

1Corinthians 14:26-33a "Procedures for Tongues and Prophecy  
- Part 2"

As we come to our text this morning we are going to wrap up Paul's instruction concerning spiritual gifts in the church at Corinth as it relates to the contrast between tongues and the gift of prophecy. He has spent the entire fourteenth chapter correcting these people and encouraging them to use their gifts in such a way that they edify the body of Christ.

Since the issue of tongues seems to have been a point of contention, where some of these believers felt this was one of the most important gifts, since it was one of the more "showier" ones, Paul puts it into perspective as he compares it with the gift of prophecy.

1CO 14:5, 18-19 "I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy. He who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may be edified. 18 I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. 19 But in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue."

The misuse of tongues results in so much noise and is not edifying to the body, especially where there is no interpretation of that tongue. And so, Paul would rather have them use a gift which can be utilized in their own language, namely the gift of prophecy. But even this gift must be used biblically.

But whatever gift is used in the body of Christ among the members of that local church, it must be done orderly and for the strengthening of the church.

1CO 14:26 "What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church."

What is Paul saying here? First, it should be pointed out that each member of that local body was encouraged to use their gifts, or at least to be used of God to edify the body in a tangible way.

No one was forced to use their gift each time they met. But, they were given the freedom to use their gifts as the Lord led. And so,

it's not as though Paul is saying that unless you have a psalm to share, or a teaching or a tongue, or an interpretation, or a revelation, you are not adequately serving the Lord or His people in that context of meeting together to worship the Lord.

Rather, he is saying when you do these things it builds up the body, which should encourage each member to consider their role and their place in that body as Christ has given each believer the privilege of accomplishing that very thing through the gifts He has given us in the Spirit.

Now you'll notice that the NIV uses the word hymn where in many of your translations the word psalm is used. The Greek word is *psalms* and it most certainly is in reference to the psalms. But since the psalms were designed to be put to music the translators of the NIV chose to make the intent of these psalms more clear by referring to them as hymns which are set to music.

However, when Paul says that everyone has a psalm he certainly would include the idea of a psalm also being read. After all, it is the word of God and the word is meant to be read as well as put to music if it can be. And so, the intent here would include any musical arrangement or reading of the word of God which is used to edify the body of Christ.

That can be taken in any number of ways. In a contemporary setting it could be special music during the service where someone does a solo, or it may be a reading from the word of God during our time of sharing.

The bottom line is that Paul is encouraging the word of God to be given to the body by members, other than the pastor, for example, where they edify each other. This gets everyone involved.

And by the way, notice in verse 26 how Paul starts this section. "What then shall we say, brothers?" Paul has an uncanny way of getting his point across in the form of correction, while at the same time reminding his readers that he still considers them brothers and sisters in Christ. They're still part of the same family, even if they need correction.

But he goes on to give this list in verse 26, "When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation."

"A word of instruction." This word in the Greek could literally be translated teaching or doctrine. In other words, in the setting at the

church in Corinth there was time for anyone in the congregation to bless the church with a short expounding on the word. It may be a Scripture someone read during the week where the Lord spoke to their heart and they want to share it.

"A revelation." This word in the Greek is *apokalupsis*. This is where we get our English word apocalypse, which also refers to the revelation of Jesus Christ to the apostle John, which we know as the book of Revelation. And so, Paul is saying that some in the church at Corinth were receiving revelations from God. This was not the same caliber of revelations which John and Paul and Peter and the rest of the apostles were receiving and passing on to the church as the very word of God.

These revelations would have been in reference to the gift of prophecy which, as we have studied previously, was a gift used by God in the church to allow the church to experience the nearness of God as He conveyed His presence through a word of encouragement, which could have included the existing written word of God which someone was prompted by God to share.

In this gift of prophecy God illumines the hearts and minds of the ones gifted by the Holy Spirit and then allows them to share these illuminations or revelations, from the very throne of God, with the rest of the body. Since these revelations were to be tested, as we'll see shortly in our text, these revelations obviously were not on a par with the revelations the prophets of old and the apostles received from God, which we now know as the bible; being completely authoritative.

And then, of course, Paul adds the sharing of a tongue and its interpretation in the last part of verse 26. None of this is meant to suggest that these are the only forms of edification to be shared in the body. It is a sampling of the types of ways in which the Lord can bless His people through other believers as they are gifted by God.

