

I Corinthians Lesson # 30
Spiritual Gifts –Prophecy is Superior
Pentwater Bible Church
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As we saw last week in chapter thirteen all of God's attributes are working together in perfect unison. One attribute does not out weigh another. So while this chapter focuses on one attribute, Love, it does not mean that love overrides all the others. For a human example we can look the other way when a brother or sister in Christ does not treat us well or ignores us. However, sin must be called out for what it is. This does not mean that we do not love. When we correct our children we are administering love so they will know the truth and behave in a proper God-fearing manner. In the same way when God corrects or administers His justice it does not mean that He does not love us. He does and wants what is best for us at all times. He wants us to conform to Him.

Regardless of what we are trying to accomplish within The Body of Believers without love it will fall flat. The exercise of our Spiritual Gifts in the Church must be done with love for each other. We just studied the reverse of this in the chapter twelve. Some were exalting their gifts over others. Some were appealing to have gifts that God had given to others. Spiritual Gifts are very important to the Body for its effective operation. Without love though they lose their value and can't be administered as God has intended.

Last week's Scripture started with the abuse the Corinthians were exercising regarding speaking in tongues. In verse 12:28 tongues is listed last showing its relative importance to building up the Body of Christ. The Corinthians considered tongues to be the language of angels. Remember the pagans used this practice too. They were called ecstatic utterances. When the pagans did this they called it speaking with the voice of the gods. Paul immediately struck at this practice and refuted the way they were going about it. They were doing it without any love for their fellow believers. When Christianity is mixed with unbelievers practices or even ecumenical efforts to combine truth with false beliefs we call this syncretism. In I Cor 12:2 Paul reminds the Corinthians that they were led astray to the dumb idols. In the KJV here the translators used the word charity for love because they reasoned when one loves properly one is led to give (John 3:16).

The gift of prophecy enabled first century Christians to foretell the future as to what God's plans were. It is used today to primarily bring a clear presentation of God's Word under the direction of the Holy Spirit. Some people are given this gift along with the ability know everything about God's Word and as such can easily communicate it to others. Without love though this gift falls flat and is, as Paul states so clearly *nothing*. Some who have faith in the extra measure described in these three chapters have to exercise it in love or their faith is worth nothing. Nobody will care if there is no love shown along with the faith.

Some think that giving to the poor in an act of charity is sufficient to gain God's favor. They reason that because they have done a good deed they deserve God's grace and should therefore be admitted to heaven. This is not true and it is also not true for the believer who gives to the poor for reasons other than in the spirit of love for the furtherance of God's Kingdom. True love produces a willingness to sacrifice and to

suffer. If pride is added to this as the motivating factor instead of love it is of no use to the Church.

Jesus said to His followers that if they will Love God they would fulfill the Law. Instead of striving to keep the commandments just love God with all of our hearts, then our behavior will follow. Much in the same way Paul opens chapter twelve with the same concept and showed us what it looks like. Love is patient and is not easily angered. Just as God is long suffering we should not be quick to anger. Such love bears annoyances or inconveniences without resorting to anger. Kindness takes the initiative to respond to the needs of others with generosity. Love does not become envious of others for what they have especially in how God has gifted them spiritually. This was a major problem with the Corinthians they wanted the gifts that others had. Boasting or a prideful attitude is wholly outside of a loving attitude. One should never boast about our Spiritual Gifts. We did nothing to obtain them.

Rudeness and or discourteous crude speaking are not in keeping with the love God wants us to convey to others. Love does not demand that we always get our own way. Much in the same as love is patient our exercise of Spiritual Gifts must not allow easily being angered. It does not say *without anger*. It says *easily* angered. Righteous anger or indignation is within orthodox Christian communication. A loving attitude does not immediately assume that our brothers and sisters in Christ are intentionally plotting wrong or intentionally disappointing us. We need evidence of that before we think wrongly of others. Love will not easily remember past wrongs done to us.

No believer should ever take joy in another's fall. Love does not take pleasure in that kind of injustice. Even if it was deserved, we should not be joyful over another's problems. We should remain untainted by evil. Desire the truth and the author of truth Jesus. Protect the truth and proclaim the truth with each opportunity.

