

A Triad of Short Bible Studies

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Preface

The three Bible passages used in this study are the following:

1. Heb., chapters 1 and 2, dealing with the supremacy of Christ over angels and all created beings.
2. Rev. 21. In this particular study we are not so much interested in the “deep” and the occult symbolism hidden in the text as we are in the exhortative and edifying words lying right near the surface.
3. 1 Cor. 14.1-20. Treating of the gifts of prophecy and speaking in tongues. New Testament prophecy is not necessarily the predicting of events. Such an ability is impressive (**if** and **when** the events come true), but it seems to be a rather frivolous use of the gift of prophecy. Paul describes prophecy in the 3rd verse : “But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification [building up], and exhortation [encouragement], and comfort.”

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A Bible Study of Hebrews 1 & 2

The Supremacy of the Son of God

Hebrews 1

Verse 1

- 1) God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets,
- 2) Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom [His Son] also he made the worlds [universe-NIV];

Comment on vv. 1, 2

God has always had someone, somewhere, with whom He could communicate. Even in mankind's periods of lowest spiritual ebb, God has had a people who made Him foremost in their lives. The history of Israel is a microcosm of this, not that I intend here to use them as an example of a people chosen by God from the sinful nations around them. They were indeed a people chosen by God, but they were a very rebellious nation. I am compelled to use them as the example of sinful men who persecuted the true followers of Jehovah among them. The prophets in particular were a persecuted group who most often were outnumbered by the enemies of Jehovah right there in the midst of Jehovah's own chosen nation! (1 Kings 19.14)) But God spoke through the prophets, telling Israel and Judah (the Northern and Southern Kingdoms respectively) to turn from their wicked ways. (2 Kings 17.13-18; Jer. 25.4)

The word of the prophets was largely ignored and the God who sent the word was often rejected. It was as though God in desperation – only because He didn't want mankind to perish -- chose to do as the man in the Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen: (Mat. 21.33-39) He decided to send His own Son to speak to the people (v.2).

“Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son...” The writer now gives us some of the Son’s credentials: The Son is more than a mere mortal. He inherits all things and it was He who created the universe. But we have a dilemma here. Gen. 1.1 informs us that God, not the Son Jesus, created the heaven (heavens-NIV) and the earth. We will deal with this in the next verse.

V. 3

3) Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high...

Comment on v. 3

In this verse the writer further declares, “The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.” (John 1.14; Mat. 1.20-21, 23; Col. 2.9) (Ref., v.3-NIV) Who is this Son of God who is the “expression of his substance” (Darby Translation) and who declared on numerous occasions that He and the Father were one? Why, it’s clear now – as the expression or projection of the substance of God and being one with God, the Son must be God Himself in visible and tangible form. And that is exactly who He is: God come to earth as a man.

This is corroborated by the angel’s announcement to Mary shortly before Jesus was conceived. The angel told Mary, “...they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, **God with us.**”

Vv 4-7

4) Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.

- 5) For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son?
- 6) And again, when he bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him.
- 7) And of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire.

Comment on vv. 4-7

The writer of Hebrews is forcefully making the contention that the Son is superior to the angels because 1) He has inherited a name better than theirs (Eph. 1.21; Phi. 2.9, 10) 2) God never claimed the angels as sons (Psa. 2.7); and 3) the angels should worship the Son. (1 Pet. 3.22)

He adds this: "Who makes his angels winds, and his servants flames of fire." (NIV, RSV) The writer is convincingly pointing out the vast difference between angels and the Son of God. Angels are powerful beings, but their power comes from God – they are “His angels” (messengers) and “His servants.” They attend upon God’s every wish.

Vv. 8-12

- 8) But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom.
- 9) Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.
- 10) And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands:
- 11) They shall perish; but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment;

12) And as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail.

Comment of vv. 8-12

The writer has a very fixed goal in this chapter: He is determined to show his Jewish readers the complete ascendancy of Christ over angelic beings. (The readers would have to be Jewish as this dissertation would not be appropriate for any other nationality. No other nation had the Mosaic law and the rituals to which the entire book of Hebrews alludes.)

But he has a broader objective for the full epistle. As we read further into the book of Hebrews it is also clear that the writer is showing his readers that the Old Covenant was not complete without the New Covenant established in the blood of Christ. In this particular chapter he contrasts angels with the Son, but it is only a prelude to showing the incompleteness of the Mosaic system, which was predicated on the coming of Christ to fulfill it.

