First Corinthians

Chapter 14:26-40

Introduction

If you feel prompted to speak in tongues in a meeting of the church, should you do so?

The correct answer is *"Maybe."* Maybe you should; maybe you shouldn't. It depends on several things:

1. Is there someone who will interpret so everyone can understand and be edified?
2. Have two or three others already spoken in tongues?
3. Is there a time during the assembly when you can speak "in turn," that is, without interrupting the purpose of the gathering?

If you feel prompted to prophesy in a meeting of the church, should you do so?

The correct answer is *"Maybe."* Maybe you should; maybe you shouldn't. It depends on two things:

1. Have two or three others already exercised their gift of prophecy?
2. Are you willing to submit your prophecy to the judgment of the believers present, especially the leadership?

Behind these cautions is a fundamental biblical principle that governs your exercise of the gifts in meetings of the church: **Your Spirit anointed speech must be under control.**

Many Christians would take issue with the use of the word "control" in the same sentence with the Holy Spirit. They would call the effort to be under control a <u>quenching</u> of the activity of the Spirit among believers.

But that is **not** what the Apostle Paul would call it! Everything that Paul says throughout chapter fourteen absolutely assumes that you

maintain a proper and biblical measure of control over your exercise of the gifts of the Spirit. He says it most plainly in verse thirty-two,

1 Corinthians 14:32 And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.

The NIV Bible better translates this verse, "the spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets." When you exercise your gifts, even though you are receiving a supernatural impulse or impression, **you remain in control of yourself**. The Holy Spirit **does not** overrule your will; rather, He solicits your willing cooperation.

You *can* and *should* submit to rules of proper conduct in the public assembly; “all things” *can* and *should* be done decently and orderly.

Last week we saw that the goal of the gifts was to edify, or build up, others in the church. In verses one through twenty-five we learned that your Spirit anointed speech can only be <u>profitable</u> in edifying others if it is understood. In verses twenty-six through forty you learn that your Spirit anointed speech can only be <u>practical</u> in edifying others if it is under control.

1 Corinthians 14:26 How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.

We’ll organize our thoughts around two points this morning: #1 If You Are Under Control You’ll Be A Source Of Comfort To Others, or #2 If You’re Out Of Control You’ll Be A Source Of Confusion To Others.

#1 If You’re Under Control
You’ll Be A Source Of Comfort To Others
(v26-33)

Christians meet together in different settings. They meet together in small groups in various homes, and the various small home groups meet together in a larger setting. In Corinth there were various home groups, or house churches, which came together on Sunday's in a larger setting. In verse twenty-three Paul described the larger group meeting when he said "therefore if the <u>whole</u> <u>church</u> comes together in one place." In verse twenty-six he is probably *not* describing the

"whole church" assembling together in one place; he is probably describing the various smaller house church assemblies.

Last week I told you that we discourage - actually, we disallow - speaking in tongues when the whole church assembles together in one place on Sunday mornings. We encourage speaking in tongues with an interpretation in the smaller meetings - such as our home fellowships. It is perfectly Scriptural to do so. The Bible makes such distinctions between the types of meetings the church promotes, and the activities permitted at the different meetings.

In the meetings Paul is describing everyone has an opportunity to participate in Spirit anointed speech: In singing, in teaching, in speaking in tongues, in interpreting tongues, in prophecy. You don't have to participate, but you can participate as the Lord so gifts you to do so. If you participate it is **not** for your own *enjoyment*; it is for others *edification*.

When you participate there are rules of order regarding how you are to conduct yourself since you remain under your own control. Paul gives principles for speaking in tongues in verses twenty-seven and twenty-eight.

1 Corinthians 14:27 If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be two or at the most three, each in turn, and let one interpret.
1 Corinthians 14:28 But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God.

The gift of tongues is not uncontrollable. You can choose to use it or not to use it; you can choose to use it in private or in public; you can choose to keep it silent and private even in public.

Here, then, are the basic principles governing the exercise of the gift of tongues:

Principle #1
"Let there be two or at the most three" - Speaking in tongues should not dominate a meeting. Two or three people might be allowed to speak in tongues to the whole group, and that's all.

Principle #2
"Each in turn" - There is to be no multiple speaking or singing in tongues; only one person at a time should be exercising the gift of tongues.

Principle #3
"If there is no interpreter...keep silent" - You must be concerned with there being an interpretation of the utterance in tongues since uninterpreted tongues cannot edify others. If, for example, there is an utterance in tongues that goes uninterpreted, that's a pretty good indication that there should be no further exercise of the gift in that meeting.

Principle #4
Look at verse two of chapter fourteen:
1 Corinthians 14:2 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.

The interpretation of a tongue will always be prayer and praise *from* men *to* God. It will never be a message *from* God *to* men.

How is this practiced? You are in a meeting of believers. The leader of the meeting indicates to you whether or not it would be appropriate to have a time of prayer and praise during which the gift of tongues and the interpretation of tongues could be exercised. As the group prays and praises, *you are prompted to speak in tongues!* You might already know someone there who has the gift of interpretation. If so, you can be somewhat comfortable in speaking or singing in tongues.

What if you're not sure if someone there has the gift of interpretation? You might simply share with the leader of the group that you feel God prompting you to speak in tongues. Perhaps he knows if someone is there who can interpret. Or, he might feel that God wants to give someone the gift of interpretation as they hear your tongues being spoken. He will instruct you what to do.

That brings up an interesting point that is rarely considered. God may genuinely prompt you to speak or sing in tongues. You obey God, following the kind of procedures I've just outlined. But there is no interpretation! What happened?