Paul then gave us four positive attributes of love. We must bear up to the embarrassment or gossip we hear about others and not pass it on. It does not mean that we are willing protect someone guilty of harmful sins. Believing all things does not mean we are gullible. It means we should think well of others unless convinced otherwise. Being hopeful of all things means that we want situations to turn out for the best even though it does not seem like they will. We should stay positive about issues in our lives that affect the body of believers. Perseverance is a loving attitude in the face of adversity. It does not mean we never give up. It means we put up with a lot before we give up.

Even though everything on this earth will fail, corrode, rot or be destroyed including our Spiritual Gifts love will last forever. This is because God is Love (I John 4:8, 16). No matter how much some of us know compared to God, we only know a little. Our knowledge will cease when we leave these bodies. When God's Messianic Kingdom is set up here on the earth all the Spiritual Gifts will disappear. This is because they are given for the building of the Church, which will be eliminated with the establishment of God's Kingdom here on earth.

Paul uses the illustration of becoming a man and leaving childish endeavors behind to compare the elimination of Spiritual Gifts once the Kingdom is set up. Only love will outlast the Gifts. This is also an implied reference to the elimination of some Spiritual Gifts after the apostolic age was complete and the Church was established.

Our Spiritual Gifts and Christian experience here are a fuzzy glimpse of heaven. When we see God face to face we will have a much richer experience that is presently unseen and impossible to describe.

For now faith and hope as well as love are Christian experiential spiritual realities. We have faith and hope in God's Word and we love God and others. When we leave these bodies our faith and hope will have been used to get us to heaven. It is only our love that will endure into heaven and later the Messianic Kingdom

The gift of tongues is present in the inspired Scriptures. In the New Testament two lists of gifts appear in which the gift of tongues is included. In I Corinthians 12:8-11 "kinds of tongues" and "the interpretation of tongues" are said to be sovereignly bestowed gifts of the Holy Spirit. In I Corinthians 12:28-30 "tongues" appears in the list of gifts. We call them "spiritual gifts" from the Greek word *charisma*, suggesting that the gift is a bestowment of the Spirit's grace. It is not a natural talent that one might develop, but rather a special gift that God has endowed the Christian with. It is a supernatural power if you will.

In Acts 2:4 Luke uses a different adjective when he says, "they began to speak with other tongues." The word "other" (Gr. *heteros*) simply means that they spoke in languages different from the normal language they were used to. The context substantiates this. Notice the surprised reaction on the part of the hearers—"And they were all amazed and marveled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?" (Acts 2:7,8). Every man heard them speak in his own language (Acts 2:6). Here the word "language" is the translation of *dialekto* from which our word "dialect" comes. The two words *glossa* (tongue) and *dialektos* (language) are used synonymously, making it obvious that the disciples were speaking in known languages other than the language native to them. In verses 9-11 the languages are then identified. It was a miraculous phenomenon, which enabled the disciples to speak in languages, which they had never learned. Here in this Acts passage we have tongues speaking in its pure and unperverted form as God gave it.

The tongues spoken at Corinth and in some denominations today are unknown languages. That is they were *unknown to anyone* not just to the folks hearing them in the Corinthian assembly. Tongues were not merely a *communicating* sign but a *confirmatory* sign as well. When the Apostles used the gift of *tongues* it was because they did not have the completed Word of God, God's full and final revelation to man. When they went about preaching the Gospel, their message was confirmed by the exercise of the sign gifts. Tongues speaking vindicated both the message and the messenger. "Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds" (II Corinthians 12:12). Now that the Canon is complete miracles are not needed to confirm God's message. The other spiritual gifts are still needed to build up the Church until the Rapture occurs.

I Corinthians 14: 1 Follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy.

Pursue love and desire spiritual gifts. He means that spiritual gifts have great value but they must be kept in perspective. It is only proper to seek after the gifts that will fulfill the mandate to love. Since prophecy provides the greatest benefit to the greatest number of people it is fitting that that is the gift to seek above all others. By seeking gifts the apostle is not saying we can obtain gifts that the Spirit has not already gifted us with. He means that we should respond to and encourage those with the gift of prophecy so as to provide the greatest amount of benefit to the most people.

