

Loving tongues

Think about times when you have sat around the campfire, or have a fire going in your fireplace (wood burning, not gas). but it's one of the most enjoyable, pleasurable experiences. Especially when you around that fire with people you love. The fire itself is beautiful, it's got this almost sacred, sublime sense about it, it's peaceful, just sort of destroys your anxieties, helps you to slow down, it's warm, and there's a pleasure there with the heat that it gives off. You can cook with it. If you've ever been on a mens' camping trip.

Now imagine the recent images you've seen of wildfires. Fire and smoke overtaking mountainsides, and towns, fires spreading at 10-15 mph. You've probably seen images of cars driving through fire, or fireman dashing around, helicopters and planes dropping dirt, trying to contain the fire. These are images and experiences of horror. It's destruction. There's nothing peaceful or pleasant about a fire that's out of control.

that's why there is firerings at campsites and you get in trouble.

Fire, not in a fire pit, is not a good situation.

For the Corinthian church their use of spiritual gifts was out of control. It wasn't in the fireplace. And the fireplace that Paul's been arguing for is love. Their spiritual gifts were not operating love, and therefore were destructive rather than life giving.

This morning as we come to chapter 14 which deals with a couple spiritual gifts in particular, tongues and prophecy, which might have some of us running for the exits (don't leave, we aren't going crazy). But it's important to know that chapter 14 comes as the end of Paul's discussion on spiritual gifts that began in 12. In chapter 12 he opens up the discussion with the criterion for true spiritual gifts, talks about how the Spirit always glorifies the Son as Lord, and that the Spirit manifests Himself in a variety of ways within the church body, that there's unity in the Spirit but diversity in the gifts.

v.4, "there are a variety of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."

Paul goes on to list out several supernatural gifts, and is emphatic about the great diversity and how not everyone receiving the same gifts, but all using their gifts as members of the body.

You see, Corinth was in serious trouble. They were a gifted bunch, but they were using their gifts to their own destruction and to the destruction of God's witness among them. It was fire out of the firepit. This church was caught up in the elevation of one gift over another, caught up with elevating one person over another, and caught up in using their own giftedness for self-glory and not for the glory of Christ.

That lands Paul to do what he does in chapter 13, the love chapter, not a chapter on defining love, but a chapter to apply love to their context.

"If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing."

Chapter 13 flows seamlessly into chapter 14 as Paul continues his argument and instruction to them. And as we will see, if chapter 13 was a general application of love to spiritual gifts, here in 14 Paul is going to zoom in, and zoom in on one particular issue that evidently had gotten out of hand, the gift of speaking in tongues in their corporate gathering.

We see in v.1 "pursue love..." this is the tie from chapter 13 to now everything that follows.

To address speaking in tongues in their gathering, Paul is laying the grid of love up against their use of the gift. And as he does this, holds up love as the standard and filter, he has two broad applications for the gathering that flow out of his concern for love; intelligibility and order. Paul is aiming for love, and the two ways he is going to get there is through one issue of intelligibility and another issue of order. grids that he wants to lay against their use of the gift; intelligibility and order.

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Okay, and before we get going, i want to just preface and say we are not going to answer all your questions today about these supernatural gifts. You may have more questions than answers when you leave this morning. This is a very controversial chapter, solid christians interpret and apply this text is very different ways.

Paul's aim here is not to define and satisfy every question about these gifts. It's a section aimed at teaching about the gift. It's aimed at how to use the gifts, and certain in some measure that forces him to talk about the gifts. But it is by no means exhaustive.

I am going to stick mostly with Paul this morning, I want to be faithful in tracking his argument and exactly what he is doing. At the end I will speak briefly about these gifts, because I know that you have questions. However, think of this morning more as a conversation starter than manual on the gifts.

1. Make your corporate worship intelligible

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

So Paul begins the corrective by reminding them of love, that love is what matters, but it's not love at the expense of spiritual gifts. That's what I love about Paul here, and it's so different than how I and we often think. We got some problem in our lives, and the easy thing to do is just pull the rip cord and be done with it, and swing the pendulum the other way. Oh, spiritual gifts are a problem, alright, that's easy, we won't deal with those any more, not allowed in the church. Next.

No, that's not what Paul does. He says pursue love, that's absolutely what you need to do, but also earnestly desire spiritual gifts (which is interesting because the easy thing is to think the spiritual gifts are causing the problem, but they aren't, it's their hearts and usage of these gifts).

It's so easy to want to make a devil out of spiritual gifts, especially when they might confuse us or offend us. But for Paul, he doesn't do that, it's not an either or, but a both and. Love and the spiritual gifts are not at odds with each other, and should exist together. Love is the way you use your spiritual gift.

So he says, eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. Now you might say, i thought you said this was about tongues, why is he bringing up prophecy. That's a good question, I think the answer lies in the tight relationship we see between tongues and prophecy, both in their similarity and their differences.

They are very similar to each other in that they are both speaking gifts.

2 For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God

3 The one who prophesies speaks to people

That's how they are similar. They are very different from each other in that one is unintelligible and the other is intelligible.

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.

