

1 Corinthians 14 The Orderly Use of Spiritual Gifts

For some reason the Corinthians were really into the vocal gifts (speaking in tongues and prophecy) (maybe thinking it **somehow proved how spiritual they were**). Yet with all their use of these vocal gifts Paul writes to point out how **carnal and immature they really are**: The use of these vocal gifts was not producing mature Christianity; **Spiritual gifts** in the church service the way they were doing it (**was not benefitting anyone**) - so he was trying to bring them into line in the proper understanding and use of the gifts of the Spirit in this chapter. He just finished chapter 13 about LOVE, now combines the motivation of love with the desire for spiritual gifts. This is not a chapter that speaks of STOPPING the use of spiritual gifts, rather it is a chapter teaching the CORRECT USE.

A Key Theme Throughout: “What is beneficial when the church gathers?”

1Co 14:1-40 ESV Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, ***especially that you may prophecy***. 2 For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit. 3 On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation.

ESPECIALLY PROPHECY

- **Especially prophecy *because it is spoken in the language of the hearer***
- **Prophecy *[since it is spoken in the language of the hearer]* strengthens encourages and comforts**

TONGUES

- **On one hand speaking in tongues is beneficial (on a personal level)**
 - Those who speak in tongues are **speaking to God**
 - He utters **mysteries in the Spirit**
- **But on the other hand no one understands them (when the church is gathered)**
 - **No one understands him** / (“though I speak with tongues of men and angels”)

REINFORCING THE KEY THEME

4 The one who **speaks in a tongue builds up himself**, but the one who **prophesies builds up the church**.

- **The church is edified when they understand what is spoken [i.e. prophecy]**
- **When a person speaks in tongues --- only he/she [the speaker] is edified**
- This does not say that tongues is bad, on the contrary, if it builds you up, why wouldn't you pray in the spirit?

REINFORCING THE KEY THEME AGAIN (GREATER/UNLESS)

5 Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but ***even more to prophecy***. The one who prophesies is **greater** than the one who speaks in tongues, ***unless someone interprets***, so ***that the church may be built up***.

- **The GREATER comment is about the benefit...”that the church would be built up” not a**

value upon tongues - for he wants them all to speak in tongues

- It is an exhortation to seek to build others up when the church gathers
- Prophecy is greater than tongues because the hearer understands what is spoken - **UNLESS** tongues is followed by is an interpretation - because when there is an interpretation the hearer understands it in their own language as well - so tongues **WITH** interpretation is on par with prophecy since both end up building up the church

REINFORCING THE KEY THEME COMMON SENSE

6 Now, brothers, if I come to you speaking in tongues, how will I benefit you unless I bring you some **revelation** or **knowledge** or **prophecy** or **teaching**?

- If Paul comes and **ONLY** speaks in tongues to the church it does no one any good
- It is only if he brings a revelation, or knowledge, or prophecy or word of instruction - **WHY?** [*because those things are spoken in the language of the hearer*]

REINFORCING THE KEY THEME - ILLUSTRATION OF LIFELESS INSTRUMENTS

7 If even lifeless instruments, such as the flute or the harp, do not give distinct notes, how will anyone know what is played? 8 And if the bugle gives an indistinct sound, who will get ready for battle? 9 So with yourselves, if with your tongue you utter speech that is not intelligible, how will anyone know what is said? **For you will be speaking into the air.**

- Here Paul gives a natural illustration - if you just bang on an instrument (pipe or harp) rather than play a distinct song, no one will know what you are playing
- If a trumpet blows, but does not blow the sound of “charge” for example the troops will not prepare for battle
- In the same way speaking in tongues is intelligible - no one knows what you are saying - essentially you are speaking into the air

REINFORCING THE KEY THEME - LANGUAGES IN THE WORLD

10 There are doubtless many different languages in the world, and none is without meaning, 11 but if I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be a foreigner to the speaker and the speaker a foreigner to me.

