce problems (chapter 7), participation in heathen religious festivals and eating sacrifices dedicated to idols (chapter 8), not supporting God’s workers (chapter 9), ignorance about what happened in the Old Testament (chapter 10), women prophesying in public like the heathen prophetesses (chapter 11), abuse of the Lord’s Supper (chapter 11), abuse of the gift of tongues (chapter 12), lack of love (chapter 13), disorderly worship services (chapter 14), doubts about the resurrection from the dead (chapter 15) and neglecting the collection of money for the poor (chapter 16) . The Letter to the Corinthians suggests that the speaking in unintelligible tongues or sounds was one of the problems in the congregation of Corinth!

Paul does not say that the people in the congregation at Corinth “were eager to have spiritual gifts”, but that they “were *continually zealots (pushers, fanatics) of spirits*”<sup>275</sup> (1 Corinthians 14:12). The Christians at Corinth were eager to possess (*evil or false*) *spirits (sic!)*, *instead of spiritual gifts!*<sup>276</sup> Apparently, *non-Christian spirits* operated in the meetings of the congregation that enabled some people to say or shout something in unintelligible tongues during the meetings of the congregation. There were certainly also *false spirits* operating in the meetings of the congregation who denied Jesus Christ (1 John 4:1). They possibly believed that different “spirits” produced different spiritual gifts, but Paul taught them that all the different spiritual gifts are given by one and the same Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:4,11). Amidst all this error and sin, there certainly was a greater need for the functioning of certain spiritual gifts, like “prophecy” and its complementary gift, “the distinguishing between spirits”.

Paul exhorts the Christians who *possessed spiritual gifts permanently and were accustomed to* use spiritual gifts during the meetings of the congregation, to stop chasing after the abilities of these non-Christian spirits that caused confusion

<sup>271</sup> Greek: γενη γλωσσων

<sup>272</sup> Greek: ο λαλων (participle, present, active) γλωσση

<sup>273</sup> Greek: εχει (indicative, present, active)

<sup>274</sup> Greek: λαλει (indicative, present, active)

<sup>275</sup> Greek: επει (because) ζηλωται εστε (indicative, present, active) πνευματων (spirits, not πνευματικων, spiritual gifts)

<sup>276</sup> The RSV translates “the manifestations of the Spirit” and the NIV translates “spiritual gifts” (Greek: πνευματικων), but these translations are based on a late Greek text (called P1175) from about the 9<sup>th</sup> century A.D. This is a deviation from the much older majority Greek texts: “spirits” (Greek: πνευματων).

among the hearers. Christians must instead excel in those gifts of the Holy Spirit that edify the whole congregation during the meetings of the congregation. Such gifts are for example the gift of prophecy that communicates God's Word clearly in intelligible words during the meetings of the congregation. Paul has in mind what ought to happen in the meetings of the congregation.

**The Corinthians were overestimating the gift of tongues.** The Letter to the Corinthians suggests that the speaking in unintelligible tongues was one of the many problems in the congregation of Corinth. The Corinthians overestimated the gift of tongues (1 Corinthians 12:30). The gift of tongues disrupted the orderly meetings of the congregation (1 Corinthians chapter 14). Therefore the apostle Paul thought it necessary to address the question of spiritual gifts (Greek: *charismata*).

With the authority of an apostle of Jesus Christ Paul teaches the following three important truths:

- Paul first deals in general with the question of “the spiritual gifts”<sup>277</sup> in which he assigns the gift of tongues its rightful place: not at the top, but at the bottom of the list of spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:4-11,28-30).
- Then he points out “the most excellent way of love” that surpasses the possession of all spiritual gifts. Love should be the principle according to which the whole Christian life must be conducted, including the exercise of spiritual gifts. He teaches that the use of the gift of tongues without the fruit of the Spirit (love) is *absolutely useless* (1 Corinthians 13:1-3) and that the use of the gift of unintelligible tongues is *still a visible sign of imperfection* (spiritual immaturity) (1 Corinthians 13:8-13; 1 Corinthians 14:20-21)!
- Finally he teaches the only right way of using the gift of tongues during all the meetings of the congregation. The speaking of unintelligible words in tongues must be replaced by *the speaking of intelligible words in prophecy* (1 Corinthians 14:1-40)!

**The Corinthians were misusing the gift of tongues.** It seems that during the meetings of the congregation at Corinth, certain people were using the gift of speaking unintelligible words in tongues in order to make themselves heard in the congregation. The meetings became disrupted, because no one understood what these people were saying in tongues.

While God desired that everything happening during the meetings of the congregation should happen in a fitting and orderly way, some Christians at Corinth behaved without dignity and decorum. They changed the meetings into in disorderly meetings, that removed the peace which people should experience in relation to God and other people. Instead of peace, irritation, confusion and disorder prevailed (1 Corinthians 14:33,40). Their disturbing behaviour not only confused the Christians present, but also caused the non-Christians present to exclaim that these people were out of their mind! The speaking in unintelligible tongues repelled the interested non-Christians away from the gospel and from Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 14:22-23).

