

"The Church in the World:  
Studies in 1 Corinthians" No. 16

## "Tongues and Prophecy"

1 Cor.14:1-25

--CEFC 9/12/21

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I remember the first time I attended a bacculaureate service  
of one of our local public high schools.

Before I went, I wasn't sure exactly what a bacculaureate service was,  
and I'm still not exactly sure what it is even now,  
but I believe it is meant to be a religious recognition  
of that rite of passage in life known as high school graduation.

It was held in a church, and had a slight predominance of Christian themes,  
but it was intentionally pluralistic in its content--  
with contributions from Jews, Muslims, African animist religion,  
and even a reading from philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.

The student-performed music was beautiful,  
I appreciated most of what was said,  
and I am not at all criticizing those who planned it,  
but what struck me most about it  
was its explicit emphasis,  
not on God, or even on religion,  
but on spiritual experiences.

It was introduced as a celebration of spirituality.

Now, this in itself is not a bad thing.

In what can be a spiritually deadening environment in a secular public school

it is important to affirm that there is more to life

than what public schools generally feel free to talk about.

It is good to recognize that there is a deeply spiritual dimension to human experience

without which we are less than fully human.

But I was left wondering what exactly was meant by the term "spirituality."

The impression given at that bacculaureate

was that spirituality is clearly a matter of the emotions--

it is our "feelings" of spirituality that matter most.

In fact, before the singing of *Ave Maria*,

one student almost apologized for its Christian content,

and suggested that the beauty of the music itself is what matters most

in fostering our spirituality--in whatever form that may take.

Whatever works for you,

whatever evokes in you that sense of wonder or mystery

or transcendence or whatever you might want to call the "spiritual"--

even if it is just getting in touch with your own Self, with a capital "S".

That's what spirituality is about,

and I tell you, there is a bull market for spirituality in our culture today.

“Spiritual but not religious”—or SBNR for short,  
is a movement in America that is gaining steam.

One fifth of the US public and a third of adults under the age of 30  
are reportedly unaffiliated with any religion.  
Of these religiously unaffiliated Americans, 37% classify themselves as SBNR—  
spiritual but not religious,<sup>1</sup>

The movement has been linked to the late nineteenth century  
Harvard psychology and philosophy professor William James,  
whose book *Varieties of Religious Experience*  
was widely read and referred to even in my college days.  
He defined spirituality as the "feelings, acts and experiences  
of individual men in their solitude,  
so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation  
to whatever they may consider the divine."<sup>[11]</sup>

It is simply an experience of transcendence  
that evokes a feeling of awe or wonder or mystery.

Spirituality in this sense is now the "in" thing--  
it has become the buzz-word in the shopping mall bookstores<sup>2</sup>--  
with whole sections devoted to the theme,  
with everything from pop-psychology to self-help manuals

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<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spiritual\\_but\\_not\\_religious](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spiritual_but_not_religious)

<sup>2</sup>So Hays.

to New Age to Zen Buddhism to Christian mysticism--

it's all there.

It's all under the heading of "spirituality."

Spirituality today is all about experience;

it is all about techniques;

it is all about feelings and emotions.

And most importantly, spirituality today is almost entirely devoid of truth.

In fact, any claims to truth are dangerous and to avoided at all costs.

That last thing a "spiritual but not religious" person would want

is some church dogma.

And in this kind of cultural environment,

we as Christians can easily fall into some false understandings of spirituality, too.

For it certainly seems that the Christians in first-century Corinth did.

In his first letter to them, as we have seen,

the Apostle Paul deals with various problems in the congregation.

He's dealt with divisions in the church,

with sexual immorality,

with the issue of eating meat sacrificed in the pagan temples,

and, beginning with chap. 11,

various issues related to the public gatherings of the church.

He talked about the importance of recognizing the gender distinction

in the way that men and women dress in worship,

he addressed their ungodly behavior

in the way they were sharing in the Lord's Supper,  
and starting in chap. 12

he deals with the issue of the exercise of spiritual gifts in their gatherings.

It seems that the church's meetings had become unruly and almost chaotic--

the confusion coming especially from the unbridled exercise  
of the gift of tongues.

Some people were speaking in unintelligible sounds,

and were, in Paul's mind, disrupting and dominating the church's meetings,  
to the detriment of the congregation.