Vv. 13-14

13) But to which of the angels said he at any time,
Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy
footstool?

14) Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to
minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?

Comment on vv. 13-14

The writer of Hebrews completes his contrast between the Son of God whose “throne is forever and ever” and the angels who are “ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation.” In the remainder of Hebrews the writer will show not just the superiority of Jesus to the angels, but to Moses and Aaron. He will also reveal the superiority of the new priesthood, the one patterned “after the order of

Melchizedek,” to the old Levitical priesthood. This of course points up the preeminence of the New Covenant that Jesus ushered in over the Mosaic Covenant, which had faded away, becoming engulfed by the New Covenant that the old one faithfully foreshadowed.

Hebrews 2

Vv. 1-4

- 1) Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.
- 2) For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward;
- 3) How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him;
- 4) God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?

Comment on vv 1-4

He notes in chapter 2 that the law was “spoken by [through] angels.” (Heb. 2.2,3, 10.28, 29) He concludes, “...if the word spoken by angels [who are manifestly inferior to the Son] was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation...?”

Under the Old Covenant transgressors of the law were severely handled and sometimes put to death. We should not think, just because grace is so free in this day and under the New Covenant, we will be allowed to go without punishment. Grace does flow freely now and God is very merciful and patient, but

every sin is adding to the cup of God's wrath until one day it will brim over and the wrath of God will come cascading down on this earth as never before. (Rev. 15.1) Only God's grace has spared this planet up to this point, but when will that grace run dry for the individuals who continually spurn it? It will be very soon – and an indifferent world is fatefully slumbering its way to eternal damnation. It seems to neither know nor care that the sword of doom is hanging by the slimmest of threads over its head. Soon the fires of hell will consume the thread and the sword of damnation will plunge downward, splitting open the skull and piercing to the vitals everyone who is of the world. Whoever is not of Christ is of the world

Vv. 5-9

5) For unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak.

6) But one in a certain place testified, saying, What is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man that thou visitest him?

7) Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and honour, and didst set him over the works of thy hands:

8) Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him.

9) But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.

Comment on vv. 5-9.

Again the writer of Hebrews stresses the inferiority of the angels to the Son of God who came to earth as a man and in that role was vulnerable to death. In His role as a man, Jesus was also lower than the angels. But Jesus suffered death and arose to his

rightful position of being one with the Father and far superior to the angels. The interesting item here is that Jesus, as a man, was a “little while lower” than the angels, but when He arose He was the God He has always been and an infinity above the angels. In like manner, man, made “in the image and likeness” of God, when he (man) is resurrected will follow his resurrected Lord and be superior to all angelic beings.

The writer states that God has not made angels rulers over the world to come, but He has given that prerogative to man. Although the actual subjection of all things to man has not yet been fully accomplished, in the proper time man, as one of the royal family, will be ruler over all and, as we have stated, consequently he too will have a status higher than the angels. Jesus endured the temporary indignity of being a man scorned and rejected so that He might experience death for all who believe in Him. In this way the death of the body that all men must face is no terror to believers; it is only an open portal to a much higher plane.

V. 10

10) For it became him [God], for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings

Comment on v. 10

When I was a youngster, I had difficulty with the idea that Jesus had to be made perfect. I later found that the meaning was that Jesus would be perfected in His role as the Captain or Author of our {the ‘many sons’) salvation. Jesus was undoubtedly perfect in righteousness, but, in the same way that God decreed that Jesus had to grow into manhood from infancy, God decided that Jesus would grow— by sufferings — into the fulfillment of His position as the Savior of mankind.

Vv. 11-18

11) For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren,

12) Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee.

13) And again, I will put my trust in him. And again, Behold I and the children which God hath given me.

14) Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil;

15) And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

16) For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham.

17) Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.

18) For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.

Comment on v. 11-18

These closing verses of chapter 2 are very significant. In verse 11 the writer tells us that Jesus ('he that sanctifieth') and we who follow Him ('they who are sanctified') spring from one Source, that is, God. Going on that premise, we see that Jesus and we are siblings in the family of God. This is established in vv. 11 and 12. We are brothers (and sisters) of the One who saves us.