It's possible God *wasn't* really prompting you at all! But it is <u>also</u> possible that there was someone there with the interpretation, *but that they lacked the faith to share it!*

Here is something else to consider:
The interpretation need not come immediately on the heels of the utterance in tongues. It can come later in the meeting. In other words, you don't have to just stop everything and wait for the interpretation. Trust God to give it to someone as you continue to pray and praise.

I would add to this the exhortation that the leader of the group explain everything that is going on.

These principles of control allow interpreted tongues to be a gift that edifies others.

Paul next turns your attention to the gift of prophecy. How is this practiced? You are in a small group meeting of believers. The leader of the meeting indicates to you whether or not it would be appropriate to have a time of prayer and praise during which the gift of prophecy could be exercised. As the group prays and praises, you receive a word of prophecy!

There are principles for the exercise of the gift of prophecy:

Principle #1
1 Corinthians 14:29 Let two or three prophets speak...

Prophecy should not be allowed to dominate the meeting. All of the gifts are for edification and there should be no over-emphasis of any one gift.

Principle #2
1 Corinthians 14:29 ...and let the others judge.

When someone speaks what they believe to be a word of prophecy, the believers in the group must judge its accuracy according to God's already revealed Word. The leader of the group has a very real responsibility to judge the accuracy of the prophecy. He should look

at it from at least these two viewpoints: *content* and *character*. Does it's content agree with the revealed content of Scripture? Does it's character agree with the revealed character of God?

I recommend you stop and discuss the prophecy right then and there. Write it down while it is fresh. Take it seriously from the beginning, and don't take it to heart until you have examined it thoroughly.

Principle #3

1 Corinthians 14:30 But if anything is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent.

At first this statement seems like a contradiction. It seems to be saying that you can interrupt someone if you suddenly receive a prophecy.

That can't be the correct understanding of these words since it would then contradict what Paul said earlier. Here is what I think it means: Paul just told you "let two or three prophets speak." He is putting a *time limit* on each prophecy! In other words, don't just ramble on; allow time for others to exercise their gift of prophecy, too. That agrees with what he says next:

1 Corinthians 14:31 For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged.

When Paul says "you can all prophesy," is he saying everyone can and should have this gift? No. In chapter twelve you learned that not everyone has the gift of prophecy. In addition, he just limited the exercise of the gift of prophecy to two or three instances per meeting. He is simply saying that those who do have the gift of prophesy should exercise it in an orderly way, allowing time for others to exercise their gifts.

What Paul says next is a key to the whole discussion of the gifts of the Holy Spirit:

1 Corinthians 14:32 And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.
1 Corinthians 14:33 For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.

When the Spirit is truly the source of your gifts there will be peace, not confusion. Peace is achieved by controlling your gifts according to the principles set forth, and especially to the overall principle that your gifts should be exercised in ways that edify others.

#2 If You're Out Of Control
You'll Be A Source Of Confusion To Others
(v34-40)

There was another problem in the meetings at Corinth. It involved the out-of-control behavior of certain women:

1 Corinthians 14:34 Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says.
1 Corinthians 14:35 And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church.

Paul is **not** telling women they cannot speak in the meetings of the church. In chapter eleven verse five he already referred to women praying and prophesying in meetings. Women <u>were</u> allowed to participate in the meetings.

The reference to "their husbands at home" immediately indicates that Paul is thinking about the behavior of certain married women. We can't know exactly what the problem was but we can determine two of the attitudes of these women:

1. Whatever they were doing lacked a proper submissiveness - because he says they are "to be submissive."
2. Whatever they were doing was shameful - because he said "it is shameful."

We can therefore conclude that certain married women were speaking to their husbands during the meetings of the church in a way that was unsubmissive and shameful.

The word translated "speak" gives you a clue as to what was happening. It carries the connotation of *chattering*. Christianity had given women a great freedom in their worship; they could participate in prayer and in prophesy. But certain of the married women were abusing their freedom by chattering to their husbands during the

meeting while others were speaking. Their chattering was interrupting the meeting - *the way chattering always does!* They should control themselves and talk to their husbands at home.

Paul begins to summarize his thoughts on controlling your conduct:

1 Corinthians 14:36 Or did the word of God come originally from you? Or was it you only that it reached?
1 Corinthians 14:37 If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord.
1 Corinthians 14:38 But if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant.

You and I are not at liberty to develop our own principles regarding the exercise of the gifts. Regardless your background and experiences with the exercise of spiritual gifts, control <u>must</u> be acknowledged and followed. If you have seen or even personally experienced something different, then you must bring your background into submission to the Bible!

Let me put it another way: Control does not equal quenching. You do not quench the Holy Spirit by remaining rational and under control.

Let me give you something to think about. Those of you who have experienced the more wild, out-of-control Pentecostalism. Can you see Jesus acting that way? Or any of the apostles?

Conclusion

Paul encourages you to experience the gifts of the Spirit in your meetings.

1 Corinthians 14:39 Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues.
1 Corinthians 14:40 Let all things be done decently and in order.

Decently focuses on how your meetings appear to onlookers - to the uninformed or to unbelievers. *In order* focuses on your ability and responsibility to exercise your gift or gifts in the ways that edify others - making sure your gift is both understood and under control.

Teaching on the gifts usually finds you in one of two places in your own experience with the gifts: You are either at a place of *discovery*, or you are at a place of *correction*.

1. The believers at Corinth were at a place of correction. Their understanding of the exercise of spiritual gifts needed correction. **Anyone** whose experience of the gifts is like theirs also needs correction! As Paul said, " If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord."
2. Others are at a place of discovery. You might need to discover certain gifts of the Spirit and how then can truly be edifying when exercised Scripturally.

As we press forward as a fellowship, seeking in our various meetings to follow the instruction of God's Word concerning the gifts, be open to both correction and discovery.