And Paul, who was not only an inspired theologian, but also a sensitive pastor,  
addresses this issue in a comprehensive manner.

First, in the beginning of chapter 12,

Paul wants to clearly distinguish their new understanding as Christians  
from their earlier pagan life—

**“You know that when you were pagans,**

**somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols” (12:2).**

But now you confess Jesus as your Lord—

and that by the work of the Holy Spirit.

And that same Spirit is at work among you,

uniting you to Christ and to one another.

Then in the rest of that chapter he speaks of

the complementarity of the various gifts of the Spirit in the one body of Christ.

In the church there is both unity and diversity—

and both are God-given, and both must be valued.

Then in chap. 13, Paul extols the preeminence of love  
as the norm which is to be the motivation for all spiritual manifestations.

Now in chap. 14, Paul puts these together and contends that  
when the church gathers together, their supreme concern ought to be  
the ways they build each other up.

For that reason, in the church gatherings,  
the gift of prophecy,  
by which we speak intelligible words from God  
for the edification of others,  
is to be preferred to the gift of tongues,  
by which we speak only unintelligible words to God  
for our own enrichment.

And in the second half of this chapter, which we will look at next week,  
he contends that their gatherings ought to be ordered with this priority in mind.

This morning we want to unpack that a bit,  
before we look at some areas of application for us,  
particularly as it relates to our understanding of "spirituality."

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We begin with the most pressing question that hits us immediately--

**I. What in the world does it mean to "speak in a tongue"?**

The Greek expression you sometimes hear for this is glossolalia.

For some of you, this may be entirely new--

you may not have even heard of this before,

and it may even strike you, as, well, very strange.

Others may be well acquainted, not only with the term, but also with the experience.

This is an area of some controversy among Christians,

and there are certainly varying views regarding what Paul is talking about,

and even whether it has any relevance for us today.

But let's try to focus on what Paul says in our passage--

At the outset, let's be clear--

Paul does not give us a definition of "speaking in a tongue or tongues"

We must try to come to some understanding based only what can be implied

from what he says.

This ought to give us some caution about the certainty of our conclusions.

So, what can we say about speaking in tongues?

Look at v. 2 of chap. 14--

**"For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to people but to God."**

Here we see that speaking in a tongue

is a way of praying--that is, speaking to God.

In v. 16, Paul talks about it also as "praising God in the Spirit."

It is a way of praying,

and it is essentially unintelligible both to the speaker and to the hearers--

"Indeed, no one understands them," Paul says in v. 2.

**"they utter mysteries by the Spirit."**

Without some gift of interpretation,

given either to the speaker or to someone else,

what is said is unknown and is of no value to anyone,

except the person who speaks.

For Paul says in v. 4 that **"Anyone who speaks in a tongue edifies themselves"**--

and here Paul seems to allow that even though

there is no understanding in the mind of the speaker,

there can still be some personal spiritual benefit--

but he is quick to assert that there is no benefit to others in the church.

So what sort of speaking is this?

We don't know.

From the events on the day of Pentecost recounted in Acts 2,

some see this as some human language unknown to the speaker,

but it's hard to see why Paul should be so concerned about

the need for a *gift* of interpretation if that is the case,

rather than simply the need for some native speaker of that language

to be an interpreter.

I suspect Paul may be thinking in terms of some "heavenly language"

which is Spirit-inspired--



perhaps the "language of angels" that he mentions in 13:1.

In *The Testament of Job*, an Egyptian Jewish text of about this period,<sup>3</sup>  
we read of a woman speaking "ecstatically in the angelic dialect,  
sending up a hymn to God  
in accord with the hymnic style of the angels" (T. Job 48:1-3a).  
Maybe that has something to do with this, we don't know.

But it is important to notice that for Paul speaking in a tongue  
is not ecstatic speech.

In other words, the speaker isn't compelled to speak,  
losing all self-consciousness, as if in a trance.

We'll talk more about this next week,

but Paul says later in the chapter, in v. 28,

**"If there is no interpreter,  
the [tongues] speaker should keep quiet in the church  
and speak to himself and God."**

That is to say,

he is to maintain control of himself, and only speak when it is appropriate.

So, to summarize,

we see that speaking in tongues involved unintelligible speech addressed to God;  
it requires some gift of interpretation to be understood;  
and unless it is interpreted, it is edifying only to the speaker;  
and without some interpretation,

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<sup>3</sup>the 1st century B.C. or A.D.

it is to be exercised in private prayer only. /

What is Paul's attitude toward speaking in tongues?