Yet in v. 13 Christ is quoted, "Behold I and the children which God hath given me." (This is based on Isa. 8.18 in which

Isaiah speaks literally of his own natural children and in prophetic vein of the spiritual progeny that would be begotten by Christ.) Note that this changes the relationship. In vv. 11 and 12 Jesus referred to His followers as His brothers and sisters (and “mother” also in Mat. 12.50 and Mark 3.35), making no distinction between the fraternal and the maternal: they were all simply His family although it was clear that He was their Master. Now, with the same lack of familial distinction, v. 13 tells us that we are both His brothers and sisters and His children: we are all one family, although it is clear that Jesus is our Master.

This same Jesus who was for a little while inferior to the angels has now become the Lord of all creation. This should encourage us as we go through life’s drudgery and disappointments, trials and temptations. Jesus has prayed that we would be one with Him as He is one with the Father, therefore, we shall one day rule creation and be subservient to no one and nothing but God. What a thrilling thought...a rags-to-riches story of the ages! We – mankind – who were less than the dust of the earth through the vileness of sin, will one day reign over everything there is.

“Even so, come, Lord Jesus!”

A Bible Study of Revelation 21

Hope in the Direst Distress

If at this time you need more than abstruse symbolism and profound concepts—if you need a word or two of hope and encouragement in the midst of troubles all around you, here is the “word or two.”

The entire book of Revelation, of course, is full of mystic depictions and is subject to various interpretations. But with regard to the 21st chapter, in this essay we are not so much interested in the “deep” and the occult symbolism hidden in the text as we are in the exhortative and edifying words that are lying right near the surface. Let’s look at it (verses 1-7 are from the Contemporary English Version of the Bible – CEV):

Revelation 21

Verse 1

“I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The first heaven and the first earth had disappeared, and so had the sea.”

Comment on v. 1

This is interesting when you look at it from the perspective of enduring great opposition in your life and being frustrated in the work you are trying to do for Christ’s sake. At times the hassle of living a life of continual self-denial and having to overcome obstacles in the way of doing a work for the Lord – sometimes it gets to be a bit much. But in the verse above we have the assurance that, some day, all things will be made new, just as God states in the 5th verse (not listed here): “I am making everything new.” It’s energizing just to think on the time when everything will be new and the old daily trials of our faith will be completely done away with forever.

Vv. 2-4

“Then I saw New Jerusalem, that holy city, coming down from God in heaven. It was like a bride dressed in her wedding gown and ready to meet her husband. **3** I heard a loud voice shout from the throne: God's home is now with his people. He will live with them, and they will be his own. Yes, God will make his home among his people. **4** He will wipe all tears from their eyes, and there will be no more death, suffering, crying, or pain. These things of the past are gone forever.”

Comment on vv. 2-4

The New Jerusalem (our final abode) will be hard to believe – that is, it would be if we were still in our earthly bodies with their limited powers of grasping what God is doing. What would be incredible in this life will be joyously accepted in the life beyond. God will literally be in our midst just as Jesus was literally with His disciples in His earthly stay. But life in the heavenly residence will be even greater. Jesus was limited by His earthly body that could not be in two or three places at the same time. There Jesus will be literally everywhere with us: The Lamb of God (Son of God) will have all power and will be one with the Father on His throne, reigning and dominating all creation.

We will never, never cry again. There will be no need for tears, not for sorrow and anguish of heart nor as a cleansing, lubricating agent for the eye. There will be no irritation or dirt to remove from our eyes. “These things of the past are gone forever.” “Forever” means they will never return to plague us and we can live in unsurpassed peace and joy. The future cannot frighten us because 1) there will be no “future”; the future will be the continuing present, and 2) even if there were a future,

there could be nothing of a negative nature in the New Jerusalem, therefore nothing can terrify or harm us.

Vv. 5-7

“Then the one sitting on the throne said: I am making everything new... **6** Everything is finished! I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will freely give water from the life-giving fountain to everyone who is thirsty. **7** All who win the victory will be given these blessings. I will be their God, and they will be my people.”

Comment

If God is the Alpha and Omega (the Greek alphabet equivalent of our English A-Z, signifying all things), we can expect no less than an eternity without negatives of any kind. The Alpha and Omega has covered every contingency. As a matter of fact, there will be no contingencies (possible happenings) as God has ordered everything in the New Jerusalem to be exactly to our liking. There will be no such thing as “chance” and that means no mishap. In our present life God allows “chance” happenings (which He always foresees) in our lives for our perfecting, reaping, and the like. We will not require perfecting or reaping in that City toward which we are now so resolutely pressing.

