

"Seeing the Signs of the Spirit "
1 Corinthians 14:13-40

It takes LIGHT to activate sight. This is true in the physical realm. It is also true in the spiritual realm.

As we celebrate Advent this Christmas season, we celebrate how Jesus came as the Light to give us spiritual sight! (Isaiah 9:2-7 - "Those dwelling in darkness have seen a GREAT LIGHT!")

If you follow Jesus, you have received spiritual sight. 2 Corinthians 4:6, "For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

As we turn to 1 Corinthians 14, we discover a great irony. Sometimes people who have the Holy Spirit don't always view spiritual gifts through spiritual eyes. The Corinthians possessed a faulty perspective that led them to faulty practice. [Our theology *always, always, always*, effects our "do-ology."]

That's why, for the 12th Sunday this year!, we are going to focus on getting our perspective right when it comes to spiritual gifts, so that we can move forward in our practice of serving others, building up the church and bringing a blessing to the world as we invite people to receive the good news of Jesus!

I want to encourage us to...

The Point: See the gifts of the Spirit through spiritual eyes.

The first encouragement we encounter in vv. 13-19 is to...

1. See the diversity of God's gifts and be thankful. (14:13-19)

1 Corinthians 14:13-19 (display verses)

Paul begins in verse 13 by saying, "Therefore" or "For this reason..." which points us to the strong connection with what he just said in verses 6-12 about the necessity of communication being understandable or intelligible.

He says, "Therefore, one who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret." Again, if we pray, sing, or speak in a tongue we should pray for the gift of interpretation (whether that comes us personally or someone else).

Then in verses 14-17, Paul essentially says, "I am going to pray and sing with my spirit (in tongues - a language that I DO NOT understand, but understood by God) AND... I'm going to pray and sing with my mind (in a language I DO understand)."

A few important lessons here.

1. Paul commends tongues, primarily for our private devotion before God, and prophecy for the public church gathering. Tongues should only be addressed publicly to others if there is an interpreter or interpretation, which then makes it analogous to prophecy.
2. We should pause and consider the distinction between our minds and our spirits.
 - In our Western culture, people often operate with the mentality: if it can't be seen, proven, rationalized, or completely understood with our minds, it must not be true. We are uncomfortable with MYSTERY, which means, at times, we are going to be very uncomfortable with God.
 - This reality tempts us to dismiss the strengthening of our spirits if our mind is not engaged, but God has made us as beings who are more than our minds. We have souls that can be moved. Praying or singing in tongues allows our spirit, our inner person, to commune with God in a unique, immediate way.
 - We are not setting aside the mind as unimportant.
 - We are recognizing that God cares about our whole person engaging with him. (Other examples: we experience this with music, the power of community.)
3. Whatever the gift (tongues, prophecy, or any other gift), and wherever it is practiced (as long it is practiced consistent with Scripture), we should BE THANKFUL! Paul uses the word *eucharisteo* (Gk) three times, once each in verse 16, 17, & 18. With thanksgiving, we recognize the goodness of his provision.
 - Now, you know I love verse 16, Amen? "Amen" Why? Because it says that it is okay, good, expected that we will say, "Amen" in church. "Amen"? That means "yes,"; it means "I agree,"; it means "that's most certainly true." "Preach pastah!" Works too :)

In all of this, Paul is primarily highlighting the value of prophecy in the church gathering.

T: But then, it's as if Paul can almost hear an objection from the anti-tongues crowd "See people aren't being built up with your tongues speech, so let's do away with it all together."

Paul rejects in verse 18: "I thank God I speak tongues more than all of you." which seems to point to the measure of his gift and the measure of his gratitude. Paul is not being proud but seeking to correct the perspective of some that tongues is not a good gift from God.

Then he hears another objection from the pro-tongues crowd. "See if Paul prays in tongues like that, we should without restriction."

So one more time, in verse 19, he highlights the superiority of prophecy, in the corporate gathering of the church, with a hyperbolic statement designed to shock them into proper perspective. "Nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue."

You may ask: "Pastor Tanner, how many people pray in tongues in our church?" More than you think. I share that because the practice of tongues in our church is NOT going to lead to disorder or non-biblical practices.

- If God has gifted you with tongues, use it to deepen your relationship with him, but know that it does not make you any more mature than the person who does not pray in tongues.
- If you do not have the gift of tongues but desire it, pray for it and seek God with others!

T: That's #1.. #2...

2. See the powerful effect of God's gifts and be expectant. (14:20-25)

1 Corinthians 14:20-25 (display verses)

Verse 20 is a call to maturity.

