

1 Corinthians 14

November 4, 2018

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1 Corinthians 14:13-19

This morning we are going to continue our “long walk on thin ice” by working through the second half of 1 Corinthians 14. If you missed either of the last two Sunday’s, I would encourage you to pick up a copy of the sermons or listen to them online. I think they will give you a better understanding of how we approach the baptism in the Holy Spirit as well as the use of spiritual gifts in public worship. This week, Paul will provide more detail about the gift of speaking in tongues as well as how that gift can and should be used in public worship. So let me read 1 Corinthians 14:13-19 for us and we’ll get going.

¹³Therefore, one who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret. ¹⁴For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful. ¹⁵What am I to do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also; I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also. ¹⁶Otherwise, if you give thanks with your spirit, how can anyone in the position of an outsider say “Amen” to your thanksgiving when he does not know what you are saying? ¹⁷For you may be giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not being built up. ¹⁸I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. ¹⁹Nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue.

Verse 13 begins with therefore, so, of course, we ask what the therefore is there for. Verse 13 begins a summing up of what Paul has said so far. Because tongues only builds up the church if it is interpreted, the one speaking in tongues in the church should pray that they would be able to interpret so that the church might be built up. It’s worth noting that while a person who speaks in tongues should pray for the interpretation, other

passages make it clear that the gift of interpreting tongues is sometimes given to others in the body of Christ. So, for instance, in 1 Corinthians 12:10, Paul lists “the interpretation of tongues” as a gift that is distinct from the gift of speaking in tongues and is given to someone other than the speaker. However, if no one in the congregation has the interpretation, the one who spoke should pray for the interpretation.

Verse 14 explains in a new way what Paul has already said in the verses 1-12. When someone is speaking in tongues, their spirit prays but their mind is unfruitful. Speaking in tongues, Paul says, is a spiritual exercise, not a mental one, which is not a bad thing, unless it takes place in the church, in which case it should be interpreted so that the mind can be fruitful as well as the spirit. So, Paul’s answer to the dilemma he has set out is, “I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also.” Rather than neglecting to pray with his spirit, he will pray for the interpretation so that both his spirit and his mind will be fruitful and the church will be built up, encouraged, and consoled (v. 3). So also Paul describes singing, which is a more typical form of worship. Paul argues that both the mind and the spirit can and should be used in worship.

Verses 16-17 then return to Paul’s overriding purpose in all of these things: the edification of the body of Christ. So verse 16 gives the example of giving thanks to God, which is an important element of the worship we offer to him. If we offer thanksgiving with our spirit, that is without ever putting that thanksgiving into human words that can be understood by others, there is no way for anyone else in the church to agree with us, or to worship with us. Amen, of course, is just the Greek transliteration of the Hebrew word amen, which signals that what was just said is trustworthy and that the person who says amen is in full agreement. Intelligible words allow others to participate in the worship being offered to God. So also, the interpretation of tongues allows others to understand what is being said and be built up, encouraged, and consoled. And that is Paul’s point in verse 17. Giving thanks is a necessary and joyous part of worship, but no one else in the church gets to participate unless the thanks is given using

intelligible words.

Verses 18-19 then provide a summary of sorts. Paul thanks God that he speaks in tongues more than all of the Corinthians. It seems likely here that Paul is talking about a qualitative more rather than a quantitative more. In other words, he’s not saying, I’m glad that I speak in tongues 30 minutes a day and you only speak 15 minutes a day. Rather, he’s saying that he’s glad he understands the various uses of speaking in tongues more than the Corinthians—that he understands the importance of interpreting tongues so that the body of Christ might be built up. That means the gift can be used as a gift rather than something that leads to disorder. So, Paul concludes, in the church he would rather speak five words with his mind than ten thousand in a tongue.

Conclusions

So let’s draw a couple of conclusions before we move on. One, the importance of tongues being interpreted in the church is that corporate worship is, in many ways, the amen of God’s people who worship him together. Through faith in Christ, God has created for himself a people who gather to worship him together. Titus says that together we wait for the blessed hope, “the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own (Titus 2:13-14).” If it seems like we’ve talked a lot about the church the last couple of weeks, it’s because we have. Spiritual gifts are for the church; if they’re not, they’re being misused.

Two, Paul does not disparage either the mind or the spirit. Let me say this: Scripture in general, and the NT in particular, do not precisely define the difference between mind, spirit, soul, body, etc. There are physical realities and non-physical realities and Scripture does not take great pains to distinguish between all of them in every passage. Here’s what often happens: you have your “mind Christians” and your “spirit Christians.” Your mind Christians find your spirit Christians to be whacky. Your spirit Christians find your mind Christians cold and cerebral. And so we fight and

carry on and gather around ourselves people who agree with us and we look down on others who disagree.

I sometimes day dream about the Apostle Paul walking into a spirit church and taking his vast training and laying down some serious doctrine and shutting down some serious wackiness. And then I daydream about him walking into a mind church and waiting for prophecies and extolling the virtues of speaking in tongues and watching the terror on people’s faces. If we’re supposed to love the Lord with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength, then all of those things can and should be used in worship. It’s not one or the other. Let’s look at verses 14-26 together.

