

Series: **“Being the Church in a World Gone Wild”**

CDOBC – beginning on 1/28/18

Today’s Title: **“Prophecy Over Tongues”**

October 7, 2018 - 1 Corinthians 14:1-5

Objective: To help people know that building up others is our priority of our gatherings.

Like some of you, I was raised in the Church.

This has been a blessing in my life - raised in a loving Christian home, and have been in excellent, bible-believing, grace promoting churches.

So, even before going to seminary - before years of pastoral ministry - I was very familiar with ‘church life’.

My freshman year of college (mid-1980’s), me and some of my friends decided to check out a church in downtown Chicago (JPUSA Evangelical Covenant Church - <http://jpusa.org>) which was the home church of a popular Christian band (Resurrection Band - in the early days of ‘*Christian Rock*’). We went there not knowing what to expect, but the service was about 2 hours long - and the charismatic expressions were new to each of us.

Fast forward to the late 90’s - I was a youth pastor, and on a mission trip to the inner-city of LA with HS students. We attended a Sunday night worship service in an inner-city church. The service was wonderful - great worship - good message - but after the service ended, they started the healing service. People lined up, and the evangelist would put her hand on a person’s forehead and push them backwards - they

would fall into the waiting arms of the Deacons - and then the next person would come forward.

We were not in Kansas anymore!!

In the past several years, when I've had a Sunday off, I can remember going to other churches - and being disappointed by the lack of excitement and energy during the singing - or the dry, disconnected message.

Every church has its own feel - its own culture - its own strengths and weaknesses. This is not like McDonalds, where no matter what town or city you're in, it's going to be the same experience.

Churches are unique - because the local church is made up of people - with different personalities, backgrounds, interests - and different spiritual gifts.

The Corinthian church in 1st century Corinth - was different from the other N.T. churches - different from Ephesus, Galatia, Thessalonica. But Corinth had some serious problems when it came to their public worship.

They were selfish...

They were chaotic...

They were confusing...

They loved the spotlight.

Turn to 1 Corinthians 14:1-5

As we have already seen in 1 Corinthians 12, spiritual gifts are talents / abilities given to each follower of Christ, for them to

use in building up the local church. I would refer you to the sermons from 9/2 & 9/9 for more details on the gifts.

But Corinth was struggling with: Loving one another - and with the spiritual gift of tongues.

If you're not familiar with tongues - or speaking in tongues, this can seem really weird - which is in part what Paul will address in our verses today.

Our passage today is more about building up the church, by using clear, understandable language.

By their very nature, tongues are not clear language - and this is what Paul will focus on. Follow along as I read **vs. 1-5**:

“Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy.

2 For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit.

3 On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation.

4 The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself (and herself), but the one who prophesies builds up the church.

5 Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up.”

The primacy of love and prophecy. vs. 1

There are 2 commands in this verse. The first is “pursue love”, which is a natural way to lead from **chapter 13** into the next topic Paul addresses here in **chapter 14**. It's not the normal way we think about love - we often think

love just happens...we love because our emotions lead us to love. But the command to “pursue love” makes it clear that love is something we choose - it’s a decision of our will. Both in and out of the church...we must “pursue love” in everything we do. The verb tense (present-active) means we do this all the time. This is an ongoing, everyday pursuit for us!

The second command is “earnestly desire the spiritual gifts”. Our energy and activity are not 1-sided or limited to one thing (love) - but spiritual gifts are also a high priority. Notice we don’t pursue spiritual gifts - it’s not an issue of our will, but an issue of our desire, because we must receive a spiritual gift - we don’t go out and create a spiritual gift. We don’t discipline ourselves in order to have a spiritual gift.

I believe we’re responsible to develop and improve the spiritual gift God has given us. I have the gift of teaching / preaching, but I need to work hard at improving this gift - to become a better communicator of God’s truth.

Paul highlights one of the gifts - prophecy: “especially that you may prophesy.”

Why does he do this? Why does he put the gift of prophecy in a primary position?