- Paul wants the Corinthians to possess a healthy view of the purpose and powerful effect of these gifts.
- As we have seen, this is a church that loves God but has a lot of growing to do. So he says, "Do not be children in your thinking. Sure, it's really good to have a childlike innocence regarding evil, but in our perspective of God, his gifts and how we exercise those gifts, we must be mature.

First Interpretive Key

1) In order to understand this section, we have to understand that signs can be both positive and negative, a sign of blessing and life or a sign of judgment and distance from God. The vast majority of time in the NT, the word is used positively, as a sign of blessing. That is not the case here.

To help them grow in their maturity, he says this (Listen carefully because I'm about to explain the heart of verses 21-23.):

- For those of you who speak in tongues without regard for others, you are a reflection (a sign!), not of blessing but of judgment."
- He proves this by quoting Isaiah 28:11-12: "By people of strange tongues and by the lips of foreigners will I speak to this people, and even then they will not listen to me, says the Lord."
 - Who are the people of strange tongues? The Assyrians whom God would raise up and allow to invade and destroy their land as a sign of his discipline and judgment for their rebellion against him.
 - In other words, the sound of speech they do not understand was a sign of God's displeasure.
 - Just like unintelligible language makes you feel distant from the conversation and the relationship, so uninterpreted tongues has the same effect on nonbelievers. It doesn't help them draw near to God but makes them feel Christians are out of their mind.
- That's how tongues are a sign of judgment for unbelievers. That is a powerful effect we do not want!

Prophecy is primarily a sign (a positive sign) for the benefit of believers. Why? It builds them up, strengthens them, encourages and comforts them.

But then verse 24-25 seems to clearly contradict what he's just said about prophecy not being a sign for unbelievers. Sheesh... What is going on here?

Second Interpretive Key

2) The word "primarily" is implied... "While prophecy is a sign not [PRIMARILY] for unbelievers but for believers." Intelligible messages given in the context of the worship gathering primarily serve to encourage believers, but that is not their exclusive function. Why? Because he goes on to talk about the very positive and powerful effect prophecy can have in verses 24-25. (READ AGAIN)

Prophecy can help people draw near to God. It can show them that God knows them, loves, them, and wants them to worship him. This is the powerful effect of God's gift of prophecy. We should expect it!

When sharing a prophetic word with someone yet to believe in Jesus, verses 24-25 form our prayer: "conviction" leading to "worship"!

I want to challenge you to pray on your way to Sunday Worship, pray on your way to Tuesday or Wednesday night Group: "God, do what you do." He knows what he do. :) "God, change lives tonight, including mine."

T: See the diversity of God's gifts and be thankful. See the powerful effect of God's gifts and be expectant. Finally...

3. See the order of God's worship and be faithful. (14:26-40)

1 Corinthians 14:26-33 (Text Displayed)

While these principles are applicable for various contexts, Paul is addressing the gathering of God's people in public worship. Just like what we are doing right now.

Verse 26 gives us one clearest pictures of what worship was like in the early church. Most worship gatherings would have been hosted in homes. Part of this was due to persecution. Part of it was due to the progress of the gospel spreading in a grassroots way. This encourages all of us to...

- Participate. Don't spectate. You have something to bring, so bring it!
- Participate, not just on Sundays, but especially in our Community Groups, through prayer, through care and compassion, through encouragement, through sharing what God has been teaching you.

Principles for Tongues (27-28)

- When Paul says, "If any speak in a tongue..." in verse 27, we should make two observations: 1) Paul did not assume someone would speak in a tongue in every gathering. 2) The type of tongue he is talking about is not private prayer, but speaking for others to hear. If that happens, here are the stipulations...
 - 1) Only two or at most three.
 - 2) One at a time.
 - 3) Must have an interpreter.
 - 4) If there's not an interpreter: keep silent in church and speak to God.
- This is how tongues should be practiced, not like what you may have seen on TV or in the movies, not even how it might have been practiced, sadly, in some of the churches you attended in the past.
- Paul then provides...

Principles for Prophecy (29-33)

- 29: Limit the number of prophetic revelations, especially to give space for people to weigh what is shared.
- 30-31: Speak one by one, to eliminate confusion and maximize learning and encouragement.
- 32-33: Practice humble, mutual submission, so that worship is orderly and peaceful.

Receiving a Prophetic Word

- Prophesying starts with hearing God's voice. As we grow in discerning God's voice, we will grow in hearing his voice for others.
- Develop an EAR to hear!
 - Expect... that God will speak to you.
 - Ask... at any time! Ask God specific questions. Ask him for specific direction.
 - Revere... Be ready to follow through on what you hear!

