

Gamma

Study 17
Matured Thinking

1 Corinthians 14

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Introduction

In our discussion of tongues and spiritual gifts, we have a situation within the Corinthian church where there was unregulated public exercise of the gift by overzealous Christians possibly over enthused with their new gifts and probably allowing this new experience to fill them up with pride.

This was the new spirituality and tongues was the sine quo non of this new era. If one had the tongues gift then one was more spiritual so the worship session should be one where each one was to let loose with the gift after all it was a worship session wasn't it. Having our inner most being communicate with God in this almost celestial mode of worship was a superior form of worship.

Paul counters the attitude with his explanations in Chapter 12 that all spiritual gifts came from the same source which was God. All spiritual gifts were necessarily different and it did not make certain people who possessed certain gifts more superior or inferior to others. Certainly then the people who did not speak in tongues but had other gifts which were perhaps less visible should not be made to feel less important to the life of the church. The function of all the gifts were to build up the church they did not exist to glorify the owner of the gift. The mere presence of the gift of tongues did not make them more spiritual as in 1 Cor 3 Paul chides the church for spiritual immaturity based on their divisive attitudes and behaviour and not on the practice of tongue speaking.

In Chapter 13 Paul hammers home the ultimate motive of love which should be the reason why we exercise our gifts. It is in our patient, unending love for each other and the church that we contribute our spiritual gifts not in order to demonstrate our spirituality or to infer that others who do not have our gifts are possibly missing out on a fuller dimension of Christian life that only we have now that we have the gift of tongues. In Chapter 14 with the back ground of the nature of the gifts and the manner in which they have to be exercised established, Paul therefore attacks the actual problem which is in the worship where there is excessive unregulated public speaking in tongues.

Tongue speaking

There are various forms of tongue speaking

Xenoglossia is speaking in unlearned but human languages. This was seen in the first Pentecost but it is not usually the case in contemporary tongue speaking. In Acts 2:5:11 foreigners understood the tongues in their own language and the contents of the tongues

was actual praise of God. There was no need for interpreters as required in Corinthians 14. Linguistic studies conducted on recorded contemporary tongue speaking have shown no discernable linguistic structure nor pattern.

Tongue speaking today is "Glossolalia" which is speaking in verbal patterns that cannot be identified with any human language. Some think this could be a sort of coded language. Others take from 1 Corinthians 13 that this could be the language of angels but who is to say if we have not heard angels converse?

Whatever the precise mode that it takes whether it be foreign human languages or coded ones the important thing is that is a spiritual gift.

For the people around the tongue speaker the spiritual benefit only occurs when there is interpretation

(cf. 1 Cor 14:4,5,13). Its value is also as a herald of the Lord's presence and intention to address the congregation, and so raise expectation and increase dependence on God for interpretation.

For the person itself the gift finds its value in personal worship and communion with God although he himself does not understand the meaning (cf 1 Cor 13:13-15)

It is merely one of the many spiritual gifts noted in 1 Cor 12:27-30. That list is not exhaustive. The gift is not the sign of spirituality nor is it a mandatory experience for all who would want to have a closer experience with God. It is certainly not the sign that the person has been "baptised in the Holy Spirit" or filled with the Holy Spirit as early Pentecostal movement have proposed. Paul is clear in 1 Cor 12:13 when he says "for we are all baptised by one Spirit in to one body ---whether jews or Greeks ,slave or free --- and we are all given one Spirit to drink." It is clearly a universal experience for all Christians whatever their backgrounds to be baptised with the Holy Spirit. There is no second baptism for the Christian elite who can speak in tongues.

Prophecy

The definition of prophecy in Christian circles remain somewhat controversial. Basically it will involve both foretelling as well as forthtelling.

Foretelling denotes the predictive dimension of the gift where a prophet like Isaiah can predict the fall and exile of Israel more than 100 years in to the future. This is the dimension most popular press will pick up on and judge the veracity of the prophet upon. Forth telling refers to the dimension of God speaking an appropriate revelatory word to His people to sustain them for that particular time.

There are basically three views of modern prophecy.

1. The broad view of prophecy includes even teaching and expository preaching from the pulpit as it is the forthtelling dimension of the gift as it brings God's Word to His people at an appropriate time.