For example, preaching is not mentioned in our text. The word of wisdom or word of knowledge is not mentioned. Neither are the miraculous gifts of healings. All of these things could certainly bless the body of Christ whenever they came together to worship the Lord corporately.

And so, he's not restricting what gifts are used, only that whatever gift is used, "all of these must be done for the strengthening, (or edification), of the church." This would suggest that there was

little if any strengthening going on in Corinth. And this, by the way, gives us some practical direction as to what each of us is to be doing when we do come together.

The idea of building up, or edification, is actually in the context of building a structure. The Greek word used here in our text could be translated "house building, [or] the construction of a house."

And so, if we see ourselves in the role of spiritual contractors or construction workers, we begin to get a flavor of what Paul is trying to convey. In other words, each of us in Christ actually play a role in spiritually building this church and the people in it.

When writing to the Romans Paul uses a similar phrase when encouraging them as he does these Corinthians to have all things done for edification.

ROM 14:19 "Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification."

The word edification here in Romans is the exact same word used in our text which is housebuilding. The same is true when Paul wrote to the Ephesians when explaining how the gifts of the Spirit are given "to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ *may be built up*..." (EPH 4:12)

The phrase "built up" is, once again, the exact same word for housebuilding. And so, the question needs to be raised, are each of us housebuilding or are we only bystanders watching everyone else pounding the nails and erecting the structure? Or, are we in the demolition business?

It seems that in the case at Corinth housebuilding was a foreign concept to some of these people at this time. Instead of building the Lord's house, they were building individual efficiencies for themselves as they decided to live in their own little corner of the spiritual world called the church.

In fact, Peter addresses this whole concept of us being part of a spiritual house where we are called by God to accomplish His will to His glory as we participate in the building of this house with the gifts we've been given by God.

**1 Peter 2:4-5** <sup>4</sup> And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, <sup>5</sup> you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual

house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Being a holy priesthood suggests that we are faithfully representing the Lord to the world and that the world can be introduced to this Savior through us as we minister to them and each other with the truth of who Jesus Christ is and what He accomplished for His people.

But our ability to minister depends on our ability to follow instruction as we follow the Lord. Can you imagine trying to build a house without following instructions? I mean, do we start the construction process by first installing the wiring and plumbing, or do we start with a foundation?

It's similar in a spiritual house. We build up each person where they are, but we always start by pointing them to our foundation who is Christ, and His love for us. When we use the gifts the Spirit gives us we use them to point others to Christ. In the case at Corinth they were using their gifts to point people to themselves.

Instead of building each other up, they were tearing each other down. And so, now Paul is going to take the gifts that seemed to take precedence and he's going to once again demonstrate on a very practical level how they are to use these or any gifts to build the spiritual house according to God's plan.

1CO 14:27-28 "If anyone speaks in a tongue, two - or at the most three -should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. 28 If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and God."

Regarding the gift of tongues this is not something you hear taught in a lot of churches today which believe in the gift of tongues. Unfortunately, this section seems to be hidden deep in the archives of undesirable doctrines. Why is this?

Well, if we go and restrict the gift of tongues in this way, it doesn't allow the spontaneous and uncontrolled emotionalism that runs rampant in a lot of churches today which is then misconstrued for being Spirit controlled.

To suggest that only two, or at the most three, should speak in a tongue on any one occasion, drastically reduces the potential for the Spirit of God "blowing" across a congregation, as some of these churches perceive it.

Now, there are people today who would suggest that Paul is probably addressing a church which met in homes where possibly up to thirty people were able to meet. And so, they do the math and conclude that if up to three people can speak in tongues, in a room of thirty, Paul is laying down the principle of 10% participating in speaking in tongues. And so, if you've got a congregation of 100 or 1,000 you can conceivably have up to 10 or 100 people speaking in tongues.

Of course this defeats the whole purpose of being orderly, as it would take about two hours in a congregation of 1,000 if one hundred people spoke in a tongue with the interpretation, each limited to about 30 or 40 seconds. This doesn't even include the time used for teaching of the word, or of singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to the Lord with the rest of the congregation.

Of course, the way you get around this is to have all 100 speaking in tongues at the same time. And this is what we see today in many congregations. No. Paul is making it very clear. Two, or at the most three, are to use their gift of tongues, and they are to do this one at a time. And then, only if there is someone with the gift of interpretation.