That’s what he explains in the next few verses.

The limitations of 'tongues' vs. 2, 4a

Before we go any further, let's define what the gift of 'tongues' is, and what the gift of 'prophecy' is.

What is the gift of speaking in "tongues"?

This is not an easy answer. Some believe the spiritual gift of tongues refers to the supernatural ability to speak in a known language that you haven't learned how to speak previously. **Acts 2** is the primary text used to support this view where the Disciples and Apostles were able to speak in foreign languages on the Day of Pentecost:

"And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language." (**Acts 2:6**)

This is certainly part of the gift of tongues, but there seems to be more to it than that.

Others see the gift of tongues as a combination of known languages, and unknown languages - spiritual utterances.

Romans 8:26

"Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words."

1 Corinthians 12:28

"...and various kinds of tongues."

So, allow me to offer a definition of tongues:

The spiritual gift of speaking in tongues is a God-given supernatural ability to speak in a language previously unknown to the speaker, which is used to communicate the Gospel (Acts 2) and to build up the church.

What is “prophecy”?

Some equate prophecy with preaching, but I don't think it's that simple. Prophecy is not simply preaching, but preaching is part of prophecy. Prophecy and preaching are not synonyms, because Paul would be saying in this chapter he wishes everyone in the church at Corinth was a pastor! It might include preaching, but I believe it's ‘*a Spirit-enabled ability to speak the truth of God to others which will help them either put their faith in Christ and/or grow in their faith.*’

It was “*a gift...not to predict events in the future, but to build up believers in the present.*”

(Source: <http://www.planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/html/nt/1corinthians/1corinthians.htm>)

There is a difference between the role / office of prophet, and a Christian with the gift of prophecy. God gives spiritual gifts to Christians in order to build up and strengthen the Church.

Most of these gifts are focused on the Body of Christ, but the gift of prophecy can speak truth to the non-Christian. Prophecy can build up the

Church by adding new souls to the Church - and at the same time, it can strengthen those who are already saved.

Now, let's get back to the verses at hand (vs. 2, 4a). Paul is not saying tongues are bad, he's pointing out their limitations in a church setting.

Since the 'tongue' is some sort of unknown language to the people gathered in the church, if someone started speaking in that 'tongue', it doesn't help the church, because nobody but God understands what's being said!

2 For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men (and women) but to God; for no one understands ^{him} (them), but (they) ^{he} utter mysteries in the Spirit.

The problem with tongues is nobody understands what in the world the tongue-speaker is saying. Tongues are unintelligible to the other people in the room.

4a The one who speaks in a tongue builds up (themselves) ^{himself...}

This is not what spiritual gifts are for. They are not for personal encouragement - they are to strengthen the church.

13:5 (NLT)

Love is not "...rude. It does not demand its own way."

NIV - "it is not self-seeking"

It goes against the Law of Love to speak in tongues - in the midst of the church when there is no interpretation - because it only edifies the speaker - and that is “self-seeking”.

This is not loving, and this is what was happening in Corinth. There were people in the church, speaking in tongues, but there was no interpretation, and therefore nobody knew what was being said, and apparently (vs. 2) not even the tongue-speaker!

This is what we often see in churches where there are no biblical limits or restrictions put on speaking in tongues. It becomes a sign of spiritual status - spiritual prominence.

This is what Paul was getting at in 13:1

“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.”

There are some churches that believe the only way you can know for sure that you're saved is when you receive the spiritual gift of speaking in tongues.

This is way off base from the Bible's teaching.

Every believer does not receive the gift of tongues.

‘Well, what about Paul's statement in vs. 5 - I want you all to speak in tongues?’ Paul also said in 7:7, “I wish that all were as I myself am” - meaning having the

gift of singleness - celibate! In these 2 statements, he's not saying every Christian should...or will have these gifts...he's making a point - he's endorsing these gifts as good things...he's making sure the readers of the letter don't get the wrong idea when he speaks critically about being single (if you don't have the gift of singleness) or speaking in tongues. He's not against these things, he's for them, but:

- 1) not everyone will have this gift from God, and
- 2) The use of tongues, in a church setting, when there is no interpretation, does not help the church!

