

CGYG & LIFE Bible Study: 1 Corinthians 14:1-25

For Discussion: How much of the reason behind your choice of church or fellowship rests on what it and/or the people there have to offer you? How important is it for there to be opportunities for you to serve and invest in the spiritual lives of others?

Read 1 Corinthians 14:1-25

For review: In 1 Corinthians 13:1-13, Paul expounded on the preeminence of love above all spiritual gifts. This is due, in part, to the fact that spiritual gifts are intended only for a time, before the full unveiling of Christ at His return. When that day comes, all gifts will have served their purpose and will be surpassed by unhindered fellowship with Him. Furthermore, this love, which is characterized by an attitude of forbearance and a self-sacrificial concern for the good of the other person is both a fundamental attribute of God, who is eternally unchanging, as well as His children, who bear His image. Paul follows this with a direct comparison between the gifts of prophecy and tongues to illustrate why he regarded the former as preferable, in contrast to the Corinthians who had an excessive preoccupation with the latter.

Read 1 Corinthians 14:1-5

What is the gift of tongues (1 Cor. 14:2, 13-17, 27-28)?¹ What is the gift of prophecy (1 Cor. 14:3, 29-31, 1 Thes. 5:20-21, Acts 27:21-26)?²

¹Tongues – The ability to speak by inspiration a real language that is unknown to the speaker. This can be praise (**Acts 10:46**) or thanksgiving (v.16) expressed in prayer (v.14) or song (v.15).

-The speaker communes with God in their spirit but does not understand the meaning of what they say (v.2, 13).

¹Paul assumes that the gift of tongues will ordinarily be manifested in a language that no one understands (v.2), despite there being instances when it was in human languages that were understood by witnesses (**Acts 2:1-11, 10:44-47**).

²Prophecy – The spontaneous telling forth of a message that is inspired by something the Lord suddenly reveals to the speaker (v.29-31, Acts 27:23-24). It does not necessarily have to include an element of predicting the future.

“If a message is the result of conscious reflection on the text of Scripture, containing interpretation of the text and application to life, then it is a teaching. But if a message is the report of something God brings suddenly to mind then it is a prophecy.” – Wayne Grudem

²As a revelation that is understood and reported in the prophet’s own (merely human) words, it is not equal in authority to Scripture. New Testament prophecies are not prefaced with, “thus says the Lord” (i.e., not treated as the very words of God).

-NT congregational prophecy was not infallible, so it had to be received with careful consideration and discernment (v.29, 1 Thes. 5:20-21).

Paul’s opening statement in chapter 14 is a summary and application of his teaching in 12:28, 31 (desiring the higher gifts) and 13:1-7 (pursuing love). His encouragement to the Corinthians to desire the gift of prophecy is qualified by 13:2 (prophecy is useless without love), 13:8 (prophecy is temporary), and 13:9-10 (prophecy is limited and will be surpassed). In the context of corporate worship, prophecy is a better expression of love for God and for others than the gift of tongues alone since its primary purpose is the building up of the body of Christ through the edification of its members.

According to Paul, what are the main differences between the gift of tongues and the gift of prophecy?

-Tongues – the person speaks primarily to God (v.2). Prophecy – the person speaks primarily to people (v.3).

-With tongues, the speech is not intelligible without interpretation, not even to the speaker (v.13), while with prophecy, people do not need assistance to comprehend what is said.

-Tongues – the main beneficiary is the speaker (v.4). Prophecy – the main beneficiary is the church (v.4) although the speaker is also able to benefit from the prophecy that is delivered through them since it can be understood by all.

-Even the nature of the benefits is different between tongues and prophecy. For uninterpreted tongues, the blessing is in the spirit as the speaker communes with God (v.2, 14) because their words are not understood. For prophecy, there is spiritual edification, but it is also informed by the content of the message (e.g., upbuilding, encouragement, consolation).

-Tongues – the prayer or praise is directed from man to God. Prophecy – the prophetic message is delivered from God to man.

-Although it can be practiced publicly, speaking in tongues is an inherently personal act (v.2), while prophecy is an inherently shared act (v.3).

-Without interpretation, the one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues (v.5), but with interpretation they are both able to benefit the rest of the body.