It is a hard question to answer why Paul chooses prophecy here, but i think it may be helpful to think of prophecy as the representative of the speaking gifts that are intelligible, like teaching, etc. ??

So what Paul is actually doing is laying the foundation for intelligibility in the corporate gathering. But why?

Intelligibility builds up others.

4 The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but the one who prophesies builds up the church.

This is the love argument. Edification of others is how Paul refers to love, building others up in their faith. Tongues, he says, does not do that, tongues builds up the individual. Prophecy, however, builds up the church.

The main point without a doubt is the fact that tongues does not build anyone else up, and the right replacement for tongues in corporate worship is intelligible speech, with either an interpretation (v.5), or prophetic speech.

Put it this way, Paul's arguing for speech that is characterized by love, which demands intelligibility.

Listen as he goes on...

6 Now, brothers, if I come to you speaking in tongues, how will I benefit you (there's the love piece) **unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching?** (now he gives a few analogies to drive home his point that they need to abandon unintelligible speech (tongues without an interpreter) in the corporate gathering) **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.** (that's a way of saying there's not love there, you are creating division) **12 So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church.**

Paul continues to press on the issue of intelligibility by offering some instructions as well as his own personal experience.

13 Therefore, one who speaks in a tongue (which is between himself and God and doesn't build up the church, that person) **should pray that he may 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.**

The fruitfulness of the mind is what leads to others being built up. That again, is the focal point, that's love.

And then Paul drops what would have been the bomb to the Corinthians, a shock to them, and likely a shock to us.

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.

Paul is a master pastor here, well he's an apostle with the Spirit of God, so He's well equipped. We, and the Corinthians, might be tempted to think Paul is bashing tongues, but here he lauds the gift, praises God for his own use of it, and then it's like he sucker punches the Corinthians, you want to talk tongues, you think you are so spiritual cause you speak in tongues, I speak in tongues more than all you cats. (A little holy trash talk). But, the truly spiritual, which I am, and you're not, don't speak with tongues in the corporate gathering.

The truly spiritual are about building others up in love.

In church, I'd rather speak five words of intelligible speech to that end, than ten thousand in a tongue (ten thousand there meaning unlimited).

UNBELIEVERS

Paul has just dealt with the corporate gathering with a focus on believers, and now he turns to discuss the nature of intelligibility to unbelievers.

20 Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature. 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." (this is a quote from Isaiah 28) 22 Thus tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers, while prophecy is a sign not for unbelievers but for believers.

The thrust of this passage must not be lost though in it's details it can be confusing. 22 is a hard verse for people to crack. But whatever it means, it means v.23. Paul is making the exact same argument that he made about believers in regard to intelligibility, but now to unbelievers. Signs function here, as they did in the OT, as a sign of God's attitude, either his pleasure or displeasure. In the Isaiah quote, tongues of foreigners were the Assyrians that God raised up to bring judgment, and when those tongues came, it was exactly that, a sign of God's judgement and displeasure. Paul carries this idea over to the church service, and it's a bomb to the Corinthians.

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?

They thought their tongues were a sign of their own mature spirituality and manifested sign of God's presence among them. Paul flips this on its head. Tongues don't mean anything good to believers. They actually mean the very opposite.

If lost people come in, they will see you as foreigners, consider you out of your mind, won't understand your language, and so, the things of the Spirit they will not listen to, and be destined for judgement. This of course is not God's heart for the church service, that would be failure on God's people. Instead, God desires the lost to be saved, and so he compares this to prophecy.

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.

The sign of prophecy here is used, again, to look at the effect on the unbeliever, but Paul states that it's a sign for the believer. How does this fit? if your head's not spinning, your not paying attention.

The way through it is that it is a sign to believers as the effect happens on the unbeliever. The unbeliever comes into the gathering, hears intelligible words, is convicted of sin, and falls on his face in worship and declares that God is among you. What a beautiful picture? I pray that would happen more here.

Well that effect on the unbeliever coming to Christ and declaring God among you is the sign that believers can interpret as God's favor upon them.

	tongues	prophecy
audience?	God	the church
content?	mysteries of prayer and praise*	upbuilding, encouragement, consolation
intelligible?	no*	yes
who benefits?	the speaker*	the church, the lost
love?	no*	yes

*unless interpreted

Paul's focus in the corporate gathering is love, that others would be built up and that the lost would be saved. To this end, he argues for intelligibility, either by prophecy or by tongues in cases where there is an interpreter.

Application: What is your view of your tongue? How do you use your tongue? God is equipped you and empowered you with a tongue for life and death. Use it. God is not for your silence. Satan is for your silence.

The second road to love with tongues and prophecy...

2. Make your corporate worship orderly

26 What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up. (There's the love piece again, and now for some practical instructions) **27 If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret. 28 But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God. 29 Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. 30 If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent. 31 For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged, 32 and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets. 33 For God is not a God of confusion but of peace.**

Paul lays out some very practical instructions to this church in order to bring it some order, which I love this last verse, God is not a God of confusion but of peace. The very way you structure your services, Paul is saying, and the way you act, is to flow out of God's character.

Here's what's wrong with a chaotic, confusing, and crazy service, that's a terrible reflection of who God is. Our services are to shine God. Or it could be the error on the other end, cold, stuffy, disengaged.

The Corinthian church service was a zoo. It resembled confusion and chaos. People off in their own individual worlds, speaking tongues at the same time. Kinda like the Poole house around 7pm some nights, everyone is speaking/crying.

Paul's gonna put an end to this real quick. You got tongue speakers, pick out up to three, and they are going to go one at a time, and you are going to wait for someone to interpret. No interpreter, no public tongues.

Prophecy must also be done in order. Prophets will each speak one by one and others will weigh what is being said.

There is humility here characterizing the assembly. A togetherness, a oneness, there's a mutual submission and a control. These aren't people going into trances, frenzies, and these sort of ecstatic realms. There is control. There is peace. No-one is losing control. That's what the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets means, both the tongue speaker and the prophetic speaker are fully under control of what is happening. It is the Spirit that is empowering them, but they are in control, they are not overtaken. That is a pagan idea.

Paul continues..

As in all the churches of the saints, 34 the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. 35 If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.

Talk about a controversial text. The women should keep silent in the churches? Really? What's going on here?

If you remember, back in chapter 11 Paul just told us that women can pray and prophesy, which takes speaking. So Paul completely changed his mind in a few chapters, or there's something else going on.

I think upon further examination we can make sense of this text here. We have to consider it in the flow of his argument. Why in this very direct passage about prophecy and gifts does he write this text, which almost feels out of place, like it was copy/pasted or something, and then his argument is going to jump right back to tongues and prophecy. So either it's a copy/paste and has nothing to do with the context, or it has everything to do with the context. Our challenge is not to take every sentence in the bible and let it stand on its own, but to let it stand in its context.

The text is serving a very specific function talking about order and peace in the assembled gathering while prophecies are being given. Likely, this is referring to the actual time of prophecies being weighed, that is, tested to their truthfulness, tested to their Spirit. And this weighing is what Paul does not want the women doing.

You mean the women can prophecy but they can't judge prophecies. Yeah, I think that is where Paul is going with this. Why? Because according to 1 Tim. 2 Paul does not permit a woman to teach and have authority over a man. And those reasons go back to creation. And so very likely the weighing of prophecies involved the application of authority and teaching. Prophecy was not based upon God's word, and was therefore non-authoritative, we will get to that in a min, so women were free to prophecy. But it would upset the balance, especially if women were to begin judging men in the congregation.

FEE - "If our understanding of God's character is revealed in our worship, then it must be admitted that God is not often thought of in terms of allowing spontaneity or of joy."

Paul gives a final smackdown in his argument...

36 Or was it from you that the word of God came? Or are you the only ones it has reached? 37 If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord. 38 If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized.

And then concludes

39 So, my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. 40 But all things should be done decently and in order.

Okay, where does that leave us?

What is tongues?

a prayer and praise language that should be kept in private unless there is an interpreter. Is it an actual language? Not a human language, though there have been times, such as Acts 2 where the speaker is unaware that they are speaking an actual human language.

common abuses of tongues in our day

1. necessary for salvation
2. tongues are an entryway to the greater gifts
3. correlates to greater spirituality
4. speaking in the congregation

encourages to tongue speaking

1. personal edification
2. prayer and praise language
3. paul spoke more in tongues than all the Corinthians, wishes they would speak in tongues

Fee “Those who tend to discount it as meaningful because of Paul’s strong words against it in the assembly need to pay closer attention to his own determination to pray and praise in this way—and his thanksgiving for it. On the other side, those who have rediscovered this gift as a meaningful expression in their personal lives of devotion need to be especially conscious of the greater concern of this paragraph that the gathered assembly be a time for the building up of others individually and the body as a whole.”

*pursue using your mouth as an instrument of God’s grace to others.
Use your tongue to speak life. Don’t be silent.*

What is prophecy?

Spirit-prompted spontaneous utterances for the sake of edifying, encouraging, and comforting others. it could be a number of things that edify, encourage, comfort. Direction for ministry and life, warning, encouraging words, scriptures, imparting and identifying gifting.

prophecy in the NT is NOT authoritative.

Encouragements to prophecy

1. *Be open to God using you to speak to others*
2. *pray for it*
3. *step out in it*
4. *don’t say “the Lord told me”, say “I felt the Lord say this, I sense the Lord.”*
5. *start by praying for scripture for others (safest and best)*
6. *be willing to fail, be willing to let others fail*

We must love because God first loved us. Jesus lived and died not for Himself, but for us.

Christ died not just for me as an individual, He died for the church. That gives me a different posture on Sunday services.

APPLICATION: Why do you come to church? Is it about getting fed or feeding others? I once heard of an illustration of hell, not accurate, but makes a point. Hell is a place where everyone is starving because their spoons are too long. In Heaven everyone is fed because they’ve learned to feed each other.

Your small group? Why are you in a small group? I don’t want to be too hard on you

Let us take our final cues from Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. He gave up His right to speak as a foreigner to us to come and speak our language, to live and die for us, to edify not Himself, but us.