With the authority of an apostle of Christ Paul subjected the use of the gift of speaking in unintelligible tongues during the meetings of the congregation to strict rules (which were commands of God)(1 Corinthians 14:26-40)! The freedom with which each one may use his particular spiritual gift during the meetings of the congregation must be limited and governed by the principles of love, clear communication and edification. In all the meetings of the congregation the purpose must be to build up the congregation and its individual members.

▪ **The commands of God and of his apostle to the congregation at Corinth.**

Thus the apostle Paul puts the speaking of tongues in its right place and in the right relationship to all the other spiritual gifts. He especially exhorts those Christians who possess the gift of speaking in tongues permanently and were used to speak in tongues only by means of their human spirit. They only uttered strange and unintelligible sounds (1 Corinthians 14:13-17). Such people must pray that in the future they would be able to explain what they wanted to say with their human spirit. This does not mean that they must first speak in unintelligible tongues and thereafter explain what they were saying. They must pray that their speaking in tongues in the future would work simultaneously through their human spirit and their human mind. They are exhorted to pray that their speaking (praying, singing, praising and thanking) in tongues would be expressed, not in unintelligible sounds, but in intelligible communication! Only in this way is the congregation edified!

**The Christians at Corinth were not encouraged to pray that they might receive arbitrary spiritual gifts.** In 1 Corinthians 14:13 the apostle Paul does not teach any Christian that he must pray to receive any arbitrary spiritual gift he may desire to possess! The Christians in Corinth must not think that it is right to pray for the gift of tongues or for the gift of interpretation (or any other gift), because Christians *have already been commanded to eagerly desire the greater gifts* (1 Corinthians 12:31a; 1 Corinthians 14:1)<sup>278</sup>! Their hearts must eagerly desire what God desires! They must pray for what God desires. “The three greater gifts” in the Bible are:

- apostles or people sent out on a special mission (as planting and building congregations)
- prophets or prophecy (preaching Gods revelation in the Bible)
- and teachers or teaching God's Word (1 Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 4:11).

<sup>277</sup> Greek: *χαρισματα*

<sup>278</sup> Greek: *ζηλοῦτε* (imperative, present active) *δε τα χαρισματα τα μειζονα*

**The Corinthian Christians who were accustomed to speak in tongues were not exhorted to pray for the gift of the interpretation of tongues.** In 1 Corinthians 14:13 the apostle Paul does not teach any Christian that he should pray for the gift of interpretation *after* he has spoken in tongues! With the authority of an apostle of Jesus Christ he commands that the Christian who is accustomed to speak in tongues during the meetings of the congregation must pray that he may receive the grace and ability to interpret or translate what he wants to say in his heart (spirit) in the way taught in the following verses (14 to 19)! He must pray that the Holy Spirit would enable him to express what he wants to say by means of his human spirit in intelligible words by means of his human mind.

**The Corinthian Christians were commanded to pray for the grace and ability to express what their spirit wants to communicate only by means of the intelligible words of prophecy!** In 1 Corinthians 14:14-19 the apostle Paul commands the Christian who was accustomed to speak in tongues to pray that he may be able to speak what he wants to say, not simply by means of his spirit in unintelligible tongues, but at the same time (simultaneously) by means of his mind in intelligible words! He must pray that his speaking (praying, singing, praising, thanking) does not manifest itself in unintelligible sounds of his spirit (heart), but manifest itself in intelligible words of his mind (1 Corinthians 14:15)! This Christian must ask God to change his speaking in unintelligible sounds of tongues into intelligible words of prophecy! Because the human spirit of that Christian is subject to his own control, he can do it and must do it (1 Corinthians 14:32)! This is not the same as praying for the gift of interpretation *after* he has spoken in unintelligible tongues!

God is free to answer his prayer and give him the interpretation (of what he wants to say by means of his spirit) in his mind (understanding), so that he can express it through intelligible communication. Thus, in stead of speaking in unintelligible tongues operating through his spirit only (as in the past), he must now (in the future) speak in tongues operating simultaneously through his human spirit and his human mind. If God answers his prayer he will no longer speak (pray, sing, praise and thank) in unintelligible tongues, but only in the intelligible words of prophecy!

But God is also free not to answer his prayer and then he must remain silent during the meetings of the congregation. He must refrain from speaking (praying, singing, praising, thanking) in unintelligible sounds or words in the meetings of the congregation!

