

**Autumn Ridge Church - Women's Bible Study**  
**1 Corinthians 14: Unity in Worship**  
**April 12, 2017 ~ Jann Wright**



Good morning/evening and welcome to Women's Bible Study. I cringed a few weeks ago when it was announced that I would be teaching chapter 14, addressing the gifts of tongues and prophecy, with the implication that I would have some helpful knowledge on the subject. I had already begun my preparation and it wasn't going well.

Each commentator I read seemed to have a different perspective on the topic. The conservatives were very conservative and some of the charismatics were very charismatic. There didn't seem to be a lot of understanding between the viewpoints.

While it is tempting to split the difference and form some sort of compromise between the two, instead we will focus on the basic principles Paul is teaching. Principles that can be applied regardless of our perspective on particular gifts. We will also touch on some passages that are a bit more difficult and for which there are substantial disagreements. There are reputable Christians, pastors, commentators, and scholars who have different perspectives on these more disputed segments. You will have to weigh the evidence in those areas for yourself. Finally, we will address the role of spiritual gifts and unity within the church.

Cautions

Realize our opinion is influenced by many sources

Before we jump into the topic I have a few cautions. One is that our opinion on topics, even spiritual ones, are influenced by many sources. These include our childhood, experiences in church, exposure to different points of view, our investment in reading the Bible on a regular basis, and our attendance in weekly worship just to name a few. I say that not as a negative or to weigh in on a side, but as a neutral fact.

For example, I grew up in a very small rural Presbyterian church in Kentucky. We contracted with an Episcopalian minister to preach on Sundays. His day job was the director of Eastern State Hospital which provided acute care mental health services in a large urban area. Members of the congregation took turns leading the Wednesday night services.

In that little church only one wedding took place between my parent's wedding and mine 25 years later. That week we moved some pews from the choir loft that had not been moved in decades, it caused quite a stir, but eventually they decided they liked change and left them. We sang the same number of stanzas in each song, had the same call to worship and the same order of service literally for decades.

Needless to say we did not speak in tongues, have prophecies told, or have disorderly worship. Until I dated and eventually married a Southern Baptist, developed friendships with others in different denominations and had opportunities to travel, I did not realize the body of Christ was much more diverse than my little church. But it was there I met Christ, so that little church is very important to me.

#### As adults we have to address issues we may have taken for granted.

As adults, who Paul continually admonishes us to be in our faith, we have to address issues that we sometimes have taken for granted, assuming that everyone believes as we do, and that we are right. We have to read the scriptures and align our thinking with them rather than make the scriptures align with our thinking.

#### Everyone may hear something with which they disagree

So this morning/evening I am concerned that everyone may hear something with which they disagree. That is not my intent, but in a group this size with such a sensitive topic, it is likely. This topic way is beyond the scope of a 30 minute lecture so if you are interested you will want to invest some additional time reading. In the meantime, consider Paul's words, "Love is patient, love is kind. . . it is not easily angered".

#### Review

#### Spiritual Gifts and Love

Last time we met, Angie taught on 1 Corinthians 13, the love chapter. We learned that while that passage is often used to describe romantic love, Paul had in mind the context of spiritual gifts. There are a variety of gifts mentioned in scripture and available on your gift assessments. Among these are the gifts of: teaching, administration, service, mercy, faith, wisdom, and knowledge. Also, there are those labeled as miraculous gifts. These are spiritual gifts of healing, tongues, prophecy, and miracles.

Apparently, in the Corinthian Church there had been issues over the use of spiritual gifts. One of which seems to be the use of gifts in the absence of love which would explain why Paul spent a whole chapter tying the concepts of spiritual gifts and love together. Specifically, in that chapter he refers to the gift of tongues and prophecy, as well as other gifts like knowledge, faith, and giving.

*<sup>1</sup>If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. <sup>2</sup>If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. <sup>3</sup>If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. (1 Corinthians 13:1-3, NIV)<sup>1</sup>*

Spiritual gifts are only useful when they are combined with love. Paul now reminds them of this concept and builds upon it. If you have your Bible, please turn to 1 Corinthians, chapter 14, we will begin in verse 1.

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<sup>1</sup> Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

## Scripture Passage: 1 Corinthians 14:1-6

*Follow the way of love and eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit, especially prophecy. <sup>2</sup>For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to people but to God. Indeed, no one understands them; they utter mysteries by the Spirit. <sup>3</sup>But the one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort. <sup>4</sup>Anyone who speaks in a tongue edifies themselves, but the one who prophesies edifies the church. <sup>5</sup>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. (1 Corinthians 14:1-5).*

### Follow the way of love

Spiritual gifts are for the building up of the church. Using them in a loveless way is to totally misunderstand the gifts. Imagine if one used the gift of teaching or knowledge to demean others, to show off, or to ridicule those who do not have the gift. Or what if serving or giving were used to make others feel guilty, or to manipulate them. What an abuse of the treasures gifted to us from God!

Love is critical, the Corinthians needed to be reminded of that and so do we. No matter what our gifts, they are for building the body of Christ. We have not earned them, they are not for self recognition or self promotion.