- Every language has meaning (even tongues)
- But if the hearer does not understand or grasp the meaning...then both the speaker and hearer are like foreigners to one another

REINFORCING THE KEY THEME IN HIS CONCLUSION

12 So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church.

- Conclusion... In your eagerness for spiritual gifts... Seek those that will edify the church [i.e. those that people will understand]

13 Therefore, one who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret. 14 For if I pray in a

tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful. 15 What am I to do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also; I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also. 16 Otherwise, if you give thanks with your spirit, how can anyone in the position of an outsider say "Amen" to your thanksgiving when he does not know what you are saying? 17 For you may be giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not being built up.

- **“The one who speaks in a tongue should pray that they may interpret” -**
- **More than praying that he may interpret his OWN tongues, I think a better understanding of the scripture might be that the person should pursue the gift of interpretation - since it is the interpretation that edifies...**
- **It could be said this way “pray that he may be used in the gift of interpretation” - or pray that he may interpret”**
- **I lean toward this understanding because of these verses:**
 - **Let one speak in tongues and let one interpret (1 Cor 14:27) - sounds like two different people**
 - **If there is no interpreter in the church - KEEP SILENT (1 Cor 14:28)**

1Co 14:18-19 ESV I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. 19 Nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue.

- **Again there is a positive reinforcement re: speaking in tongues [I thank God I speak in tongues more than all of you]**
- **But the emphasis as in the rest of the chapter is “BUT IN THE CHURCH” he would rather speak 5 words people understand than 10,000 that are unintelligible**

REINFORCING THE KEY THEME - MATURE THINKING

1Co 14:20 ESV Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature.

- **He appeals to them to be mature in their thinking about this (don't be so tied to your current method of how you use tongues that you can't hear mature thinking about it)**
- **Put speaking in tongues in its proper place and don't make a sacred cow out of it**
- **He is basically telling them to back off from how they have been using tongues in their services because it is no longer edifying...when you take something away, people get mad**

He appeals to the OT example - ineffectiveness of tongues in bring about change to the people of God

1Co 14:21 ESV In the Law it is written, "By people of strange tongues and by the lips of foreigners will I speak to this people, and even then they will not listen to me, says the Lord."

- **He is drawing a parallel here**
- **(you think your tongues is beneficial so you continue to speak in it)**
- **(I have shown you that it does not really edify the church unless there is an interpretation)**

- In this scripture of Isaiah, foreigners came [it was the Assyrians] with a foreign language...God was using Assyrians to “speak” to his people (for judgement), yet they would not listen - those “foreign tongues” did not move people to change back then
- Similarly today, foreign tongues have no impact if we speak them to one another (see vs 11) - we are like foreigners trying to communicate
- The point being - the Corinthians may think that “speaking in tongues” is the greatest thing going - but it was not bringing about positive change into their carnal lives - no differently than the foreign tongues of God’s instrument of judgement never brought about repentance

New Thought

1Co 14:22 (a) ESV Thus tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers,

- So based on all that has been said above - tongues [without interpretation] is not really of any benefit to the believer - it is not in this sense a SIGN for the believer
- Tongues IS a sign for unbelievers (see the box below with more insight on this)

Regarding Tongues as a Sign for the Unbeliever...here are some thoughts

On the day of Pentecost - to the gathering crowd it was a sign of the working of God - a fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy, and part of the message that moved many to repent.

Act 2:32-38 ESV This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. 33 Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. 34 For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, "The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand, 35 until I make your enemies your footstool." 36 Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." 37 Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" 38 And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

In Samaria - it was a sign to Simon the sorcerer of the power of God

Act 8:18-23 ESV Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, 19 saying, "Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." 20 But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! 21 You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. 22 Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. 23 For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity."

At Cornelius’ house - to the “unbelieving” / or “unlearned” Jews (unbelieving in the sense that they never would have believed that God accepted the Gentiles apart from them speaking in tongues - unlearned in the sense they were not aware of God’s ultimate plan to include the Gentiles) it was a sign of God’s inclusion of the Gentiles

Act 10:44-46 ESV While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. 45 And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. 46 For they were hearing

them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared,

Act 11:15-17 ESV As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning.
16 And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' 17 If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?"

1Co 14:22 (b) ESV while prophecy is a sign not for unbelievers but for believers.

