

“Spiritual Speaking Gifts”

17 October 2021 - Led by Rev. Sam Mawhinney

Welcome & Call to Worship

Hymn of Preparation: Shine, Jesus, Shine

Prayers of Adoration & Confession

Reading: 1 Corinthians 14:1-25

Sermon:

It will help us appreciate the significance of Paul's concern in this passage if we imagine what the city of Corinth was like. A prosperous cosmopolitan city, heavily influenced by Greek culture, valuing knowledge and gifting and full of religion. The young Christian church recently founded by Paul was enthusiastic about the ecstatic, vibrant, supernatural spiritual gifts they had been given, they valued these gifts especially the ability to speak in tongues. However, the use of the spiritual gifts was a source of division and so in Ch 12 Paul teaches that unity as in a body of many parts was the purpose of the gifts. The uniting motivation for the use of the gifts was love so he teaches about love in Ch 13 and now he picks up his teaching with the combined, *“follow the way of love and eagerly desire the spiritual gifts.”*

Each week I check the Hockey Ireland website to look at the league table, and when I watch Match of the Day on Monday, I want to see the table and check where the team I support is placed. The Corinthian Church placed the spiritual gift of speaking in tongues at the top of the table and the gift of prophesy well down the league table. Paul argues they were wrong to place tongues on top, he says, *“desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophesy”* *“I would rather have you prophesy”* (v5) *“the one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues”*.

I. What is Paul's concern?

His concern is not to forbid the use of the gift of tongues, he uses the gift himself, (v18) but he wants them to be edified. (v3,4,5,12,17,26) The gift of Tongues does not edify the church, but the gift of prophecy does! Edify is related to the idea of education and the use of our minds.

Education is a good thing we are very concerned about what the Taliban are doing to girls' education in Afghanistan, we are concerned about what the pandemic has done to the education of our young people and Paul is concerned about what the emphasis on the spiritual gift of tongues is doing to the education and growth of the church in Corinth.

But the word is translated “build up” in the ESV and it is helpful to hold that practical idea of growth, strengthening in our thoughts. Paul's concern is the use of the spiritual gifts in a loving way, so that the church will be edified or built up. The motto of the Irish Bible Institute here in Dublin “head, hands and heart” captures well the breadth and totality of what it means to edify.

II. Speaking in tongues.

Imagine yourself as a visitor, walking around the city of Corinth and you decide to check out the Corinthian Church. From Paul's description, you would hear "tongues" either spoken or sung (v15) What do you hear?

When I worked in Derry and attended a young church that regularly spoke in tongues, I didn't hear a language that I understood, it was a mystery to me as Paul says here. (v2) Now that is not to say Paul is rebuking them for the use of this gift, he is keen to teach them what the gift is. It is unintelligible speech, which communicates to God, it bypasses the mind coming from the Holy Spirit and edifies the person but not the church (unless interpreted v5). Paul sees this as a gift available to everyone and he says he would like everyone to have the gift of speaking in tongues.

What are the benefits of the gift of speaking in tongues? Here is one view, *"the edifying benefits of such personal speaking in tongues include a particular sense of God's presence, relaxation from tension, strength to cope with pain, power in prayer, to resist demonic onslaught, freedom in intercession when verbal prayer is inadequate or impossible, and freedom to worship God when lost in wonder love and praise"* David Prior

III. The gift of prophecy (v.3-12)

Prophecy is contrasted as speaking to others and is used to strengthen, encourage and comfort. (v3) and in so doing edifies the church (v4) Prophecy like tongues is a spiritual gift, and it is available to every Christian, and Paul wants everyone in the Corinthian church to use the gift to build up the church.

Prophecy reveals the mind and will of God. Paul in Ephesians tells us the church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Jesus as the cornerstone. The revelation of God was complete in the person of the Lord Jesus, he who has seen me has seen the Father, Jesus told his disciples (John 14:9) see also Hebrews Ch 1, and the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments are a completed cannon. This being true, the gift of prophecy is primarily an ability to understand and apply the bible to the life of the church and people and situations that we face each day. A good definition of the gift of prophecy is speaking the words of God (God's word) in the power of the Holy Spirit by a member of the church.

Some then place expository preaching, that is preaching systematically through the books of the bible as the outworking of this gift and tie it to this teaching ability alone. That is too narrow according to what Paul says here because every church member should desire to exercise the gift (v5). Also, in v6 he lists a variety of ways of speaking God's word, which point to a wider definition.