Normally, a person acts or functions by means of his mind. But with the gift of unintelligible tongues the mind remains inactive, that is, the mind is not used. What he says in tongues is unintelligible for himself (i.e. for his own spirit). It is also unintelligible for other people (i.e. the spirit of other people). But Jesus Christ commands the Christian to love God and his neighbour with all his mind (Mark 12:30-31). That is why he must use his mind when he communicates the message in his heart (spirit). A Christian must subject his human spirit to the control of his human mind so that everything happening within the meetings of the congregation would promote order, peace and edification (1 Corinthians 14:32-33)!

**Paul describes a hypothetical case about what might happen within the meeting of the congregation in order to explain what he means.** He (Paul) would pray with his spirit and at the same time (simultaneously) pray with his mind. This means that he would let the gift of speaking in tongues function, not only by means of his human spirit, but simultaneously through his human mind. This is what Paul actually does.

Although Paul says that he speaks in other languages which he listeners do not understand more than the Christians in Corinth, he never makes use of this ability in any meeting of any congregation. "In the church" where people meet to be edified Paul would rather speak five intelligible words with his mind in Aramaic or Greek than a thousand unintelligible words with his spirit (1 Corinthians 14:18-19)! In the meetings of the congregation Paul *never* speaks unintelligible words with his spirit, because it would make no sense to the people listening. He *always* speaks intelligible words with his mind, because his purpose is not to confuse, but to edify people. He *never* speaks (prays, sings, praises, thanks) with his spirit without simultaneously speaking (praying, singing, praising, thanking) with his mind. He *always* expresses what his spirit wants to say with words of his mind which his listeners can understand (1 Corinthians 14:15)! He communicates with other people only by means of his mind! He has subjected the function of his spirit to the control of his mind (1 Corinthians 14:32)! He *always* speaks (prays, sings, praises, thanks) with his spirit by expressing what his spirit would like to say by means of the intelligible words of his mind!

Paul gives this *hypothetical example* so that the Christians at Corinth would follow his example and *only* use intelligible (understandable) words during the meetings of the congregation when they bring a revelation, knowledge, prophecy or word of instruction. In this way everyone is edified and no one is repelled (1 Corinthians 14:6,15,19).

▪ **The authoritative teaching of the apostle to the Corinthian congregation at Corinth.**

**Christians must make a clear distinction between the historical description of something and the authoritative teaching about that same thing in the Bible.** Christians must distinguish between the historical description of the speaking in tongues during the meetings of the congregation of Corinth on the one hand and the authoritative teaching and command of the apostle of Jesus Christ about this matter on the other hand.

**The historical description of the gift of tongues in the congregation of Corinth.** At Corinth the speaking in tongues was a speaking in unintelligible sounds by means of only the human spirit! It did not edify anyone, except the person

who possessed this gift (1 Corinthians 14:4). And when the speaking in tongues was also a speaking by means of an evil (non-Christian) spirit it had to be absolutely forbidden!

**The authoritative teaching and command in the Bible about the gift of speaking in tongues.** The apostle Paul commands that the people with the gift of speaking in languages or tongues may only speak when they bring their message by means of intelligible words of their human mind. Only in this way the message is clearly communicated! Everything done during the meetings of the congregation must be done to enhance love, communication, edification and unity. This where the emphasis lies. This is more important to God than exercising the spiritual gift of speaking in unintelligible tongues that edifies only the speaker (1 Corinthians 13:1; 1 Corinthians 14:12).

Christians should note the following:

