

This morning, I am continuing in my sermon series called The Gospel Changes Everything, based on the New Testament book 1 Corinthians, Paul's first letter to the church in Corinth, a church he started around the year 50 AD. He has since left the church in the hands of other leaders so that he might start other churches, and he writes this letter around the year 54-55 AD in response to what he is hearing about some of the issues in the Corinthian church. So far he's addressed the **pride and arrogance in the church that has led to division and rivalry, the sexual issues that are rampant in the church and culture, how they should interact with the idols and false gods in the city, and some of the problems happening in their worship gatherings**. In this section, from chapters 12-14, he is addressing something he calls "spiritual gifts" – supernatural abilities that believers receive when God puts His Holy Spirit in them at salvation.

Remember that Paul is writing this letter in response to the issues going on in the Corinthian church, and one of the issues they were dealing with is that they had elevated certain gifts and abilities above others as the mark of real spirituality. **Specifically, those who could speak in tongues, in other-worldly language, were seen as superior, as more spiritual than everyone else**. And so Paul is addressing the idea of spiritual gifts and whether or not there really are different classes of spirituality in the Lord. In **chapter 12**, he talked about how God gives spiritual gifts to every believer, that every gift is important, and that all the gifts are to be used to build up the church and serve others. In **chapter 13**, he taught them that love is more important than gifts, and that if their gifts are used for self-seeking purposes and not to love others, than they have missed the point. Now, in chapter 14, he is going to address speaking in tongues and prophesying in the church.

Before we read the passage, I just want to help you understand it by letting you know up front what I think Paul's main concern in this passage. **Paul is grieved by how self-centered the Corinthians are, how they have found a way to turn even their worship gatherings into a competition of who is more spiritual. Paul's main concerns seem to be that they would not exercise their gifts and freedoms in a way that cause believers to be brought down and unbelievers to be turned off. Instead, he wants them to exercise their gifts and freedoms in a way that builds up believers and clearly displays the gospel and the transforming presence of God to unbelievers.**

This is a common theme throughout 1 Corinthians. Paul is often reminding the Corinthians that their gifts and freedom are not to be used in a self-centered way but to serve others. Remember:

1 Corinthians 10:23-24 - "Everything is permissible"-- but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible"-- but not everything is constructive. ²⁴ Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others.

So far he has made this point about **marriage, sexuality, eating food sacrificed to idols, observing the Lord's Supper, how people pray and prophesy in the church, and protecting the reputation of the church.** Use your freedom not to serve yourself but to build others up.

With that in mind, let's read the passage:

1 Corinthians 14:1-40 - 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!" 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 inquire 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.

Since most of this passage deals with speaking in tongues and prophesying in the church, I want to make sure I address both of those. And I also want to address the bomb he drops near the end about women being silent in the church.

Remember that in the Corinthian church, those who spoke in tongues were seen as more spiritual than the rest, and Paul tries here to correct that attitude. We need to first define speaking in tongues. Some of you have no experience with this and are probably wary of it or turned off by it. Others of you may come from backgrounds where you saw it practiced and abused in ways that paid no attention to what the

Bible says, and so you're also wary of it. Others of you may speak in tongues and have a very positive view of it. Speaking in tongues is the Greek word "glossolalia," and let me share six things about this phenomenon, because there is a lot of confusion and ignorance out there:

1) It is a spiritual prayer language directed to God

The word "glossa" in Greek can refer to both tongues and languages, and so there is some debate among Christians and theologians over whether "speaking in tongues" means "speaking foreign languages" which is what happened in Acts 2 when the Holy Spirit fell on the disciples at Pentecost and they declared the wonders of God in the languages of all who had gathered there, or whether it refers to heavenly languages that do not correspond to any earthly language. I believe the context will show that it is the latter, that what Paul is referring to in 1 Corinthians is a prayer language to God that sounds like meaningless babbling to those who are listening unless someone interprets it, not a message in a foreign language that needs to be translated so that others can understand it. It allows you to pray and praise God in a whole other way that is meant to fill and lift you up spiritually. It is not like praying with your mind. You will likely not be able to understand cognitively what you are saying, but your soul knows that you are praising and worshiping God in a way that brings deeper spiritual life to your soul.

1 Corinthians 14:2 - 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.

1 Corinthians 14:13-14 - 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.

2) **It is a good gift of God that can build up your faith** – We believe the gift is still in operation today, and that it is a good spiritual gift given primarily to edify the believer rather than the church

1 Corinthians 14:4-5 - He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church. 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.

Notice that even though he says that prophecy is more important, he wishes that everyone would speak in tongues. It's not just for the spiritually elite.

- 3) **It is not given to everyone** – We do not believe that all Christians should speak in tongues

1 Corinthians 12:29-30 - Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? ³⁰ Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?

This contrasts with some denominations that teach you that speaking in tongues is the evidence that you have the Holy Spirit. I think this is a consequence of not reading the Bible according to its genre, reading the historical book of Acts as if it were prescriptive. There are many instances of conversion in Acts where the individuals do not consequently speak in tongues. You can pray and ask God for the gift, while understanding that it is not given to all.