David Hill¹ with Thiselton, JI Packer and other noted scholars have expanded the dimensions of prophesy based on 1 Cor 14:3, 31 as speech for edification and encouragement and does not even exclude teaching . It does depend on revelation and is sometimes closely related to prayer (1 Cor 11:4-5). Where there may be some difference with teaching is that it addresses issues of the moment albeit by bring teaching and gospel truth to bear on the present issues at hand. In some ways it is like the contemporary application part of a sermon whilst a teaching is more of a transmission a fixed body of information without regard to the present scene.

Opponents against this view note that 1 Cor 14 :30 seems to indicate that the prophesy may be given spontaneously to a person and the preceding person ought to stop his prophesy and let the most immediate prophesy stand up and share. This suggests that it is not something prepared and thought out way before hand.

However, the mistake would be to base all our knowledge of prophets in the NT on this once instance mentioned here. This cannot totally limit the view of prophesy to solely spontaneous revelatory speech. In all other Pauline Epistle there is scant mention of prophets. His emphasis on prophesy as a gift must be taken as a polemic against the public unregulated use of tongue speaking based on its value for edification. There is no such emphasis in any Pauline epistle after this and there is far more in the way of emphasis on the proper transmission of the gospel and on teaching. Thus based on this there is good reason consider a wider definition of prophesy. Thus prophesy can be predictions , encouragements, applied teachings or spontaneous revelatory speech. The important issue to Paul is its impact for edification on the church not that it is spectacular or seems supernatural.

2. Cessationist view

This is a view of prophesy is a sort of revelatory speech which is fully inspired by God and is totally true and authoritative at all times. It was given to establish the truth of God revealed in history, supremely in the Christ event, thus with the completion of all biblical revelation it ceased. This is taken from the OT view of prophecy when the prophet says "Thus sayeth the Lord "it was totally authoritative.

Proponents of this view say that since the canon is complete there is no more need for prophesy.

They also read in to 1 Cor 13 :8-12 as when the perfect comes then prophecies will cease, when the perfect comes the imperfect will cease as referring to the end of the apostolic age. However, it is rather clear from the text of 1 Cor 13 that the "perfect" actually refers to when Christ comes again when we will have all knowledge.

Also this view ignores 1 Cor 14:29 that Paul allows for prophesy and Paul actually pushes for prophesy and these prophesy are not the same the OT prophesy in their authority as they must be sifted as we see in 1 Cor 14 29-33.

3. This 3rd view was popularised by Wayne Grudem and basically differentiates between OT canonical prophets and the NT prophets. NT prophecies carry less authority than scripture but does not include contemporary preaching. The Apostles were the NT

¹ David Hill ,NT Prophecy, (London: Marshall) 1979 p 112-115 as cited in A Thiselton , The First Epistle to the Corinthians, NIGTC , (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans) p 960

equivalents of the canonical prophets in the OT and this has ceased but the secondary prophets that arise from the congregation have revelatory utterances which do not deal with doctrine but is used to upbuild and guide the church or individuals.² Such NT prophesy also is subject to Apostolic authority as we see in 1 Corinthians 14: 37. These prophesies had to be checked by other prophets and subject the leadership of the church and consistent with the Scriptures. These prophesies would be spontaneous, revelatory as set out in 1 Corinthians 14.

- 1. Paul clearly advocates the gift of prophesy over that of tongues in the context of the congregational worship meeting. Look in the first 6 verses and can you understand why he says so?**
- 2. Can you list down Paul's reasons for not advocating the public unregulated speaking of tongues at the worship meeting?**
- 3. Are there any benefits for prophesy for Non Christians attending the meeting vv 24-25**
- 4. In verses 26 to the end of the chapter Paul outlines the practical outworking of his theology, that is he applies all that he has talked about with regard to the ills of tongue speaking and merits of prophesy. What is the over riding principle that he uses in his advice on the conduct of the worship meeting. What are his actual commands to them with this regard, can you summarise his conclusions?**
- 5. Compare verse 34-35 with 1 Cor 11:1-16. This is a very difficult pair of verses as there is an apparent contradiction. In chapter 11 , Paul allows the women to prophesy and pray as long as their heads are covered but in Chapter 14 they are told to keep silent . Why is this so?**

² Wayne Grudem, the Gift of Prophecy in the NT and today, Eastbourne : Kingsway Publications 1988

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6 . Discuss Paul's conclusion in verse 39-40, how does this apply in your church today. From the flow of chapter 14 discuss the way in which the worship was conducted in the Corinthian church in what way was it different from the way you worship in your church today?