- The gift of speaking in unintelligible sounds in the Letter to the Corinthians was **different than the prophesying in intelligible words of a known language in the Book of Acts.**
- The gift of speaking in unintelligible tongues **occurred only in the congregation at Corinth** in the history of salvation of the New Testament. If it also occurred in other congregations, Paul and Luke would surely have mentioned it.
- The gift of speaking in unintelligible tongues is **not taught in the Bible to be the proof of being baptised with the Spirit.** In the Book of Acts it is *only related* as one of the accompanying signs of the unique historical event of the initial outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the three major groups of people in the Bible. The speaking in unintelligible tongues is nowhere in the Bible a sign of the so-called “second blessing” (i.e. the baptism with the Spirit *some time after* the regeneration by the Holy Spirit). The authoritative teaching in the Bible with respect to the baptism with the Spirit is that the permanent signs of the baptism with the Spirit are: the coming into existence of functioning congregations and the manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit, especially love.
- The gift of speaking in unintelligible tongues is definitely **not given to every Christian** (1 Corinthians 12:29-30).
- The gift of speaking in unintelligible tongues **could be a manifestation of a non-Christian (evil) spirit** (1 Corinthians 14:12)!
- The gift of speaking in unintelligible tongues is **never a sign of being spiritual.** The congregation of Corinth possessed all the spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 1:7) and yet the apostle Paul calls them “unspiritual” (carnal) (1 Corinthians 3:1-4).
- The gift of speaking in unintelligible tongues is **never a sign of “being mature”** (1 Corinthians 13:8-13). It is rather a sign of infant (childish) behaviour (1 Corinthians 14:20-21). Children boast about external behaviour and they say senseless things. The thinking, speaking, boasting, reasoning and behaving as that of an immature child belong to “the imperfect” (i.e. “the things in part”)<sup>279</sup> and is contrasted with “the perfect”. Through the apostle Paul God *commands* all Corinthians “not to be children”<sup>280</sup>, but to *continually* grow to spiritual maturity!<sup>281</sup> “When the perfect will *once for all* come, the imperfect will *certainly* pass away (cease)”<sup>282</sup> (1 Corinthians 13:10).
- The gift of speaking in unintelligible tongues by those accustomed to speak in tongues **does not communicate!** The gift of speaking in unintelligible tongues is the only spiritual gift that requires interpretation. God commands such Christians to express what they want to say with their spirit only in intelligible words of his mind (1 Corinthians 14:13-17) or that another Christian immediately gives the interpretation in intelligible words (1 Corinthians 14:27).
- The gift of speaking in unintelligible tongues **must be subject to the control of the speaker** (1 Corinthians 14:32). The exercise of all the spiritual gifts must be subject to the control of the people who possess those gifts, so that everything happening during the meeting of the congregation will be done in a fitting and orderly way (1 Corinthians 14:40).
- The gift of speaking in unintelligible tongues during the meetings of the congregation **must be subject to the leadership of the elders.** They are responsible before God and answerable to God for the orderly conduct of all the meetings of the congregation (1 Timothy 3:3-4; 1 Timothy 4:14; 1 Timothy 5:17; Hebrews 13:17). They are responsible for what happens in the meetings of the congregation, including:
  - the discovery and fanning into flame of spiritual gifts (2 Timothy 1:6; 1 Thessalonians 5:19)
  - overseeing that the spiritual gifts function according to the teaching in the Bible (1 Corinthians 14:1-40)
  - and discerning and testing of the spiritual gifts (1 Thessalonians 5:19-21; 1 John 4:1; 1 Corinthians 12:10).

<sup>279</sup> Greek: το εκ μερους

<sup>280</sup> Greek: μη παιδια γινεσθε (imperative, present, deponent)

<sup>281</sup> Greek: τελειοι γινεσθε (imperative, present, deponent)

<sup>282</sup> Greek: οταν δε ελθη (subjunctive, aorist, active) το τελειον, το εκ μερους καταργηθησεται (indicative, future, passive)

- The gift of speaking in unintelligible tongues during the meetings of the congregation **must be tested** in order to insure that no human opinion is proclaimed as God's Word. The gift of prophecy needs the complementary gift of other Christians prophesying (1 Corinthians 14:29) and the supervision of the responsible elders (Titus 1:9) to evaluate what has been said. Likewise, the gift of speaking in unintelligible tongues must be tested by the complementary gifts of discernment of spirits and the interpretation of tongues (1 Corinthians 12:10; 1 Corinthians 14:27) as well as the supervision of the elders (Acts 20:28).
  - The truth must be tested: Are the contents of what is spoken true on the basis of God's revelation in the Bible?
  - The source must be tested: Is the Holy Spirit or an evil spirit or merely the human spirit the source of the revelation?
  - The effect must be tested: What effect do the message and the way it is presented in unintelligible tongues have on the people? Does it edify, encourage and comfort them? Or does it cause confusion, disorder and rejection?
  - The life of the speaker must be tested: What is the daily life and testimony of the person speaking? Is the speaker mature and spiritual or immature and carnal (1 Corinthians 2:14 to 3:4; 1 Timothy 3:7)? Does the speaker promote unity or cause division (Titus 3:10-11)? Is the speaker obedient<sup>283</sup> or arrogant (James 3:13-18)?
  - If the exercise of spiritual gifts is not controlled or tested, people can and do become false prophets, as happened during the times of the Bible (Jeremiah 23:9-32) and in modern times.

### 3. The biblical rules for speaking in tongues (1 Corinthians 13:1; 1 Corinthians 14:26-28).

When Christians come together in a meeting, there are people present to whom the Holy Spirit has given either *a special ability* (e.g. prophecy or tongues) or *a specific task or office* (e.g. a teacher or a shepherd/pastor). The word "each" does not refer to everyone person present, but to every person who is *accustomed* to exercise his spiritual gift in the meetings of the congregation. The apostle Paul makes a clear distinction between the possession of a spiritual gift (1 Corinthians 14:26) and the use of a spiritual gift (1 Corinthians 14:27-40).

Christians who possess spiritual gifts do not suddenly receive their spiritual gift as if they are overwhelmed by the Holy Spirit and cannot help to exercise their gift. Christians who possess spiritual gifts have the ability to exercise or to refrain from exercising their spiritual gift! Their human spirits are subject to the control of their will and mind. Therefore it is possible that everything that happens in the meetings of the congregation can happen in a fitting and orderly way. Because God is a God of order, genuine Christians must and can resist and refuse the work of evil (non-Christian) spirits. Born-again Christians have self-control (as a fruit of the Spirit) and can and must exercise self-control in the exercise of spiritual gifts. They can and must exercise or refrain from exercising their spiritual gifts in the biblical way.

