

Prophecy and Tongues 1 Corinthians 14

God has blessed His church by giving each of us spiritual gifts with which we serve one another and the world at large. In Corinth that included the gifts of prophecy and tongues. Discover what these gifts are and how they are at work today. And more importantly, discover how to charitably debate issues like these that tend to divide God's people.

Turn to 1 Cor 14

Jericho Riders

- Local chapter of **Christian Motorcyclists Association**
- Purpose: to share and show the love of Jesus to people who dig motorcycles
- I LOVE THAT! Found a way to take something they enjoy and use it to share Jesus

Many of us are often too content to stay within our Christian bubble

- Jesus has called us to step outside that bubble and be salt & light to the world
- Jericho Riders step out of the bubble using the tool of motorcycles
- I'm not a motorcycle guy... I'm a car guy – that's the tool I use
 - o Next Sunday, weather & health permitting, I won't be here – at Auto-X
 - o Doing something I love while becoming friends – many who don't know Jesus yet
 - o If you're in to cars, join me – let's have fun, meet some people, and be salt & light
- Whatever your passion is: hunting, sports, Zumba, cooking...
- ...find a way to do it with people who don't know Jesus – be a friend... be salt & light

What you will discover when you step outside the Christian bubble...

- **the things that divide us within the bubble** – what Christians disagree about...
- **are very small compared to what divides us from the rest of the world**
- What things do we get hung up on inside the bubble?
 - o worship styles, political views, public vs private vs home, date or court, Genesis 1
 - o or our topic this morning: what to think about prophecy and tongues
 - some churches believe they ended in 1st century... others – every Sunday!
 - and lots of churches in between
- **But you know what?... all of those things are small compared to what unites us**
 - o All believers have hope in Jesus the world knows nothing about
 - o know an unconditional, undefeatable love the world can't even comprehend
 - o have a forgiveness that's strong enough to drive away any guilt/shame
 - All the world can do is blur the lines of right and wrong till guilt subsides
 - o We have the Gospel...
- Compared to that good news, the things that divide the church today are so very small

So our plan for this morning:

- Talk about **prophecy and tongues**
- Talk about HOW TO TALK ABOUT these issues that divide us
 - o in a way that's charitable and keeps them appropriately small
- Then celebrate what we have in common that's infinitely more important... Communion

Begin by setting up our passage... Last week & this week – talking about spiritual gifts

- = special abilities given to believers by the Spirit for the glory of God & good of others
- Last part key to understanding ch12-14 – gifts are for God’s glory & others’ good
- **They were using their gifts for the exact opposite: for their glory and their good!**
 - o Especially those with the “up-front” gifts: teaching, preaching, prophecy, tongues
 - o Used their gifts to show off – look mature and important
- **So Paul’s burden in ch12-14: rebuke pride & correct abuse of spiritual gifts**
 - o **ch12:** he teaches the unity of all believers & the equality of all gifts
 - o **ch13:** teaches us that love is better than all spiritual gifts
 - o **ch14:** teaches us about 2 gifts: prophecy & tongues
 - focuses on gift causing most trouble in Corinth: tongues
 - they promoted it above all other gifts – sign of their maturity, importance
 - Paul refutes that erroneous idea

So let’s look at these two spiritual gifts that continue to cause divisions in the church today...

PROPHECY

- **Read 14:1-4**
- **Prophecy = speech from God to man – special revelation from God**
 - o A prophet speaks on behalf of God to other people, either believers or unbelievers
- **This message from God is given for one of two purposes...**
 - o **1) to edify the church**
 - v3-4 – teaches, encourages, convicts, or warns of the consequences of sin
 - o **2) to convince and convict unbelievers**
 - **read 14:24-25**
 - miraculously reveals the secrets of the man’s heart
 - **Convinces** him that God is in this place
 - **Convicts** him of his sins & prepares him to believe the gospel
- **May include either or both foretelling and forth-telling**
 - o **Foretelling** = revelation of the future
 - E.g. Paul in 1 Thess 5 telling us about the future return of Jesus
 - E.g. Agabus in Acts 11 warning church of Antioch that famine was coming
 - o **Forth-telling** = revelation of something private
 - Couldn’t be known by natural means
 - v24... “the secrets of his heart are disclosed”
 - o So not the same thing as teaching or preaching
 - teaching & preaching = study existing revelation and explain it to others
 - prophecy is NEW revelation from God about the present or future
 - teaching & preaching – may include some errors
 - I’m quite sure some of my interpretations have been off
 - Because I’m human – my preaching will never be perfect
 - But prophecy will be perfect... always...
- **Prophecy is infallible and inerrant or it isn’t prophecy**
 - o No such thing as prophecy that’s only partially true
 - Either all true and absolutely perfect... or you’re a false prophet!
 - Why? Because you are speaking for God and God never makes mistakes!
 - o **Like an engineer who designs a bridge...**
 - Tells you: “90% of that bridge is perfect – strong, reliable, well-built.”
 - “Ummm.... what about the other 10%?”
 - “Oh, that’s junk! Sick that day; just phoned it in. Put together with duct tape!”
 - Would you drive on that bridge? No way!