The following verses (8-27) are from the KJV.

V. 8

“But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.”

Comment on v. 8

This verse presents a totally opposite future for sinners who have clung to their sins in their lifetime and rejected Christ up to the end. It will be an absolute hell, not necessarily of literal fire, but of longing desperately for another chance – which they will not get. Their “time” will be spent in a futile longing for that feeling of the presence of God, a feeling of which they were unaware at the time. But now there will be a gaping unbearable hole in their very beings and they will cry out bitterly in their sore anguish and remorse. We cannot conceptualize how sore will be the anguish nor how bitter the remorse: God would never subject His children to such a fate.

The Scriptures point out, time and again, how greatly diverse the consequences are for those who believe what God says and those who reject His counsel. The Scriptures bear witness to it from the beginning, in Genesis, to the end, in Revelation. But oh, how terrible and final will be the end in Revelation! It will be like the awful clicking sound one hears when the mortician closes the casket for the last time, never to open it again. For the sinner the Last Days of judgment will be over and he will enter into an eternity of damnation without a shred of hope left to him.

Vv. 10-21

“And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, Having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal; And had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: On the east three gates; on the north three gates; on the south

three gates; and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. And he that talked with me had a golden reed to measure the city, and the gates thereof, and the wall thereof. And the city lieth foursquare, and the length is as large as the breadth: and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs. The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal. And he measured the wall thereof, an hundred and forty and four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of the angel. And the building of the wall of it was of jasper: and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass. And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, a chalcedony; the fourth, an emerald; The fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, a topaz; the tenth, a chrysoprasus; the eleventh, a jacinth; the twelfth, an amethyst. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; every several gate was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass.”

Comment on vv. 10-21

What a tremendous description! Below is what one commentator has to say about “that great city, the holy Jerusalem,” of verse 10, which the preceding verse had referred to as “the bride, the Lamb's wife,” which is quite a change of symbolism:

“The change of emblems from a bride to a city, shows that we are only to take general ideas from this description. The wall is for security. Heaven is a safe state; those who are there, are separated and

secured from all evils and enemies. This city is vast; here is room for all the people of God. The foundation of the wall; the promise and power of God, and the purchase of Christ, are the strong foundations of the safety and happiness of the church. These foundations are set forth by twelve sorts of precious stones, denoting the variety and excellence of the doctrines of the gospel, or of the graces of the Holy Spirit, or the personal excellences of the Lord Jesus Christ. Heaven has gates; there is a free admission to all that are sanctified; they shall not find themselves shut out. These gates were all of pearls. Christ is the Pearl of great price, and he is our Way to God. The street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass. The saints in heaven tread gold under foot. The saints are there at rest, yet it is not a state of sleep and idleness; they have communion, not only with God, but with one another. All these glories but faintly represent heaven.” —*Matthew Henry’s Concise Commentary*

As I have said, that is one commentator’s interpretation of the symbolic Holy Jerusalem, but there are varied opinions of other authorities, out of which, however, we can safely draw one conclusion: the Bride of Christ or the Holy Jerusalem represents a very secure place in Christ because 1) as members of the Bride we shall be one with Christ whose wife is “flesh of [His] flesh and bone of [His] bones,” and 2) as part of the New or Holy Jerusalem, we will have all the blessings and glory and eternal security that this great city symbolizes.

V. 22

“And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it.”

Comment on v. 22

No temple or church edifice will be needed in heaven: “the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb” will literally be there with us to worship Him as we revel in the incredibly blessed and glorious state in which we find ourselves. We shall indeed have “God with us” ...in our midst... beholding His surpassing beauty.

Vv. 23-27

“And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there. And they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it. And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life.”

Comment on vv. 23-27

There will be no need for any source of light other than the effulgent glory of “the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb” – the ONE glorious God – who will be the everlasting light of our world and our universe. There will be no Satan and his demonic host to contend with, no sin in our natures to guard against. Only our fellow saints of all ages will be there. What a party we’ll have over there! And there will be no hangover...