That is why God and the apostle Paul are able to command Christians that "all things must *at all times* be done for the edification of the congregation" (1 Corinthians 14:26) and "all things must *at all times* be done decently (becomingly, properly) and in good order (in an orderly manner)"<sup>284</sup> [commands in the present continuous tense](1 Corinthians 14:40)! Christians do not have the freedom to use their spiritual gifts as they please during the meetings of the congregation, because the use of the spiritual gifts has *at all times* very clear limits and these limits are *commanded* by God himself (1 Corinthians 14:37)! All Christians to whom the Holy Spirit has given spiritual gifts *must at all times* subject themselves to these limiting rules (commands) of the Lord!

#### ▪ The use of the gift of tongues must be edifying.

The Christian who is *accustomed* to speak in tongues must determine whether the exercise of his spiritual gift would edify the Christians present (1 Corinthians 14:5,12-13) and not repel the non-Christians present (1 Corinthians 14:22-23). Every use of a spiritual gift during the meetings of the congregation must be motivated by the desire to love (1 Corinthians 13:1), to edify (1 Corinthians 14:12) and to communicate the message with clear intelligible words. The message may be a revelation, or knowledge, or prophecy, or a word of instruction (1 Corinthians 14:6-11). The person accustomed to speak in tongues (or use any other spiritual gift) does not have the freedom to use his gift as he pleases. The use of every spiritual gift is bound to strict rules. There are circumstances in which he must refrain from using his spiritual gift.

#### ▪ The speaking in tongues must be a clear communication of a message.

**When the speaker is able to interpret himself.** When God heard his prayer and he is able to say what his spirit wants to say by means of intelligible words of his mind, he must only speak (pray, sing, praise, thank) by means of clear intelligible words of his mind (1 Corinthians 14:13-19).

**When an interpreter is able and willing to interpret.** When God has not heard his prayer and the Christian is not able to express or manifest what his spirit wants to say by means of clear intelligible words of his mind, *he must first determine* whether another Christian, who is known in the congregation to possess the gift of translation or

<sup>283</sup> Greek: εὑπειθής

<sup>284</sup> Greek: πάντα δε εὐσχημονως και κατα ταξιν γινεσθω (imperative, present, middle)

interpretation permanently<sup>285</sup>, is present and willing to interpret his message in clear intelligible words or not (1 Corinthians 14:27). In the meetings of the congregation Paul forbade the speaking of tongues operating only through the spirit!

But Paul allowed the speaking in languages or tongues that are expressed in clear intelligible words of the mind. He also allowed the speaking of unintelligible languages or tongues during the meetings of the congregation when it is *immediately* translated or interpreted by someone known in the congregation to possess the gift of translation or interpretation permanently (1 Corinthians 12:10; 1 Corinthians 14:27).<sup>286</sup> This is a command! Remember, God searches the heart and knows whether the speaker or translator (interpreter) is genuine or fake. And remember, there are evil spirits present during the meeting of the congregation who will try to manifest fake speaking or fake interpretation of tongues.

**When there is no interpreter.** When this other Christian is not present or unwilling to translate (interpret), the speaker must *at all times* remain silent during the meetings of the congregation [a command in the continuous present tense]! He may not even *whisper or mumble* in unintelligible tongues during the meetings of the congregation. But he may speak (pray, etc.) in tongues “for his own benefit” and “for the glory of God” when he is completely alone<sup>287</sup> (1 Corinthians 14:28).

▪ **The speaking in tongues must be limited to a maximum of three persons.**

No more than three persons *accustomed to* speak in tongues [present iterative tense]<sup>288</sup> may speak in tongues during a meeting of the congregation (1 Corinthians 14:27a), provided they obey God’s other rules. They must utter what their spirit wants to say in intelligible words by means of their mind (1 Corinthians 14:12-19) or there must be *another Christian* with the permanent gift of translation or interpretation that is willing to immediately give a correct (genuine) translation or interpretation in intelligible words (1 Corinthians 14:27). Clearly the gift of tongues is not a blind power, but a gift of God which can be controlled by the possessor!

The interpreter of tongues *must be someone other than the speaker in tongues* (1 Corinthians 12:10), because the speaker in an unintelligible language or tongue must be tested just as a prophet prophesying in intelligible words must be tested by the other prophets (1 Corinthians 14:29).