Paul will criticize the Corinthians' practice of this gift,  
but he doesn't deny its value.

I think we can say his attitude toward speaking in tongues is positive--

"I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you," he says in v.18.

"I would like every one of you to speak in tongues," he says in v. 5.

"Do not forbid to speak in tongues," he says in v. 39. //

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Next we ask,

Does this gift still exist in the church today?--

Some argue that it was meant only for the founding of the church  
in the first century.

It faded out with the death of the Apostles.

Didn't Paul say back in chap. 13—

**"where there are prophecies, they will cease;  
where there are tongues, they will be stilled"** (13:8).

But I'm convinced that the "ceasing" there is a reference to the age to come,

when we shall see face to face,  
and we will know, even as we are known,  
and not to the post-apostolic period.

Christians disagree on this,

but I find the biblical arguments that the gift of tongues has ceased unconvincing,  
and I don't see why the gift of tongues should not exist today.

So I think Paul's command still stands—

**“Do not forbid to speak in tongues.” /**

I will say, I have never spoken in tongues,

but I know good, godly, and well-informed believers who say they have,

and I believe them.

I don't believe we can say this gift no longer exists,

though this doesn't mean that I think that

everything that goes on with regard to this gift today

is the same thing that Paul is talking about here,

or that all that goes on today in this regard is good.

We must exercise judgment.

For though Paul is positive toward this gift,

that enthusiasm has to be tempered by other considerations.

He does say, **“I would like every one of you to speak in tongues,”** just as he did,

but he had also said back in chap. 7 that he would like everyone

to have the gift of celibacy, just as he

did,

but each person has his own gift from God.

At the end of chap. 12, he had posed the rhetorical question,

**“Do all speak in tongues?”**

and the presumed answer was “No, certainly not.”

So Paul recognizes that not every Christian, even in Corinth,  
would exercise this gift.

"I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you." he says, but he continues:  
"But in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others  
than ten thousand words in a tongue." (v.18)

"Do not forbid speaking in tongues,"  
but he prefaces that with, "be eager to prophesy." (v. 39)

V. 5--"I would like every one of you to speak in tongues,  
but I would rather have you prophesy."

Now before we examine why Paul says that,  
let's first look more closely at what he means by "prophecy."

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## II. So, what is prophecy?

Again, Paul doesn't define the term for us--  
we have to draw implications and conclusions  
from various clues he does give us.  
This, again, is an area of some controversy,  
and there is much here that we simply do not know.

As we examine this,  
we first have to understand that the word "prophecy"

does not simply mean a "prediction" of the future.

It can include prediction,  
but probably 90% of what is called prophecy in the Old Testament  
was of direct relevance to the people in their own time.  
It was an application of the will of God to the people of God,  
and we should understand prophecy in the New Testament in the same way. /

Second, we have to be careful that we don't jump to conclusions  
simply because we think we know what prophecy is  
based on what we know of Old Testament prophets like Isaiah or Jeremiah.

There were various types of prophets, even in the Old Testament,  
and the so-called canonical prophets--  
those whose words have been written down and preserved  
as a part of our authoritative canon of Scripture--  
they are in a special category.

They said, "**Thus said the Lord**," and spoke divine truth,  
and their words ought to be received by God's people as such.

But New Testament prophecy, as Paul describes it, is much different.

When you look at prophecy in the New Testament,  
you see that it was subject to various constraints--  
and most importantly, it required evaluation.

Paul, says, for example, in v. 29--

when a prophet speaks,

**"the others should carefully weigh [or judge] what is said."**

He says the same thing in 1Th. 5:20-21—

**“Do not treat prophecies with contempt  
but test them all; hold on to what is good”**

It is hard to imagine Jeremiah submitting his words to a jury.<sup>4</sup>

On what basis does this evaluation take place?

Certainly these prophetic messages were tested against the Scriptures  
and against the teaching of the Apostles.

**"Anybody who doesn't recognize what I am saying as the Lord's command  
is to be ignored,"** Paul teaches the Corinthians in vv. 37,38 of our chapter.

Prophecy in the early church doesn't seem to have had the same authority  
either of the prophets of the Old Testament, or of the Apostles,  
whose teaching for us is found in the New Testament.

