

Spiritual Gifts through the Eyes of Paul

7.13.22

City of Corinth – background

- It was the largest city in 1st century Greece and the Roman capital of the region of Achaia.
- Corinth was a vast city of commerce because of its strategic location for ships with cargo.
- During that day, like Rome, the city was known for its prostitution, pagan worship, and sexual perversion.

The Church in Corinth

- Paul and his companions founded the church during his second missionary journey. He spent 18 months there during the church planting effort (Acts 18:7-8).
- The Corinthian church was perhaps the most unique and challenging for Paul under his apostolic leadership.

The Corinthian believers struggled with the following issues:

- Doctrinal purity
 - Philosophical influence and a bent towards logic and sophist teaching
 - Spiritual immaturity (3:1)
- Factions and divisions (aligning themselves under certain teachers and apostles, 1:11-13)
- Godly authority, including Paul's authority
- Sexual perversion (This even included permitting an incestuous relationship - 5:1-3.)
- The church was being torn apart by bickering and quarreling (1:11).
- Strife, to the point of lawsuits in the Gentile courts (6:1-8)
- Christian teaching regarding marital fidelity (chapter 7)
- Spiritual gifts and the basic order of believers gathered in worship.

Despite the challenges, spiritual gifts were prevalent.

- The Corinthians were not lacking in any spiritual gifts (1:7).

Spiritual gifts definition: Spiritual gifts are special *releases* or *disbursements* of the Spirit's power into a moment for the purpose of equipping and building up the church.

These gifts also aid the believer in witnessing, establishing God's kingdom, and accomplishing God's purposes in the world.

- Spiritual gifts must be understood as the spontaneous, sovereign release of God's power in a specific moment.
- These gifts must be distinguished from God-given capacities, talents, and skills that someone develops.

The Corinthian church helps us reflect on the following:

- Exercising spiritual gifts is not necessarily a mark of spiritual maturity.
 - We do not merit their operation through our efforts, discipline, and service.
- Spiritual gifts are not given to the spiritually elite.
- Operating in the Spirit's gifts does not create immunity against carnal behavior.
- Operating in the Gifts is intended for all (12:7).
 - It was the normal experience of the Corinthian believers.
 - No one is intended to be the exception.

Misunderstandings regarding I Corinthians 14

- This chapter specifically focuses on the blessings and potential abuse of tongues.
- Remember, I Corinthians 14 does not comprehensively address everything in scripture about tongues.
- The chapter primarily focuses on the use of tongues when the church is gathered.
- It gives some insight regarding this gift in an individual's private devotional life.

The context of 1 Corinthians 14 centers on exercising spiritual gifts when believers are gathered for worship.

- This context serves as an essential interpretive guide regarding the Gifts.

Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy. For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries. But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men. He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church. I wish you all spoke with tongues, but even more that you prophesied; for he who prophesies *is* greater than he who speaks with tongues, unless indeed he interprets, that the church may receive edification. But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you unless I speak to you either by revelation, by knowledge, by prophesying, or by teaching? (I Corinthians 14: 1-6).

- We are commanded to earnestly desire spiritual gifts (v.1).
 - We must stop treating the gifts as an option.
 - Desiring the Gifts and the Giver are one and the same.
- Believers are commanded to specifically seek gifts that mutually comfort, build up, and encourage the body.

Tongues definition: Tongues (spiritual language) is defined by Paul as a Spirit-enabled form of communication in a language unknown to the speaker. It may represent one speaking mysteries to God (14:2), an unknown language in prayer (14:4), offering blessing and thanksgiving (14:14, 16), speaking in a foreign dialect as a sign, a gift combined with supernatural interpretation to benefit the church.

- Xenoglossia – speaking in a language that one has never learned or known.
- Glossolalia – an ecstatic utterance or speech. It may be an unknown heavenly or earthly language.
- Xenolalia – speaking in an unknown human language known to the hearers.
- Speaking in an unknown language that is miraculously heard in the recipient’s language.

Prophecy is more beneficial in the gathered church (1:5).

- Prophecy is not inherently superior.
- Tongues with the interpretation are equivalent to prophesy.
- These verses indicate that the Spirit does not bypass human cognition and sound reasoning within the church.
 - We were never intended to be babbling mystics.
 - Revelation, clear teaching, and instruction are central to his plan.

So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church. Therefore, one who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret. For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful. 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. 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? For you may be giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not being built up. I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. Nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue (1 Corinthians 14: 12-19).

We glean several insights here from Paul.

- Speaking and praying in tongues is typically unknown to the speaker (14:13).
 - However, this does not diminish its importance and value.
 - Remember, this means of communication is God's idea.
- Paul distinguishes between the practice of praying with tongues and praying in one's known language (14:13-15).
 - Praying in tongues is described as praying "with" the spirit (pneuma).
 - Praying in one's own language is described as praying with the intellect (nous – "knowledge").
 - Tongues is a means of giving adoration and thanksgiving to the Lord (14:16).
- Paul also prescribes two types of worship through song, singing in tongues and singing in one's own language.
 - Perhaps this refers to the psalms, hymns, and "*spiritual songs*" of Ephesians 5:19.
- Paul gives a window into his own spiritual devotional practice (14:18).
 - This seems to indicate that Paul could initiate this practice.
 - It also describes a deliberate, intentional practice on the part of Paul.
 - He would have omitted his own reflections if Paul sought to downplay or forbid tongues speech.
 - Paul reemphasizes the comparative importance of giving prophetic insight in the known language of assembled believers.

Therefore, tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophesying is not for unbelievers but for those who believe. Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in *those who are* uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say that you are out of your mind? But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all. And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on *his* face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you (I Corinthians 14: 20-25).

Tongues are a sign to unbelievers.

- We may assume from verse 23, that most if not all spoke in tongues. "*if the whole church comes together and all speak with tongues...*"
 - The first century church was a Spirit filled, Spirit-empowered church.
 - We must remember the scriptures were written in this context.
- God delights in confounding the wisdom of the wise.
- God will offend the mind to reveal the heart.
- Prophecy will reveal the hidden secrets of the heart (14:25).

How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. If anyone speaks in a tongue, *let there be* two or at the most three, *each* in

turn, and let one interpret. But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God. Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge. But if *anything* is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged. And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. For God is not *the author* of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints (I Corinthians 14:26-33).

Paul gives principles to govern prophecy and tongues in public worship

- Worship is not intended to be a chaotic free-for-all (14:26).
- Paul prescribes guidelines, not hard and fast rules.
 - His appeal is to protocol, preferring one another, and order.
 - The Lord is willing to work through less-than-perfect people in less-than-ideal situations too.
 - Feeling the Spirit's unction is not an excuse to act rashly and out of order.
 - Paul makes it clear that speaking and praying in tongues is an encouraged rather than a forbidden practice (14:40).