1 Corinthians 14:26-28

²⁶What 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. ²⁷If anyone speaks in a tongue, two—or at the most three—should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. ²⁸If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and God.

In verse 26, Paul begins to talk about how the gifts of the Spirit should be used in the church. “All of these,” he says, “must be done for the strengthening of the church.” He then explains how that happens. If anyone speaks in a tongue, two or three at most should speak, one at a time, followed by and interpretation. If there is no interpreter, then those speaking in tongues should remain quiet. That actually makes it quite simple.

1 Corinthians 14:29-33

²⁹Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. ³⁰And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop. ³¹For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged. ³²The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets. ³³For God is not a God of disorder but of peace.

Now Paul addresses prophecy. He directs the

church to allow two or three prophets to speak while the others weigh carefully what is said. That brings up one important principle of the use of prophecy in the church: messages should be weighed and discerned. Speaking a word of prophecy is not a blank check, but is something that functions within the authority of the church like any other ministry of and within the church.

Paul goes on to say that if someone is speaking but another has a revelation, the first person should stop and the person with the revelation should be allowed to speak. Once that person has spoken, then the next can speak, and so on until everyone has spoken and the church has been instructed and encouraged. Notice how orderly that is and how the end result of that order is the instruction and encouragement of God's people.

Verses 32-33 provide an even broader description of why the gift of prophecy can be exercised in such an orderly manner: the spirit of the prophets is subject to the control of the prophet. In other words, even though we're talking about spiritual gifts, we're not talking about something that is disorderly or chaotic or uncontrollable. There are certainly times when someone like Saul falls and lays before the Lord all day long. But in general, the spirit of the prophet is under the control of the prophet. To claim otherwise is to go against the clear teaching of Scripture. Truly, God is not a God of disorder, or we might even say confusion. Rather, as creation itself testifies, God is a God of peace.

Conclusions

So let's draw a couple of conclusions before we wrap this whole thing up. One, you should never participate in the use of spiritual gifts in the church if you are not willing to submit to those in spiritual authority. And just so we're clear: all of us submit to spiritual authority. The congregation selects Deacons, Elders, and the Senior Pastor. The Deacons and Elders have authority in various areas that I submit to. The Deacons and Elders also submit to the authority of the congregation and the Senior Pastor in other regards. You cannot have order in the church without authority, which God has granted. The same holds true for the use of

spiritual gifts in the church.

Two, while given by God and sometimes accompanied by heightened emotional states, to exercise spiritual gifts in a biblical way, we must all affirm that the spirit of a prophet is under the control of a prophet. Some of the excesses I've talked about in my sermons have been the result of people who, when challenged on one thing or the other, simply offer the excuse that they could not do or say otherwise. That's simply not an acceptable position to take.

Three, while God's interaction with his people can be sovereignly unexpected, it is not something that leads to confusion and distraction and division. God is a God of order and peace. We see that in creation itself with the movement of the planets around the sun and the moons around the planets. We also see it in the tiniest elements of creation, the mind-boggling amount of information contained in DNA strands or the patterned interactions of atoms taking place all around us all of the time. The same is true of God in his church. He surprises us, but he does not lead us into disorder.

Series Conclusion

So let me simply draw some conclusions from the last three sermons about the Baptism in the Holy Spirit as well as the use of spiritual gifts in the church. One, none of these passages answer all of the questions we have for them. There is no instruction about who should exercise these gifts or how often. There is no instruction about whether someone can be used one time and not again or whether there is some pattern to it. But what we do find is how the gift are to be used—in an orderly manner—and what the result of it should be—the building up, encouragement, instruction, and consolation of the church.

Two, my point in preaching these sermons was not simply to add to your understanding, but to invite you to be open to the Baptism in the Holy Spirit and being used in the exercise of spiritual gifts. I want to invite you to seek the Lord for everything that he has for you, and for everything that he may want to do through you for the sake of his bride, the church. Are you open to the empower-

ing work of the Holy Spirit? Are you open to being used by God to bless his church? This was anything but academic for the Apostle Paul, who was an incredible academic. If our understanding is way out in front of our experience, we need to step back and ask God to bring those two into greater parity.

Three, I want to encourage you to pray for our church. I want to ask you to pray that God would give us everything he wants us to have, but that we would receive it in an orderly way. Would you pray that God would help our hearts to be opened, but our brains engaged? We didn't have a chance to talk about every verse, but the gifts of the Spirit can be used to testify to God's power in the lives of both believers and unbelievers alike. We want to be such a place.

Four, and finally, I want to state once again that neither the Baptism in the Holy Spirit nor the exercise of spiritual gifts in any way makes one more saved or more holy. While important, our beliefs about these things is not the basis of our fellowship with other believers, which means breaking fellowship with those who disagree on these points is wrong. We should know what we believe and why and be able and willing to clearly share that, but this is not the test of orthodoxy.

1st Corinthians

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