There is the interesting example of the prophet Agabus mentioned in Acts 21,  
who prophesied to Paul as he was on his way to Jerusalem.

**“He took Paul’s belt, tied his own hands and feet with it  
and said, “The Holy Spirit says, ‘In this way the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem  
will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles””** (v. 11).

That wasn’t exactly what happened to Paul, but it was close,  
but it is interesting that this Spirit-inspired word  
was interpreted in two opposite ways—  
Paul’s fellow believers saw this as God’s direction for Paul not to go to Jerusalem,

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<sup>4</sup>So Clements, in his helpful booklet, *Word and Spirit*, p. 23.

but Paul disagreed.

He took it simply as what might happen to him there

but which he was willing to accept.

And he continued on his way.

A prophetic word needs evaluation and judgment.

In addition, according to Paul,

a prophet could be interrupted and be required to sit down and be quiet--

v. 30--"If a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down,

**the first speaker [who is prophesying] should stop."**

Again, as with tongues, this is not ecstatic speech, uttered in a mystical trance--

**"The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets,"** Paul insists in v. 32.

So what is it, then, this gift of prophecy

that Paul is so keen to see exercised in the church?

Clearly, to prophecy is to speak words that edify the church (v. 4)--

these are words that "**strengthen, encourage, and comfort**" (v.3).

Is it the same as biblical preaching?

Many in the history of the church have thought so--

and I have some sympathy for this view,

but I don't think they are exactly the same.

I am speculating here,

but the main distinctive may lie in the immediacy of prophecy.

Prophecy involves, not just what God has said--

as, for example, when a preacher explains the message of Romans--  
but it involves what God is saying--what we are to do, here and now--  
perhaps, as when a preacher applies the message of Romans to us.

The Holy Spirit brings something to mind or provides some intuition or impression  
which the person so gifted feels would be edifying to the listeners.

As we noticed in v. 30, he refers to a prophetic utterance as a “**revelation**,”  
and that “**revelation**” is something I pray for every week  
as I am preparing what I will preach.

A prophetic word does not come as the inerrant words of God--for it must be tested.

Nor need it be some strange ecstatic form of speech--

in fact, the opposite is the case.

Paul says it should be intelligible, engaging the mind.

That, in fact, is integral to his argument—and I’ll get back to that.

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But the question rises—

Does this gift still exist in the church today?--

Again, some think it was only for the time of the apostles,

but again, I find the arguments for that unconvincing,

though I do think that circumstances have changed.

But in fact, I think this gift should be desired today--



Paul says in v.39--"Be eager to prophesy."<sup>5</sup>

We need this gift--for we need to hear the living word of God.

Supremely, we need to hear the word of God through the exposition of Scripture--  
through the systematic teaching of the Bible  
in a way that is applied to our lives today.

But we also God speaking through the Spirit-led application of God's truth to our lives  
through believers who are not necessarily teachers, or Bible-scholars,  
or trained expositors.

You don't need to be an authorized pastor or elder  
with special responsibility to guard the doctrinal teaching in a church.

God can work through anyone in this way--

you don't need great intellectual gifts or Bible knowledge--  
--men and women, young and old, can be God's instruments  
for conveying some spiritual insight  
given to strengthen, encourage, or comfort others  
for evaluation and consideration by God's people.

"Me? a Prophet?" You may say.

I suspect that this gift of prophecy is operative in our own church  
far more than we think.

During a Sunday School class, a church testimony, during a small group-

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<sup>5</sup>Cf. also 14:1 and 1Thess. 5:19,20.

people speak edifying words,  
applying God's truth to our present situation--often spontaneously.

There need be no "Thus saith the Lord"--to make a statement prophetic.

In fact, such a claim would be wrong.

For New Testament prophecy always stands under the authority of Scripture.

It may simply be an "impression,"

a sense that the Spirit of God is speaking to you,

that prompts you to speak.

But we need to be careful—

just saying something is a word from God doesn't make it so.

But let me give a word of caution here—

In the words of J. I. Packer—

our "impressions must be rigorously tested by biblical wisdom—

the corporate wisdom of the believing community

as well as personal wisdom.

If this is not done,

impressions that are rooted in egoism, pride, headstrong unrealism,

the fancy that irrationality glorifies God,

a sense that some human being is infallible,

or similar misconceptions

will be allowed to masquerade as Spirit-given.