The superior nature of prophecy. vs. 3-4

3 On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation.

4 The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself (and herself), but the one who prophesies builds up the church.

Contrary to speaking in tongues, the gift of prophecy is beneficial to the entire church. The contrast Paul is making in these verses is the difference between unintelligible speech and intelligible speech.

When the church is gathered together, what we talk about should be intelligible...understandable.

When I preach, I try to make sure I define theological terms which are unfamiliar to most people in the culture (and many in the church!).

When we take the offering, we try and make sure you understand that it's part of our worship - and to know the details.

When we observe the Lord's Supper, I explain what it's about and what the bread and juice represent.

Paul uses 3 words here, which he says are the effect of prophecy upon the church.

“upbuilding”

The Greek word means to build a house (*oikodome*).

This is what God's truth does...it builds you up.

Notice the plural use of the words...prophecy “speaks to people” (plural, meaning the church) - and it builds them...adds to them...improves them. Think of building a house, and all the details, the levels of construction, the layers which make up the roof, the insulation to protect against the elements, the finishes throughout the home which are functional and beautiful. Speaking the truth of God does this for the church gathered!

“encouragement”

The Greek word is the same root word found in **John 14:16** to describe the Holy Spirit. It means *‘to be called in alongside, to assist, to support’*. What a beautiful picture of what the gift of prophecy does for believers in the church!

“consolation”

The root of consolation in English is *console*.

The Greek word being translated here has the idea of ‘*whispering in the ear, to encourage, to comfort, to soothe, relieve*’. Most commentators think the idea behind this is to combat fear - to enable a fellow-believer to be calm under pressure, faithful when tempted.

Psalm 119: 49-50

“Remember Your word to your servant, for You have given me hope. My comfort in my suffering is this: Your promise preserves my life.”

We gather to edify one another! vs. 5

Read vs. 5

Once again, Paul is not belittling or decrying ‘tongues’. On the contrary, as I’ve pointed out earlier, he says “I want you all to speak in tongues”!

He’s ‘pro-tongues’, but, he’s more in favor of prophesying, because of the benefit prophesying brings to the entire church.

Tongues are often only for the tongue-speaker - they don’t build up the church. The only way they build up the church is when someone is there with the gift of interpretation, or, when a language is spoken and there are people present who speak that language - and the person with the gift of tongues is building up the body -

because they're now speaking God's truth in someone's native tongue.

A question which comes into my mind is this: *How does the person with the gift of tongues know if someone else is present who will interpret?* I don't know this answer... (Read article: "Interpretation of Tongues: How to Do It")

Spiritual gifts are not used for individual growth or strengthening, they are to build up the body!

They should not be used - in a church setting - to build up the one person claiming to have the gift of tongues. "unless someone interprets".

1 Peter 4:10

"As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another..."

1 Corinthians 10:23

"All things are lawful," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful," but not all things build up.

1 Corinthians 13:5 NIV

"it (Love) is not self-seeking"

Apply it...

We gather together to worship God and to build-up one another.

What's your motive in coming to church?

What expectations do you have when you come to church?

There are the 2 priorities for our times of corporate worship. ***Our first priority*** it to worship the Lord -

to give ourselves to Him - to commit our life to Him - to meditate on His Word and sing songs of praise and adoration. But as we do that - ***our 2nd priority*** is to edify one another as we do those things. Often, in the Western Church, people come to worship and expect their needs and preferences satisfied. We often approach Church with a consumeristic expectation.

But it's clear from our passage today that our public worship gathering needs to be God-centric and other-centric.

Whatever gift God has given you - has been given to build-up the church - the edify / strengthen the Body of Christ.

Are you using your gift for that purpose?

Are you serving and contributing in a way which builds-up others in the Church?