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Tongues and Prophecy—Second Try **I Corinthians 14**

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PowerPoint Presentation included: NONE

SermonAudio Blurb: In this final message on the issue of spiritual gifts, Pastor Henry shows why prophecy is supreme over tongues. And in the process we find that the gifts, once again, are not for ourselves, but for the building up of the Church. Until that simple truth is learned, the issue of spiritual gifts shall always be a point of great struggle.

I. Introduction.

- A. Today we will consider an entire chapter together. Please turn to 1 Corinthians 14.
 - 1. The reason is simple, this whole chapter deals with two spiritual gifts, tongues and prophecy.
 - 2. Both gifts are present in that church and Paul is seeking to bring a level of balance and sanity into the church situation.
 - 3. Remember that this passage is not primarily instructional/didactic, but polemic. He is correcting error and speaking against that which is wrong.
 - 4. I say this, because often this passage is used by people to explain what the biblical pattern for a church service is to be.
 - 5. There is no indication that this church in Corinth was the norm, nor is there any indication that Paul is telling all churches to be like them in worship style.
- B. For two weeks I took us through the essential make-up of being human. The key point is that God views us wholistically and so should we. We are made up of a physical and a non-physical part.
 - 1. Call it what you want, body and spirit or body and soul. It does not matter.
 - 2. Purpose was to show why Paul would never see it as a good thing if tongues affects one aspect of you but not the wholeness of you. This is in relation to vss 4 and 14.
- C. Now let's move on to chapter 14 of 1 Corinthians and understand the relationship of tongues and prophecy in the church.

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II. Tongues and Prophecy.

- A. *The ability that prophecy possesses over tongues to edify the church (vss. 1-25).*
1. The preeminence of prophecy (1).
 - a. He has challenged them to see that love is what must control all that they do, say and believe.
 - b. Now we pick back up with the command of 12:31a.
 - c. But it is prophecy that is to be most desired for the church.
 2. Why? **Two basic reasons:**
 - a. First, vss. 2-5 shows us that prophecy helps all believers in a church while tongues, by itself, helps no one but the speaker.
 - (1) When a person speaks in tongues, they do not understand it themselves (2).
 - (a) The only one who understands is God. And that is because it is His gift.
 - (b) But the gifts are not designed to be used toward God. They are God's gifts to the church to be used toward each other.
 - (c) Tongues, on their own, can't accomplish this task.
 - (2) But look at what prophecy accomplishes (3).
 - (a) Edification = building up, strengthening the church.
 - (b) Exhortation = Encouragement, but more than that, it is packaged often as an appeal. A begging and urging to grow or change or become something. Here it is a word of God for the church to begin to change and do something or stop something.
 - (c) Consolation = This is a special kind of exhortation. It is designed to build up people's hope, stimulating their faith in God and His promises.
 - (3) Vs. 4 then simply sums up the vast difference between these two gifts.

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- (a) It is here that some will make the argument for the value of tongues. The point they will make is that it edifies them.
 - (b) But this is simply missing the obvious point! Only in a country where the individual is the most important would this make sense.
 - (c) Paul is showing that tongues, without interpretation, does not help the body. And that is really all that matters.
- (4) Vs. 5 shows us an important truth related to both of these gifts.
- (a) Why is prophecy so much better? Because it edifies.
 - (b) Notice that the prophet is greater only **if** the tongues speaker has no interpretation.
 - (c) The implication is that in the speaking of true tongues there is prophecy. . . we just can't know it due to no interpretation.
 - (d) Gifts are greater or lesser in value based upon their ability to build up the church.
- b. Second, vss. 6-19 shows us that though tongues can build up the church, it is **only** through interpretation of the tongues.
- (1) Vs. 6: Paul uses himself as an example of the essential profitlessness of tongues.
- (a) Even an apostle cannot build up the church through the speaking in tongues.
 - (b) But these must have been hard words for this church to hear since they so dearly loved the gift of tongues. This is probably why he says "brethren." A way to soften the blow.
- (2) Vss. 7-11 are illustrations from life to prove his point.
- (a) Music is able to cause tremendous emotion. But if there is no order and purpose behind the notes then it is just noise.

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- (b) A trumpet/bugle was designed to send various messages to the troops. But if there is no order and purpose behind what is played then the troops do not know what to do. Chaos and defeat are sure to follow.
- (c) Language (10-11) are designed to communicate information.
 - i) Anyone who has tried to speak to another person who does not know English knows the frustration Paul speaks of.
 - ii) Corinth was a town that had many different people groups coming through it at all times.
 - a) Probably the reason for the large amount of tongues speakers.
 - b) Most likely everyone in the church could understand Paul's point about speaking to another who did not speak their language.
 - iii) No matter how much talking takes place **no communication takes place!**
 - iv) Therefore, it is right and proper to say that truth can only be communicated through understandable language.
- (3) Paul now gives an initial conclusion (12): (Follow along carefully here.)
 - (a) **Since** truth must be communicated in understandable language.
 - (b) And **since** the whole purpose of spiritual gifts is to build up the church as a whole.
 - (c) And **since** the Corinthian church was already very, very zealous about spiritual gifts.