Only impressions verified as biblically appropriate and practically wise

should be recognized as from God.

People who receive impressions about what they should believe or do

should question such impressions until they have been thoroughly tested.”<sup>6</sup>

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So why does Paul prefer prophecy to speaking in tongues

in the context of the gathering of the church?

That ought to be obvious--

It is all about the need for understanding.

True spirituality must engage our minds—

it involves hearing from God.

As Paul says in v. 6--

**"Now, brothers, if I come to you and speak in tongues,**

**what good will I be to you,**

**unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge**

**or prophecy or word of instruction?"**

If you can't understand what I'm saying to you,

I would be as useless as a flute or a harp that only had one note,

or a trumpet without a clear sound.

v. 9-- **"So it is with you. Unless you speak intelligible words with your tongue,**

**how will anyone know what you are saying?**

**You will just be speaking into the air."**

Speaking in tongues is unintelligible.

But not so with prophecy--

v. 2--**"For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to people but to God.**

**Indeed, no one understands then; they utter mysteries by the Spirit.**

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<sup>6</sup> "Guidance: How God Loves Us," in *God's Plans for Us* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001), 89–106.

Cited in <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/j-i-packer-on-impressions/>

But everyone who prophesies speaks to people  
for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort.

I would like every one of you to speak in tongues,  
but I would rather have you prophesy.

The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues,  
unless someone interprets,  
so that the church may be edified.

Paul's point is clear--

he prefers prophecy over speaking in tongues in the gathering of the church  
because prophecy, as an understandable word from God,  
results in the edification of believers.

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And in vv. 21-25 his attention shifts to the effects of these gifts on unbelievers--  
v.23--"So if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues,  
and some inquirers or unbelievers come in,  
will they not say that you are out of your mind?"

This need not have the sense that

the unbelievers will think that the Christians are crazy,  
but simply that they were caught up in some religious frenzy,  
just like other mystery cults of the day--  
no different from the devotees of Dionysius or Cybele--  
for speaking in strange tongues is a phenomenon that has been found  
in a variety of religions.

To unbelievers entering into this context,

Christian worship becomes "just one more consumer option  
in the pluralistic religious market."<sup>7</sup>

v. 24--"But if an unbeliever or an inquirer comes in  
while everybody is prophesying," --  
now that is different--  
" they are convicted of sin and are brought under judgment by all,  
as the secrets of their hearts are laid bare.  
So they will fall down and worship God,  
exclaiming, "God is really among you!"

It's not that Paul saw prophecy as some fortune-telling trick,  
disclosing some otherwise unknown facts about a person's history or background.  
When the Lord discloses the secrets of a person's heart  
he is revealing to them the moral truth about their own lives--  
exposing their corruption and duplicity,  
cutting them to the heart,  
convicting their conscience of their sin and their need of a Savior  
when they stand before a holy God.

This is what prophecy, as a word from God, can do--  
resulting in repentance and faith and worship.

This is why prophecy, as an intelligible word from God,  
is to be preferred over tongues in the gathering of the church.

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<sup>7</sup>So Hays.

Prophecy is powerful tool of evangelism,  
while tongues are a hindrance to making the gospel understood.

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But why, then, does Paul say in v. 22 that "tongues are a sign, not for believers,  
but for unbelievers"?

The key to understanding this is in recognizing that the word "sign"  
can have two senses--

a sign can be an indication either of God's blessing  
on those who live before him in faith  
or a sign can be an indication of God's judgment on unbelievers.

In v. 21 Paul quotes Isa. 28:11,  
and the point of that passage is that because Israel has not listened to God  
when he spoke so clearly to them through his prophets,  
God will now speak gibberish to them  
through the foreign language of an invading army.

Thus, for them as unbelievers, the "sign" of unintelligible speech  
is a prophetic sign of judgment.

Paul's point is that the Corinthians have become childish (v. 20)  
in thinking that their speaking in tongues served as unqualified evidence  
of their advanced spirituality.<sup>8</sup>

It's just not true--it is nothing of the sort--  
in fact, the prophet Isaiah could speak of such unintelligible language

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<sup>8</sup>Cf. v. 20 with Isa. 28:9: "Who is it he is trying to teach? To whom is he explaining his message? To children weaned from their milk, to those just taken from the breast."

as a sign not of God's blessing but of his judgment.

