

First Corinthians

June 15, 2025
Chapter 12

The Matters of the Spiritual Part 3

“Manifest Grace of the Holy Spirit”
Chapter 12:10c-d

11. The Holy Spirit’s Discernment (12:10c)

Next, Paul introduces the manifestation of the Holy Spirit’s discernment in verse 10c.

^{10c} and to another the distinguishing of spirits,

This manifestation enables individuals to discern whether a particular spiritual influence, inspiration, encouragement, sway, authority, or teaching comes from God, human origin, or a demonic source. This discernment protects the Church from false teachings and deceptive forces. The Holy Spirit may utilize this manifestation in more saints throughout the Church compared to the other manifestations. The Holy Spirit works within each saint daily, guiding them in understanding right from wrong. Immature saints often overlook this movement of the Holy Spirit in their lives. In contrast, mature saints recognize the consequences of neglecting this movement, pausing where the immature continue, often to their detriment.

Let me explain. As saints of the living God, the Holy Spirit resides within each of us. When things are not right around us, the Holy Spirit sometimes causes discomfort in our physical bodies to alert us that all is not well in our circumstances. Often, the Holy Spirit brings to mind a Scripture passage that advises us against engaging in something the world offers, which is seen as a sin in God’s eyes. Sometimes, the Holy Spirit gives us a sense that something is wrong, but we may not understand why it is wrong at the time. This manifestation is often signaled in our lives by feelings of unease in our bodies, minds, or souls, warning us that danger is ahead. However, the Holy Spirit also uses this manifestation differently, guiding us to pursue new life paths as opportunities arise. This manifestation is frequently accompanied by a beautiful, peaceful calm and reassurance that these opportunities align with God’s will for our lives. A prominent example of this manifestation is when you instinctively know something is wrong without knowing why, yet that inner feeling prevents you from proceeding. Then, days, months, or even years later, you reflect and realize the tremendous devastation in other people’s lives that you would have experienced had you indulged in the wrong choice.

Many years ago, a saintly doctor friend, whom the LORD blessed abundantly in his medical practice, was presented with an opportunity to invest some of his wealth in real estate ventures alongside other doctors. This doctor was already a mature saint, a gifted Bible teacher, a soul winner, and a pillar in his Church. While listening to the sales pitch, he sensed something was amiss with the ventures offered to him and the other doctors. Under pressure from his peers, he reluctantly invested some of his money. Shortly after the transfer, the doctor confided that he didn’t want to proceed because he had an inner sense that it was wrong, but he couldn’t pinpoint why. As you might expect in this story, all the doctors lost their money because it was a scam. However, that is not the end of the story. The scammers structured the venture in such a way that each doctor became a co-conspirator in a racketeering scheme that defrauded thousands of people.

Consequently, each doctor was convicted and had to serve time in prison. The manifestation of the Holy Spirit in that doctor's life urged him to flee from evil. Nevertheless, he deliberately ignored the warning and ultimately faced severe consequences. Moreover, the repercussions impacted not just him but also his wife and family.

The same holds true for this manifestation of the Holy Spirit in a saint's life. In the 1990s, the financial housing bubble burst in the United States. Every industry and business in the US began laying off workers, leading to a surge in home foreclosures to the point that banks ceased foreclosing on bad loans due to the lack of home buyers. Home buying came to a standstill, except for those with cash on hand who could purchase homes at astonishing discounts, much to the banks' relief as they were willing to take a loss. One of my dear friends lost his job in Houston with a major corporation; however, the same company offered him a similar position in another state. From within, the Holy Spirit guided him toward the right decision, but in his immature stage as a saint, he was reluctant to leave the Church we attended. Due to his attachment to the Church, he resisted the Holy Spirit's guidance and declined the offer.

The family was nearly starving. Had it not been for the banks refraining from foreclosing, they would have lost their home with nowhere to go. A year passed. Finally, when he was at the end of his rope and the foreclosure notice arrived, he called the company that still had the same job available in a different state. Several others had filled the position, but none had worked out. The family moved. Their home was sold to the first family that viewed it. On the first Sunday in their new town, they visited a church in their new neighborhood, and it was so much like their old church that they joined that same day. About ten years later, he retired from the job. It had been a truly blessed experience. Then, the manifestation of the Holy Spirit spoke within him once more. He did not miss it this time. He did not resist it this time. The children were already adults living on their own back in Houston. It was time for this man and his wife to return to Houston. They did. Not long ago, it was my privilege to perform his funeral. I did not share this story during the service, but I did express how he was a saint, someone who could distinguish between right and wrong when he heard the voice of the Holy Spirit within him, making the right choices for his family.

This manifestation of the Holy Spirit remains vibrant in the lives of the saints whom the Holy Spirit has chosen to employ.

12. The Holy Spirit's Languages (12:10d)

Paul now tells of the manifestation of the Holy Spirit's languages. Verse 10d.

^{10d} *to another various kinds of tongues,*

This manifestation refers to the speaker's ability to communicate in various languages they have learned or will learn naturally, as intended by the Holy Spirit for the glory of God.

To understand tongues or languages in this verse, we need to examine the development of the Church. The Bible tells us that in the upper room on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descended upon 120 people, and they began praising the Lord in tongues (Acts 2:1-4).