▪ **The speaking in tongues must be done in turn and in a fitting and orderly way.**

Christians who are accustomed to speak in tongues during the meetings of the congregation *must speak in turn* – “one at a time” - so that everything in the meeting is done in a fitting and orderly way (1 Corinthians 14:27b,40). Paul commands that a maximum of three people may take turns to speak in another language or tongue during the meetings of the congregation, that there must always be translation or interpretation, that people may not all together speak in tongues at the same time (1 Corinthians 14:27) and that women may not speak in the meetings of the congregation in tongues or in prophecy (authoritative preaching)(1 Corinthians 14:34-38; 1 Timothy 2:11-12).

#### 4. The explanation of Romans 8:26-27.

“In the same way, the Spirit *always* helps us in our weakness (literally: gives us a helping hand). We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself *continually* intercedes for us with unexpressed groans (i.e. with intercessions that are not expressed in *words* but only in groans, because they are too deep for *words*). [The Latin translation uses the word: inexpressible<sup>289</sup> groans (i.e. intercessions which cannot be expressed and therefore are not expressed in any way]. And he who *continually* searches out hearts knows [perfect tense] the mind (i.e. the intention) of the Spirit, because he (the Spirit) intercedes *continually* for the saints (Christians) in accordance with God’s will.”<sup>290</sup>

Romans 8:26-27 speaks about the work of the Holy Spirit in a Christian. He intercedes (pleads) continually for the Christian amidst his weaknesses, misfortunes and suffering!

▪ **The Holy Spirit intercedes for the unknown and inexpressible needs of Christians.**

“In the same way” means the following: Just as the hope (the certain expectation) concerning the future (the resurrection and the new earth) cheers the Christian up *in his present suffering* (Romans 8:18-25), so the Holy Spirit helps the Christian *in his present weaknesses* (Romans 8:26-27).

<sup>285</sup> Greek: διερμηνευω

<sup>286</sup> Greek: και εις διερμηνευετω (imperative, present, active)

<sup>287</sup> Greek: εαν δε μη η (subjunctive, present, active) διερμηνευτης σιγατω (imperative, present, active) εν εκκλησια, εαυω δε λαλειτω (imperative, present, active) και τω θεω

<sup>288</sup> Greek: ειτε γλωσση τις λαλει, κατα δυο η το πλειστον τρεις, και ανα μερος, και εις διερμηνευτω

<sup>289</sup> Latin: inenarrabilis:

<sup>290</sup> Greek: ωσαυτος δε και το πνευμα συναντιλαμβανομαι (indicative, present, deponent) τη ασθενεια ημων, το γαρ τι προσευχομαι (subjunctive, arist, deponent) καθο δει (indicative, present, active) ουκ οιδαμεν (indicative, perfect, active) αλλα αυτο το πνευμα υπερεντυγαανει (indicative, present, active) στεναγμοις αλαλητους. ο δε εραυνω (participle, present, active) τας καρδιας οιδεν (indicative, perfect, active) τι το φρονημα του πνευματος, οτι κατα θεον εντυγαανει (indicative, present, active) υπερ αγων.

The weaknesses may take on different forms: the difficulty of living in a broken world or the suffering because you are a Christian. The weaknesses may be temptations (seductions) that overcome you (Hebrews 4:15) or can manifest itself as “a thorn in the flesh” (2 Corinthians 12:7). The weaknesses are certainly not limited to prayer!

The Christian is strengthened amidst these weaknesses and suffering by the continual help of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit takes upon himself the humble task of helping the Christian carry his burden and his load (Galatians 6:2,5).

There is always moral and spiritual failure on the side of the Christian (cf. Romans chapter 7), so that he falls short of who he should be, what he should do and how he should pray. The Christian does not always know what he should pray for, i.e., which prayer fits which need, trouble or suffering. Though he knows in general what to pray for (Matthew 6:9-13; Colossians 1:9-12), he often does not know what he should pray for in a specific situation, need or suffering. He is not sure which prayer would be according to God’s will (cf. 2 Corinthians 12:7-10; Philippians 1:22-24; 1 John 5:14). Often the Christian does not even know the deepest needs of his own heart. That is why he does not express these needs in words, only in groans, in his prayers or he does not express them in any way because its impossible.

Prayer is directed to God (the Father) (Matthew 6:9). God searches the heart (Jeremiah 17:10; cf. Revelation 2:23). The Holy Spirit lives in the heart of the Christian (1 Corinthians 3:16) and he knows the real needs of the Christian. That is why God knows the mind (intention) of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit always prays in accordance with God’s perfect will for every need which the Christian:

- cannot express in words (because he does not know how to pray for it)
- or does not express in any way (because he does not even realise what his need is)

As a real Advocate the Holy Spirit identifies himself with the Christian and his real need and pleads that God would meet that need!