Beware of false views of "spirituality."

Speaking in tongues is, in itself,  
not necessarily a mark of real spirituality at all.

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And this leads us to our application of this passage as we close this morning--  
and the aspect that I want to focus on is our understanding of spirituality.

What is this thing we call spirituality?

From what Paul tells us here,  
we first need to be reminded that our spirituality  
means an involvement with a personal Spirit, the Holy Spirit of God,  
who is alive and active today.

Spirituality is not simply an exercise in self-exploration,  
by which we merely plumb the depths of our own spirit.

Christian spirituality involves a personal experience  
with God himself through his Spirit.

Reflect for a moment on the kind of experience Paul is assuming  
as he addresses these Corinthian Christians--  
he assumes that each one will be  
especially gifted and empowered by God in some way to serve others.

He assumes that the Spirit will inspire some to speak a word from God,

in words that are clearly understood;  
and that the Spirit will inspire others to speak a word to God--  
in some unintelligible language.

Paul assumes a community in which God is working in power  
to heal and to restore--  
a community in which God's presence is evident to unbelievers.

Let's face it, there is something unmistakably *supernatural*  
about the kind of spirituality that Paul expects Christians to experience.

God the Spirit has been outpoured on the church of Jesus Christ,  
and we ought to expect him to work among us.

So I ask,

is he at work here with us?

Is he at work in you?

Are you afraid of such a work?

or would you welcome it?

**"Do not quench the Spirit's fire,"** Paul urges the Thessalonians (1Thess. 5:19).

It's true, there is a risk whenever you deal with fire--you can get burned.

Real Christian spirituality is not for the timid.

But without fire, there is no light and no life.

Christian spirituality puts us in touch with the living God by his Spirit.

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But let's be careful to consider again what that means—



Paul's emphasis in this passage is not on seeking some personal experience,  
but on seeking some word from God  
that strengthens, encourages, and comforts others.

Remember the goal of the Spirit's work is to conform us to the image of Christ—  
to help us grow up in our union with Christ,  
and the Spirit works supremely through the word of God.

Whatever place there may be for profound, personal experiences of God's Spirit,  
perhaps even through a private exercise  
of some unknown language of prayer and praise,  
when it comes to the life of the church gathered together,  
pride of place must be given to understanding God's word to us.

The NIV translation puts as a heading for our passage:

**Intelligibility** in Worship.”

Isn't that what Paul is most concerned about?

Prophecy is preferred over tongues  
because in prophecy God speaks to us  
in a way that we can understand and communicate to others in the church.

And when you look at v. 6 you see that Paul lumps together  
revelation, knowledge, prophecy, and teaching  
as different ways God speaks to his people in intelligible speech  
to edify the body of believers.

This is what the church needs most of all--

**"in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others  
than ten thousand words in a tongue" (v.19).**

Former Trinity professor Don Carson says it well:

"Our God is a thinking, speaking God; and if we will know him,  
we must learn to think his thoughts after him."<sup>9</sup>

True spirituality needs truth—God’s truth.

Hence, we need to hear his Word,  
above all else.

Yes, I do believe God can speak through spontaneous, Spirit-inspired prophetic words.

But as I suggested earlier, we are not in the same position  
as the first-generation believers of Paul’s day.

We now have the authoritative teaching of the apostles given to us in this book—  
the New Testament Scriptures.

And these words, with those of the Old Testament,

are not only intelligible, they are also reliable.

They give us a norm by which all other norms are judged—  
even so-called prophetic utterances.

Paul doesn’t discount prophecy, but his emphasis in his letters lies elsewhere.

The qualifications for a church elder, for example,

includes the ability to teach, not to prophecy.

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<sup>9</sup>*Showing the Spirit*, p. 106.

He says,

“The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor,  
especially those whose work is preaching and teaching” (1Tim. 5:17).

In instructing the young pastor Timothy,

he says, “devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture,  
to preaching and to teaching” (1Tim. 4:13).

And again, he says this to him:

“In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus,  
who will judge the living and the dead,  
and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge:  
Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season;  
correct, rebuke and encourage—  
with great patience and careful instruction” (2Tim. 4:1-2).

So I do not apologize for giving a substantial portion of our time together each week  
to the systematic exposition of God's word in the Bible—  
to preaching the Word, with great patience and careful instruction.

