

Prophecy and Tongues: Used or Abused?

1 Corinthians 14

Spiritual gifts are for the glory of God and the good of others. When they are used properly, the entire Church is strengthened. When they are misused, the Church is weakened and divided.

Pastor at a church in Prague. Incredibly rich variety of people that participated in our fellowship

- Every continent represented
- Children through retirees
- Half spoke English as first language; all spoke multiple languages
- Leaders of missions agencies, atheists
- Conservative Presbyterians, liberal Anglicans
- Why did they come? Atheists just wanted to hear English, connect with English speakers. The rest wanted to worship in a familiar language, Czech is horribly difficult to master, so we were the only game in town. Set aside their differences and united around Jesus Christ.
- Forced me to think through core beliefs: What are the essentials of my faith? What beliefs are non-negotiable, hold strongly but Christianity does not rise or fall on these matters?

Matters that divide the church in America are most often non-essential

- This morning we are going to talk about a non-essential issue – gift of tongues
- Why are we talking about it if it is non-essential? I didn't say unimportant.
- Important because there is so much confusion and division
- Need: clear understanding, and ability to speak in a non-divisive, gracious way

Last week we began our study of spiritual gifts. Spiritual gifts have been given to unite the Church – we are each uniquely gifted in order to build up one another.

Ironic that spiritual gifts were dividing the church in Corinth, and they often divide the church today. Specifically, public gifts that gave people opportunity to put themselves ahead of others. More specifically, the spiritual gift of tongues.

- Frames the argument – 12:1; 14:36-38
- 12 – Spiritual gifts. begins positive; all gifted; all valuable; each unique
- 13 – superior way; love, greater than all the spiritual gifts
- 14 – Gifts used and abused; drives home the point of concern

PROPHETIC: A gift that strengthens – 14:1-5

Gifts improperly used result in the following

- 14:4. Builds himself up
- 14:9. Speaking into the air
- 14:10. Confusion
- 14:17. The other person is not strengthened
- 14:33. Disorder in the church;

Gifts properly, unselfishly used, result in the following (just from ch. 14)

- 14:4. Builds up the church
- 14:5. The church may be strengthened

- 14:12. Strengthen the church
- 14:26. Strengthening of the church
- 14:31. All can learn and be encouraged
- 14:33. Peace in the church

Prophecy is greater because it is more easily understood; no interpreter required, less likely to be misused.

- **Prophecy = speech from God through man to man**
 - o **special revelation from God**
 - o prophet speaks on behalf of God to other people, believers or unbelievers
 - o A prophet can say, “Thus says the Lord...”
- **2 purposes of prophecy**
 - 1) to edify the church – 14:3
 - 2) to convince and convict unbelievers – 14:24-25
 - Convicted of sin; convinced of reality of God
 - Moved toward faith in the gospel
- **2 modes/types**
 - o **Foretelling** = revelation of the future
 - Old Testament – Daniel; rise and fall of kingdoms; Isaiah named “Cyrus”
 - New Testament – John in Revelation; outworking of Daniel’s 70th week
 - Agabus – famine, Acts 11; Paul captive,
 - Localized; no enduring impact on God’s people
 - Other predictions given to early church not recorded in scripture
 - o **Forth-telling** = Application of revelation to a particular setting
 - Fresh revelation and application
 - Old Testament – most “prophecy” was forth-telling. This is how the Law will be worked out, just as God has always told you.
 - o Prophecy is not the same as teaching or preaching
 - Prophecy is new, direct revelation from God
 - Teach/preaching = explanation/application of existing revelation
 - Teaching & preaching – may include some errors
 - But prophecy will be perfect... always
- **3 qualities of prophecy**
 - o Inerrant
 - No such thing as prophecy that’s only partially true
 - all true or you’re a false prophet!
 - Prophecy = speaking from God who makes no mistakes!
 - **Building: 90% of the floors are safe, well-constructed**
 - 90% of construction workers were trained; the rest were 5th graders; we were over budget
 - Other 10% - duct tape, glue sticks and string; knots?
 - So it is with prophecy – ALL OR NOTHING!
 - o Infallible – it won’t fail; it will come true
 - o Authoritative – “Thus says the Lord”
- **Therefore prophecy must be tested – 14:29**
 - o Old Testament prophet’s words failed, he was stoned
 - Do prophet’s words come true, consistent with rest of scripture
 - New Testament – character and behavior of prophet evaluated. 2 Peter 2
 - o Church, prophets tested under the authority in the church, the elders

- 14:34-35. Women not allowed to judge the prophets. Elders' role

Is the spiritual gift of prophecy still given and used today?

- Depends on how we are using the term

1. Scripture is closed – Eph 2:19-22

- John died late first Century after writing Revelation – last book of New Testament
- No more Apostles after John
 - because an Apostle had to see the risen Jesus with his own eyes
- No more Apostles, no more Apostolic Prophecy, no more Scripture
- 1 Cor – scripture still being written; they had OT, maybe copy of Galatians
- Now God speaks primarily thru scripture; creation; circumstances

2. Non-scriptural prediction?

- Possible. God can do whatever God wants to do.
- Less likely in our setting because we have the word of God
- 2 Peter 1:19. We have something better than eye-witness experience
- More likely in areas that do not yet have the church or Bible
- More likely when God begins to unleash end of days
- If someone at Grace claims to have a prophetic word from God, I would send him or her to speak with the elders

3. Forth-telling

- Ministries of teaching and preaching
- Spiritual gifts of discernment, word of knowledge/wisdom – 1 Cor 12:8
- Cautious to say, "Thus says the Lord"

TRANSITION: prophecy, direct, clear revelation from God superior to tongues. Tongues is not "bad," it is a gift from God's Spirit, but it is open to misuse.