A Bible Study of 1 Corinthians 14.1-20

The Gifts of Prophecy and Speaking in Tongues

Before we plunge headlong into our study, we should do a little toe dabbling. We need to understand what New Testament prophecy is. Prophecy is not necessarily the predicting of events, such as Mabel Sue is going to have a baby or Howard Thomas will get a new car. These things are impressive (**if** and **when** they come true), but it seems to be a rather frivolous use of the gift of prophecy. As much as I'd like to have the best in material possessions, please predict, if you must predict, that I am going to really love God more and that I'll accomplish all of His will in my life. That would excite me!

Paul describes prophecy in the 3rd verse: "But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification [building up], and exhortation [encouragement], and comfort." With that definition we can proceed with our study.

Verse 1

"1) Follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy."

Comment on v. 1

In the two preceding chapters of 1 Corinthians (12 & 13) Paul has 1) laid out for the Corinthians the various gifts of the Spirit in chapter 12, ending the chapter with this: "...covet [desire] earnestly the best gifts [that he has just named]: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way," and 2) in chapter 13 Paul eloquently shows what the "better way" is. To give chapter 13 a single-sentence wrap, we could put it this way: **No gifts a person might acquire nor anything he can accomplish is worth an ice cube in the hot sands of the Sahara Desert if the person does not LOVE.**

Now we can start our primary lesson. Paul begins this 14th chapter by urging the saints, “Be constantly pursuing this love.”¹ Love is the hallmark of the Christian.² Jesus said, “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” (John 13.35.)

Paul next encourages them to seek the gifts of the Spirit, “BUT,” he advises them, “seek rather that ye may prophecy.” He then explains his preference for prophecy in the next three verses (2-4), verse 3 in particular. It gets to the heart of the matter.

Verse 2

“2 For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him; howbeit [although] in the spirit he speaketh mysteries.”

Comment on v. 2

When a worshiper speaks in tongues it is a private conversation, not meant for our unenlightened ears – unless God grants interpretation. Frankly, even the person speaking doesn’t understand what he is saying although he is thrilled by his conversation with God.

It is hard to understand our obsession with speaking in tongues, although Paul said in vs. 18, “I speak with tongues more than ye all.” But he had the powerful anointed word to go with his speaking in tongues. Then, after he had mentioned his

¹ Kenneth S. Wuest, “The New Testament , An Expanded Translation, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

² This particular Bible study is not the place to expound on love, but love is what holds the Church together. Without it the Christian is not a Christian except in name only. For an expanded look at love, please read “The Essence of Love” by Aaron J. Smith.

tongues-speaking prowess, Paul showed the much greater importance of the prophetic gift by saying that he would rather speak just five words in his own language than ten thousand in an utterance unknown to his listeners.

It is also significant that in the four times (to my knowledge) that Paul speaks of the gifts of the Spirit in his letters, twice he does not mention the gift of tongues (the first and the last scriptures in the following list) – Rom. 12.6-8; 1 Cor. 12.4-10; 1 Cor. 12.28-31; Eph. 4.11, 12 – and in both of the other two passages it is next to last in the list. Only interpretation of tongues comes after it. I am not saying that this proves anything, but if speaking in tongues is as crucial to the believer's (and Church's) survival as we say it is, why did the Apostle not list it more prominently?

The hard fact here is that the tongues-speaking is not what is so important, but the power of the Holy Spirit who speaks through the individual. Backslidden saints have been known to speak in tongues. We can speak often, but if we are not fully yielded to the Spirit who uses our mouths, the power will be hindered. As a gift of the Spirit, speaking in tongues is important but we have overrated it. Paul did not.

With regard to speaking in other tongues, there was a show on TV recently that featured the attempts of a specialist in his field to fathom the mystery (or sham) of speaking in other tongues. I was impressed with the evident sincerity and objectivity of the specialist – he was intent neither with proving or disproving the experience. He did not jump on the bandwagon, but he did not look down his nose at these misguided people who were caught in an emotional frenzy of self-hypnosis that caused them to speak a gibberish that had no evident benefits. To repeat: he was objective.

The specialist had two subjects: one was the pastor of a church, an intelligent man of apparent deep convictions and spiritual values. The other was a lay person, a woman of average intelligence and deep spirituality, one who could subject herself

to such a probe – I could not have done it. In each case the subject was wired to some type of device that recorded the activity in different parts of the subject’s brain as he or she spoke in tongues.

