

# To Be Continued...

## The Holy Spirit & His Gifts

First Corinthians 14:1-5

The controversy over the cessation versus the continuation of certain gifts of the Holy Spirit is as intense as I've ever seen it in. Cessationists are definitely on the offensive.

One of their arguments is that continuationists are not very biblically astute. We're not very smart, they say, when it comes to the Bible.

That's why it was interesting to me to come across a recent interview in *Relevant Magazine* with John Piper. Piper is a champion of the modern Reformed movement and, while we disagree with Reformed theology in general, he's an intellect and a force to be reckoned with by cessationists.

Here is what he said about the gift of speaking in tongues, transcribed by me as I listened:

I see no reason for arguing that anything has changed in the history of redemption that between the age of the apostles and today that gift should have disappeared... I don't see any mandate that we not pursue it, but I see encouragements that we do.

We've come to chapter fourteen. It is where Paul applies chapters twelve and thirteen, telling the church how to properly exercise and manifest the gifts when they assemble.

If you want to successfully study chapter fourteen, you need to keep verse five in mind:

1Corinthians 14:5 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.

The last clause, beginning with the word "unless," is uber-important. When Paul says "speaking in tongues" in this chapter, and compares it to "prophecy," **he means speaking in tongues that go uninterpreted.**

His focus in this chapter is not your private devotions; it's the public worship of the church.

In verse six Paul will ask, "What shall I profit you?" In other words, "What kind of public speaking in the Church will profit you and build you up?"

The answer is a word he uses nine times in this chapter in various forms: "Understood," "understand," "understanding." In the assembly of the church, you must *only* and *always* speak with understanding in order to profit others and build them up.

Paul was in no way demeaning or devaluing or disparaging the gift of speaking in tongues.

When it is interpreted so that everyone can understand what was being said to God by the speaker in tongues, it is on equal par with prophecy or any other speaking gift.

At the end of verse twenty-six you read, "Let all things be done for edification." "Edify" means *to build up*. You should *only* and *always* exercise your gifts in ways that encourage the spiritual growth and progress of others in the assembly.

This is so important that Paul uses the word "edify" in one form or another six times in this chapter and it is implied in everything he says even when he is not using the word.

"The concern is edification (v3-5), the issue intelligibility. [Uninterpreted] tongues is not understandable (v2), hence it cannot edify the church (v4). Prophecy is addressed to people precisely for their edification (v3), and in that sense is the greater gift" (Gordon Fee).

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

"Pursue love" summarizes chapter thirteen. "Desire spiritual gifts" summarizes chapter twelve.

You might recall that chapter twelve closed with the exhortation, "desire the best [greater] gifts." Chapter fourteen defines what Paul meant by "best" or "greater."

Certain gifts are to be preferred in the public assembly because they can edify others. The gifts aren't better or greater in and of themselves; only in their use.

If you desire spiritual gifts in the context of love you will want to "prophesy" in the public assembly because it can be understood by all. You will not speak in tongues unless there is the possibility of an interpretation.

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.

Paul defined the gift of “tongue[s]” as an unknown language by which a believer speaks to God. It is the supernatural enabling to worship God through prayer and praise in an unknown language you have not naturally learned.

We spent a great deal of time in a previous study examining whether or not the speaking in tongues Paul was describing was a known human language. It is not.

We also pointed out some reasons why we don't believe that what happened on the Day of Pentecost was the gift of tongues. It was a miracle of languages as the disciples spoke in known human languages that the travelers gathered in the Temple could understand.

One point I failed to mention, something Geno pointed out to me, is that, on the Day of Pentecost, when the 120 disciples were praising God in languages they did not know, you get the distinct impression they were all speaking at once. The hearers could pick out their own native language from the symphony of voices.

If that is, in fact, true, then it is another evidence that what happened on the Day of Pentecost was *not* the gift of tongues because Paul will tell us later in this chapter that it is wrong to practice simultaneous speaking in tongues.

“In the spirit speak[ing] mysteries” emphasizes that the meaning of the language is not immediately understood by anyone except God. Thus, if you speak in tongues in the assembly, “no one understands” you.