The word "tongues" in Acts 2:4 is translated from the Greek word *glossa*. It does not refer to the physical tongue in your mouth. When Wycliffe translated the Bible in 1380, people did not ask each other, "What language do you speak?" Instead, they asked, "What tongue do you speak?" The term "language" was relatively new in the late 1300s and was used to describe a *manner of*

expression considered vulgar.² One hundred years earlier, an Anglo-French author, Bartholomew Glanville, in 1240 AD, claimed that any tongue other than your own was vulgar language. If you spoke Old English, you considered French a vulgar tongue, and vice versa. If you spoke French, you deemed German vulgar, and so on. The contemporary definition did not gain acceptance until the turn of the 1800s, when it was solidified in the *Century Dictionary* of 1897. Thus, all versions of the Bible in English prior to the 1900s used the terms “tongue” or “tongues” because the editors wanted to avoid implying a vulgar language.

The word “glossa” should be translated today as “languages.” “... and began to speak with other languages, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.” A quick note about the word ‘glossa’: while it translates to ‘languages’ today, it also refers to *hearsay*, which means to “hear something” and then “say it” or repeat it. Instead of using the term *hearsay*, we will use ‘hear and repeat’ for this lesson. When you use your tongue to communicate, you hear and repeat words. Additionally, notice that the passage states they "... began to speak with other tongues...." What does “other” imply? The Greek word for “other” is ‘heteros,’ which means *secondary*. What kind of secondary languages were present among the people in the upper room that day? Remember, Pilate wrote the note nailed to Jesus’ cross in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek. These would have been secondary languages known to the Jews who primarily spoke Aramaic, like Jesus. The border of Israel is adjacent to Egypt, and since Simon of Cyrene from Egypt was there to carry Jesus’ cross, the Egyptian language was indeed represented in the room. Acts 2:8-11 tells us about the regions from which the people came.

“And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born? Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God.”

All of these languages are represented, illustrating the vast diversity of people in the Roman Empire who heard the gospel and began to share it on the Day of Pentecost. These were the “other tongues” spoken in the upper room and in the streets just outside that day. It will take at least 90 days for these individuals to return home after the Day of Pentecost and for a church to be established in villages, towns, and cities. The word “other” does not mean “unknown,” as many try to assert today.

If “tongues” in this passage refers to known, naturally developed languages, how did the idea of a supernatural, spontaneous, unknown language become part of Church theology?

The origin of speaking in unknown tongues can be traced back to the Holiness Movement, which emerged after John William Donaldson published his paper in 1857, thereby creating and defining a new Greek word. Donaldson, born in London in 1811, lived until 1861. He was a teacher of classical Greek (distinct from the common Greek of the New Testament) but did not achieve notable success in his academic career. He began but did not complete a Greek Dictionary. In 1844, he published his version of the Book of Jasher, which was met with criticism from the academic community, although it gained approval among German theologians. In 1857, he coined the term “*glossolalia*,” a Greek word that does not appear in either classical or common Greek. He derived it from the word “*glossa*,” meaning *tongue or language*, and combined it with “*lalia*,” which

² <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=language>

means *to chat, prattle, or make a noise*. Frederic Farrar, a cleric of the Church of England, adopted Donaldson's term and began using "glossolalia" in 1879. From Farrar, the word spread to the Methodist Episcopal Church of America, where speaking in an unknown tongue originated, leading to the birth of the Church of God (Holiness). Subsequently, it has branched into various denominations, including the Assemblies of God and Pentecostal Churches. Prior to 1857, the practice of speaking in unknown tongues and the emphasis on *glossolalia* were absent in any church.

In our passage, the "*kinds of tongues*" refer not to unknown languages, but rather to those that exist and can be learned or will be learned. Some individuals can quickly learn and translate other languages for the glory of God.

Let me share an example of a person whom the Holy Spirit has used in my ministry for the glory of God for nearly two decades.

In the first decade of the 2000s, a young man joined our support staff at the Church as the mailroom clerk. He was Pentecostal and not a member of our congregation. He was a simple man with very little understanding of logical concepts, nor was he mechanically inclined in any way. One time, he came to help with a project. I handed him an electric screwdriver, but he couldn't keep the bit square on the screw, stripping every screw he attempted to drill in. He once gave me a book written by Billy Graham and asked if it was a good read for him. He was an immature saint in many respects. However, as he grew in the LORD, I noticed he possessed a unique knack during times of need in my office. He could learn different languages on the spot. He had grown up speaking Spanish and English. One day, he walked by my office while I was struggling to understand an Asian woman. I called him over and asked if he knew her language. He entered and sat down. They conversed back and forth for a few minutes, after which he translated her words for me. I had never witnessed anything like it in my life. Here's the short story: the neighborhood around the Church was changing. Immigrant visitors to the area came to my office speaking a myriad of languages and dialects from around the world, and not a single one was beyond his ability to communicate with. In each case, I witnessed to those individuals, as I always did, about the love of God through the Holy Spirit, aided by my friend and co-worker.

This manifestation of the Holy Spirit remains vibrant in the lives of the saints whom the Holy Spirit has chosen to employ.