#### ▪ **Five important observations with regard to the intercession of the Holy Spirit.**

##### **The first observation. It is the Holy Spirit who pleads and not the Christian that prays.**

Some Christians interpret this Bible passage as if it speaks about how Christians pray. They say that the Holy Spirit causes the Christian to pray with unspeakable groans, i.e. with aspirations, desires and emotions which the Christian cannot express in words. The Christian hears these groans, but cannot understand them. They claim that the Holy Spirit (overwhelms them and) dictates to them what they ought to say in their prayer or how they should present their cause in prayer to God: either with intelligible words (normal prayers) or with unintelligible sounds (groans).

This explanation too easily suggests that the audible sounds (groans) in the Christian’s prayer are wholly an expression of the Holy Spirit praying in and through the Christian. This causes the Christian to believe that the highest form of prayer which God approves is praying in unintelligible groans!

Other Christians interpret this form of prayer with “praying in unintelligible tongues” (1 Corinthians 14:14-17). But NOTE: “the praying in unintelligible tongues is the praying of the Christian and not the praying of the Holy Spirit!

The correct explanation is it is the Holy Spirit Himself who intercedes. This Bible passage does not say how the Christian ought to pray, but how the Holy Spirit is interceding for the Christian! It is not the Christian who prays, but the Holy Spirit who intercedes! The mind (intention) known by God is not the mind (intention) of the Christian who prays, but the mind (intention) of the Spirit who intercedes! God the Father listens, not to the audible groans of the prayer of the Christian, but to the unexpressed groans of the prayer of the Holy Spirit. (Romans 8:27).

##### **The second observation. The pleading of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:27) is as the pleading of Jesus Christ (Romans 8:34).**

In the Gospel of John the Holy Spirit is the Representative or Advocate<sup>291</sup> of Jesus Christ on earth. He represents Jesus Christ and his thoughts and will in the Christian on earth (John 14:16-17,26; John 16:14; cf. Romans 8:9-10). But in the Letter to the Romans the Holy Spirit is the Representative or Advocate of the Christian in heaven. The Holy Spirit like Jesus Christ represents the Christian and his needs with God the Father in heaven (cf. Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25; 1 John 2:1-2)! The Spirit stands next to the Christian on earth and represents both Jesus Christ with the Christian on earth and the Christian with God in heaven! Thus, the Christian has Jesus Christ as his Intercessor before God’s throne in heaven and the Holy Spirit as his Intercessor in his heart on earth! The intercessions of Jesus Christ are like the intercessions of a father for his whole family, while the intercessions of the Holy Spirit are like the intercessions of a mother for every one of her small children.

##### **The third observation. The groans of the Holy Spirit are not prayers that are formulated in intelligible words.**

The intercession of the Spirit has contents, either spoken and heard, or unspoken and not heard.

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<sup>291</sup> Greek: parakletos

The original Greek text and the Syrian and Armenian translations of the Bible say: “But the Spirit Himself pleads *continually* for us with “unspoken”<sup>292</sup> groans.” The groans are not expressed in intelligible words, but in unintelligible groans. The groans are too deep to express in words, but they can nevertheless be heard as sounds.

The Latin translation of the Bible uses the word: “unspeakable” or “inexpressible”<sup>293</sup>. The groans cannot even be expressed in sounds, let alone words. The groans are “inaudible.”

**The fourth observation. The intercessions of the Spirit rise up to God’s throne in the form of unexpressed or inexpressible groans.**

The groans of the Spirit can only be understood as:

- unexpressed groans: that are not expressed in intelligible words, but in audible sounds, because the Christian does not know how to pray for his need.
- inexpressible groans: that are not expressed at all, because the Christian does not even realise what his need really is.

These groans take place *in the heart of the Christian*, because God searches the heart of the Christian. In his intercession in unexpressed or inexpressible groans for the Christian, the Spirit makes use of *the Christian as his instrument of prayer*. Thus, the word “unexpressed” is the best, because the groans are expressed audible – not in audible words, but in audible groans. And the word “inexpressible” is the best when the groans are not heard at all.

But the Christians must not confuse his own praying in audible groans with the intercession of the Spirit. Although the Christian is aware that the Spirit makes use of these audible groans in his heart to plead with God on his behalf, he cannot claim that when he expresses his prayers in unintelligible sounds that these groans are the intercessions of the Spirit! Christians must not forget that God searches the motives and intentions of the heart (Romans 8:27a; Hebrews 4:12-13)!

Romans 8:26-27 speaks about how the Holy Spirit intercedes for the Christian with God and not how the Christians may or should pray!

**The fifth observation. God knows that the intercession of the Spirit is in accordance with his will.**

God continually searches the heart of the Christian. He knows everything in his heart (1 Samuel 16:7; 1 Chronicles 28:9; Jeremiah 17:9-10; 1 Corinthians 4:5; Hebrews 4:13) and he also knows the contents, the meaning and the intention of the intercession of the Spirit for the Christian.