By definition, speaking in tongues *by itself* cannot edify other believers since your words are a “mystery” to them.

Some people, who believe tongues have ceased or otherwise have problems with the gift, argue that you cannot be personally edified by something you cannot understand.

*God says you can!*

We all agree and take comfort with Romans eight, where we are told some of our own groanings in prayer can be interpreted by the Holy Spirit. If groanings, then why not utterances I cannot understand?

In passing we should note that by Paul's definition speaking in tongues is never God speaking to you; it is you addressing God with prayer and praise. If you are in an assembly and someone speaks in tongues and then it is interpreted by them or someone else as a message *from* God, that just isn't biblical. Period.

The things Paul said about tongues are all very positive. We are not justified in thinking he in any way thought badly of the gift - only its misuse and abuse.

1 Corinthians 14:3 But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men.

- Prophecy "speaks edification" in that it focuses my attention on a specific message from God. It is as if God is speaking directly to me at that very moment. It builds me up in the moment, for what I am enduring or about to face.
- Prophecy "speaks exhortation" in that it reminds me I am empowered to receive and, if necessary, obey the message from God.
- Prophecy "speaks comfort" in that I realize God is speaking to me to encourage me in my walk.

One thing to notice about the gift of prophecy as Paul understood it. It was more about the present than the future. It was a means by which God could take His Word and apply it in an immediate sense. It can be a *foretelling* of the future but it seems most often to be a *forth-telling* of God's Word.

This is why I think a powerful but often overlooked way to exercise prophecy is to simply be directed to a Scripture, to a Bible verse or verses.

Even if it isn't something God has already said, if it is a 'word' purported to be from God, then we simply judge what is said by His already revealed Word.

Either way, the gift of prophecy depends upon and is anchored by the written Word of God.

1 Corinthians 14:4 He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church.

There's no wiggle room here. Speaking in uninterpreted tongues builds you up and it does not build-up others. Speaking intelligible words, like prophecy, does build-up others.

The apostle Paul said that the way to build-up others is to speak in ways they can understand. I may think otherwise.

- I may think that hearing an assembly of believers speak with tongues simultaneously is a beautiful thing that can build-up others. *But I am wrong!*
- I may say that I am, in fact, built-up by such a phenomena. *But I'd be wrong!*

The inspired Word of God says that the words spoken church, in public, must be understood in order to edify.

1 Corinthians 14:5 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.

Don't miss Paul's point. Whenever you speak in a public assembly of the church you're to do so "that the church may receive edification." That's why the gift of prophecy is to be preferred over the gift of speaking in tongues (unless interpreted).

By the way: It seems clear that by "prophecy" Paul wasn't talking about the prepared sermons of the pastor. Certainly those can be prophetic. God very much speaks to us through them. But his emphasis here was on a more immediate bringing forth of a Word from God that speaks to the situation a believers or believers are in.

Paul gave a side-by-side comparison of two speaking gifts of the Spirit with regard to their ability to build-up others when exercised publicly. From the standpoint of public worship, prophecy trumps tongues because it can be understood by all.

Paul wished that they "all spoke with tongues." That tells us two things:

1. It tells us that he held the gift of tongues in high esteem. It was not an inferior gift; it just needed to be exercised properly.
2. It re-tells us that not every believer is given the gift of speaking in tongues. Earlier, in chapter twelve, Paul had clearly stated that tongues was not a gift for every believer.

We cannot deem tongues inferior or unnecessary. We cannot ignore it or say it has passed away.

Speaking in tongues is *not* a gift for every believer. It is *not* the sign that you are a Christian; it is *not* the sign that you have been baptized with the Holy Spirit. *It is not even a sign of spiritual maturity.* It is a gift that is distributed to some members of the body of Christ according to the will of the Holy Spirit.

Since it is a gift, you can't learn how to speak in tongues. No one can help you learn how to do it by giving you certain words to release your faith. It must be given to you.

If you do have the gift, are you using it? Especially in your private devotions.