

# The Compass

Week 34

OT Readings: Esther 8:1 – Job 22:30  
NT Readings: 1 Cor. 12:27 – 2 Cor. 1:11

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## Things to Watch for in Your Readings this Week

### Old Testament

- Esther 8-10 completes the Esther story.
- Job 1-2 (“prologue”) presents the circumstance or situation of the dialogues that follow.
- Job 3 is Job’s lament. Job 4-27 the first cycle of “dialogue-disputes.” See “How To Read Job” for more on this important book.

### New Testament

- 1 Cor. 12-14 deals with the “things of the Spirit.”<sup>1</sup> Paul’s concern is with the need for diversity of Spirit workings/activities in the Body. Apparently the Corinthians had emphasized tongues to the exclusion of other Spirit-things.
- 1 Cor. 15 is a significant statement on the bodily resurrection of believers. 1 Cor. 16 is final comments and greetings to persons at Corinth.
- 2 Corinthians, while continued correspondence to the Corinthians, is very different in tone and content from 1 Corinthians. See “How To Read 2 Corinthians.”

## Highlight of the Week: Who is God?

How are we to understand the God of Job? Much intellectual capital has been expended on the question of evil, what is in theological terms called *theodicy*. Is God ultimately responsible for evil? Is He the cause of it? Job stands at the center of this question. However, we must not isolate Job from the larger context of the Bible. It is in Jesus that the culminating revelation of God is given and that revelation is clear: God hates evil and human suffering and Jesus came to deal decisively with it.<sup>2</sup>

Job paints a picture of the world as a war zone in which humanity finds itself caught up in a cosmic conflict. Job finds himself personally caught in this conflict and does not know it. With the granting of free will, God gave humanity the responsibility for the world and the “adversary” (Satan) has been the spoiler of all that is good ever since the loss in the garden. However, it is not a war between equals, God and Satan are not locked in some kind of cosmic dualism. But the conflict is real and it is waged over the hearts and minds of humanity who bear God’s image. Greg Boyd captures this well, “...the mystery of evil is **not** located in the heart of God but in the heart of humanity and in the hidden world between humans and God...Evil is a mystery, but not a mystery concerning God’s character.”<sup>3</sup> (Emphasis mine)

In other words, God truly is good and we need never doubt it. There is no “dark side” of God where He somehow mysteriously wills both good and evil at the same time. To grant freedom is always a risk and no one has experienced more pain at freedom gone awry than God.<sup>4</sup>

## Application: “What about me? How does this apply?”

**Job 1:6-11.** I have thought that Satan’s question is **the** question, “the question of the ages.” Simply put, the question is this, “Who loves God just for Who He is and not what He gives or provides?” In other words, is God a means or an end in your life? Do you serve no matter what, because of Who He is, or do you serve Him because of the nice perks that come from Him? This was the devil’s challenge: “Job doesn’t love You, He loves the ‘bennys’ You give to Him.”

In Job 1:8 God calls Job “blameless,” the Hebrew is *tamim*, meaning having integrity or being whole or complete. Job was *wholehearted* toward God and his life proved it.<sup>5</sup>

What about us? Do we love Him just for Who He is? Or do we use Him as a means to our own selfish ends? Don't be too quick to answer. Take the "question of the ages" to the Holy Spirit and ask Him to probe deeply into your heart. Are you, am I, wholehearted?<sup>6</sup>

### Difficult Question of the Week

#### 1 Cor. 14:1-40. Q. "What are we to make of 'spiritual gifts?' And what about 'speaking in tongues?'"

It is likely that Paul would find our questions in this arena puzzling as would most of the non-Western Christian world where the Holy Spirit's presence, action and dynamic are a very normal part of their lives. NT believers and believers outside of the West are simply experiencing and living in these dimensions, not having debates about them. Yet, the Bible must be our standard as to be legitimate experience.