So, it is better to see this as more than expository preaching and to include any Church member who speaks to another from the word of God. A verse, wise biblical counsel, or a fresh insight from the preaching that can be applied to the church publicly.

A. What prophecy does

There has been a great growth in the use of personal trainers, and they are used to physically strengthen us, encourage us to be motivated for life and usually over time become a confident and support. They use their knowledge of exercise, nutrition and

life to impart these good things to us and so we are built up, strengthened and encouraged.

This is what the use of prophecy does for a church, it must be central to everything, the church does. When the word of God is central to all we are and do then the church can expect to be

1. Strengthened (edified, built up)
2. Encouraged (the one who comes alongside, the word used of the Holy Spirit)
3. Comforted (the one who says do not fear)

Paul uses a couple of pictures to describe the effect of prophecy on the church.

(v7) **Melody**, like an instrument played well, there must be a distinction in the notes to make melody, to hear the tune, otherwise it is just noise. When the tune is heard then the call to **Action** (v8) can be heard as the trumpet call, the call to battle in the spiritual realm. The wisdom of God to know his will and follow it.

Paul's call to the church in Corinth (v9) is to speak intelligible words, to prophesy and in v12 he summaries his argument by saying, *"So, it is with you, since you are eager to have the spiritual gifts, try to excel in the gifts that build up the church. Indeed, the purpose of love is to excel at the gift that edifies, builds up the church"*.

B. Receiving and developing the gift of prophecy

The personal testimony of a prophet (Isaiah Ch 50:4-6): Isaiah writes of his experience as a prophet in Ch 50 of his book and I found this helpful.

The description in v5 of not being rebellious, and in v6 of being beaten and humiliated by mocking and spitting pushes us to consider that under the Holy Spirit's inspiration he also describes the experience of Jesus the ultimate prophet as promised by Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15.

Note in v4 the gifting and the daily discipline of spending time with God, which was Isaiah's daily practise, and we know Jesus also did supremely well, points us to this being the duty and privilege of every Christian, to spend time with God listening to his instruction through his word.

The purpose of such instruction is to be filled with knowledge of God which can be imparted and note the desire to give this to the weary (v4). *"Come to me all you who are weary and burdened,"* Jesus said, *"and I will give you rest."* Matthew Ch 11:28 and that is the purpose of receiving God's word and passing it on.

Lastly the one who speaks God's word can expect opposition, courage and resilience is needed for the task.

This is how we can all seek to have and develop the gift of prophecy.

IV. The importance of the mind (v13-19)

Again, let's go back to the church in Corinth and imagine what a church service would have been like with the dominance of the gift of tongues. Noisy, not distinct, exuberant, supernatural, an experience of worship not understood by anyone, praying in tongues,

singing in tongues, thanking God in tongues and when the experience stops that is that, over. It says Paul is unfruitful (v14) and it doesn't edify. (v17)

Paul is not impressed, and he advocates very strongly that they would use their mind in prayer, singing, thanksgiving, instructions and in evangelism. (v14-19)

Understanding is important and therefore the use of our mind is vital. Paul does not want to forbid speaking in tongues he does want to regulate it and so he says tongues in church should be interpreted. With interpretation everyone will know what God has been saying to the person for the good of the church. He has listed this as a separate gift in Ch 12:10.

This is the obvious advantage of the gift of prophecy and centring on the word of God. Our prayer life is focused as a response to the word of God heard and understood. Prayer can use the word of God as a basis for its content. Our singing of hymns and songs are to be biblical, understandable and singable (BUS) our worship is centred on the word of God, and we are encouraged to engage with the words we sing. The teaching and preaching of God's word are central to our services and we are to be encouraged to share the word with others in our activities and daily life. If someone is downcast, we can strengthen, encourage, and comfort them as we speak to one another in intelligible words of scripture.

- Relate the story from Porto shared on WhatsApp.
- Suggest reading a book on biblical friendship (i.e. Ed Welch's book, *Side by Side*).

So, Paul's argument is not against tongues it is his own experience (v18) but he sees the gift of prophecy, intelligible spirit filled words from God as 2000 times more important than speaking in tongues.

Praise: Speak, O Lord

Prayers for Others

Announcements

Closing Hymn: May The Peoples Praise You

Benediction

Discussion Questions:

What has been your experience of the spiritual gift of tongues and prophecy? How has this passage challenged or affirmed your understanding of these gifts?

How can we develop the use of the gift of prophecy?

What practical steps can be taken to develop the use of the gift of prophecy in edifying (building up) the Church?