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## ***Tongues and Prophecy*** **I Corinthians 14**

Keywords: Love, Spiritual gifts, tongues, prophecy, edification.

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.
  6. Rather, **the biblical picture is very vague on how a church ought to function.**
    - a. Withing this chapter there are two driving points on a church service:
      - (1) It is to be done for the purpose of building up the body (vs. 12)
      - (2) And it is to be done in a proper and orderly fashion (vs. 40).

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- b. Frankly, these two things were not occurring in their service at that point in time.

B. Read chapter.

*Propositional Statement*

Paul gives this hurting and struggling church some much needed direction on how they are to gather to worship and use their gifts. And in doing so he shows them that tongues need to decrease while prophecy needs to increase. But the manner in which they are to decrease or increase is not in numerical occurrence, meaning, there is to be a lot more prophecy and a lot less tongues speaking. Rather, the importance and desire for these gifts are to be adjusted in the minds of the church.

Therefore, to give a basic working outline of the chapter, as I will deal with it, the first part deals with the ability that prophecy possesses over tongues to edify the church (vss. 1-25). The second part deals with restrictions and directions on the exercising of both of these gifts (26-40).

But before we get into the chapter itself, I need to briefly speak about what tongues is.

C. Identity of tongues.

- 1. Please appreciate that I cannot spend a large amount of time on these. You can hear my points, and study them more fully on your own if you find the need.
- 2. Lexical:
  - a. The word can mean the physical organ in our body (cf. Vs. 9).
  - b. It is used in Acts 2:3 to describe the shape of what appeared to be flames.
  - c. And it is used to speak of the act of speaking. It is this last one that is what we are concerned about today.
- 3. Three views regarding the identity of the spiritual gift of tongues.
  - a. (Remember that most people do not fit neatly into only one of these groups).
  - b. First, tongues represent a heavenly/angelic language (1Cor. 13:1).
  - c. Second, tongues represent an unintelligible ecstatic language that is only known to God (1 Cor. 14:2).

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- d. Third, tongues is a human language unknown to the speaker (Acts 2:4-10).
- 4. Views on the importance of tongues.
  - a. The first view sees that speaking in tongues is proof of being baptized with the Holy Spirit.
  - b. A second view sees that it is proof of entering into a higher plane of Christian experience and living. (These two often go hand in hand).
  - c. A third view sees them as a gift of the Spirit but are relatively unimportant in the overall building up of a church.
  - d. A fourth view sees them as a gift of the Holy Spirit that was used in various ways by the Spirit to accomplish God's plan.
    - (1) As judgment in Acts 2.
      - (a) We will see this in 1 Cor. 14:21.
    - (2) As proof of the Jews' and non-Jews' inclusion into the church.
      - (a) Acts 2, the Jews.
      - (b) Acts 10:46, the Gentiles.
      - (c) Possibly in Acts 8:14-17 with the Samaritans.
      - (d) Important to note that except for Acts 19 where the well-known preacher Apollos and his friends spoke in tongues no more was mentioned in the whole of Acts.
    - (3) As a means to evangelism.
      - (a) The sense of 1 Corinthians 14 is that without interpretation tongues has little purpose.
      - (b) But there seems to be the idea that as a person suddenly possesses the ability to speak in another language that it is used by God to speak on His glory and power and to call others to Christ.
      - (c) We saw that in Acts 2 and 10 where they were praising God and speaking of God's mighty works.

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- D. Now let's move on to chapter 14 of 1 Corinthians and understand the relationship of tongues and prophecy in the church.

## 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.

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- (3) Vs. 4 then simply sums up the vast difference between these two gifts.
  - (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.

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- (a) Music is able to cause tremendous emotion. But if there is no order and purpose behind the notes then it is just noise.
- (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):
  - (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.

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- (c) And **since** the Corinthian church was already very, very zealous about spiritual gifts.
- (d) So therefore, direct that zealousness, 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)

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- 2) ESV has a poor translation of this ('in the position of an outsider').
- 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.



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- (4) So in verse 22 he makes the simple point.
  - (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.

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- (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.
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.

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- 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.