Is there any Biblical evidence that what the NT presents as the Spirit's manifestations (1 Cor. 12:7) are no longer for today? I can see no such evidence.<sup>7</sup> The NT picture of what it means to be "filled" with the Spirit includes the whole gamut of "Spirit-things;" gifts, fruit, power for witness, holiness, life in the Body, power to do life, power to do life together, wisdom and insight to know and walk with God, etc. Paul's imperative in Eph. 5:18 is "be continually filled with the Spirit." It is not just a one-time experience, but a lifestyle of empowered relationship with the Spirit.

So what about tongues?<sup>8</sup> My Biblical conclusion is that there is no reason to doubt that tongues are for today. Also, the experience of countless Christians world-wide affirms this.<sup>9</sup> But what exactly is this gift? Paul has much to say about it in 1 Cor. 12-14. The Corinthians had over-emphasized its use in the *public* gathering. Paul addresses this not to hinder its use, but to bring correction so that would not miss the point of why they gather together. When they gathered, they were to make sure that all was done for *edification*, what was said needed to be *intelligible*. Because tongues is prayer toward God (14:2) and is not understood by even the speaker (14:2, 13-16), Paul instructed that it should either be interpreted or that the one speaking in tongues "speak to himself" (14:28 = meaning under his breath or perhaps in private).

While there is more to discuss here, the bottom line is something in this direction:

- Paul practices tongues himself (14:18), endorses it and wishes that all do so (14:5) and forbids forbidding it (14:39).
- It is, I believe, available to every believer and is essentially a "prayer language." It is "supernaturally natural," i.e., beyond human ability to create, but not something weird, to be afraid of or irrational.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 12:1 and 14:1 use the Greek, "pneumatikos" translated in the NLT as "special abilities"; some translations use "spiritual gifts." Pneumatikos could be translated, "the things of the Spirit," or "Spirit-stuff." The idea in this context involves the workings and activities of the Spirit among God's people when they gather together.

<sup>2</sup> Acts 10:38. 1 John 3:8, "the Son of God appeared that He might destroy the works of the devil."

<sup>3</sup> Greg Boyd, *God at War* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 149. For a very readable discussion of the problem of evil and God's character, see Greg Boyd, *Is God to Blame?* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003). Chapter four deals specifically with Job.

<sup>4</sup> Here is where I must fundamentally part company with my Calvinistic brothers. Any way one tries to explain things from their perspective, they must finally leave God directly responsible for *willing* evil as part of His "sovereignty."

<sup>5</sup> This word and idea appears throughout the OT, e.g., Gen. 17:1, Deut. 18:13, Joshua 24:14, etc.

<sup>6</sup> Winkie Pratney tells the story of an encounter he had with a non-Christian girl on the campus of a Christian college. Her question was pointed and cuts to the heart, she asked, "Do Christians really love Jesus or do they just love the good feelings that they get from loving Jesus?" She saw clearly the issue of motive; it is here that God looks to know where we are with Him.

<sup>7</sup> The theological position that the gifts are no longer for today is called "cessationism," i.e., that the gifts "ceased" with the death of the apostles being no longer necessary because of a completed Bible. I find no basis from reading the Bible to believe that whatever God does in the NT should not be expected to be part of our experience today. In fact, where else would we look to discover what kind of experiences we *should* be having with God if not the NT?

<sup>8</sup> This for many is the "problem child" when the Spirit's activities are discussed. However, tongues must be kept in the broader context of Spirit activity and even more importantly in the context of relationship with Jesus and His kingdom.

<sup>9</sup> It is estimated that seven hundred million believers world-wide would identify themselves as "Pentecostal-Charismatic."

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<sup>10</sup> It is “trans-rational” in that it goes beyond our reason, but not “irrational,” i.e., not against reason. The American evangelical fear of experience has led some to reject anything supernatural out of hand. This is not only sad, but a tragic mistake. If ever we needed the Spirit’s power to meet the demands of living, ministering and addressing our culture it is now!