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- (d) So therefore, direct that zealously, that eagerness, toward those gifts that will accomplish the goal of edification.
- (4) In vss. 13-19 Paul shows how tongues, once interpreted becomes a valuable gift for the church.
 - (a) This is actually a command in verse 13. He is not suggesting.
 - (b) Why is interpretation so important? “. . . for.”
 - i) Because even the mind of the tongues speaker is not strengthened.
 - a) There is spiritual blessing that occurs, perhaps a sense of general well-being and pleasure.
 - b) But it is indefinite. So indefinite, so vague, that the mind does not grasp it and it cannot be explained to others so that they are helped by it.
 - ii) But if there is interpretation (15-17) then the mind is strengthened.
 - a) By the way, this shows some ways that tongues can show up.
 - b) In prayer and in song and in giving a blessing.
 - c) **The ungifted in vs. 16 speaks of those who do not have the gift of interpretation.**
 - 1) You bless that person, but they have no idea what you are saying (16b-17)
 - 2) ESV has a poor translation of this (‘in the position of an outsider’).

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- 3) The word always is used of one who is unskilled in the NT.
- iii) Paul then (18) shows them that he has no problem with tongues in and of themselves.
 - a) He speaks them often.
 - b) This is not surprising since he was the apostle to the Gentiles.
 - c) “However. . .” (19) when it came to the assembled church (‘in the church’) it is words that instruct that are most desired by Paul.
- c. Third, vss. 20-25 shows us that prophecy is designed to reveal the heart of the unbeliever, while tongues, **uninterpreted**, only brings shame to the church and God.
 - (1) Paul now gently scolds them, calling them children.
 - (2) Let me just explain the point of this section for time’s sake.
 - (3) Paul gives a very loose quotation of Isaiah 28:11-12 to make his point about tongues.
 - (a) He is not saying that they are fulfilling Isaiah’s prophecy, nor that this is the meaning of Isaiah 28:11-12.
 - (b) He is using it as an illustration.
 - (c) In Isaiah 28 this spoke of a time when He would bring judgment upon Israel. It speaks of the times in which Israel would be taken captive and no longer would they understand the languages being spoken.
 - (d) The word of God would be removed from their land. And it would be a time of dread.
 - (4) So in verse 22 he makes the simple point.

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- (a) You Corinthian believers seem to so desperately want to all speak in tongues.
 - (b) The word “sign” here means that tongues and prophecy function as apparent indicators of God’s mind.
 - i) If an unbeliever were to come into their service and hear nothing but hundreds of foreign tongues being spoken, he would not conclude that something good was taking place; rather, that God was not in this place, only madmen. So would any believer who does not interpret tongues.
 - ii) But if an unbeliever comes into their service (24) or any other believer who does not have the gift of prophecy, hears prophecy, conviction can occur and true worship occurs.
- B. *The restrictions and directions on the exercising of tongues and prophecy (26-40).*
- 1. Paul introduces this section by simply referring to the manner in which the church there apparently gathered to worship (26).
 - a. There was the working out of the various gifts in the body as they assembled.
 - b. But though all of this may occur Paul gives them a controlling command at the end of the verse, “let all things. . . .”
 - (1) There is no room in the assembled service for simple silliness.
 - (2) There is no room for disorderliness.
 - (3) There is no room for self-centeredness.
 - (4) No matter what type of worship style any church has, this is a divine command that cannot be ignored. It must drive all that the church does.

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2. Conditions for speaking in tongues in a church service (27-28).
3. Conditions for prophesying in a church service (29-36).

III. Conclusion

- A. Paul brings this section to a close with three final mandates:
- B. First, he does a frontal attack on any so-called spiritual one who might be inclined to disagree with him (vss. 37-38).
 1. If they are truly spiritual or truly a prophet, they will be compelled to confirm that he is speaking God's words, not his own.
 2. If anyone there wants to disagree with him, they are simply declared to be of no relevance to him or to the church. Pay them no mind.
- C. Second, he gives one final statement about prophecy and tongues.
 1. Prophecy is to be sought after in the church.
 2. Tongues are to be graciously and lovingly allowed.
- D. Third, regardless of how they wish to worship and meet as a church, two things must always be present.
 1. Properly means to act in a way that is not rude or harsh.
 - a. Romans 13:13 Let us behave **properly** as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy.
 2. Orderly manner is a military term that speaks of ranks of soldiers all lined up in their respective places. It speaks of being regulated and under control.
 - a. This speaks volumes against how some churches worship. There is no order, there is no purpose, there is no control.
 - b. In fact, to do so invites the accusation of stifling the Holy Spirit.
 - c. But Paul calls for a stable, organized, thoughtful worship service.
 - d. It is not driven or designed by emotion or desires. It is driven by what is proper and most effective in the building up of the Body of Christ.

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Small Group Questions

- What challenges are raised in this sermon for you personally?
- Why do you think Paul discussed the nature and necessity of love prior to writing this section (meaning chapter 14)?
- How would love help you in a discussion or debate with a person who holds to a different view of tongues or prophecy? If possible give examples.