Romans 8:26-27 speaks about the Holy Spirit who in his intercession pleads for the Christian in accordance with God’s perfect will. He does not speak about what the Christian is praying to God. The Christian cannot claim that what he thinks he is saying in unintelligible sounds (groans) is the intercession of the Spirit for him. The content of the intercession of the Spirit is not revealed to the Christian!

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God. He is completely perfect. He thinks exactly like God thinks. Therefore the intercession of the Spirit must always be completely perfect and effective! He never fails and he cannot fail! That is why not a single genuine Christian is ever lost (Romans 8:29-30). That is why nothing happens in a Christian’s life that does not first have God’s permission or that would not contribute to God’s plan for the Christian’s life (Romans 8:28)!

These groans in the heart of the Christian point to the fact that God does immeasurably more than all a Christian asks or even can imagine (Ephesians 3:20)!

## (16) THE INTERPRETATION OF TONGUES

### **1. The ability or function to translate other known and intelligible languages of men or to interpret unknown and unintelligible languages (tongues) of angels (1 Corinthians 12:10,30; 1 Corinthians 14:5,13,27-28).**

The gift of the interpretation of tongues is the special *desire and ability* to understand and to “translate” a known and intelligible language of men in the world or to understand and to “interpret”<sup>294</sup> an unknown and unintelligible language of angels<sup>295</sup>. This spiritual gift is the indispensable complement of the gift of speaking in another known language of men or in an unknown tongue of angels during the meetings of the congregation (1 Corinthians 12:10,30; 1 Corinthians 14:27-28).

The Christian with the *permanent* gift of interpretation of languages (tongues) is able to discern whether the person with the *permanent* gift of speaking in languages (tongues) during the meetings of the congregation is genuine or fake. He is able to discern whether the person speaking in another language (tongue) is inspired by the Holy Spirit, by an evil spirit

<sup>292</sup> Greek: alalētos < a + laleo (not + speaking)

<sup>293</sup> Latin: inenarrabilis:

<sup>294</sup> Greek: ερμηνεία γλωσσῶν, διερμηνεύω, διερμηνεύτης

<sup>295</sup> Greek: ερμηνεία γλωσσῶν

or merely by his own human spirit. And he is able to discern whether what the person speaking in a language or tongue is saying is applicable for the congregation or not.

It is clear that the person who was accustomed to speak in unintelligible tongues during the meetings of the congregation usually did not possess the gift of interpretation and thus could not interpret what he himself had said in tongues. That is why the apostle commands him to pray and ask God to give him the ability to express in clear intelligible words of his mind what his spirit wanted to communicate (1 Corinthians 14:13). His speaking in tongues had to work simultaneously through his spirit, his mind and his mouth (1 Corinthians 14:5,13-19)!

Nevertheless, this ability was not automatic (1 Corinthians 14:5,13). That is why there had to be another Christian with the permanent ability “to translate the known language” of man or “to interpret the unknown language” of angels. The translator or interpreter had to be someone else than the speaker in a foreign language or unintelligible tongue, because the speaker in tongues had to be tested just like the prophet had to be tested (cf. 1 Corinthians 14:29). Both the speaker in foreign languages or strange tongues and the translator or interpreter have to be Christians who *are known in the congregation to be accustomed* to speak in languages or tongues and to translate languages or interpret tongues during the meetings of the congregation. [The verbs are in the present iterative tense].

If there was no *known* translator or interpreter present in the congregation or he was unwilling to translate or interpret, then the speaker in a foreign language or a strange tongue had to remain silent during the meetings of the congregation. All speaking in foreign languages without direct translation or speaking in unintelligible tongues without direct interpretation is prohibited!

## 2. The task of all Christians.

Although some Christians possess the permanent spiritual gift of speaking in tongues, they are not free to use their gift as they like. And although some Christians possess the permanent spiritual gift of translating foreign languages of men or interpreting unintelligible tongues of angels, they must be completely willing to translate or interpret.

All Christians present in the meetings of the congregation are responsible to see that everything happening during the meetings of the congregation is:

- promoting love
- edifying, encouraging, comforting
- fitting or becoming
- and orderly

## (17) CONTINENCE OR CELIBACY

### 1. The ability (gift) to remain unmarried.

“Celibate” (1 Corinthians 7:7,32-38; Matthew 19:10-12) is *the special desire and ability* (based on a spiritual gift) or choice (calling) to remain unmarried in order to serve God with an undivided heart.

Just as all the other spiritual gifts, also this spiritual gift may be given for a period of time, that is, as long as God deems it necessary. This spiritual gift may be given permanently for the duration of one’s whole life. The gift of celibate may not be enforced by any denomination onto its offices.

### 2. The task of all Christians.

While some Christians receive the spiritual gift of continence or celibacy, all Christians are called to avoid sexual immorality (Hebrews 13:4), to learn to control their own bodies and to win their wives in a way that is holy and honourable and to live a holy life (1 Thessalonians 4:3-8).