

The Gift of Tongues (Cont.)

1 Corinthians 14:20-28

20 Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature. 21 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." 22 Thus tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers, while prophecy is a sign^[a] not for unbelievers but for believers. 23 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? 24 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.

26 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. 27 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.

Introduction:

We are going to continue our discussion on the gift of tongues and how they are inferior to the gift of prophecy. Last week we saw the primary reason why prophecy is to be preferred over tongues, and that is because of how effective prophecy is in building up the body of Christ. Paul has spent a considerable amount of time and energy preaching that the primary purpose

for spiritual gifts is for the edification of the body. And, let me reiterate something else I have pointed out in previous sermons on the subject. The primary reason why we gather together is to worship God and the thing that honors God most when we gather is the love that we have for one another when we are seeking to build one another up. You may remember me saying that if we are to honor most appropriately the one we have gathered to honor, we must find out what that particular person desires to be honored by. We gather to honor the Lord and the Lord has made clear that he is honored when we love one another.

In today's text we are going to learn about a secondary effect of our loving one another. The primary effect of our loving one another rightly is the worship of God, the secondary effect is an effective witness to the lost. There is an element of evangelism that occurs when the body of Christ gathers for worship. This is in no way a new idea. In John 13:34-35 Jesus says, *"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. 35 By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."* Jesus prayed in John 17:20-21 *"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, 21 that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me."*

So there are three main elements for the purpose of our worship gathering; worship God, love one another, and evangelism. It is important that we prioritize these three elements of worship properly. First and foremost we gather to honor God through worship. One of the primary ways we accomplish this is through loving one another and seeking to build one another up through the use of spiritual gifts. Thirdly, through the process of these first two elements, evangelism can and will occur. Today we are going to see one of the ways in which this happens.

But first a reminder from last week.

1. **Prioritize the Scriptures as the main source of information.**
2. **Exercise liberty with this subject.**
3. **Keep the Main Thing the Main Thing, which is the good of the BODY.**
4. **Above all - *Pursue Love*,**

I am going to take the same approach as last week by walking through the text, but this week we will see four divisions in the text. In verses 20 through 21 Paul uses an old covenant prophecy from Isaiah to establish the point he is going to make in versus 22 through 25. That point being that prophecy is superior to tongues in accomplishing the secondary effect of the spiritual gifts, namely evangelism. Lastly, we will end with some practical application found in verses 26 through 28.

1. **An Old Covenant Illusion to Make a New Covenant Point (20-21)**

20 Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature. Some commentators believe that Paul is referring to uninterpreted tongue speaking as immature versus prophecy being mature. I don't particularly see it that way. Paul often uses the call for mature thinking as a means to introduce a deeper level of truth or application. I believe that Paul is about to take his argument to one more level by alluding to a prophecy from Isaiah in the old covenant.

21 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."

Paul is alluding to Isaiah 28:11. I say Paul is alluding to this prophecy instead of quoting this prophecy because it is a loose reference. Paul has somewhat paraphrased it and it's application isn't perfectly clear and obvious. This is an example of the New Testament use of an old testament reference that can be extremely difficult to discern the intent and meaning. This serves as another proof that we must give liberty when it comes to interpreting 1 Corinthians 14.

In order for us to attempt to accurately understand Paul's point in using that illusion we must go back and understand its original context for ourselves. About 15 years before Isaiah made this prophecy the northern kingdom of Israel had fallen captive to the Assyrians in 722 BC. Their fall was the result of their own apostasy and unbelief. In this passage Isaiah is warning Judah that they are facing the same outcome of captivity to the Babylonians if they do not turn from their apostasy and unbelief. God had been warning Judah through Isaiah using plain and simple language. God had been speaking to them like children freshly weaned from the milk and taken from the breast (Is. 28:9). So God says through Isaiah, *For by people of strange lips and with a foreign tongue the Lord will speak to this people, to whom he has said, "This is rest; give rest to the weary; and this is repose"; yet they would not hear. (11-12)*

Paul only refers to verse 11 but including verse 12 really helps us better understand what's going on here. God has been preaching to them to repent and turn to him and find rest and repose for their weary souls. However, they refused to listen to the message in simple words from the prophet but soon, as a sign of judgment God will speak to his people through a people of strange lips and a foreign tongue. Which will be the Babylonians.

This is not the only place in the old testament that foreign speech is a sign of judgment on Israel's rebellion. 800 years earlier God had warned them, *"The Lord will bring a nation against you from*

far away, from the end of the earth, swooping down like the eagle, a nation whose language you do not understand,” (Deut. 28:49). About 100 years after Isaiah God warned them through Jeremiah, *“Behold, I am bringing against you a nation from afar, O house of Israel, declares the Lord. It is an enduring nation; it is an ancient nation, a nation whose language you do not know, nor can you understand what they say.”* (5:15)

Hearing a foreign language that they did not understand served as a sign to the Jews that God has judged them for their refusal to listen to him. It is that, "we messed up" moment. Simply put, Paul's warning to the Corinthians was that the use of tongues without a clear interpretation would serve as a misleading “sign” to unbelievers that come into their presence.

So here is his point in Paul’s words...

2. The New Covenant Point (22-23)

Thus tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers, while prophecy is a sign not for unbelievers but for believers. 23 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?

The key word here is sign. Paul uses the word *sign* and not gift or spiritual gift. What is a sign? A sign is something that points to or represents something else. When people walk into a gathering and everyone is babbling an unintelligible language without anyone explaining what the meaning is, they will be confused. It will be a sign to them that the people are *mainesthe*, insane. Tongues without interpretation are detrimental to the secondary effect of our worship services.

3. The Best Possible Solution (24-25)

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.

The main point is that prophecy is to be preferred over tongues, not only because of its value to the body of Christ but also its effectiveness to communicate the gospel to unbelievers who may be in their presence. Prophecy will not be a misleading sign to unbelievers like tongues, it is a clear and easy to understand sign pointing to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Paul has a heart for evangelism. Paul knows that the use of tongues in a corporate gathering is not the best way to reach the unbeliever. In fact, he's warning of the dangers it poses for having the opposite effect. Tongues without interpretation can scare people off. Uninterpreted tongues is a sign to unbelievers that Christians are insane.

How do we know evangelism is what Paul is referring to? I believe that these verses describe the clear telling of the gospel and someone receiving it by faith. What better description can there be of true conversion than someone who is convicted by preaching (prophecy), held to account, having the secrets of his heart disclosed, and falling to his face worshipping God, declaring the reality of God's presence?

4. The Application (26-28)

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. 27 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.

What then, brothers? In spite of all that has been said, what do we do about it brothers and sisters?

When you come together, It primarily affects our corporate worship gatherings.

each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Do not miss the word 'each'. Paul is saying that every true believer who comes to worship should seek to bring a gift for the church that will edify the body in some way. I do not believe he is referring only to the corporate manner. In other words, not everyone needs to get up on stage and present their spiritual gift to every one at once every Sunday. However, everyone should seek to bring a gift and contribute it to someone in some way that will ultimately affect the body as a whole. As the body is one and each member is a part of the one body, ministering to one member can contribute greatly to the good of the whole body.

Let all things be done for building up. That is the primary point Paul has been trying to make throughout chapters 12-14. It is our goal.

27 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. I want to give a few comments on these verses before we close. First, it is clear that Paul is not forbidding the use of tongues in a worship gathering. If that was his goal he certainly would not have said what he just said. Secondly, I believe the fact that he limits tongue speakers

to two or at most three, indicates that he does not wish for tongue speakers to dominate any service. It also seems that in his experience he was not seeing God choose to use tongues very often. I believe if he was seeing this more often he would not have put a limitation on it as he did. I believe he is leaving room for the Holy Spirit to use tongues if He so chooses.

Tongues must be interpreted or the tongue speaker needs to remain silent while the body is gathered. Without an interpreter it is a matter between them and God.

Closing:

We are the kingdom of God. We are the body of Christ on earth. We are the place where sinners meet Jesus to find forgiveness and salvation. When we are not gathering corporately for worship we are missionaries in a lost and dying world. When we are gathering for corporate worship we are gathered to be strengthened and equipped to continue the battle. However, when we gather there is always the possibility that unbelievers will be among us. Therefore, we should be mindful of this fact in everything we do and say.

God does not restrict the gospel to be heard only at the end of the sermon. The invitation from the preacher is not the only opportunity God gives sinners to come to him in repentance and faith. Everything we do when we gather together is being seen and heard by the lost. We want to do everything in our power to make certain our message is clear. Whether it is in the way we act toward one another or in the very words we use to speak to one another.

A word to the lost among us.

CG Discussion Questions

- 1.** What are the three elements in our purpose for gathering to worship and how are they to be prioritized? This was discussed in the introduction.
- 2.** What were the four reminders from last weeks sermon that we need to keep in mind when it comes to interpreting first Corinthians 14?
- 3.** What did Paul mean in verse 20 by telling the Corinthians to be infants in evil but mature and their thinking?
- 4.** What was the prophecy of Isaiah that Paul alluded to in verse 21?
- 5.** What was the basic meaning of that prophecy in its original context?
- 6.** What was Paul's point that he made through using Isaiah's prophecy in 1 Corinthians 14?
- 7.** How was Paul's use of the word '*sign*' important for helping us understand the point he was trying to make?
- 8.** Compare the two reactions that Paul discusses from unbelievers to the use of uninterpreted tongues versus prophecy.
- 9.** What is the message we hope to convey during a worship service to visiting unbelievers?