

## PREFACE

The second and third paragraphs in Chapter Twelve offer us valuable insight for understanding not just the *first* paragraph, but the entire three-chapter treatise.

**Read 1 Corinthians 12:4-13.**

Now, as Paul opens this extended passage, what is his emphasis? What is the root, the foundation of his argument? Is this all about the various *gifts* of the Spirit? Yes, but is that the *root*? Paul's foundational point, from which everything else will spring, is less the gifts themselves than the Spirit that makes them possible! This is stated in v7: "But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good"—that is, the work of God's Holy Spirit in believers for the good of the body of Christ.

In all the proceeding discussion of the various gifts and their use in the next three chapters, we must not lose that focus: It is all about the Spirit. And knowing this helps us understand what Paul is saying in the first paragraph—v1-3. There is another clue in v13.

**Read 1 Corinthians 12:13.**

Without stating them explicitly, it is these disparate groups that are being addressed in v2-3: Greeks ("pagans"), Jews ("Jesus is accursed"), and Christians ("Jesus is Lord").

**Read 1 Corinthians 12:1-3.**

## v2

*You know that when you were pagans, you were led astray to the mute idols, however you were led.*

There is a wealth of imagery packed into this verse, and although the verse is directed toward Greeks (Gentiles, pagans), both groups—Greeks and Jews—would be familiar with the imagery Paul is drawing from.

**Note:** Not "led astray *by*" (CSB) but "led astray *to*" mute idols.

The cultic procession was something very familiar to both Gentiles and Jews in the ancient world. For pagans, whether carrying the image of the god at the head of the procession or just proceeding to the temple where the god was in residence, the procession was a method of instilling a pronounced level of anticipation, expectation in the worshipers—even a sense of ecstatic euphoria. (In music it is called a *crescendo*.)

For Jews it was much the same, except that they neither carried or marched to an image of their God, but the temple in which He, in Spirit, dwelt. We even have a set of fifteen psalms sung by individuals or groups as they ascended to the temple mount. Each of these psalms (120 to 134) are called, in their superscription, “A Song of Ascents [or Degrees (KJV)].”

### **Read Psalm 68:24-26.**

But there is an even more pertinent image of a different sort of procession to which Paul refers.

**led astray** = *apagomenoi* = from <G575> (apo) and <G71> (ago); to take off (in various senses) :- bring, **carry away, lead (away), put to death, take away.**

### **Read Matthew 27:31.**

*Albert Barnes:* Led along; that is, deluded by your passions, deluded by your priests, deluded by your vain and splendid rites of worship. The whole system made an appeal to the senses, and “bore along” its votaries as if by a foreign and irresistible impulse. The word which is used, *apagomenoi*, conveys properly the idea of being carried into bondage, or being led to punishment, and refers here doubtless to the strong means which had been used by crafty politicians and priests in their former state to delude and deceive them.

*to the mute idols,*

Practically speaking, *of course* these idols were mute—they were man-made statues. But there is more here than just that. It is the powerful contrast between these mute idols which represented death for their worshipers, and the God *who speaks*, and represents light and life to His.

### **Read Psalm 115:4-8.**

There is a dramatic contrast between that and the Lord God. We remember that in Genesis 1 the Godhead literally speaks the universe into existence. And in Hebrews 1 the writer addresses how the Lord God spoke to His people after that.

### **Read Hebrews 1:1-2.**

So to the former Gentiles/Greeks/pagans in the church Paul reminds them that earlier, when they were in that “spiritual” condition, they were being regularly—and ultimately—led to their destruction by their faith in lifeless, impotent idols—behind which, Paul earlier noted in this letter, were actual demons (10:20-21).

Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, “Jesus is accursed”;

In v3 Paul addresses the two other groups that comprise the local church. In v2 the group was former pagans—and in this context that is the proper translation of *ethnos*.

**pagans** = *ethnos* = probably from <G1486> (etho); a race (as of the same habit), i.e. a tribe; **specially a foreign (non-Jewish) one** (usually by implication pagan) :- **Gentile, heathen**, nation, people; **in practical terms, any non-Jewish peoples.**

Much has been made over this blasphemous utterance of *anathema lesous*. Just who is saying it? Was it someone in the church? If so, why, and under what conditions? Many fanciful explanations have been offered—none of which track well. What makes the most sense is that Paul is *not* claiming that any *believers* were saying this, but refers instead to something a Jew might say prior to becoming a Christian.

In v2 Paul could rightly refer to those who “*were pagans*”; anyone who used to worship idols, but now worships God through faith in Christ Jesus, would have left behind their heathenism—it would now be something only in their past, and no longer true of them. But he could not say that about those who were formerly members of the synagogue before their conversion to Christ, for they would remain Jews.

Note too that the phrase is not “*Christ is accursed*,” for a Jew would *never* say that “*Messiah is accursed*” (as a pagan could)—but he might very well say this “*Jesus [of Nazareth] is accursed*.”

### Read 1 Corinthians 1:22-23.

Christ Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God was a “*stumbling block*” to Jews because, first, they did not believe He was what He said and, second, in their eyes anyone crucified was accursed.

### Read Deuteronomy 21:22-23.

Finally, “*anathema* language generally reflects Jewish usage, not Greek” (Behm in Garland). So there is good evidence that Paul is referring to something Jews might say prior to becoming Christians. Anyone who might say this is not “*speaking by the Spirit of God*.”

...and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.

David Garland, cites C. H. Talbert's outline of vv2-3 to show that Paul describes three religious experiences:

1. Pagan experience: being led astray to dumb idols
2. Jewish experience: declaring Jesus is *anathema*
3. Christian experience in the Spirit: confessing Jesus is Lord

Paul closes this introduction to his treatise on the gifts of the Spirit with a reference to the classic utterance of those who are in Christ: "Jesus is Lord." Sadly, too few Christians today grasp the importance and centrality of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

- Without the initiating act of the Spirit, one would not even be a Christian, one would not know Christ, one would not be saved.
- Without the work of the Spirit, as Paul says here, one could not rightly, honestly make the confession that "Jesus is Lord."
- Without the Spirit one could not comprehend God's word, or commune with a God who is also spirit-kind.
- Without the Spirit both the individual and the church would not possess the essential gifts that make it work.
- Without the Spirit's active influence in the church universal, this world would be even more miserable than it is.

It can be said that the church—the world-wide, spiritually interlinked community of believers in Christ Jesus—exerts, as a collective, a binding force upon the evil that dwells in and on a fallen earth—a world that is in the power of the evil one (1 John 5:19). If the "spirit of the Antichrist" pervades, it is met by the Spirit of Christ, working through His body, the church. Is there any wonder that unimaginable havoc and evil will ensue when every Christian is removed from the earth!

(from study of 2 Thessalonians 2:5-7)

As with so many aspects of their personal and corporate lives, the Corinthians were misunderstanding—and thus misusing—the things of God. They were associating the work of the Spirit with the various "ecstasies" of tongues and prophecy, to the point that those with such gifts were the only truly "spiritual" ones in the church. Paul is going to be saying to them that *all* Christians dwell within "the sphere of the Holy Spirit's power" (Hays)—and only *with* that power can one utter the confession, "Jesus is Lord."