



1 Cor. 14:1-5
Tongues

NKJ 1 Corinthians 14:1 Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy.

2 For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries.

3 But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men.

4 He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church.

5 I wish you all spoke with tongues, but even more that you prophesied; for he who prophesies is greater than he who speaks with tongues, unless indeed he interprets, that the church may receive edification.

I remember the first time I ever walked into a Pentecostal church one evening shortly after I became a Christian. The service was actually underway, and in one area a woman was screaming, while two or three men in suits I learned were elders were laying hands on and casting out a demon. Meanwhile at various points, people would begin “tongue speaking” without interpretation and at the same time, there was stuff going on at the front at the podium. This didn’t even change when the Pastor began preaching. There was no readily discernible order to the service.

What I thought at the time was Well, this certainly is different, but finally, I’m in a real church, stuff is going on, people have great zeal. This was by contrast to the mainline liberal church I had been attending where everything was in order, but there was no gospel and to say that it was “decent” was to ignore the fact that what was being taught was an abomination.

But had I thought for a moment that evening, I might have stopped to consider, everybody is certainly zealous, there seems to be a profusion of gifts, and we are certainly all being excited by their manifestation. But are we being *edified, exhorted, or comforted*. After all, I don’t understand what the people who are speaking in tongues are saying, and because everything is happening at once, I can’t even follow what the Pastor is saying.

Now that happened admittedly at a time when I ranked excitement and signs very high, so it didn’t phase me much, but later I would begin to develop this sense that something was missing, and that maybe our priorities were a little out of whack.

Clearly as we have seen, having your priorities out of whack is nothing new in the church, as Paul has shown us the Corinthians had many things out of whack, they were clearly pursuing after the wrong things, seeking spectacular gifts aimed at self-edification, and as we shall see our personal individual

edification should not be our paramount pursuit. The sheer weight of text Paul devotes to the subject tells us that the gift they wanted most was *tongues*.

Now in discussing these tongues let me make a textual comment. Some of you may have a KJV and the word *unknown* that occurs in the KJV in verses 2 and 4 is not actually present in the Greek text, that is why most modern KJVs put it in italics, to indicate it isn't in the Greek, but was a translators exegetical decision. That isn't that helpful, because it leads modern readers to assume that these can't be actual foreign languages.

So are these foreign languages or angelic tongues (from 1 Cor. 13) – is this what today we hear spoken of as an angelic “prayer language?” Well as some commentators have noted you can just as easily substitute here the word *language* for tongue and not lose the essential meaning of the text. There are exegetical reasons that many readers would prefer to think they aren't foreign languages, because unlike in the biblical age, in the modern church NO ONE breaks out into foreign languages. You don't suddenly have someone speaking saying Mandarin or Arabic who hasn't learned it in school. Actually it always sounds like the speaker is babbling nonsense words related to their own native language.

But clearly, the important put for this section is that regardless of what your opinion on this is, **without an interpreter**, no one but God, possibly even the speaker understands what the speaker is saying. The tongues are unintelligible to others.

Paul tells them here as he has spelled out for them in chapter 13 that Christians, should not first and foremost be seeking after spiritual gifts, but should be following after that which most important - love – pursuing that *doggedly, with determination and intensity*. For it is the quality of Agape, that selfless Christian love, as we have seen that most defines a Christian and a Christian congregation.

Love is most important, when you have that greatest of all gifts, then Paul tells them you should seek after spiritual gifts. But notice he does not rank their favorite gift TONGUES #1, after love he ranks *Prophecy*

Now when you think of prophecy brothers and sisters, don't do the modern re-spinning of that word that makes it solely concerned with predictions of the future. A prophet, in the bible, is one who speaks in the name of God. And that is what prophecy is supposed to be the, the word of God. Therefore we should be thinking of prophecy as forth-telling, not necessarily fore-telling.

During the time of the building up of the canon, prophecy was inspired speech mediated directly to the speaker by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, today this prophecy is wholly contained in the word of God, but please remember that in a very real sense when scripture is rightly preached it is the declaring of the word of God.

As the Second Helvetic, that is Swiss, Confession written during the Reformation puts it:
The Preaching of the Word of God Is the Word of God. Wherefore when this Word of God is now preached in the church by preachers lawfully called, we believe the very Word of God is proclaimed, and received by the faithful; and that neither any other Word of God is to be invented nor is to be expected from heaven: and that now the Word itself which is preached is to be regarded, not the minister that preaches; for even if he be evil and a sinner, nevertheless the Word of God remains still true and good. – Second Helvetic Confession, Chapter 1

Paul therefore gives us three reasons that Prophecy is superior to tongues: 1) It is Intelligible, 2) It builds up the Church, 3) It Edifies the Assembly, the Church.

1) it is intelligible – as we have seen when someone speaks in tongues, it is a mystery to everyone

2) it builds up the church – The prophet edifies, exhorts, comforts. Prophecy, then, is a means of building up Christian character, of strengthening men, of giving them comfort in their distress. It tells us the will of God for our lives.

The proclamation of God's Word is the means by which the lost are evangelized. No one is evangelized by speaking in tongues. Paul specifically says that no one comes into the assembly of God from the outside and is converted by means of tongue speaking. That is something that only the preaching of the gospel can do:

1 Cor. 14:23 *Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those who are uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say that you are out of your mind?*

24 But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all.

Please notice that we do not read in the Acts of the Apostles that Paul or Peter or Barnabas came into a new town and began speaking in tongues. In fact, the only place where we see tongues in connection to the converting of sinners is in Acts 2, and there they are CLEARLY foreign languages that each man understood.

Acts 2:4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

5 And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven.

6 And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language.

7 Then they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, "Look, are not all these who speak Galileans?"

8 "And how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born?"

9 "Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,

10 "Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes,

11 "Cretans and Arabs -- we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God."

Elsewhere we read that those who were converted *speak in tongues and prophesy*, but that is only after they have had the gospel explained in an intelligible ordinary language.

3) Prophecy is superior edifies the church, and he would rather this happened - the most important gifts are those that edify the saints and which evangelize sinners. Edify and Evangelize, not another e-word "entertain" as one commentator points out. I am sure many "enjoyed" this, but did it do that which was most important.

To desire to edify yourself is easy, but is not part of the outpouring of Agape. To much of our society and the modern church is oriented towards entertainment and self-gratification. But if you truly love your brothers and sisters in Christ, you will long to see them edified and built up and will do all you can to see that happen, if you truly love the lost, you will desire to see them evangelized. Therefore you will amongst other things pray that there would be an outpouring of the gospel of Christ and revival.