- A bridge is either 100% reliable or it's not reliable at all!
 - If 10% of the bridge falls into the river, you're not making it across!
 - So it is with prophecy – ALL OR NOTHING!
- **Therefore prophecy must be tested**
 - **Read 14:29**
 - In our context: by the elders of our church
 - They would test a prophecy to see...
 - What it said about Jesus – must exalt Him
 - How it aligned with scripture – must not contradict God's Word
 - Whether its predictions proved true
 - The character of the prophet or prophetess
- **Now the million-dollar question... is prophecy still around today?**
- **Depends on which type of prophecy you're talking about – 2 kinds in New Testament...**
- **1. Apostolic Prophecy: "Prophecy with a capital-P"**
 - = divine revelation meant for the entire Church at all times.
 - Includes prophecies by Jesus and His Apostles
 - This is the prophecy of **Eph 2:19-21**
 - = the revelation of God centered on Jesus which forms the one, timeless foundation for the entire church.
 - **This form of prophecy ended with the death of the last Apostle, John**
 - died late first Century after writing Revelation – last book of NT
 - No more Apostles after John
 - because an Apostle had to see the risen Jesus with his own eyes
 - no longer possible... so there are no more Apostles
 - If no more Apostles, then no more Apostolic Prophecy – no more Scripture
 - because that can only come from someone with authority of an Apostle
 - Eph 2 is clear: the foundation has already been laid – back in 1st Century
 - church is being built on that foundation today
 - no new foundation is needed
 - So prophecy with a capital P... that's done – won't see it again till end times
- **2. Localized Prophecy: "Prophecy with a lower-case-p"**
 - = revelation directed to a particular individual or group at a particular time
 - This is the prophecy of 1 Cor 12-14
 - not through Apostles – through any man or woman with this spiritual gift
 - = the prophecy of Agabus we mentioned earlier about famine in Antioch
 - **This type of prophecy may still be around today**
 - There's no verse that says it has ceased
 - But experience leads us to believe it will be less common today in established churches with the Bible in their own language
 - When Paul wrote 1 Cor – just had Old Testament and 2 letters from Paul!
 - They needed prophecy every week to guide their church
 - We don't – we have something better – Prophecy-with-cap-P!
 - So not surprised to see it in missionary contexts
 - among people who don't have the Bible in their language yet
 - But a bit surprised to see it here since we have better Prophecy
 - **But that doesn't mean that it's impossible!** God can speak however, whenever
 - **SO IF SOMEONE AT GRACE CLAIMS TO HAVE A PROPHETIC WORD**
 - We wouldn't shut that down
 - Would follow Paul's advice and bring them the elders to test
 - If it passes 4-part test – deliver message to whom it's intended

TONGUES

- **read 14:2,5-19**
- Gr: “glwssa” = “a literal tongue” or “a language”
 - o Paul picks up second meaning to describe this spiritual gift we call tongues
- **= the ability to praise God in a language unknown to the speaker**
 - o Always spoken to God – words of worship & thanks to God in a unknown language
 - o May be **a human language** unknown to the speaker
 - Acts 2 – languages of the Parthians, Medes, Elamites, Egyptians
 - o Or possibly an **angelic or heavenly, non-human language**
 - Read **1 Cor 13:1a** – he seems to present it as a possibility
 - o But it’s always a language – discernible sounds that convey meaning
 - NOT babbling, humming, or meaningless chanting
- **2 purposes behind this gift of tongues:**
 - 1. To authenticate the presence of the Holy Spirit**
 - Acts 2, 10, 19 – proves to believers & unbelievers that God was present
 - That’s why Paul says in... **1 Cor 14:22 - read**
 - Tongues are meant to be a sign to unbelievers – to help them believe that God is present in the church
 - 2. To edify the church**
 - **Read 14:26** – meant for edification of the church – strengthen/encourage
 - o **So NOT primarily for the benefit of person speaking**
 - primarily for the benefit of those who hear – believers or unbelievers
- **But for either of these purposes to be fulfilled... God must provide the companion spiritual gift: interpretation**
 - o Paul’s point in v7-11
 - compares tongues to musical instruments, military bugle, human languages
 - point: if hearer doesn’t understand the communication, it’s pointless
 - o If there’s no interpretation then the church is left in the dark – not edified
 - o So... **read 14:27-28**
 - If no interpretation, then no place for tongues
 - Would create chaos & confusion for the church
 - Worse: would drive away unbelievers... **read 14:23** – a sign of madness
- **So v13 – If you speak in a tongue, pray that God would give you ability to interpret**
 - o That’s the only way your gift of tongues will be useful
- **That’s why I don’t personally support idea of tongues as private prayer language**
 - o No spiritual gift meant primarily for benefit of recipient
 - o Teaching, serving, faith, tongues... meant for the benefit of others
 - o My spiritual gifts are not for ME, they are for the benefit of OTHERS
 - o So if you can speak in a tongue but can’t interpret... don’t be content with that!
 - If it stays private then it’s incomplete – not doing what God designed it for
 - o Pray urgently for the ability to interpret or for God to send someone who can
- **So, again, the million-dollar question... what about the gift of tongues today?**
 - o No biblical evidence that tongues has ceased
 - o **I would expect to see the gift of tongues in missionary contexts**
 - Gospel going to new group of people – just like in Acts
 - God may use tongues to demonstrate His power
 - o **What about here in an established church? Maybe, but it would surprise me**
 - We now have the completed New Testament – don’t need revelatory gifts as much
 - Bible is BETTER than tongues or prophecy
 - This is how God builds His church today
 - o **But we can’t be certain. We may see the gift of tongues here. So...**