- **Prophecy on the other hand is NOT for unbelievers**
- **Prophecy is FOR the believer - because with prophecy we are speaking words that we understand and that will build and edify us**

Tongues is not a sign for the believer

1Co 14:23 ESV If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your minds?

- **Imagine the church has come together for a meeting - and an unbeliever or inquirer comes - He is expecting to see a meeting where people are being encouraged and built up and understanding what is going on - instead he sees everyone is speaking languages that no one understands - no one is edified...and he says "these people are out of their mind" because everyone is talking, but no one is understanding.**
- **Why? because tongues is a sign to the unbeliever not the believer (and if we are using it in a meeting for believers it is unfruitful (again without interpretation)**
- **The gift of tongues is not meant to be used in the way the Corinthians were abusing it - it was not intended for believers as a stand alone way of communication with NO INTERPRETATION - in this sense it is not for believers**

1Co 14:24-25 ESV But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, 25 the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you.

- **If that same unbeliever comes in to the service and they see prophecy - which IS a word that speaks to edification, exhortation and comfort - they see something that makes sense because prophecy is FOR the believer [they see believers doing what they should be doing]- that is - it is the gift that we in the church understand and comprehend...The believers in the service are using this gift for its intended purpose - it is FOR the believer...So in this case the unbeliever sees something that makes sense...believers are speaking to believers in a way that is profitable and beneficial, and the whole thing causes the unbeliever to recognize that God is really among us, and he falls down and worships Him. Prophecy is NOT for unbelievers (that is we are not to prophesy to unbelievers)...however they are impacted in a positive way when they see the gift being used believer to believer since prophecy IS for believers.**
- **It seems reasonable that what is said in the church meeting (a meeting of believers)**

should be words understood by those present. Tongues, without interpretation does not accomplish that

1Co 14:26 ESV What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. **Let all things be done for building up.**

- **Now he is summing up everything he has just said and giving instruction for the proper use of tongues - insuring that with the use of tongues the church continues to be edified**
- **EVERYTHING must be done so the church is built up**

1Co 14:27-28 ESV **If any speak in a tongue**, let there be only **two or at most three**, and each in turn, and let **someone interpret**. 28 But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God.

- **The “rules” governing the use of tongues in the church**

1Co 14:29-30 ESV Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. 30 If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent.

- **The “rules” governing prophecy**
- **2 or 3 should speak - others should weigh or judge what is said**
- **Be willing to take turns**

1Co 14:31-33 ESV **For you can all prophesy one by one**, so that all may learn and all be encouraged, 32 and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets. 33 For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. As in all the churches of the saints,

- **All may prophesy**
- **Speaking with the gift of prophecy does not take over a person’s faculties**
- **Because of this there is order and prophesying in turn**

1Co 14:34-36 ESV the **women should keep silent in the churches**. For they are not permitted to speak, **but should be in submission**, as the Law also says. 35 If there is anything they desire to learn, let them **ask their husbands at home**. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church. 36 Or was it from you that the word of God came? Or are you the only ones it has reached?

- **Women are not called to absolute silence - only under certain circumstances - we can see in Chapter 11 that they are permitted to pray and prophesy**
 - ~ A tongues-speaker is to be silent (sigaō) and stop speaking in tongues if there is no one to interpret (1 Cor. 14:28 ESV).
 - ~ A prophet is to be silent (sigaō) and stop prophesying if someone else receives a revelation (1 Cor. 14:30).
 - ~ Women are to be silent (sigaō) and stop asking questions if there is anything they want to learn; they should keep their questions for home (1 Cor. 14:34-35).

- 1Co 11:4-5 ESV Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head, 5 but every wife who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, since it is the same as if her head were shaven.
- **It seems the issue here was women were inquiring about things in the gathering, and Paul stated this should happen at home rather than in the assembly**
- **The word of God has reached more than you (church leaders?) - let the husbands do this at home**

1Co 14:37-40 ESV If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord. 38 If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized. 39 So, my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. 40 But all things should be done decently and in order.

- **Paul basically says if you are a prophet or spiritual that there is an acknowledgement in their heart that what he is writing is the command of the LORD**
- **Be eager to prophesy**
- **Do not forbid speaking in tongues**
- **Everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way**