

**Message: Prophecy and Tongues - Love Pursues What Is Better for the Body**

**Text: 1 Corinthians 14:1-26**

**Introduction**

A. A few weeks ago I was discussing with a young couple the things that attract different people to different churches. When the husband asked me, “If you couldn’t go to Three Rivers, what church in the Columbia area would you attend?” I didn’t have a ready answer, except that it would need to be a church where proclaiming the Word of God, the Word of Christ, where speaking the truth in love is given highest priority. The Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write the following words to Ephesian believers so that we would all share this conviction.

Ephesians 4:15 but **speaking the truth in love**, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ,

B. I would hope every Christian would feel this way, but as we chatted further, not everyone does. Style of dress, style of music, style of preaching, age or cultural affinity groups, physical building structures and related amenities (gyms, cafes, playgrounds, ball fields, high tech equipment, sports teams, etc.) are not necessarily bad things in and of themselves and can be useful things, but when what is more spectacular or inviting to our natural senses takes priority over having Christ reveal Himself to us through His Word, we are falling into one of the many errors that Paul is addressing in his Spirit inspired letter to the church at Corinth.

C. In chapters 12-14 Paul is refuting the prideful notion of some that their spirituality is measured by the ministry gifts of the Spirit rather than the fruit of the Spirit, the greatest of which is love.

D. It becomes evident by chapter 14 that some in Corinth were unduly elevating speaking in tongues as a mark of spirituality, perhaps since speaking in tongues “appears” to be more spectacular and supernatural than speaking prophetically the revealed Word of the risen Christ in ordinary, common language. In chapter 13 Paul rebukes their attitude, stating that even if we speak with the tongues of men or angels, without love, we are not spiritual at all, we are in fact nothing.

1 Corinthians 13:1 If **I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love**, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.<sup>2</sup> If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, **I am nothing**.

E. And so as Paul begins chapter 14 to reverse their elevating the more visually spectacular speaking in tongues over prophetic revelation from the Lord, he urges them to pursue love, because as he has already written, love edifies, love builds up the body of Christ.

1 Corinthians 8:1 Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant, but **love edifies**.

**I. 14:1-5 Love pursues the revealed Word of Christ that builds up the body of Christ.**

A. In urging love for the body, Paul is not denigrating spiritual ministry gifts. Yes, in 13:8 Paul tells us that both prophecy and tongues will cease, but they had not ceased as of this writing. Therefore, he says, “be zealous” for spiritual gifts. However seek for the good of the gathered church those ministries which most build up the body of Christ. Prophecy does this in a way that uninterpreted tongues cannot.

1 Corinthians 13:8 Love never fails; but if *there are gifts of **prophecy, they will be done away***; if *there are **tongues, they will cease***; if *there is knowledge, it will be done away*.

1 Corinthians 14:1 **Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy.**

- B. Speaking in tongues refers to speaking by the Spirit in languages not naturally learned or understood by the speaker, language full of content (not gibberish).

1 Corinthians 14:2 For **one who speaks in a tongue** does not speak to men but **to God; for no one understands**, but in *his* spirit **he speaks mysteries**.

Acts 2:6 And when this sound occurred, the crowd came together, and were bewildered because **each one of them was hearing them speak in his own language**.<sup>7</sup> They were amazed and astonished, saying, "Why, **are not all these who are speaking Galileans?**"<sup>8</sup> "And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born?"<sup>9</sup> "Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,<sup>10</sup> Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes,<sup>11</sup> Cretans and Arabs-- **we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God.**"

Acts 10:44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message.<sup>45</sup> All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also.<sup>46</sup> For **they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God**. Then Peter answered,<sup>47</sup> "Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit **just as we did**, can he?"

- C. The reason Paul elevates prophecy over tongues is because the prophetic revealing of the Word of Christ to the church is what builds up the church into the image of Christ. Notice in Ephesians 4 the five spiritual ministry gifts the ascended Christ gives His church for its upbuilding into His image are all ministries of the intelligible Word.

1 Corinthians 14:3 But **one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation**.<sup>4</sup> One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; but **one who prophesies edifies the church**.