The pastor, who obviously possessed the “gift” of speaking in tongues (which not every believer has), was asked to speak. After a short prayer, he did so, and it was no sham, like some persons who “speak” on TV; it was the real thing. The Spirit within me witnessed to the fact. It was notable that there was no visible activity in the frontal lobe of his brain as there is when a person talks normally. This, said our specialist, was an indication that he was not consciously forming concepts and choosing words with which to express them. I took it to show further that, although he chose to speak in tongues, he did not choose the words nor the concepts the words expressed. The Spirit chose as He willed.

Next the specialist tested the woman. She apparently could not speak in tongues “at will,” so he stood by while she prayed and sang – in other words, she worshiped – until the Holy Spirit took over and she too began to speak in tongues. (Incidentally this was all very intriguing because of the understanding air with which the specialist conducted the tests.) Again there was no sign of frontal lobe activity, indicating that she too spoke on a higher authority (my words, not the specialist’s).

A similar test was conducted on a group of Buddhist monks who were praying to their god Buddha. This time the recording device showed frontal lobe activity similar to what occurs when a person engages in a normal conversation. They were consciously speaking their words.

The tentative conclusions the specialist reached were, as expected, not a sanctioning of the experience of speaking in tongues, but neither were they a lumping of all tongues speakers into one loony bunch and sending them off to a mental institution. The specialist decided that more testing was needed before any final conclusions could be drawn. Fair enough.

But that is beside the point. My own conclusions were these: 1) The tests, despite not presenting hard conclusions, could possibly convince some outsiders that what we experience is the real thing, and 2) they neither confirmed nor shook my personal belief in the experience known as speaking in tongues. I have experienced speaking in tongues for myself and I could scarcely be open-minded about the matter.

It is my earnest prayer that the tests will help to convince others who have not the faith, to see that there is something big and factual and genuine going on among the true believers in Christ.

Vv. 3-4

“3 But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification [building up], and exhortation [encouragement], and comfort.

4 He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church.

Comment on vv. 3-4

We have already touched lightly on the meaning of New Testament prophecy and its highly important role in the Church. Here the Apostle gives us the nitty-gritty New Testament meaning of prophecy. And looking at it from a whole, biblical perspective, we could add that it includes speaking under the anointing of the Spirit of God. But of course, in order for a word to be to edification, exhortation and comfort, it would necessarily be an anointed word. The Spirit would have to give it impact. A word of truth spoken without the anointing behind it is lifeless though true. I could mechanically say words to a discouraged person that would technically fit the category of edification, exhortation and comfort – “Hang in there!” “Keep praying; God will answer!” – but if there were no anointing present, and the words did not even have the ring of sincerity,

they would be futile and my disheartened brother or sister would not be helped. I might have added a little to her discouragement by my evident lack of empathy.

There can be no substitute for the anointing of the Spirit on our words, even those words we speak in all sincerity. It is incumbent on all believers to pray as they walk, pray as they talk that their "...speech be alway **with** grace, **seasoned with** salt, that [they] may know how ...to answer every man" (Col. 4.6) in any trying situation. We have not fully attained that goal, but we are pressing toward it.

Verse 5

"5 I would that ye all spake with tongues but rather that ye prophesied: for greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying."

Comment on v. 5

Paul is not downgrading the gift of other tongues. If he were, he would not say that he wished that they all spoke in tongues. That brings up an interesting side point. If he wishes that they all spoke in tongues, does that imply that there were some believers in the local church who did not have the gift and who did not speak in tongues on a regular basis? Think it over.

Now the Apostle sets a hierarchy of gifts. He puts the prophet on a higher level than the speaker in other tongues. Once again, I must say that it is because the Church needs the beneficial effects of prophecy.

Vv. 6-12

"6 Now, brethren, if I come unto you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you, except I shall speak to you either by revelation [speak a revelation to

you], or by knowledge [bring further knowledge], or by prophesying, or by doctrine [teaching]?

7 And even things without life giving sound, whether pipe or harp, except they give a distinction in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped?

8 For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?

9 So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the air.

10 There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world, and none of them is without signification.

11 Therefore if I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh shall be a barbarian unto me.

12 Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church.”

Comment on vv. 6-12

The reason for the gifts of the Spirit is that the Church and its individual members may be helped. Speaking in tongues does edify the speaker, but the rest of the congregation is left in the dark. They can't very well say amen to what he says: they don't have the least idea of what God is saying through His ecstatic worshiper.

Paul is stressing here the need for prophetic utterance, that speech that supplies what is lacking in a person or a church group at that moment. The congregation may not lack teaching, although that is too often true, but God may see a need of the moment that he wants a layperson to fill. Tongues will not suffice then. Shouting and great demonstrations by others cannot fill the need of the moment. A word of prophecy is required.

We should heed Paul's words. When we seek spiritual gifts, prophecy should be one of the foremost. A good pastor, of course, has the gift of prophecy. If he does not, he has missed his calling. Perhaps he should be a plumber or an electrician; certainly not a pastor. But there is always a place for an anointed word from the ordinary person in the pews. God has so structured His Church that everyone has a niche to fill, a slot into which she fits. Sometimes God will use you for a particular task just for that instant. There are other tasks that are yours on a permanent basis. We need to seek God earnestly for our proper place in the Church. It is the body of Christ and it cannot function as a body without the contributions of its individual members.

The pastor will be the first to admit that he cannot do it all. There are many things that the laity has to do. The pastor cannot always be there on the spot when your sister needs encouragement. He cannot always be there when your brother is depressed and on the verge of taking drastic measures to climb out of his pit of despair. If you are there, you, my friend are IT. You are the mouth of God for that moment.

We have a habit of underrating ourselves, of being "humble" and saying, "Oh, I can't do that; I don't have that kind of ability." The brother in need can't wait until someone comes along who supposedly is more talented than you. The sister who desperately needs encouragement and comfort doesn't have the luxury of waiting for just the "right" person to come along. God let you come at just that time to fill just that need. Fill it. You will cry a thousand bitter tears if a life is ended or a soul is lost because you "don't have that kind of ability."

Speak to your brothers and sisters in a tongue they can understand. Speak to them under the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Use the language of love. Speak. Write. Use sign language, Pony Express – anything to get the word to them that God wants them to hear or read.

And then again, sometimes all that the unfortunate victim needs is a hearty pat on the back, a cordial handshake or an affectionate embrace. And whisper earnestly in his ear, “God bless you, my brother!” Do what God leads you to do. To me it all comes loosely under the heading of prophecy, the anointed “word” from God. This of course assumes that the Spirit of God is leading you.

V. 13

“13 Wherefore let him that speaketh in an unknown tongue pray that he may interpret.”

Comment on v. 13

If you simply have to have the gift of unknown tongues, ask the Lord to give you also the interpretation of what you say.

Vv. 14-17

“14 For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful.

15 What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.

16 Else when thou shalt bless with the spirit, how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say Amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest?

17 For thou verily givest thanks well, but the other is not edified.”

Comment on vv. 14-17

Although, as Paul said earlier, the individual saints were edified by speaking in tongues, they did not know what they were saying. This was true also when they prayed in an

unknown tongue. Therefore he advised that there should be a balance: Pray in the Spirit and also pray in your own language.

There are times when a heavy spirit of prayer comes on you and you don't know why the heaviness. The prayer is not necessarily for you at that time. The prayer is a growing pressure within your spirit and it has to be expressed. That is the golden moment when the Spirit will either pray through you in other tongues or will vent your prayer with "groanings" or deep-seated sighs "which cannot be uttered." Rom. 8.26. When the Spirit takes over and prays for you, through you and for someone else possibly half a world away from you, that, my friend, is a mystery – but a beautiful one.

Vv. 18-19

“18 I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all:

19 Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue.”

Comment on vv. 18-19

We have already dealt with verses 18 and 19.

V. 20

“20 Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men.”

Comment on v. 20

Our study concludes with verse 20 in which Paul is enjoining his parishioners to grow up spiritually. It is all right, even needful, to come to God as little children – Our Master said

that we have to become as little children before Him – but God does not want us to remain children in understanding nor in our grasp of spiritual truths.

Paul wished for his flock what God wishes for us all, that we would go on to perfection in Christ.

If we are indeed mature members of the body of Christ, we should deport ourselves in a mature fashion. We have to see things in the right perspective and quit giving disproportionate weight to the gifts of the Spirit that are relatively less important. You will note that I use the term “**relatively less** important” because all the gifts of the Spirit are important and profitable for the Church and its individual members.

