

1 Corinthians

Chapter 14:1-25

June 30, 1996

- Spiritual gifts are not a measure of spirituality.
-

- Spiritual gifts are distributed according to God's purposes.
- Miraculous gifts were used by God to testify to something.
- Spiritual gifts are given for the edification of the body of Christ.

- **1 Corinthians Outline:**

- Chapter 1 Ungodly divisions result from man's wisdom.
- Chapter 2 Carnal man cannot understand our Spiritual God.
- Chapter 3 All Christians will have their labors tried by fire.
- Chapter 4 Boasting in our leaders puffs up and destroys fellowship.
- Chapter 5 Maintain the purity of the Church.
- Chapter 6 Do not dispute before the world and do not partake in sexual immorality.
- Chapter 7 Principles of marriage
- Chapter 8 The responsibility of liberty
- Chapter 9 Those who preach the Gospel should live from the Gospel
- Chapter 10 You cannot partake of the Lord's table and the table of demons.
- Chapter 11 Propriety in corporate worship and communion
- Chapter 12 The body of Christ is unified around a diversity of spiritual gifts
- Chapter 13 Some spiritual gifts are temporary but love never fails
- Chapter 14 The spiritual gifts are to be administered in such a way that the entire body is edified.

- **Introduction & Review**

Paul has argued plainly that giftedness is not an indication of maturity or of one being loving. When the gifts are used by the saints they are told that they must do so with love for their brother or sisters. In addition, last week we looked at the temporary nature of the revelatory gifts and concluded that the cessation of these gifts must have occurred at the close of the canon. To suppose otherwise puts the sufficiency of scripture into question and doesn't comport with Paul's instruction in chapter 13.

In this chapter, Paul will give very detailed instruction on how and why the gifts of prophecy and tongues were to be administered.

- **Exposition**

Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy.² For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries.³ But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men.⁴ He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church.⁵ I wish you all spoke with tongues, but even more that you prophesied; for he who prophesies is greater than he who speaks with tongues, unless indeed he interprets, that the church may receive edification.

- After showing the "more excellent way" in chapter 13, that is, to be motivated by love, Paul begins this next section by giving an imperative to pursue love and desire prophecy. Notice that he didn't say to pursue prophecy. The command given by Paul is with the understanding that the gifts are given by the will of the Spirit not by our desires. This command from Paul is to the entire church not just to individuals. Therefore, the command is that the Corinthians were to desire that these gifts be manifest in the church but not necessarily that each individual should strive to have the same gifts.
- Paul teaches that when someone spoke in tongues, God understood what was said but the hearers did not understand because the tongue was a language other than their own. Paul goes on to say that by the spirit he speaks mysteries. There are two ways to understand the term mysteries: either as a truth once unknown but now revealed or as something which continues to be hidden.

⁶ But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you unless I speak to you either by revelation, by knowledge, by prophesying, or by teaching?⁷ Even things without life, whether flute or harp, when they make a sound, unless they make a distinction in the sounds, how will it be known what is piped or played?⁸ For if the trumpet makes an uncertain sound, who will prepare himself for battle?⁹ So likewise you, unless you utter by the tongue words easy to understand, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air.¹⁰ There are, it may be, so many kinds of languages in the world, and none of them is without significance.¹¹ Therefore, if I do not know the meaning of the language, I shall be a foreigner to him who speaks, and he who speaks will be a foreigner to me.¹² Even so you, since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, let it be for the edification of the church that you seek to excel.

- Paul goes in to great detail to uncover a deeper truth about these spiritual gifts. It is not enough to simply exercise our gifts in the church. We must do so in such a way that the saints are edified. Paul instructs that if the Corinthians were just all speaking in foreign languages they would be alienating each other not, furthering fellowship. This was because they must have been all speaking in tongues without interpretations. Clearly this would have been of no value to the body although he did say earlier that the individuals may be edified simply by knowing that God had given them a gift.

¹³ Therefore let him who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret.¹⁴ For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful.¹⁵ What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding.¹⁶ Otherwise, if you bless with the spirit, how will he who occupies the place of the uninformed say "Amen" at your giving of thanks, since he does not understand what you say?¹⁷ For you indeed give thanks well, but the other is not edified.¹⁸ I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all;¹⁹ yet in the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that I may teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue.

- Given that the highest good is the edification of the body of saints not the gift holder, Paul instructs that those who spoke in tongues were to pray that God might also distribute to them the ability to interpret their tongue for the sake of the hearers.
- It is crucial to note exactly what Paul is saying here: because his mind was unfruitful when he spoke in tongues (unless he interpreted) he would abstain from exercising the gift and pray with his spirit and his understanding by speaking in a language his mind understood. Paul was able to control himself and to exercise the gift with purpose. This contradicts much of the modern charismatic speaking in tongues where people are losing self control.
- If the saints at Corinth didn't heed Paul's instruction, the gift of tongues would result in disunity rather than its intended purpose of unifying edification.
- For fear that the readers might think that Paul was disparaging the gift of tongues, he states that he was thankful that he spoke in tongues more than all of them. Then using another hyperbole, he states that five clear words which produced edification for the others is of greater value than ten thousand words of gibberish.

²⁰ Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature.²¹ In the law it is written: "With men of other tongues and other lips I will speak to this people; And yet, for all that, they will not hear Me," says the Lord.²² Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophesying is not for unbelievers but for those who believe.²³ Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those who are uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say that you are out of your mind?²⁴ But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all.²⁵ And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you. NKJV

- Paul corrects their childish thinking (self edification of tongues) by instructing them on the mature understanding of the gift. This instruction is foundational to our understanding of the purpose of this gift and the relevance that it carries today. Paul quotes Isaiah who had prophesied the impending occupation of Israel by the Assyrians and of the Babylonian conquest of Judah. Isaiah teaches that the word of God had become useless to them due to their childish thinking ("...rule on rule..."). Therefore the implication of the prophecy is that if Israel would not listen when the word of God was spoken plainly through His prophets, maybe they would listen (they wouldn't) when they heard foreign tongues spoken in their land. (cf. Deuteronomy 28:49, Jeremiah 5:14-15)
- This Spiritual gift was a sign to unbelieving Jews that the kingdom was to be stripped from them and given to the gentiles. This was a sign of the impending destruction of Jerusalem. This gift was a gift that would drive people away (vs. 23) not evangelize. If the church was to evangelize, the gift that would be fruitful during the corporate gathering was the gift of prophecy.