1 Corinthians 10:23 All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but **not all things edify**.<sup>24</sup> **Let no one seek his own good, but that of his neighbor**.

Ephesians 4:8 Therefore it says, "WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH, HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES, AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN." ...<sup>11</sup> And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers,<sup>12</sup> for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, **to the building up of the body of Christ**;<sup>13</sup> until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, **to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ**.

- D. Love seeks the edification, the building up of Christ's church through giving priority to making the Word of Christ intelligible to people.

1 Corinthians 14:5 Now I wish that you all spoke in tongues, but even more that you would prophesy; and **greater is one who prophesies than one who speaks in tongues**, unless he interprets, **so that the church may receive edifying**.

1. Paul's saying "I wish that you all spoke in tongues" does not indicate that all Christians "should" speak in tongues, any more than Paul's saying "I wish that you were all as I am (unmarried)" indicates that all Christians "should" be unmarried. He has earlier in chapter 12 made clear that the Spirit does not give to all the gift of tongues (contrary to much current charismatic teaching).

1 Corinthians 7:7 Yet **I wish that all men were even as I myself am**. However, each man has his own gift from God, one in this manner, and another in that.

1 Corinthians 12:29 All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they?<sup>30</sup> All do not have gifts of healings, do they? **All do not speak with tongues, do they?** All do not interpret, do they?

2. Notice again that the tongues/languages the Spirit gives some to speak are full of content that can be interpreted if the Spirit enables. It is uninterpreted tongues within the assembled church that Paul is restricting. (Once again, this restriction is widely ignored within charismatic gatherings, as it was being ignored in Corinth. The Roman Catholic church violated this principle for centuries, speaking only Latin at the Mass in the gathered church.)

1 Corinthians 14:5 Now I wish that you all spoke in tongues, but even more that you would prophesy; and **greater is one who prophesies than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets**, so that the church may receive edifying.

1 Corinthians 14:19 however, **in the church I desire to speak five words with my mind so that I may instruct others also, rather than ten thousand words in a tongue.**

## II. 14:6-12 The edification of Christ's body depends on the intelligibility of God's truth.

- A. So tightly were some Corinthians holding on to their arrant, over-elevated view of tongues that Paul found it necessary to illustrate what should have been obvious - that unintelligible speech does not benefit the hearers. (Instrument illustration)

1 Corinthians 14:6 But now, brethren, if **I come to you speaking in tongues, what will I profit you** unless I speak to you either by way of revelation or of knowledge or of prophecy or of teaching? <sup>7</sup> Yet even lifeless things, either flute or harp, in producing a sound, if they do not produce a distinction in the tones, how will it be known what is played on the flute or on the harp? <sup>8</sup> For if the bugle produces an indistinct sound, who will prepare himself for battle? <sup>9</sup> **So also you, unless you utter by the tongue speech that is clear, how will it be known what is spoken?** For you will be speaking into the air.

- B. Again, all tongues given by the Spirit have meaning/content, but only if it is made intelligible will speech edify the body. Those who pursue love will pursue intelligible speech for the building up of the body over an apparently spectacular or exciting phenomenon. Charismatics and non-Charismatics must ask, what kind of ministry am I most desirous to see manifested in Christ's gathered church?

1 Corinthians 14:10 There are, perhaps, a great many kinds of languages in the world, and no kind is without meaning. <sup>11</sup> If then I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be to the one who speaks a barbarian, and the one who speaks will be a barbarian to me. <sup>12</sup> **So also you, since you are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek to abound for the edification of the church.**

## III. 14:13-19 Principles and priorities in applying love to the public exercise of tongues.

- A. 14:13-17 Paul makes no distinction between speaking in tongues and praying in tongues (contrary to much current charismatic teaching). In 14:2 Paul has already established that speaking in tongues is primarily directed toward God. I.e., speaking in tongues is a form of prayer. Tongues that speak public prayers, praises, songs, thanksgivings to God must be either interpreted or not be spoken at all in public, which would be unedifying to the body. Love edifies.

