

1Corinthians 14:14-25 "Purpose and Procedure of the Gift of Tongues"

1CO 14:14-17 "For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. 15 So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind. 16 If you are praising God with your spirit, how can one who finds himself among those who do not understand say "Amen" to your thanksgiving, since he does not know what you are saying? 17 You may be giving thanks well enough, but the other man is not edified."

As I mentioned last week, the entire 14th chapter of 1Corinthians is dedicated to helping these Corinthian believers to put into perspective their responsibility to serve one another with the gifts they've been given by the Holy Spirit.

Paul is pointing out that to use a gift of the Spirit only for one's own edification is to miss the point of why the gifts are given. And since these people in the Corinthian church seemed to be enamored with the gift of tongues Paul is showing them how, despite the importance of such a gift, it is to be used biblically, with the express purpose of building up the church.

But, because the gift of tongues cannot build up the church without the gift of interpretation of those tongues, Paul cautions them not to put so much importance on this gift that they lose sight of other gifts which are designed by God to edify the church without the aid of an additional gift to make them effectual.

In other words, every other gift of the Spirit can stand on its own in the way it can build up the body. The gift of teaching doesn't need the gift of prophecy to be effective. The gift of helps doesn't need the gift of evangelism to be effective. It doesn't mean they can't or won't work together and compliment each other, but they are not dependent on each other as is the gift of tongues, which needs the gift of interpretation to make it effectual to the body at large.

And this is why Paul states that "for this reason anyone who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret what he says." (1CO 14:13) And then he goes on in our text.

1CO 14:14 "For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful."

In other words, there is only a partial effectiveness taking place through the gift of tongues. The reason for this is that it only deals with one aspect of man. Man is body, soul, and spirit. And as such we are to worship and serve God in all of these areas to be effectual in our own lives and the lives of others.

This is why Jesus said to the Samaritan woman that men must worship the Lord in spirit and in truth. They must go together. To worship in truth necessarily means that the mind will be engaged to understand what that truth of the Spirit of God is as it accomplishes the spiritually desired effect in our lives.

Again, this doesn't negate the true spiritual aspect of this gift of tongues, even without the gift of interpretation. Paul's point is that it is of little use from a practical stand-point in the body of Christ when it is not accompanied with the gift of interpretation. Why? Because the mind is unfruitful.

This must be a prime objective with any gift used in the body of Christ. It must touch the whole man. The spirit of man must be touched and the mind of man must be engaged and touched as well. So, what's the solution where a gift on its own only touches the spirit?

1CO 14:15 "So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind."

To pray with your spirit and to also pray with your mind is not an either/or proposition. It's not as though I will pray out loud with my spirit for part of the service, and then pray out loud with my mind the other part.

In other words, regarding the gift of tongues where there is no interpretation, it is better to be blessed in the spirit and in the mind by simply praying or singing out loud in your own language. And so, you can pray and sing in the spirit without praying or singing in tongues, is Paul's point. In fact, it's more desirable since both the mind and spirit are blessed in the process.

This is different from praying or singing in the spirit in tongues to yourself, which we'll see later in this study. Right now we're dealing with the public use of the gift of tongues for the edifying of the body of Christ. And this is where Paul is going in our text.

1CO 14:16-17 "If you are praising God with your spirit, how can one who finds himself among those who do not understand say

"Amen" to your thanksgiving, since he does not know what you are saying? 17 You may be giving thanks well enough, but the other man is not edified."

Paul now gives us a practical outworking of the gift of tongues being used improperly. And unfortunately, in many congregations around the world, the gift of tongues is being used in the very way Paul discourages here in our text.

It's not uncommon to walk into a church where the gift of tongues is encouraged and hear a number of people praying out loud in tongues at the same time where no interpretation is given.

Now, if we were praying in English, and the entire congregation is able to hear and understand, we can actually enter into prayer with that person and say Amen to their prayer as we pray in agreement. Not so with tongues without an interpretation.

You may be giving thanks to God in your tongue, Paul says, but neither you or the rest of the congregation can say Amen, or pray in agreement, since their minds and yours don't have a clue what you're saying.

Then Paul qualifies this statement by suggesting that this doesn't mean there isn't a benefit from the gift of tongues in a private setting, or even in a public setting where you pray to yourself.

1CO 14:18 "I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you."

Paul had and used the gift of tongues. But he used it biblically. When he spoke in tongues in public he used his gift of interpretation along with it, if no one else had the gift of interpretation. When he spoke privately he praised God with his tongue and if he prayed for and received the interpretation he was doubly blessed.

But he also knew that as much of a blessing as the gift of tongues was to him, it paled in comparison to other gifts which were straight-forward and were not in need of an additional gift to make it effectual to the rest of the body.

1CO 14:19 "But in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue."

Paul is making a comparison here while utilizing hyperbole to make a point. In other words, he is exaggerating the numbers to get his point across.

He's comparing five words with ten thousand words. Actually the number 10,000 is not the number in the Greek here in our text. It could include it but is not limited to it. The actual Greek word is *murioi*, and includes the meaning of being innumerable, or countless. It's where we get our English word myriad's.

We get the same idea in the Hebrew in certain passages like we find in the psalms.

PSA 91:4-5, 7 "[The Lord] will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart. 5 You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, 7 ***A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand,*** but it will not come near you."

Also in the book of Daniel where we have a vision of the throne of God.

DAN 7:9-10 "As I looked, "thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool. His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze. 10 A river of fire was flowing, coming out from before him. ***Thousands upon thousands*** attended him; ***ten thousand times ten thousand*** stood before him. The court was seated, and the books were opened."

By contrast Paul is saying that if I could and did speak from now until the cows come home in a tongue, without an interpretation, I'd rather not. I'd rather speak five words which could instruct the body of Christ and edify them.

Paul was thankful for his gift of tongues, but he knew that as blessed as it was, it was not designed by God to be a substitute for the other gifts which were designed to bless and edify the church on their own.

Apparently, what the Corinthians had deemed to be "the" most important gift, Paul was saying it was down on the bottom of the list, in God's economy, for its use as an edifying gift on its own. It needed help in the gift of interpretation which by God's design made it a lesser gift.

1CO 14:20 "Brothers, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults."

Paul is saying to these Corinthian believers, who by the way thought of themselves to be rather progressive in their thinking and therefore spiritual and mature, that they need to grow up in their faith using the means God gave them to grow.

And so, in one sense he wants them to quit acting like children who backbite and divide and gossip and cause dissension with their gifts, and instead consider one another as more important than themselves as they use their gifts for the edification of the body.

However, if you're going to be infants in any sense, be infants in regard to evil. Evidently, these Corinthian believers had it backwards. They were quite well along in their evil, thinking themselves to be mature in those things which dishonored Christ, and they were proving themselves babies as they abused the spiritual things of God.

They were thinking like children. Their minds were not being fed the things of God even though they felt their spirits were soaring in the use of the gift of tongues which Paul concludes is baby talk compared to the meat of using five words which can instruct from the word of God.

Now again, we have to be careful here. We need to keep the context in mind and the people being addressed. Paul is not painting with so broad a brush as to suggest that the gift of tongues is somehow an inferior gift in and of itself. How can any gift be inferior if it comes from the hand and throne of God? But when used properly in spirit and in truth it can edify and encourage the body.

1CO 14:21-22 "In the Law it is written: "Through men of strange tongues and through the lips of foreigners I will speak to this people, but even then they will not listen to me," says the Lord." 22 so then, tongues are for a sign...."

Paul is quoting from the prophet Isaiah where the Lord warned His people Israel that unless they repent and turn back to God the Lord will speak to them once more through a people they will not understand. But this people will not be speaking about grace or mercy, but will be speaking about death and destruction as they overwhelm Israel.

It turns out that this foreign people, whose language Israel would not understand, turns out to be a combination of the Assyrian and the Babylonian. Through these foreign people's God was sending a clear sign that His word was true. He spoke to Israel and said, this will be the sign of your judgment.

Israel should have seen the sign of the invading armies and concluded that this sign of a foreign people with a foreign language clearly tells us that God was true to His word and that we should repent before these armies are on our front door step.

That didn't happen. The sign did not turn the hearts, even though it was used as a means of grace to do just that. And so, its intention was to be a sign to speak to the unbelieving Jews in Israel.

In a similar way, Paul is saying that the gift of tongues is also a sign that God is present and that He wants His presence to be realized.

1CO 14:22 "Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers; prophecy, however, is for believers, not for unbelievers."

What Paul is doing here is defining the roles of tongues and prophecy in their most broad sense. But how is tongues a sign for unbelievers and not believers?

And so, now we have an additional use for the gift of tongues. It is a gift to be utilized in declaring the wonders of God, as on the day of Pentecost. It is a gift that can edify an individual in private. It is a gift to edify the body of Christ when accompanied by the gift of interpretation. And now we see it is a gift for the unbeliever under certain circumstances.

The word for unbelievers here in our text is the Greek word *apistos*, and it means unfaithful, or faithless. And an unbeliever could certainly be included in this description. But, it may not be limited to unbelievers.

But, let's consider the first obvious use of the word *apistos*. How might tongues be a sign to unbelievers? Well, keep in mind how Paul has made a comparison to the Jews being taken captive by foreigners as Isaiah the prophet warned them. Paul certainly has the Jews of his day in mind as he uses this analogy.

One of the ways the gift of tongues can be used as a sign to unbelievers is to allow them to experience the presence of God in

their midst and then to ask what all of this means. Now granted, this sign was often scoffed at, not unlike how Israel rejected Isaiah's prophecy, but it was a sign none the less.

We see this on the day of Pentecost when the disciples began speaking in the foreign languages of the Jews who were there from many parts of the world. They were actually accused of being drunk despite the fact that those who listened to the disciples heard, in their own language, how these disciples were declaring the greatness of God.

And so, in that instance the gift of tongues was used to get the attention of the unbeliever. And trust me, if an unbeliever comes into a church service where someone speaks in the gift of tongues out loud it will get their attention.

Paul does not suggest that it will be a sign which they will understand, only that it will be a sign that God is at work in their midst. But how else was it used as a sign gift in the Scriptures?

Well, of course, it was used on the day of Pentecost. But it wasn't until after the sign of tongues got the attention of these unbelievers did Peter then stand up and give them the gospel in a language most of them would have understood, probably Aramaic.

In other places we see this gift of tongues being used as a sign, and here is where we must consider another meaning to the word *apistos*, or one without faith. It is not that unusual to think of believers in Christ Jesus being without faith, in one sense, in their walk with Christ.

We have the case of the father whose son was demon possessed and came to Jesus in faith to ask our Lord to deliver his son from this demon.

MAR 9:22-24 "It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us." 23 "If you can?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for him who believes." 24 Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "***I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!***"

The disciples on one occasion asked the Lord for more faith.

LUK 17:5-6 "The apostles said to the Lord, "***Increase our faith!***" 6 He replied, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you."

Paul identifies the fact that none of us have a perfect faith.

2TH 1:3 "We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because *your faith is growing more and more*, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing."

Our faith is to be ever increasing as we look to the one who not only gave us our faith but sustains and increases our faith. This is what the writer of Hebrews says.

HEB 12:2 "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith..."

It is possible that even believers might be alluded to here in our text as those whose faith becomes faithless at times in their lives. And so, the gift of tongues could also be used to help increase the faith of those who need a boost in their faith as they experience God's personal presence through this gift.

We see this in a couple of instances.

ACT 10:45-47 "The circumcised believers [believing Jews] who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. 46 For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. Then Peter said, 47 "Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have."

Here the sign of the gift of tongues spoke to the hearts of believing Jews, including Peter, and they concluded that yes, the Holy Spirit is treating the Gentiles just as He is the Jews. This Jewish Messiah, Jesus, has certainly come to save the lost of all people.

In this case the sign of tongues demonstrated that the Holy Spirit did not discriminate between Jew and Gentile. In this case the faith of these believing Jews was increased to see God in a whole new light; a God whose love was being extended to all people.