This again, suggests that within the church it would be known that someone had the gift of interpretation. This could certainly be done on a trial and error basis where someone spoke in a tongue and then everyone waits to see if God gives someone the interpretation. If no one has the interpretation then the gift of tongues, at least during that particular time, is not meant to be used again.

But it would seem to make sense that if the Holy Spirit is going to give someone the gift of tongues that He would also provide the gift of interpretation along with it. But, if for whatever reason that gift is not being utilized by someone who has the gift of interpretation, or if for some reason the Spirit doesn't give the interpretation the instruction is clear.

1CO 14:28 "If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and God."

The one with the gift of tongues cannot speak out loud in the church if there is not an interpreter, but can certainly speak to himself and God. This would probably include the silent or near

silent speaking in tongues in a worship service, as long as it didn't interfere with the worship of your neighbor.

Remember, this whole section is about building each other up, not simply edifying ourselves while not considering our neighbor.

Now Paul moves to the gift of prophecy. And even here, with a gift which is more edifying when compared to the gift of tongues, Paul lays down the rules for its proper use in the body of Christ.

1CO 14:29 "Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said."

These are very detailed instructions. Just as with the gift of tongues, the gift of prophecy, as it's used within the local body, is not to exceed three people utilizing this gift in any one setting.

And notice too, that the others should weigh carefully what is said. Now, this is one of the main reasons we know that the N.T. gift of prophecy is not the equivalent of prophecy among O.T. prophets who delivered the very word of God.

You can refer back to my teachings on this when I dealt with it in some detail, but to quickly recap it.

According to Dr. Wayne Grudem, (\*pg.20) "To disbelieve or disobey an O.T. prophet's words is to disbelieve or disobey God Himself."

And so, when we look at the prophets of the O.T. whom God chooses, what we see is that when they spoke in the name of the Lord none of their utterances were to be questioned, unlike what we're instructed to do here in the New Testament where each prophecy is to be carefully weighed by each member.

It's not as though the listeners of the Old Testament prophets were given permission by God to evaluate what was said as either being good or bad and then decide for themselves whether they should obey the message.

If the message came from God, through the prophet, they had no other choice but to obey. And they must view the Lord's prophet as the authoritative spokes-person for God.

And so we read that "when Samuel was established as a prophet, "the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. (1Sa.3:19). Because Samuel was a man of God, (that is, a

prophet), Saul's servant could say in 1Sa.9:6, 'All that he say's comes true.' (Grudem, \*pg.20)

"This means that when [an O.T.] prophet spoke in the name of the Lord, even if one prophecy did not come true, or one message he claimed as coming from God was proved to be false, he was a false prophet." (Grudem, \*pg.20)

This is what we read in Deut.18:22 "If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him."

In fact, the office of O.T. prophet was so awesome as carrying the responsibility of giving God's actual message that the penalty for false prophecy was death.

DEU 18:20 "But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded him to say, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, must be put to death."

"And so, what we see is that what God spoke through the O.T. prophet had absolute divine authority, extending even to the very words the prophet used." (Grudem, \*pg.21)

This is not to say that a prophet could not sin or that the prophet himself was infallible. But, when he spoke in the name of the Lord as God gave him utterance, the actual words from God, through the prophet, are infallible and carry the full weight of divine inspiration and authority.

And so, when it comes to the O.T. every part is God's very words spoken through His messengers. "And so what the O.T. says, God says, and to disbelieve or disobey it is to disbelieve or disobey God Himself. (Grudem, \*pg.23)

Now, when we come to the N.T. "we might expect that N.T. prophets would be just like the O.T. prophets. But when we look through the N.T. itself this does not seem to be the case. There is little if any evidence for a group of prophets in the N.T. churches who could speak with God's very words (with absolute divine authority that could not be questioned) who had the authority to write books of Scripture for inclusion in the N.T." ....

..... "On the other hand, there is a very prominent group of people in the N.T. who do speak with divine authority and who did write most of the books of the N.T. .... These men are not called

prophets, however, but apostles. In many ways they are similar to the O.T. prophets." (Grudem, \*pg.25)

It's interesting to note that throughout the N.T. there are several times when apostles are connected with O.T. prophets, but the gift of prophecy in the N.T. is never connected with O.T. prophets in the same way.