1 Corinthians 14: 2 For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries.

If a person is speaking in unknown tongues nobody will be able to understand them. Because the gift of tongues is a true spiritual gift, the speaker is speaking by the power of the Holy Spirit but the words are mysterious. The speaker is communicating with God. It is also important to remember that they had been infected by pagan practices, which they were turning back to, and the pagans used ecstatic utterances. So there was indeed a blend of what God was trying to do and the Corinthians backsliding to their pagan background. The utterances therefore were mysteries, truths requiring a supernatural disclosure (interpreter), which God had not provided the Corinthians in this particular instance. As a result, the expression of tongues became an exercise in futility for the assembly as a whole, with only the speaker deriving some benefit. God will not bless syncretism or ecumenism, which is a blending of God's truth with competing philosophies such as other religions, Aristotelian logic or even psychological analysis. The Corinthians wanted to continue to overemphasize this gift to the point that God was no longer blessing it.

1 Corinthians 14: 3-4 But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort. He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church.

Paul made it very clear that speaking in tongues does not edify anyone but the individual speaker who spoke without the benefit of the gift of interpretation and could edify only himself but not others in the church. The edification resulted from the fact that the user of a gift experienced the confirmation that he was the individual object of God's grace and able to offer praise to God. Though he himself would not comprehend the content of that praise, his feelings and emotions would be enlivened, leading to a general exhilaration and euphoria. This was not necessarily bad. Paul certainly was no advocate of cold, dispassionate worship. The gifts were not given for personal enrichment, however, but for the benefit of others (12:7; cf. 10:24; 1 Peter 4:10). Personal edification and exhilaration were often natural by-products of the legitimate exercise of one's gift, but they were not the main reasons for its exercise. Whereas the prophet is helping others grow in the Lord as well as encouraging and comforting them with a clear exposition of God's Word.

This is the answer to question 1: Which spiritual gift is more edifying than tongues?
Prophecy

1 Corinthians 14: 5 I would that ye all spake with tongues but rather that ye prophesied: for greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying.

Paul was not depreciating the gift of tongues; he was simply interested in appreciating the gift of prophecy. There was nothing wrong with the gift of tongues; in fact Paul thought it would be good if everyone had the gift. Of course he had said the same thing about celibacy (7:7), but in neither instance did he ever expect universal compliance with his statement. Since both were gifts from God, neither should be despised. In a church gathering, however, the gift of prophecy and its exercise was greatly to be preferred to uninterpreted tongues simply because the former built up others.

As already stated, the tongues gift was given to confirm the establishment of the Church and thus temporary. We have already seen that love never fails, in the sense it will never come to an end. Positively stated, it is eternal. This is not true of the spiritual gifts. Some of the gifts were foundational (e.g., prophecies and knowledge; cf. Eph. 2:20) and confirmatory (e.g., tongues; cf. 2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:4). Every gift is linked in some way to building up the church to maturity—some (prophecy, knowledge, tongues) functioning in the early years of the Church Age and others continuing on till the church is perfected. When that perfection is achieved, the gifts will have served their purposes and will be rendered obsolete. But this will not happen to love.

Thus those instructions, specifically directed to the Corinthians' misuse of tongues, are not directives for the use of tongues today.

1 Corinthians 14: 6 Now, brethren, if I come unto you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you, except I shall speak to you either by revelation, or by knowledge, or by prophesying, or by doctrine?

The gift of tongues as a measure of spirituality among the Corinthians and this is still true of some Christian traditions. This is way Paul described that natural inferiority of a gift that does not edify the entire Church. So he gave the example of his next visit which if he came speaking in tongues it would not help them grow. However, revelation, knowledge, prophecy or teaching would be very beneficial to them.

1 Corinthians 14: 7-11 And even things without life giving sound, whether pipe or harp, except they give a distinction in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped? For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle? So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the sky. There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world, and none of them is without signification. Therefore if I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh shall be a barbarian unto me. Even so ye, forasmuch as

ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church.

The same was true in a musical tune or a call to battle. To be profitable for others the notes of a flute or harp or trumpet needed to be clear and intelligible; otherwise they amounted to no more than the venting of air with consequences which, besides being an annoying cacophony (v. 7), might be devastating and cause an army to lose a battle (v. 8).