- 4) **Possessing the gift of tongues is not a mark of greater spiritual maturity** – We reject any theology that views those who speak in tongues as more mature, or possessing more of the Holy Spirit, than those who do not speak in tongues.

1 Corinthians 3:1-2 - Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly-- mere infants in Christ. ² I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready.

1 Corinthians 13:1 - If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.

- 5) **In the church, the practice of speaking in tongues is not edifying to the congregation unless there is an interpretation, and it can be harmful to unbelievers** – Therefore, if someone speaks in tongues during a church service, the pastor or elder should call for an interpretation, and then test that interpretation against the Scriptures. If there is no interpretation, then the speaker should be instructed to remain silent.

1 Corinthians 14:6 - 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?

1 Corinthians 14:18-19 - *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.*

1 Corinthians 14:23 - *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?*

1 Corinthians 14:27 - *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.*

My experience at the Full Gospel church; Paul Pace. Ignoring this passage turns off unbelievers and focuses the attention on yourself. V. 22 says it can be a sign of judgment for unbelievers.

6) **Don't forbid speaking in tongues, but do it in an orderly way**

1 Corinthians 14:39-40 - *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.*

The other phenomenon he discusses in this passage is prophecy. I would define prophecy as speaking words that have been revealed by God to people for their strengthening, encouragement, and comfort, and to hopefully convince unbelievers of their need for God

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.*

¹⁹ *But in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue...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!"*

Prophesying is speaking words from God to others for their strengthening, encouragement, and comfort, and hopefully to convince those who do not believe that God is real. In the Old Testament, God spoke through prophets, and they were 100% right or they were false prophets. There is a difference of opinion among theologians as to whether Paul is thinking of the same thing when he refers to prophecy, that people who prophecy must be 100% right, or if New Testament prophecy is a more broadly-defined phenomenon that can include preaching. Those who would argue the former argue that if prophecy truly is a word from God, then it means that we are adding to Scripture every time someone claims to have a Word from God.

I lean towards the latter. The New Testament mentions many who prophesied, like the disciples of John the Baptist in Acts 19, the daughters of Philip in Acts 21, and the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 12, but there does not seem to be effort made on the part of the apostles to write them down as if they were inspired Scripture. We share what we believe God has revealed to us with humility, not saying “Thus sayeth the Lord” but “I feel the Lord has shown me.” I am not to be sharing my thoughts, but God’s Word.

Whatever it is, when someone speaks a supposed word from God, it must be evaluated.

²⁹ *Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said.*

Don’t assume that just because someone says it is God’s word or God’s will that they are accurate. Put it back into context and see if they are accurate.

1 Thessalonians 5:19-22 - Do not put out the Spirit's fire; ²⁰ do not treat prophecies with contempt. ²¹ Test everything. Hold on to the good. ²² Avoid every kind of evil.

*Acts 17:11 - Now the **Bereans** were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.*

Prophets and words of prophecy in the New Testament are not infallible. They must be evaluated. And so Paul says that when they come together, tongues must

be interpreted and words of prophecy or revelation should be evaluated. It is in this context that Paul says:

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 inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.*

What does Paul mean by this? One possibility is that women are not supposed to speak, sing, pray, or open their mouths when the church gathers for worship. However, the problem with this interpretation is that it contradicts what Paul just said in 1 Corinthians 11:5, where he talked about how women in the Corinthian church should cover their head when they pray or prophesy in the worship service. So if he assumes that women will pray and prophesy, then what does he mean here?

My understanding is that in the context, he is talking about evaluating what a prophet has said. He is telling the women in the Corinthian church that they are not to be offering evaluations or asking questions in response to prophesying, but instead should ask their husbands about it when they get home. He uses the word “disgraceful,” which refers to what society views as inappropriate behavior. He is telling the Corinthian Christian women that they are not to publicly embarrass their husbands by examining prophecies or asking questions. There was something about this behavior that would have been an offense to the culture around them – maybe because they were uneducated, or maybe because they would have been seen as flouting their husband’s authority over them. And so, out of respect for their husbands and out of concern for the church’s witness, they should wait until they get home to ask questions.

The important thing for us to know is that once again, we are not to exercise our gifts or freedoms in such a way that we cause believers to be brought down and unbelievers to be turned off. Even if it means laying down our rights, we are to do that for the reputation of God and His church. Culturally, Christian women evaluating prophecies and asking questions would have done that in 1st century Corinth. In 21st century America, this is no longer the case. We have to be careful to read passages like this in their grammatical and cultural context.

Paul’s main point in this passage is that we are to use the gifts and freedoms God has given to us to build up others and to make sure that the gospel is clearly

proclaimed, without unnecessary distraction, to unbelievers. He will begin the next section by clearly explaining the gospel – Christ died for our sins.

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.*

Bring your gifts, your contribution to the community.

1 Corinthians 12:7 - Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

How can you build up your brothers and sisters? What is your contribution? How can you bring a prayer, a song, a word from God for others. This challenges us not to just come as spectators, but looking for opportunities to serve others. Who is hurting that I can encourage? Who is new that I can welcome? Who is lonely that I can talk to? Who is in need of prayer that I can pray with? Let us all bring our gifts and talents and heart to the church in order to serve and build up our brothers and sisters.