That doesn't mean that reference isn't made to the apostles as giving prophetic utterance in the N.T. sense, but that doesn't equate a N.T. prophet with an O.T. prophet.

"What's interesting though is that Paul, for example, never appeals to a gift of prophecy to establish his authority--something which would have been very natural and very easy if all N.T. prophets had been commonly thought to speak words with absolute divine authority. Rather, when Paul wants to establish his authority, he always appeals to his status as an apostle." (Grudem, \*pg.42)

You could see the problem today if the N.T. gift of prophecy were the equivalent to the revelations which the apostles or prophets of old had, in that we would still have people today who could speak with full divine authority on a par with the Scriptures, thus making them Scriptures. And yet, we are told that nothing is to be added to or taken away from the word of God with the last book written, which is the Revelation, given to John by Jesus Christ.

Today's gift of prophecy is God's personal encouraging word given to the church as He gives an illumination to one of His people, which is then expressed through the words of the one gifted, which could not be considered divinely inspired or authoritative as though it could be deemed canon.

And so, if the Lord chose to tell us that He knows intimately what is happening in our lives as individuals as well as a church, and was about to do a special work in our midst, we couldn't then run out and write it down as though we could now add it to the word of God. Remember the gift of prophecy has already been defined by Paul in this very section.

1CO 14:3 "But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort."

If someone receives a special word from the Lord these elements will be present to some degree. But that is different from Peter saying, for example, that when Paul writes it is the equivalent to the O.T. Scriptures.

2PE 3:16 "He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction."

And so, when we talk about the N.T. gift of prophecy we are talking about a gift designed by God to let us hear from Him in a special way as the Lord gives these revelations to individuals in the church.

1CO 14:30-32 And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop. 31 For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged. 32 The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets.

Here Paul continues to give us some practical advice as to how this gift is to be utilized in the church. Assuming that someone is giving his or her prophecy in the church, if someone else receives something from the Lord, they must somehow motion that they have received a word from God and the one who is standing must now give way to the next one.

Again, if this is a divinely authoritative word meant for inclusion in the word of God, we would miss out on some very important words if one were to be interrupted so as to let someone else talk. But if, this were simply a variety of encouragement's from the Lord it would not be any loss to have the Lord speak to one, and then choose to speak to another while the other gives way.

But the bottom line is that these words from the Lord are to instruct and encourage. One of the ways this is determined is by those in the congregation weighing carefully what is said.

In other words, it might be someone with the gift of discernment, or others with the gift of prophecy, or anyone else in the body of Christ. Each person is given the opportunity and responsibility to weigh the words being given against the written word of God.

If there is something which contradicts with the written word then that part of the prophecy is to be rejected as something which the Lord didn't share. And unlike the O.T. prophets, those today or in Paul's day with the gift of prophecy, who were not speaking for the Lord with their own words, were not to be stoned.

1CO 14:32 "The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets."

There are those who claim that somehow when God begins to give them a word or a tongue that they then lose control and are unable to stop in the deliverance of such a word. Paul says, that isn't the case. God allows each one gifted to have control over such a gift in a way, where if they must sit down to let another prophet speak, they have full control to do so.

The same would be true for those with the gift of tongues. This is why Paul can say if no one has the interpretation than the one gifted in tongues is to cease speaking in that tongue. If this weren't the case; if no one had control of such gifts, then you'd have a lot of out of control people running around the church.

In fact, this is precisely what we see in the phenomenon known as the Holy Laughter movement where people are writhing on the floor uncontrollably, or where they are laughing or making animal noises uncontrollably and then saying it's because they are overwhelmed by the Spirit of God. I can tell you unequivocally that it is not the Spirit of God who is causing them to do such things.

1CO 14:33 "For God is not a God of disorder but of peace."

Our God has always been a God of order. Look at creation. There is nothing more orderly than the very universe our Lord called into existence in the span of 6 days and then set each planet and star in the exact place it needs to be.

You and I have been given the privilege to be a person who brings order to the body of Christ; one who brings peace to the body of Christ. There's enough chaos in this world, we don't need to be creating more in Christ's church either through selfishness, or through the misuse of the gifts, as was the case in Corinth.

Peace and unity in the body of Christ. This is what brings glory to God who is the God of unity and peace.

COL 3:12-15 "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. 15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful."