

1 CORINTHIANS 14.1-25

Concerning Spiritual Gifts (3)

Intro: Paul began this section (chapters 12-14) by saying, “Now concerning spiritual gifts,” (12.1) indicating that the Corinthians had some questions regarding the gifts. Based on what Paul has to say in chapter 14, it would seem that the Corinthians had two basic issues: 1) confusion over which gift was greater (tongues or prophesy) and 2) how the gifts should be used in the assembly. Before proceeding to how Paul dealt with these two issues, let’s review what he had said about gifts up to this point.

- » Chapter 12 revealed their partisan attitude in the matter of gifts. Paul stressed unity, that every gift came from the same Spirit, and every member was a part of one body. They should pursue the gifts, but there is a “more excellent way” vs. 31.
- » Chapter 13 reveals the more excellent way: love. Unless the saint does so in love, his use of any gift is unprofitable for him (vss. 1-3). Furthermore, the very nature of love shapes how one views and treats others (vss. 4-7). Finally, the miraculous gifts that some Christians boasted of were only temporary in nature. However, the spiritual fruit of love would endure forever (vss. 8-13)!
- » Chapters 12-13 addressed the Corinthians’ attitude regarding spiritual gifts, but Paul makes the transition from attitude to practice in 14.1, “Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy.” The use of spiritual gifts was not at odds with love, rather the use of spiritual gifts with love would edify! (vs. 3-4).

WHAT WERE TONGUES?

1. Various “charismatic” groups use this text as justification for the practice of “tongue speaking”. Their tongue speaking is unintelligible and in direct contrast with the known languages spoken by the apostles in Acts 2.4-11.

If questioned about this a modern charismatic would probably respond with 1Cor 14.2, saying they were “speaking to God.” Robert Harkrider provides the following response:

- » “This verse teaches that to speak ‘mysteries’ is not the approved result! Merely to speak ‘mysteries’ so that only God understands is to nullify the intended purpose of tongues. God does not need edifying! And tongues are for a sign to unbelievers, not believers! V. 22.”
 - » “If others do not understand what is spoken the words are simply spoken ‘into the air,’ v. 9. They are ‘mysteries’ because they are not understood.”
2. The text identifies what “tongues” are:
 - » Vs. 10-11 states that the use of uninterpreted tongues is akin to a barbarian speaking.
 - » Vs. 21, the quotation from Isaiah 28:11-12 is clearly referencing to foreign language (Assyrian).
 - » Vs. 22, tongues are a sign to unbelievers. This accords with Acts 2.
 - » Vs. 18, if this is merely “ecstatic speech” we have no record of Paul doing this. However, this accords well with Paul proclaiming the gospel throughout the world.
 3. It would seem that an element of prophesy was involved with speaking in tongues.
 - » Tongue speakers were apparently unaware of the contents of their messages, otherwise they would not have needed to pray for interpretation (vs. 13).
 - » Referring to God-breathed messages spoken in a foreign tongue that not even the speaker understands (cf. vs. 14).

OUTLINE OF THIS SECTION:

1. Potential of spiritual gifts for building up the church (vs. 1-5)
 - » Prophecy would edify the church, whereas

- tongues would only edify the speaker.
- » One acting out of love would want to edify others, thus he would desire to prophesy rather than speak in tongues.
2. Edification depends on intelligibility of the tongues (vs. 6-12)
 3. Stipulations for tongue-speakers (vs. 13-19)
 - » “Whatever the place for profound, personal experience and corporate emotional experience, the assembled church is a place for intelligibility. Our God is a thinking, speaking God; and if we will know him, we must learn to think his thoughts after him.” (DA Carson)
 - » “It is better to be useful than brilliant.” (AT Robertson)
 4. Effects of prophecy and tongues on unbelievers (vs. 20-25)
 - » Vs. 20: “It is indeed the characteristic of the child to prefer the amusing to the useful, the brilliant to the solid. And this is what the Corinthians did by their marked taste for glossolalia (tongue speaking).” (Leon Morris)
 - » Vs. 21 quotes from Isaiah 28.11-12, the “tongues” in this passage refers to a foreign language (in this case the language of the Assyrians). Further indication that the tongues spoken of throughout these passages is that of real languages.

APPLICATION:

1. Purpose of gifts is to edify (cf. Ephesians 4:16).
2. Certain gifts edify in different circumstances.