Sharing a Prophetic Word

- Share with love and humility. DO NOT SAY, "God told me to tell you." but something like: "I believe God wants me to share something with you."
- Encourage them to prayerfully consider it (to weigh it out) by talking about it with wise followers of Jesus and weighing it against Scripture.
- Point them to Jesus and tell them you will be praying for them. Make yourself available as God leads.

In closing, Paul gives some instruction for women that can strike us as confusing, Look at verses 33-35.

1 Corinthians 14:33-40 (Text Displayed)

No doubt this is very strong language. If you are a woman here today, it is likely, to one degree or another, you find this offensive. "Women should keep silent." "For they are not permitted to speak..." "it is shameful for a woman to speak in church."

If any man spoke like Paul is speaking here at your Thanksgiving Meal, it is likely you didn't eat! Can I get an "Amen," ladies? "Amen!"

Either Paul's words mean what they sound like at face value (that a woman should never speak during a time of public worship), OR something else going on here we need to pay closer attention to?

We believe it is the latter. Do women speak in our church services? Yes. Do women hold positions of influence and leadership in our church? Yes. Are we, as pastors, very happy about that? Yes.

Let me do my best to explain what Paul is communicating here.

He can't mean women are never permitted to speak in church.

- That's impossible, unless Paul has amnesia or intentionally contradicted himself. Why? He just said in 1 Corinthians 11:5 that women can pray and prophesy in church gatherings. Both praying and prophesying require, what? Speaking audible words publicly! Both of those activities *are not* shameful but honoring to God and hold the potential to strengthen the church.
- Furthermore, Paul has spent chapters 12-14 talking about how "each one is given a manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (12:7). I believe "each one" includes men and women (go back to Acts 2), and it is clear "manifestations of the Spirit" include the speech gifts. In fact, as I've said before and will say again, I *personally* don't see one gift of the 20 or so listed in the NT that is not available to both men and women. [[That is because of how I believe Paul talks about the various leaders gifted with APEST gifts (apostolic, prophetic, evangelistic, shepherding, and teaching gifts). I don't believe "shepherd" is synonymous with the office of Pastor.]]

What Paul seems to be restricting is authoritative evaluation about words of prophecy that would require authoritative instruction and teaching in the worship gathering. Why?

- For starters, the whole chapter is about the value of prophecy, and Paul just spoke about the need for evaluating words of prophecy in verse 29.
- Additionally, the role of teaching the entire congregation belongs to pastors, which the NT assigns to men. This is consistent with what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11, here in 1 Corinthians 14, and 1 Timothy 2, where he gives a similar but clearer instruction based not on culture but creation. That principle makes sense of Paul's appeal to "the Law" in verse 34. [[It is also consistent with the qualifications for pastors in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, not to mention how the Bible highlights the complementary role of husbands and wives in the home in Ephesians 5, Colossians 3, & 1 Peter 3.]]

In all of this, the church family *and* nuclear family, reflects the heart of God and the ordering of relationships in the Trinity. The Father, Son and Spirit are perfectly equal, yet function with distinction of role, all the while maintaining perfect unity, harmony, and flourishing.

So let me say it one more time: I DO NOT believe a woman is prohibited from speaking in worship. In fact, we're open to hiring a woman to serve as our next Worship Leader. I believe Paul's concern is over proper ordering and authoritative teaching because "God is not a God of confusion but peace" as he just said in verse 33.

All that said, I want to caution us to not allow these 2 difficult verses to cloud how the other 86 verses in 1 Corinthians 12-14 call us to elevate and empower women serving with their spiritual gifts! Our church is very committed to that!

Paul's final appeal is a strong one! In verses 36, he urges them to put his words into practice! With rhetorical punch he asks, "Did the Word of God originate with you? Are you the only church following the ways of Jesus." Then, he sums up his teaching in chapter 14, in verse 39 by saying:, "*EARNESTLY DESIRE to prophecy (3rd time he's encouraged this) and DO NOT forbid speaking in tongues. But all things should be done decently and in order.*"

POWER EQUATION: Authority + Gifting + Faith + Consecration = Power

"The idea is that the amount of authority, gifting, faith and consecration you develop will combine to determine, in large part, the amount of supernatural power you have for ministry." - Seng

Growth in authority comes from obedience.

Growth in gifting comes from practice.

Growth in faith comes from taking risks.

Growth in consecration comes from devotion (worship, prayer, and fasting).

All of this increases our POWER!

"For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power!" (1 Corinthians 4:20)

How has God gifted you? Step out in your God-given authority and God-given gifts, trusting in God's power to work through you. When you do, you will bless the world and build up God's church *in his name!*