In another instance the sign of the gift of tongues was meant to encourage new believers in Christ that the Lord was with them and had in fact gifted them.

ACT 19:6-7 "When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. 7 There were about twelve men in all."

By the way, Luke is not suggesting that the gift of tongues was the means by which they also prophesied. Rather he is simply saying

that the Holy Spirit gifted them with tongues and also gifted them with prophecy.

But, this is all part of the fulfilling of prophecy Jesus had given His disciples in the gospel of Matthew.

MAR 16:17-18 "And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; 18 they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well."

In other words, tongues, among other things will be a "sign" to not only unbelievers but also to those who might be without faith, or in need of a boost in their faith. Not every believer needs such a sign, but it is still a legitimate use of the gift.

By the way, just as not every believer will receive the gift of healing and will be able to lay their hands on the sick and they will get well, or that every believer will have a need to pick up deadly snakes or drink deadly poison, or that every believer will necessarily be able to cast out demons, so too, not every believer will be able to speak in tongues as a sign that the Lord has given them life in Christ together with His Spirit.

Remember, Paul has already expounded on this in this letter when describing the unity of the body in the diversity of the gifts they each possess. He made the point that not everyone possesses the same gifts through a series of rhetorical questions.

1CO 12:29-30 "Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? 30 Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?"

The implied answer? No, not all speak in tongues.

But it must be pointed out that, for the sign gift of tongues to be effective in the church for both the unbelieving and for those weak in the faith, it must be accompanied by an interpretation.

1CO 14:23-25 "So if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and some who do not understand or some unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind? 24 But if an unbeliever or someone who does not understand comes in while everybody is prophesying, he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all, 25

and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, "God is really among you!"

Here Paul goes back to the comparison between tongues and prophecy and what tongues cannot accomplish if not used properly.

Notice that Paul is assuming in verse 23 that the whole church comes together and the whole church is speaking in tongues at the same time, a scene which is seen today in certain churches.

He creates this scenario of chaos and suggests that not only unbelievers, but also those who simply don't understand or are not familiar with the use of tongues are going to view this whole scene as madness. Is this the intended use of this gift? Of course not. God is not a God of chaos or confusion but of unity and order.

And so, Paul is simply telling these believing Corinthians that what they think is spiritual and edifying is nothing short of madness and must be abandoned unless they plan on using the gift of tongues properly.

On the other hand, if an unbeliever comes in the church, or someone who is not familiar with the gift of prophecy, they will see it as something which is not madness, but will see it as a word from the Lord.

And in that word from the Lord they will be convicted of their sin and turn to God, realizing that the Lord really is in their midst.

Now it should be pointed out that it is not the gift of prophecy which turns the heart of these people in verses 24 and 25. Rather the tool used is the gift of prophecy accompanied by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

It is still ultimately up to the Holy Spirit to turn the heart of a person. And this is Paul's point as well. If we are faithful to use our gifts in a biblical manner God can and will use those gifts to encourage and build up His body as well as reach out to a lost and dying world.

Let God do His work and we will be faithful to do our work as unto the Lord in the power of the Spirit.

Now when Paul says of the unbeliever that he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all, and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare, he is not saying that the believers are standing in judgment over him; rather the believers simply bear

witness to the truth this unbeliever is now realizing to be true for himself.

This unbeliever now realizes that he is a sinner, and the believers simply agree as this unbeliever's heart is touched by God as his heart is laid bare to the truth, which is the word of God. The writer of Hebrews points this out.

HEB 4:12-13 "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. 13 Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account."

This is the picture we have in our text. God is at work through His gifts, but ultimately the gifts give way to the word of God, as they are used according to the word, to produce an awareness of sin and the need for a Savior.

Every gift we possess must be used to point people to Jesus, not to be used to point to ourselves, as was happening in Corinth with the gift of tongues.

As long as we are willing to use our gifts for one another in the power of the Spirit as we depend on our Lord for His strength, we will find our Lord being lifted up and magnified and His will will be accomplished in our lives and the lives of others.

May we always give glory to the gift giver and then watch Him use those gifts to build each other up and edify one another for works of service as we encourage one another toward love and good deeds.