



1 Corinthians 14:1-25 Building Up the Church!

August 10, 2014

Text: 1 Corinthians 14:1-25

- Good Morning. This section of Scripture is subject to lots of scrutiny, squabbling, and fighting within the church world. It is not my intent to add to that this morning.
- My goal is to make a few observations about these beautiful passages in “the way of love” according to what it meant to its original hearers.
- By way of reminder, our position as a church on spiritual gifts (sermon on June 29, 2014) is as follows: *“Charismatic gifts continue, regulated by Scripture; the Holy Spirit chooses what gifts are given to whom, as He wills. (1 Cor 12:11)”*
- We believe there is nothing in Scripture that prevents the Holy Spirit from giving what gifts He wants to whom He wants when He wants, to be used according to the pattern He’s laid out in the New Testament. He remains **Sovereign**.
- We concede that certain gifts do not seem normative today; however we are prevented from making dogmatic statements affirming total cessationism by Scripture itself. May Christ help us understand.
- We abhor deception and manipulation with respect to gifts, and when churches descend into chaos. At the same time we are mindful of the commands, **“Do not quench the Spirit. (20) Do not despise prophecies, (21) but test everything; hold fast what is good.” (1Th 5:19-21 ESV)** and **“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.” (1Jn 4:1 ESV)**
- We believe that when everything is tested by the Word of God by a strong eldership and a discerning congregation, there IS a way God’s precious gifts can be used “for building up.” (1 Cor 14:26)
- We certainly don’t expect every member to agree 100% with every position, but we sincerely pray that all can see a sincere, rigorous, and love-based attempt to be faithful to Scripture and that we’d all extend grace to one another as we continue to learn about our great God and Savior, and how to properly worship Him in His Church.

Building Up the Church!

1Co 14:1-26 ESV Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy.

- As we’ve seen in quite a bit of detail, the context that all gifts were to be used, and indeed everything to be done in church, is **love**.
- In that vein, Paul begins to admonish the Corinthian saints, who loved gifts and had a lot of “gifty” stuff going on, to especially desire to prophesy.
- I find it interesting that the apostle, by the Spirit, approves of and exhorts an earnest desire for spiritual gifts.
- Although we define prophecy as, “the distinctive ability to boldly declare the truth of god, regardless of the consequences, calling people to righteous living (forth-telling),” we also recognize that contextually, “fore-telling” was likely in view, particularly as it relates to preparing the church for what was ahead (Acts 11:27-30).

(2) For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit. (3) On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation. (4) The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but the one who prophesies builds up the church.

- Paul explains why he prefers prophesying over tongues in the church: prophecy **builds** up!
- One who prophesies speaks to people for their up building! KJV says for their “edification, and exhortation, and comfort.” Amen!
- I’m so encouraged by this. Whether one declares “thus says the Lord” from the Scriptures or someone uniquely gifted by the Spirit helps direct and prepare the church for what lies ahead, these things encourage, build, and console! Praise His Name!

(5) Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up. (6) Now, brothers, if I come to you speaking in tongues, how will I benefit you unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching? (7) If even lifeless instruments, such as the flute or the harp, do not give distinct notes, how will anyone know what is played? (8) And if the bugle gives an indistinct sound, who will get ready for battle? (9) So with yourselves, if with your tongue you utter speech that is not intelligible, how will anyone know what is said? For you will be speaking into the air. (10) There are doubtless many different languages in the world, and none is without meaning, (11) but if I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be a foreigner to the speaker and the speaker a foreigner to me.

- Again, Paul’s desire was for the church to be built up! One who builds up others is greater than one who builds up himself in a corporate gathering.
- Paul obviously was a “tongues fan.” ☺ However, in the meeting of the New Testament church, public tongues was forbidden without interpretation, itself a gift (vv27-28). Why? Because there was no public or corporate **benefit**! (v6)
- Paul’s personal tongues would not have benefited the church. He cites *revelation, knowledge, prophecy, and teaching* and those types of things that build up!
- Paul uses properly played instruments and the need to be able to understand language as examples of the need to have public tongues interpreted. I love the “bugle” example: how will we know to prepare for battle if the sound is indistinct! Again, hence his desire for more prophecy and no uninterpreted tongues.

