

To Be Continued...

The Holy Spirit & His Gifts

First Corinthians 12:27-31

"Who's on first?"

After 58 years of calling games, Vin Scully has seen just about everything both on the field and in the stands.

In all those years, there's only been one thing Scully couldn't do, one elusive thing that he confessed on-air he's always wanted to do. He's always wanted to say three little words: "Who's on first."

That was until Chin-Lung Hu, a native of Taiwan, joined the Dodgers at the beginning of September. Hu's first hit as a Dodger was a homer in a game with the San Diego Padres. Bummer!

In the third game of the series, Hu got his first single. Scully took a deep breath and said, "OK everybody. All together... **Hu's on first!**"

As chapter twelve draws to a close, the apostle Paul speaks of certain individuals being "first," "second," and "third," with respect to the church. Let's see what he meant and how it fits into his larger correction to the church at Corinth.

1Co 12:27 Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.

If the Corinthians were unsure; if they still had any doubts; Paul directly says, "**you** are the body of Christ." In their common relationship to Jesus by the Spirit of God, they form His body on the earth.

The human body is one but made up of many members, and likewise Christians each have their own individual function and giftedness as members of Jesus' body.

Paul was emphasizing their diversity. They should not all be doing the same thing, or exercising the same gifts.

As I keep reminding us, the problem in Corinth was that, when the church gathered, they were encouraging everyone to exercise the gift of speaking in tongues simultaneously, and with no corresponding gift of interpretation.

They were acting as though their body was one huge tongue.

This is Church 101. They, however, had gotten away from the basics.

The basics start with the first, second, and third things Paul listed:

1Co 12:28 And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers...

Paul has all the while been discussing gifts of the Spirit. These seem to be gifted *men*, or *offices*, within the church, rather than gifts per se.

What we forget, in the twenty-first century, is that, in the first century, the church was just being established. To establish it, Jesus used apostles, prophets, and teachers.

In Ephesians 2:20, Paul said that the church was, "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone."

Then, in Ephesians 4:11-12 he expanded, saying,

Eph 4:11 And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers,
Eph 4:12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,

In the first century, apostles and prophets were establishing churches, which would then be continued through the centuries by evangelists, pastors and teachers.

In the twenty-first century, the "church," as an entity, has been established for, well, twenty centuries. There are no apostles; there are no prophets.

There are evangelists, pastors, and teachers.

Back to Corinth: Paul was starting from scratch, reminding them of the basics, helping them to remember how they came into being as a body, spiritually speaking. He, an apostle, had founded the church on his second missionary journey. As he preached the Gospel, individuals were baptized into the body of Christ, gifted by the Holy Spirit to function as one of it's many members.

It ought to have continued to function after his departure as a body - a whole body - not just a tongue.

To emphasize, again, the diversity of a properly functioning body, Paul throws out a random list of gifts.

1Cor 12:28 ...after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues.

There is no ranking of these gifts. He said, "after that," and it indicates they are in no particular order.

In fact, to put them in any order is to miss Paul's point entirely.

Putting "tongues" last doesn't mean it is the least of the gifts, only that it certainly wasn't to be highlighted, either. It was just one of the many possible manifestations of the Holy Spirit.

For various reasons, including some observations in Scripture, folks continue to argue that speaking in tongues is in its own category when it comes to gifts of the Holy Spirit.

For example since it is a language of prayer and praise, they argue that all believers can and should have the gift.

While that might make some logical sense, or appeal to reasoning - it just isn't true, as the next two verses makes clear.

1Co 12:29 Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers?
Are all workers of miracles?

1Co 12:30 Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with
tongues? Do all interpret?

When he says, "do all speak with tongues?," it means do all have the gift of speaking in tongues.

Focusing in on the problem in Corinth, "Do all speak with tongues?" is answered by saying "No."

Despite the clarity of Paul's argument, there are those who argue that he only means the gift of speaking in tongues *publicly*.

They'd concede that not every believer should speak in tongues publicly, but they go on to say that **every** believer *can* and *should* speak in tongues privately.

All I can say to that is, while it is clever, it is wrong. Paul does not distinguish between a gift of public tongues and a gift of private tongues. He only distinguishes between exercising your gift of tongues either in public or in private.

Proponents of the position that everyone can and should speak in tongues are reading their position into the Bible. It is not what Paul taught.

And his question, "Do all speak with tongues?," **must** be answered negatively, or else words have no meaning.

1Co 12:31 But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way.

We just said that Paul wasn't ranking the gifts, and that he put them in a random order. What does he mean, then, by saying the "best" gifts?

That depends on what you mean by best. It doesn't mean that certain gifts are intrinsically better than others, but rather that certain gifts are best in certain situations.

The "best" gift depends on the spiritual circumstances, does it not?

Think of the gifts as tools you build with. You don't cut down a tree with a hammer, or drive a nail with a saw. Depending on the task, the "best" tool is the one that can accomplish something.

In that sense, there are no "best" gifts. Only those that are most useful. The "best" gift is the one that most ministers at the time.

So, when Paul says "earnestly desire the best gifts," he isn't ranking them. We've already seen that the idea of ranking them misses his point altogether.

If we could jump directly to chapter fourteen, right after Paul said, "but earnestly desire the best gifts," we'd see *exactly* what he meant.

In chapter fourteen he will argue convincingly that, in the public assembly, speech that can be understood by everyone is 'better' than speech that cannot be understood. He will point out that even a few words of prophecy that can be understood by all are better than thousands of 'words' in an unknown tongue.

He will go on to say that if speaking in tongues is interpreted, then it, too, is 'better.'

Prophecy isn't therefore 'better' than tongues, or vice-versa. It all depends on the circumstances.

The "best" gifts in the public assembly are the ones that take others into consideration and minister to their needs.

Another way of saying that is to say if you simply think of others, rather than yourself, you will find yourself ministering to them selflessly rather than selfishly.

And that's why, instead of going directly to chapter fourteen, Paul wrote the love chapter in between. It provides the context for the exercising of the gifts of the Spirit.

You, for example, would want to prophecy to someone else rather than speak in uninterpreted tongues to them... Or show them mercy rather than speak in uninterpreted tongues to them... Or pray for their healing rather than speak in uninterpreted tongues to them.

We all have our own ideas of what we think is more 'spiritual.' For continuationists like ourselves, it can seem more spiritual if, at our meetings, someone speaks in tongues; or if we all do; or if we break into singing in tongues.

Prophecy that suddenly comes over someone so that they feel they must interrupt the meeting to share it - that might *seem* very spiritual.

We should judge what is 'spiritual' by whether or not it is loving in the self-sacrificing way described in chapter thirteen.

With love as the guiding principle, there will be no interrupting others, no calling attention to ourselves, no showboating.