That is how faithful shepherds are to feed the flock. /

You see, this is where Christian spirituality diverges most clearly

from its various non-Christian forms--

Christian spirituality has a particular content,

an identifiable and intelligible truth which we are to understand.

It involves our *minds* as well as our feelings.

We are disciples of Jesus—that is, we are learners,

and there is much to learn if we are to appropriate all the richness of God's grace

that is ours in Christ  
and if we are to be taught to obey all that he commanded us.

Paul had alluded to this at the beginning of chap. 12--

"Now about spiritual [things], brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant.

You know that when you were pagans,

somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols."

You had spiritual experiences, all right.

But the idols you worshiped were mute--they could not speak.

But how can you know if those experiences were of God or not?

v.3--"Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says,

"Jesus be cursed,"

and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit."

Christian spirituality has a certain substantive content--

it declares that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Paul is not saying that this declaration exhausts its content,

only that this is essential.

Declaring Jesus as Lord is not a sufficient condition for true spirituality,

merely a necessary one.

I do not want you to be ignorant, Paul says,

there is a true spirituality and there is a false spirituality,

and that is something that our cultural notions of spirituality cannot say.

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Christian spirituality involves a personal experience of the Holy Spirit, to be sure,  
but Christian spirituality also depends on the centrality of the word of God.

Our thoughts are not his thoughts,  
our ways are not his ways.

God must speak to us,  
he must reveal himself to us,  
if we are to think rightly about him.

God has created us with mind and heart,  
with intellect and feelings, and both are important.

We must know God's revelation of himself in both Word and Spirit.

The Word without the Spirit is sterile;  
and the Spirit without the Word may not be Christian at all.

Lord, give us both--  
the knowledge of God, objectively revealed,  
and subjectively experienced--  
so that we might become truly spiritual people.

And may our spirituality be always informed by truth—  
the truth that comes from God displayed in the gospel of Jesus Christ  
and revealed authoritatively in the holy Scriptures.

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Prayer—

Closing Hymn--*#280 I Love Thy Kingdom, Lord*

Benediction:

Acts 20:32 "Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace,  
which can build you up  
and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified."

"The Church in the World:  
Studies in 1 Corinthians" No. 16  
Sept. 12, 2021

## "Tongues and Prophecy"

1 Cor. 14:1-25

"Spirituality" has become a hot topic in our world today, and it was a hot topic in first-century Corinth, too. In our passage the Apostle Paul seeks to correct some misunderstanding of the notion with some teaching that we would be wise to heed. We will ask three questions, before seeking application to our own situation.

### I. What is "speaking in tongues"?

Speaking in tongues involves unintelligible speech addressed to God,  
it requires some gift of interpretation to be understood,  
and unless it is interpreted, it is edifying only to the speaker,  
and without some interpretation,  
it is to be exercised in private prayer only.

### II. What is "prophecy"?

Prophecy is inspired utterance whose truth must be tested.

**III. Why does Paul prefer prophecy to tongues  
in the gathering of the church?**

**A. The edification of believers (vv. 1-5)**

**B. The conversion of unbelievers (vv. 20-25)**

***Application:***

**1) Our "spirituality" and the present work of the Holy Spirit.**

**2) Our "spirituality" and the centrality of the Word of God.**

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**Sermon Response:**

**"Tongues and Prophecy"**

1 Cor. 14:1-25

- Read vv. 1-5. What is Paul's central concern here? Why is that so important to him? How does that follow from his words in chap. 13? Is that your concern when you gather with other believers? Reflect especially on v. 12.
- Read vv. 6-19. What is the central problem with "tongues" in Paul's mind as it relates to the gathering of the church? Why is "intelligibility" such an important issue for Paul? Why is that so important for our understanding of "spirituality"?
- Why is the preaching of the Bible so important to our church health?
- Read vv. 5,15,18,39. What can we learn of Paul's own experience with speaking in tongues? How ought that to affect our attitude toward this gift?
- Do you believe that the Holy Spirit is alive and active today? Has he empowered your life? What difference would it make to you if the Holy Spirit were to withdraw from your heart? Pray for his active work in our midst in the church.
- Read vv. 24,25. Pray that we have unbelievers in our midst who are convicted by the word of God and are converted.
- How ought we to treat claims of a "word of prophecy" in our midst?