(12) So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church. (13) Therefore, one who speaks in a tongue should pray for the power to interpret. (14) For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful. (15) What 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. (16) Otherwise, 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? (17) For you may be giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not being built up.

- Again we see the “more excellent way” in Paul’s tone, tenor, and teaching.
- Even when there is a good and proper eagerness for manifestations of the Spirit within the church, the goal should be to “excel in building up the church!” This indeed is the overarching point of these verses. Don’t miss this! When something is consistently done that doesn’t “build up” according to Scripture, it needs to be examined and tested carefully.
- Paul declares that tongues without interpretation is inherently **spiritual**, but causes an unfruitful mind (understanding). He mentions that he prayed (and sang) both with his spirit and with his mind.
- But again, in public (when all can hear) he encouraged understandable prayers and singing that others might be built up by such thanksgiving and praise!

(18) *I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. (19) Nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue.*

- These verses give the church great guidance. Ten thousand words in tongues in the church would not be the way of love unless they properly instruct others.
- When we gather together, remember the two-fold purpose of gifts: to honor our Lord and to build up others.
- This is again why there was a “love interruption” in Chapter 13. We must not use something given by the Spirit for **selfish** reasons when the church gathers!

(20) *Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature.*

- This is...well...kinda’ funny! Corinthians, don’t be selfish children! Stop speaking in tongues without interpretation in your gatherings! Grow up! LOL
- This verse, I believe, can speak to a broader application--literally all of the Christian life. In all evil we should be “infants;” in all of our thinking we should be “mature.”
- *1Co 14:20 KJV Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men.*

(21) *In the Law it is written, "By people of strange tongues and by the lips of foreigners will I speak to this people, and even then they will not listen to me, says the Lord." (22) Thus tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers, while prophecy is a sign not for unbelievers but for believers. (23) If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your minds?*

- Verse 21 alludes to Isaiah 28:11: “For by people of strange lips and with a foreign tongue the LORD will speak to this people...” This verse is part of God’s judgment upon Ephraim and Jerusalem. Essentially, since they refused to listen to God’s prophet, God would speak through the language of the Assyrian army who would invade them. Many still would not listen. Yikes.
- Verse 22 always confused me, especially in light of verse 21. But here is a possibility. Tongues are indeed a sign for unbelievers...just not a **positive** sign. It’s normal for us to think all signs are positive when not all signs in Scripture are. Recall many of the negative, judgments signs the Lord prophesied would come upon Jerusalem for rejecting Him (Matt 23-24; Luke 21), as well as lots of these types of signs in Revelation.
- In context then, tongues would be a **negative** sign for unbelievers (of their judgment) as the unintelligible language of the Assyrian army was a negative sign to unbelieving Jerusalem.
- An unbeliever, not understanding what is said and thinking everybody is crazy, leaves the church and essentially rejects the Word of Lord, remaining unconverted.
- Prophecy would be a positive sign for believers even as it convicts unbelievers....

(24) *But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, (25) the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you.*

- Prophecy (regardless of type) is **clear** and understandable. When God speaks, the unbeliever is convicted and called to account by the prophetic church. The Word of God cuts him to the heart and he falls on his face in repentance and worship!
- Arguing about what type of prophecy aside, how desperately the prophetic voice is needed within the church once again! How badly our nation and the world needs the Word of the Lord to be spoken in clarity and love! How desperately we all need the word of Christ to reveal “the secrets of our hearts!”

Indeed the Scripture is true:

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. (13) And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account. (14) Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. (15) For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. (16) Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Heb 4:12-16 ESV)

Amen.