

1 Corinthians 14 - Gifts of Prophecy and Tongues Gonerby October 2012

(John 4: 7-24)

Gifts of Prophecy and Tongues

1 Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy. 2 For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God. Indeed, no-one understands him; he utters mysteries with his spirit. 3 But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort. 4 He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church.

5 I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy. He who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may be edified.

6 Now, brothers, if I come to you and speak in tongues, what good will I be to you, unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or word of instruction? 7 Even in the case of lifeless things that make sounds, such as the flute or harp, how will anyone know what tune is being played unless there is a distinction in the notes? 8 Again, if the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle? 9 So it is with you. Unless you speak intelligible words with your tongue, how will anyone know what you are saying? You will just be speaking into the air. 10 Undoubtedly there are all sorts of languages in the world, yet none of them is without meaning. 11 If then I do not grasp the meaning of what someone is saying, I am a foreigner to the speaker, and he is a foreigner to me. 12 So it is with you. Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church.

13 For this reason anyone who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret what he says. 14 For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. 15 So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind. 16 If you are praising God with your spirit, how can one who finds himself among those who do not understand say "Amen" to your thanksgiving, since he does not know what you are saying? 17 You may be giving thanks well enough, but the other man is not edified.

18 I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. 19 But in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue.

20 Brothers, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults. 21 In the Law it is written: *"Through men of strange tongues and through the lips of foreigners I will speak to this people, but even then they will not listen to me,"* says the Lord.

22 Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers; prophecy, however, is for believers, not for unbelievers. 23 So if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and some who do not understand or some unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind? 24 But if an unbeliever or someone who does not understand comes in while everybody is prophesying, he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all, 25 and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, "God is really among you!"

Orderly Worship

26 What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church. 27 If anyone speaks in a tongue, two—or at the most three—should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. 28 If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and God.

29 Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. 30 And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop. 31 For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged. 32 The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets. 33 For God is not a God of disorder but of peace.

As in all the congregations of the saints, 34 women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. 35 If they want to enquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church. 36 Did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached? 37 If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command. 38 If he ignores this, he himself will be ignored.

39 Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. 40 But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.

Introduction

Chapter 14 is the last of the three chapters which Paul writes to answer the questions the Christian Church had on the use of spiritual gifts.

In chapter 12 he spoke generally about the different gifts and how they should be used to build up the whole Church, Christian community in a place.

In chapter 13, he writes, in that beautiful passage, that above the practice of all the gifts of the spirit, must come the practice of love.

In today's chapter -- 14, he looks in detail at the particular gift which has been causing friction in the church by its misuse -- the gift of speaking in tongues (CEV Bible -- "languages that others don't know")

Reminder -- The meaning of tongues and prophecies.

The expression "speaking in tongues" refers to a language phenomenon in which the speaker is caught up in spiritual exhilaration, and utters words in a language which is not immediately understandable. Hence chapter 13:1 - "If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels...".

It is a sort of spiritual exercise, where communion with God is so intimate that no earthly language can express it.
(Ministers Together in Grantham -- prayer meeting last week -- several ministers were speaking in tongues)

In chapter 14 Paul contrasts this with another spiritual gift, which is another type of public speaking out - that of prophecy.

Prophecy -- the speaking out of God's word to people -- either a special prophetic message, or in a more everyday sense, the practice of preaching or teaching from God's Word -- the Bible.

And, basically, the contrast which Paul makes is that the gift of tongues is generally more useful for private prayer and devotion, whereas prophecy is, obviously, something which happens when the whole Church meets together in a more public way -- with believers and nonbelievers and seekers present. (The exception is when an interpreter is present to explain the tongue)

Worship in the Spirit

Jesus said that those who worship God must worship in spirit and in truth. And I suppose that what Paul is writing about tongues and about prophecy, in this passage, covers those two aspects of worship.

Read v14 *For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. 15 So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind.*

Our worship, whether at home in our devotional times, or together with other Christians in church, our worship is not purely a mental exercise. A reading of liturgy and singing of words. It is that, but it is more than that as well. And there is a sense that we worship from our inner being -- our spirits touched by God's spirit -- Communion -- holy Communion with God.

But our worship is also through our rational minds, as we understand God's word to us. And when we are together corporately, then Paul says that this is equally if not more important

Read verses 18, 19 *I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. But in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue.*

And Verse 4 *"he who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church"*

Prophecy

"he who prophesies edifies the church" - So tongues have their place, but we always need more prophecy --

1. We need preachers and teachers ; who are able to bring God's word to people -- adults -- Lay readers, but also don't forget our children -- we need Sunday Club, and youth group teachers.
2. But also, if prophecy is speaking out God's will - we can all do this -- what is God's will on... the books in our school library (if you are a school governor), what is God's will on... a decision in the council chamber (if you are a councillor); or behaviour in your work environment.

You see, it's important not only to know God's will -- but also to have the courage to speak it out. Prophets have to be courageous.

Are we courageous enough to challenge the “ungodly” things in our society, or do we just stay silent?

Conclusion -- verses 39, 40

39 Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. 40 But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.