- **...If a person in our church claims to have the gift of tongues**
 - we're not going to suppress that
 - we'll ask them to use it in accordance with the instructions of 1 Cor 14
 - with interpretation, in an orderly way, and under elder authority
 - If interpretation is not available – ask them to remain silent and pray for it
 - If interpretation available – bring them to elders to evaluate message
 - elders will decide how it should be shared

Now let's talk about something more important than tongues or prophecy...
Let's talk about HOW WE TALK ABOUT these issues that divide us

How should we handle issues like prophecy & tongues that tend to divide God's people?

- Augustine "In essentials, unity. In non-essentials, liberty. In all things, charity."
- **In essentials, unity**
 - = **core teachings of Christianity that we all must agree on**
 - Non-negotiable – to deny these is to deny Christianity
 - Trinity – one God who is 3 eternal, equal Persons, Father, Son, and Spirit
 - Inerrancy – that the Bible is God's perfectly true Word
 - Gospel – that salvation is by faith alone in Jesus alone
 - **If something in the church threatens one of these, we must fight it**
 - **Example: Some churches teach that tongues is required as proof of salvation**
 - False and compromises the Gospel – adds a condition other than faith
 - We will not partner with a church that would teach that
 - **Most of you students will move away when you graduate...**
 - **When you're looking for a church to attend:**
 - If it compromises an essential tenant... run!
 - Doesn't matter if they have great worship, teaching, community outreach
- **In non-essentials, liberty**
 - = **important issues but not gospel issues**
 - worship style, whether tongues & prophecy are active, how to understand the sovereignty or Genesis 1, how to school your children,
 - **Godly believers can charitably disagree... yet still partner to share the gospel**
 - **Good issues to study, discuss, and debate... but not worth dividing over**
 - We should allow one another liberty to disagree about these non-essential
 - **So when it comes to non-essentials:**
 - Study scripture to arrive at your own view – you are equipped!
 - Graciously discuss with other believers - helps both sides move toward truth
 - At the end of the day, agree to disagree and get on with sharing the gospel!
 - **Ill: some of my fondest memories of living in DC...**
 - talking theology on my porch with Presbyterian roommate over coffee
 - we disagreed about sovereignty, nature of repentance, infant baptism...
 - both very intellectual – debated for hours – neither winning the other over
 - then next night went to same church to lead a young adult ministry!
 - We don't have to agree on everything
 - get the essentials right, have fun debating the rest... and then work together

And finally...

- **In all things, charity**
 - **Charity = love**
 - in all things, essential & non-essential – treat others with love
 - no room for hate or cruelty even when debating essentials
 - clothe everything we say and do with love

- Matt will teach 1 Cor 13 next week... but let's take a peek!... **Read 13:1-3,8,13**
 - This love: not an emotion – not Valentines' Day kind of love
 - = **a choice to put the good of the other person above your own good**
- **So when discussing something we disagree on... do it in a spirit of love**
 - even if it's a critical issue like the gospel
 - because even if your superior knowledge wins – if you haven't loved, you've wasted your time

Love trumps all the things that divide us

Why? Because we worship a God who *IS* love – 1 John 4:8

And His infinite love for us was proven on the cross – Rom 5:8

- We are sinners... we deserve God's justice
- Instead God gave us His Son
- You don't need to come forward or raise your hand... just believe!

For those who do believe in Jesus... we get to give thanks to Him by taking communion

As the bread and cup pass, prepare your heart by...

- Giving thanks for the gift of His Son
- Giving thanks that your sins, past, present, and future, are completely forgiven
- Giving thanks that because of Jesus we are all one big family of God
 - regardless of what we believe about non-essentials like tongues & prophecy
 - we are one family united in the death and resurrection of Jesus
- So let's give thanks