



Title: Prophecy & Tongues (First Corinthians)

Text: 1 Corinthians 14:1-25

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1. Why do some Christians think prophecy, tongues and some of the other miracles gifts have ceased?

- They wrongly interpret “perfect” in 1 Corinthians 13:10 as referring to the canonization of the Bible rather than the second coming of Jesus.
- They see the function of these gifts as only validating and attesting the authority of the Apostles. This view primarily comes from 2 Corinthians 12:12 and Hebrews 2:3-4 that seem to indicate that God used some of the more miraculous gifts to attest the authority of the Apostles.
- Granted, there seems certainly to be a greater concentration of miracles and gifts by the Apostles, but that does not mean gifts or miracles are given to others.
- For a more thorough answer to this question see Grudem’s Systematic Theology, chapter 17.

2. Why do some believe that tongues are evidence of a second experience after salvation?

- Because they mistakenly read a pattern for individual experience into the historical redemptive movement of the Gospel from the Jewish believers to Gentile people groups in Acts 2, 8, 10 and 19.
- This has developed into a very unhelpful culture that creates division and often produces pride in those who think they have the gift of tongues and extreme discouragement for those who have sought it but have yet to receive.
- This is not to deny that many do not have very significant second experiences of grace after salvation that may include the receiving of the gift of tongues, but that does not make a pattern for all believers.

3. What is the gift of prophecy?

- Not predicting the future as was sometimes the role of OT Prophets.
- Not to be equated with the OT office of Prophet.
- Does not contain God’s very words, thus does not have same authority of Scripture.
- *“Thus saith the Lord”* type authority is reserved for the OT prophets and NT Apostles.
- It is an imperfect human report of a divine revelation.
- The speaking forth in merely human words of something God has spontaneously brought to mind.
- *“Something that God may suddenly bring to mind, or something that God may impress on someone’s consciousness in such a way that the person has a sense that it is from God. It may be that the thought brought to mind is surprisingly distinct from the person’s own train of thought, or that it is accompanied by a sense of vividness or urgency or persistence, or in some way gives the person a rather clear sense that it is from the Lord.”* –Grudem, Systematic Theology, p.1056.
- Distinct from teaching due to its spontaneity and carries less authority than teaching (Grudem, p.1058).

4. What is the function of prophecy?

- A thought or revelation from God to people for their upbuilding, encouragement and consolation (1 Cor 14:2-3).
- Also serves as a “sign” for believers confirming and reassuring them of God’s blessing on them and can also function evangelistically for an unbeliever by bringing them to conviction and revealing the secrets of their heart so that they might worship God. (1 Cor 14:22-25).

5. What is the gift of tongues?

- The Spirit prompted speaking or singing of prayers, praise, or thanksgiving to God in speech not understood by the speaker (1 Cor 14:2, 14).

- Directionally it is from people to God, not from God to the people. Interpretations of tongues that depict God speaking to the people are simply unbiblical.
- The speaker is not in a trance or ecstatic state but rather is very much under control, able to start and stop the use of this gift.

6. What is the function of tongues?

- Speech directed toward God that is prayer, praise or thanksgiving (1 Cor 14:14-17).
- When spoken in public gathering should always be accompanied by the gift of interpretation (1 Cor 14:13).
- In 1 Cor. 14:20-23 Paul admonishes the Corinthians not to speak in uninterpreted tongues in church because this (as Isaiah 28:11 did for Israel) would cause confusion and function as a sign of God's judgment on the unbelievers.

7. Does speaking in tongues always involve known human languages?

- There seems to be clear evidence in 1 Cor 14 that the answer is no.
- 1 Cor 14:2, 23 seems to imply some sort of heavenly language.
- Also, the phrase "tongues of angels" from 1 Cor 13:1 implies something other than a known human language.

8. Does speaking in tongues have both a public and private use?

- This seems to be the case from 1 Cor 14:18-19.
- Don Carson on 1 Cor 14:18-19: *"There is no stronger defense of the private use of tongues, and attempts to avoid this conclusion turn out on inspection to be remarkably flimsy. If Paul speaks in tongues more than all the Corinthians, yet in the church prefers to speak five intelligible words rather than ten thousand words in a tongue, then where does he speak them? The only possible conclusion is that Paul exercised his remarkable tongues gift in private."* (Carson, Showing the Spirit, p.105)
- Paul's point in 1 Corinthians 14 is that the priority is edification of the whole body. But that does not mean that self-edification is a bad thing.
- Gordon Fee in his 1 Corinthians commentary: *"Contrary to the opinion of many, spiritual edification can take place in ways other than through the cortex of the brain. Paul believed in an immediate communing with God by means of the Spirit that sometimes bypassed the mind and in 1 Cor 14:14-15 he argues that for his own edification he will have both."*

9. Will all Christians receive the gift of tongues? No.

10. Is the gift of tongues necessarily a sign of spiritual maturity or power? No.

Some Pastoral Thoughts:

1. We should think about this issue with great humility towards other Christians with whom we may differ.
2. My experience in both streams:
 - Pentecostals / Charismatics tend to be very earnest but can tend towards a lack of doctrinal clarity and precision. I appreciate their passion for all God has for His people but they would do well to humble themselves and let Scripture rather than church culture inform their pursuit.
 - Confessional / Reformed: Lots of light, but not much heat. Our passion for doctrinal precision should lead us to passion for God and all that He has for His people. Good theology should lead to doxology.
3. The real issue for Paul was intelligibility. Do people understand what is communicated when we gather as a church?
4. Humility. Let's admit these are strange gifts. Tongues especially. Why would God choose to give and use this gift?
 - 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

“Throughout history there have been pendulum swings of various sorts. The church, unfortunately, is not exempt. At times there are enormous pressures to intellectualize and formulate the gospel; at others, enormous pressures to ‘feel’ one’s religious faith and develop passion for God—profound, emotional outbursts of contrition, praise, adoration. At times in history, of course, groups espousing each of these polarities co-exist, one perhaps on the decline, the other on the ascendancy; and most groups embrace some mixture of the two, without much thought as to their proportion. Only rarely have Christians, such as the early English Puritans, self-consciously committed themselves to wholistic integration of the two. Noncharismatic evangelicals tend to the former stereotype; charismatics tend toward the latter. Both have their dangers....One lesson, however, comes through these first verses of 1 Corinthians 14 with startling force. Whatever the place for profound, personal experience and corporate emotional experience, the assembled church is a place for intelligibility. Our God is a thinking, speaking God; and if we will know him we must learn to think his thoughts after him.”

-D.A. Carson, Showing the Spirit, p.105-6.