Read 1 Corinthians 14:6-12

In what ways is language like an instrument?¹ What good can an instrument serve if its notes cannot be distinguished from one another?² How are uninterpreted tongues similar to this?³

¹Both are used for communication/expression with others. Both utilize a system of units/parts to construct a whole wherein the parts need to be distinguishable and meaningful.

²An instrument relies on variation and intelligibility to fulfill its purpose.

-A flute or harp that does not play differentiable notes cannot produce a song (v.7).

-A bugle that cannot make a distinguishable sound will fail to elicit a response from others to its call to arms (v.8).

³Similarly, language requires intelligible units to communicate a message that can benefit its hearers (v.12).

-Uninterpreted tongues are unable to accomplish this even though the message itself has meaningful content.

³Causing broken communication among believers creates a situation where members who are one in the body of Christ are reduced to *foreigners* in how they worship together (v.11).

Read 1 Corinthians 14:13-19

What importance did Paul attribute to understanding versus experience in worship (Mark 12:30, John 4:24)?

-Both mind and spirit are needed => complementary and encompass different but important facets of worship. We are more than body or spirit alone, we were created to worship and commune with God with our whole being (Mark 12:30, John 4:24).

-Prayer and worship are not vicarious but require our active involvement ("Amen" is a statement of agreement and unity).

-It is with the mind that we receive and are blessed by truth (v.3, 6) and are led to join with others in worship (v.16).

-Seeking to make the gift of tongues meaningful and beneficial to others (v.13) is an expression of the love and "one body" mentality that Paul had previously taught. A disregard of these concerns demonstrates simple and juvenile thinking (v.20).

-There is an additional personal benefit to pursuing the interpretation of tongues as it brings the added blessing of an understanding of the message that neither the speaker nor the hearers would have had otherwise.

-Even something as personal as thanksgiving, when understood, can resonate with and edify non-believers (v.16-17).

-Paul highly valued his own experiences but made them subordinate to serving others meaningfully in the church (v.18-19).

-His concern for helping others and pointing them to God extended even beyond the body of Christ (v.16-17, 22-25).

Read 1 Corinthians 14:20-25

What kind of a sign are tongues to non-believers?¹ What kind of a sign is prophecy to believers?²

What event was Paul referencing in verse 21 (Isa. 28:1-4, 11-12)?

¹God was sending another nation (Assyria) to invade the land of the Israelites as punishment for their disobedience.

-Their foreign speech would be a token of God's judgment on them (see also **Deut. 28:49-50**).

-People who refused to listen to a clear message would be given over and spoken to in a manner they cannot understand.

¹Similarly, uninterpreted tongues were a sign of judgment and condemnation for unbelievers who had rejected God's word in Paul's day.

²Prophecy was a sign of blessing for believers that God was at work among and through them and was itself a blessing for them.

²Whereas uninterpreted tongues would confuse and repel unbelievers (v.23, **Acts 2:13**), prophecy would draw them in (v.24-25).

-Prophecy would convict (v.24), reveal/uncover sin (v.25), and point people to God, testifying of His presence and calling them to worship Him (v.25), even as it ministered to the hearts of believers (v.3).

What principles should guide what happens when believers gather together for worship?¹ In what ways can you contribute to such an environment in your own approach and in the ways you encourage others?²

¹In corporate worship, one of the goals should be mutual edification, conviction, and the pointing of one another to God (v.25).

¹There should be a holistic worship of God that involves both our spirits and our minds – intellect applied to truth (v.15).

¹Where appropriate, this can be aided by our spiritual gifts, but the essence of it can occur in everyday interactions (**Eph. 4:15**).

²Consider: how we sing (focusing on lyrics over melody), how we pray (based on God's word rather than on platitudes, engaging and partnering with the one who is vocalizing their prayers).

Reflection and application

In focusing on the gifts of tongues and prophecy, Paul highlights several truths about the nature of worship. Worship in its fullest sense is no less than experiential but needs to be undergirded by truth. Congregational worship brings us into contact with others and there is much blessing to be found in pursuing their good. Paul shows that the outcome of blessing others can be even greater than we imagine: with tongues there is understanding to be gained by both the speaker and the audience and with prophecy there is an overflow of God's power that can even reach the non-believing heart. Echoing the teachings of Christ, there is greatness in serving others and genuine gain in giving. Let us pursue a heart that cherishes right worship and the building up of others and earnestly desire opportunities to speak truth and encouragement into one another's lives, regardless of what spiritual gifts we may have.