TONGUES: A good gift misused – 14:5-20

- Gr: "glossa" = "a literal tongue" or figuratively "a language"
 - Always an intelligible language. Follows the rules of language – grammar, syntax, morphology
- **The spiritual gift of tongues is spiritual gift the ability to speak from God in a language unknown to the speaker**
 - May be a **human language** unknown to the speaker
 - Acts 2 – languages of the Parthians, Medes, Elamites, Egyptians
 - Or possibly an **angelic or heavenly, non-human language**
 - Read 1 Cor 13:1a; angels speak to one another, not in English
 - But it's always a language – discernible sounds that convey meaning
 - NOT babbling, humming, or meaningless chanting
- **2 purposes for the gift of tongues:**
 1. **To authenticate the presence of the Holy Spirit**
 - Acts 2, 10, 19 – proves to believers/unbelievers God was present
 - **1 Cor 14:22**
 - Tongues are meant to be a sign to unbelievers – authenticate that God is present and speaking
 2. **To edify the church – 14:26**
 - So NOT primarily for benefit of speaker but listener
 - I don't encourage pursuit of private prayer language because all spiritual gifts are for others first.

- **But for either of these purposes to be fulfilled... God must provide the companion spiritual gift: interpretation – 14:7-11**
 - o If hearer doesn't understand the communication, it's pointless
 - o **14:27-28**
 - No interpretation, keep silent, or confusion in church
 - No interpretation, pray for it – 14:13
 - **14:23** – drive away unbelievers; thinks you're nuts
 - o **Same is order is required of prophecy – 14:29-33**

Is the spiritual gift of prophecy still in use today?

- No biblical evidence tongues has ceased. God can move however He chooses.
- Historical patterns of the miraculous
 - o Moses – giving of Law; establishment of theocracy
 - o Saul prophesied once, never again; Josiah didn't
 - o Elijah, Elisha, not Nahum as far as we know
 - o Jesus, Apostles
 - o Paul: Trophimus I left sick in Miletus. Gifts don't belong to us.
- **I would expect to see the miraculous where there is no church**
 - o Gospel going to new group of people – just like in Acts
 - o God may use tongues to demonstrate His power
- **I expect to see the miraculous when end times begin to be unleashed**
- **What about here in an established church? Possible, but less necessary**
 - o We now have the completed New Testament – don't need revelatory gifts or authenticating gifts
 - o We crave the miraculous not the mundane. God, just show me a sign. I don't want suffering, I want dramatic healing for me, friends, family. Requires less faith. I want sight, not trust in an unseen God.
- **I don't want to be dogmatic when scripture is not. We could see the gift of tongues here. Pray for healing. Greatest miracle is someone coming to faith**
 - o It won't surprise me if someone tells me after sermon they have that gift
 - o **My response:**
 - use it consistent with the instructions of 1 Cor 14
 - with interpretation, in an orderly way, for benefit of others, not self
 - If interpretation is not available – remain silent and pray for it
 - If interpretation available – submit the message to the authority of our elders

TRANSITION: Heavy on teaching this morning. I want to get very practical. You might agree with me, or you might disagree. You might say these gifts certainly are for today, for our church, and we should be seeing a lot more of them. Or you might say, No way! You left the door wide open. These gifts no longer are in use. Remember, this is a non-essential matter. How should we speak about matters that can divide us?

Augustine "In essentials, unity. In non-essentials, liberty. In all things, charity."

- **In essentials, unity**
 - o **Unity is not the goal, it is the result of pursuing Christ together**
 - If we are not pursuing the same Christ with same gospel, DIVIDE
 - Non-negotiable – to deny these is to deny Christianity
 - Trinity
 - Inerrancy – that the Bible is God's perfectly true Word
 - Gospel – that salvation is by faith alone in Jesus alone

- **Go to battle over these things**
 - Galatians – Paul confronted Peter publicly
 - Some churches teach that tongues is required as proof of salvation
 - compromises the Gospel – adds a condition other than faith
 - Some teach that tongues are proof of maturity. That's legalism
- **Many of you will move on from Grace... looking for a new church...**
 - If it compromises an essential tenet... run!
 - Even if they have great worship, teaching, community outreach
- **In non-essentials, liberty**
 - **= important issues but not gospel issues**
 - worship style, order and timing of end times events, whether tongues are active, age of the earth, how to school your children
 - **mature believers can charitably disagree... yet still partner in gospel**
 - **Church in Prague**
- **In all things, charity**
 - **Charity = love**
 - in all things, essential & non-essential – treat others with love
 - no room for hatred or cruelty even when debating essentials
 - we forgive even our enemies; let God work out justice
 - **So that everyone will see the love of Christ in us**
- **1 Cor 13:8-13**

Application

You've seen division in the church

You've experienced people being dogmatic over non-essential issues

You can be a source of healing. Use your gifts to serve the body of Christ

PRAYER: Father, take our eyes off of ourselves, and let us find our joy in glorifying you and doing good for others.