1 Corinthians 14:13 Therefore **let one who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret.** <sup>14</sup> For if I **pray in a tongue**, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. <sup>15</sup> What is the outcome then? I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also; **I will sing with the spirit** and I will sing with the mind also. <sup>16</sup> Otherwise if you bless in the spirit only, how will the one who fills the place of the ungifted say the "Amen" **at your giving of thanks**, since he does not know what you are saying? <sup>17</sup> **For you are giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not edified.**

- B. 14:18-19 Paul does a whole lot of speaking in tongues in private, but not in public. Evidently some of Paul's detractors in Corinth were using against him his lack of displaying such a "spectacular" gift, undercutting his apostolic status. But Paul in chapter 13 has undercut their status by exposing how loveless their self-promotion is. Love does not puff up itself, but builds up others. What are we looking for in the gathered church? Is it what truly honors Christ by what builds up the church in His image?

1 Corinthians 14:18 I thank God, I speak in tongues more than you all; <sup>19</sup> **however, in the church I desire to**

speak five words with my mind so that I may instruct others also, rather than ten thousand words in a tongue.

1 Corinthians 13:1 If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, ...<sup>2</sup> ...I am nothing. ...<sup>4</sup> Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not puffed up,

Galatians 6:3 For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.

#### IV. 14:20-26 Mature, loving believers practice self-restraint in ministry for the sake of others.

A. 14:20 The Corinthians were self-deceived into thinking they were spiritually mature. Paul, more than once, bursts their self-inflated bubble. Young children do whatever they want without regard for others.

1 Corinthians 14:20 Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking be mature.

1 Corinthians 3:1 And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ.

B. 14:21-22 Tongues are no way to speak to believers or convict and convert unbelievers.

1 Corinthians 14:21 In the Law it is written, "BY MEN OF STRANGE TONGUES AND BY THE LIPS OF STRANGERS I WILL SPEAK TO THIS PEOPLE, AND EVEN SO THEY WILL NOT LISTEN TO ME," says the Lord.<sup>22</sup> So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophecy *is for a sign*, not to unbelievers but to those who believe.

1. In the Law God promised that if the Israelites would not listen to His intelligible words, then He would send upon them an invading army whose speech would be unintelligible to them as a sign of judgment.

Deuteronomy 28:45 "So all these curses shall come on you and pursue you and overtake you until you are destroyed, because you would not obey the LORD your God by keeping His commandments and His statutes which He commanded you."<sup>46</sup> "They shall become a sign and a wonder on you and your descendants forever. ...<sup>49</sup> "The LORD will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, as the eagle swoops down, a nation whose language you shall not understand,

2. Paul quotes from Isaiah, who picks up on this promised curse, predicting the Assyrian invasion of Israel whose tongues would be unintelligible - a sign of judgment. Tongues were intentionally an ineffective means of communicating God's will, because they were a sign of judgment. This was not to be lost on the Jews at Pentecost. So unintelligible tongues are no way to edify believers and reach unbelievers with God's truth.

Isaiah 28:11 Indeed, He will speak to this people through stammering lips and a foreign tongue,<sup>12</sup> He who said to them, "Here is rest, give rest to the weary," And, "Here is repose," but they would not listen.

1 Corinthians 14:20 Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking be mature.<sup>21</sup> In the Law it is written, "BY MEN OF STRANGE TONGUES AND BY THE LIPS OF STRANGERS I WILL SPEAK TO THIS PEOPLE, AND EVEN SO THEY WILL NOT LISTEN TO ME," says the Lord.<sup>22</sup> So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophecy *is for a sign*, not to unbelievers but to those who believe.

C. 14:23-26 Here Paul illustrates this last point, that unintelligible tongues are no way to edify other believers and reach unbelievers with God's truth. Summary: Desire those ministries that most edify the body.

1 Corinthians 14:23 Therefore if the whole church assembles together and all speak in tongues, and ungifted men or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are mad?<sup>24</sup> But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an ungifted man enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all;<sup>25</sup> the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so he will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you.<sup>26</sup> What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.

Romans 15:2 Each of us is to please his neighbor **for his good, to his edification.**<sup>3</sup> For **even Christ did not please Himself;** but as it is written, "THE REPROACHES OF THOSE WHO REPROACHED YOU FELL ON ME."

Acts 20:32 "And now **I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.**