Human communication operated on the same principles as instrumental communication. Human sounds, apart from a common understanding of their meanings, were worthless. So was the Corinthian preoccupation with uninterpreted tongues. That was why Paul did not discourage their interest in spiritual gifts but did encourage them to pursue those gifts that benefited all in the church (v. 12; cf. 12:31; 14:1).

This is the answer to question 2: Does Paul compare tongues with an uncertain sound emanating from a battle trumpet? Yes

1 Corinthians 14: 13 Wherefore let him that speaketh in an unknown tongue pray that he may interpret.

Interpreted tongues, like prophecy, could benefit the assembly (cf. Acts 19:6). Therefore the gift of interpretation should be requested of God. If no one was present who was able to interpret, the tongues-speaker should have remained silent (1 Cor. 14:28).

This is the answer to question 3: Does Paul imply that all tongues have an interpreter? No

1 Corinthians 14: 14-15 For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful. What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.

So Paul says that it was also true that however beneficial the gift of tongues might be to its recipient (cf. v. 4), when coupled with the gift of interpretation it had much more value because it involved not only the feeling aspects of a person, but his mental faculties as well. Paul wanted to communicate with the Spirit but alone and not in the assembly to cause confusion.

1 Corinthians 14: 16-17 Else when thou shalt bless with the spirit, how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say Amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest? For thou verily givest thanks well, but the other is not edified.

The one who possessed the gift of tongues would find his worship enhanced by the use of the gift of interpretation (v. 15), it was also true that anyone listening to him who did not have the same gift could not pray with the tongues-speaker. At least another person with the gift of tongues could identify with the lofty experience in the exercise of

the gift. However, a Christian with a different gift required intelligible communication if he were to gain any benefit from what was said and so have a basis for affirming his agreement by saying an Amen. But such comprehension did not exist if the tongue were not interpreted and so the brother was not edified.

I Corinthians 14: 18-19 I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all: Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue.

Paul appreciated the gift of tongues that God had given to him. Paul was concerned with ministering to others and thereby glorifying God. He also realized speaking in tongues had limited value for building up the Church compared to what teaching and prophecy could accomplish.

This is the answer to question 4: Does Paul desire understanding in the Church or tongues that can't be understood? Understanding is more desirable.

I Corinthians 14: 20 Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men.

Children prefer excitement to instruction. The Corinthians were immature. Their failure to mature spiritually resulted from their neglected study of the Scriptures. The Epistle to the Hebrews stresses this point.

Hebrews 5: 12-14 "For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness; for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil"

Peter wrote,

I Peter 2:2 "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby"

One will find confusion and license where the study of God's Word is neglected or it is not read in a literal manner. The "Spiritualization" of Scripture will cause many errors to creep into the Body. In malice though be immature or innocent and not follow through with malice.

I Corinthians 14: 21-22 In the law it is written, With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that will they not hear me, saith the Lord. Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that

believe, but to them that believe not: but prophesying serveth not for them that believe not, but for them which believe.

Paul ever the lawyer summarizes his argument here with the citation of a portion of Isaiah's prophecy against Israel (Isa. 28:11-12). Because Israel refused to listen to God's message proclaimed by His prophets, Isaiah predicted that another message would come. This one would be delivered in a foreign tongue unintelligible to the Israelites, yet unambiguous (cf. 2 Kings 17:23). The foreign tongue symbolized God's rejection (cf. Deut. 28:49; Isa. 33:19), His disciplinary response to Israel's stiff-necked rebellion against Him (cf. 2 Kings 17:14; Acts 7:51). Foreigners instead of Israel became the temporary servants of God (cf. Isa. 5:26; Hab. 1:6; Matt. 21:43; Rom. 10:19-21), and their foreign tongue was a punitive sign to Israel of what had taken place.

This is the significance, which Paul attached to tongues. As such, the primary arena for its exercise was not the company of believers but unbelievers and unbelieving Jews in particular (cf. Matt. 13:10-15, on parables). Uninterpreted tongues had their place but not in the church where prophecy benefited believers (1 Cor. 14:3). Speaking in tongues will convince no unbeliever and only confuse.

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