### Eagerly desire spiritual gifts

Paul further says they are to eagerly desire spiritual gifts. In the same way, we should desire to discover and know our spiritual gifts. I hope if you began this study not knowing your spiritual gift, that you have taken the spiritual gift assessment and learned what your gift or gifts are. Those gifts should also be developed, we should learn how to use them in the church. If you are not sure how to do that, talk with one of the teachers or your small group leader and we will help you get started.

### Two gifts: Prophecy and Tongues

Paul now focuses on two gifts: prophecy and tongues. Let's take a minute to define and describe them before we talk about how to use them. We will discuss in a minute opinions on whether these gifts are still used today, but let us first understand Paul's Letter to the Corinthians in the first century before we try to apply it to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

### Definition and Description

#### Prophecy

Commentator John MacArthur explains, "the purpose of prophecy is to build up by edification, to encourage through exhortation, and to comfort through consolation."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> MacArthur, Jr. John, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 1 Corinthians. Moody Bible Institute, Chicago. 1984, page 372. Print.

The New International Commentary notes: "Prophecy consistently included both "foretelling" (predicting future events) and more predominantly "forth telling" (exhorting God's people, and occasionally his enemies, about his will for their present circumstances). It shares the common feature of a sense of declaring a message one has received relatively directly from God."<sup>3</sup>

With Paul's words in verse 3 (But the one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort.) it seems according to Commentator Fee "that in Paul's view the primary focus of a prophetic utterance is not the future, but the present situations of the people of God."<sup>4</sup>

Commentator H.A.Ironside further elaborates that of the prophetic books in the Old Testament, only a small portion is devoted to foretelling future events. The greater part is trying to clearly explain the truth of God to the hearts and consciences of His People.<sup>5</sup>

The gift of prophecy resembled contemporary preaching. It was a message from God delivered to people in a way they could understand. It is spoken in the native language of the people. Their message of course is not on the same level as scripture and their exercise of the gift like the exercise of all spiritual gifts can be subject to error and misinterpretation.

### Tongues

The actual definition of the gift of tongues is a bit shorter although perhaps no less controversial. [spiritualgiftstest.com](http://spiritualgiftstest.com) defines Tongues as the gift of languages. The Greek word for tongues is glossa which literally means tongue. As used in the New Testament the context is languages. "Speaking in tongues is the utterance of prayer or of a message glorifying God, typically spoken to God and in a language unknown to the one speaking it."<sup>6</sup>

Paul also talks about the gift of interpreting tongues which is a gift that allows the person hearing one speaking in tongues to interpret the words being spoken for the purpose of allowing the church body to know the interpretation and therefore benefit from it.

### Problem in the Church

It appears that there was a problem in the Corinthian Church. Some of the gifts like teaching, faith, service, giving and mercy might have seemed a bit quieter, sedate, maybe even boring compared to tongues and prophecy. Those were perhaps flashier and drew more attention in a worship service. They were it appears being used in a way that drew attention to the holder of the gift as well as were disruptive.

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<sup>3</sup> Blomberg, Craig, The NIV Application Commentary: 1 Corinthians. Zondervan, Grand Rapids. 1994, pages 244-245. Print.

<sup>4</sup> Fee, Gordon D., The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The First Epistle to the Corinthians. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids. 1987, page 657. Print.

<sup>5</sup> Ironside, H.A., An Ironside Expository Commentary: 1 and 2 Corinthians. Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, 1938, page 242-243, Print.

<sup>6</sup> [spiritualgiftstest.com](http://spiritualgiftstest.com), definitions and descriptions, accessed 4/8/2017.

For these reasons the people were likely eagerly desiring these gifts especially the gift of tongues. Apparently from the context of this passage a large number of the believers were exercising the gift. It seems unlikely a large number of the believers actually had the gift. For one, we know that God gives a variety of gifts for the church for its edification. We also know that every believer does not have every gift. Paul reminds them of the role of love, encourages them to eagerly desire spiritual gifts, but notes that prophecy is the one they should look to, not tongues if they desire one.

### Value of Prophecy

It is not that prophecy somehow trumps all the gifts, but it has a particular benefit to the church. With prophecy you do not need an interpreter. Even an unbeliever can be convicted by the gift of prophecy as they realize their relationship with God and their need to be saved.

Ironside provides this example to further distinguish between the role of a teacher and one with the gift of prophecy. He says, "I might take this letter of Paul to the Corinthians and perhaps through divine help be able to expound it so that my hearers may thoroughly understand just what it is that the Spirit of God is teaching, and yet their consciences might not be exercised in the least degree. Their hearts might not really be lifted unto God, though they were edified intellectually.

But if I had the gift of prophecy, I might take exactly the same scripture and, as the Spirit of God enables, I will press it home to heart and conscience, so that those who hear will go away into a secret place, kneel down and search themselves and ask God to enable them to go out and live the truth that they have been learning. That is the highest form of ministry".<sup>7</sup>

### Illustrations

Paul now explains the limitations of the gift of tongues. It seems he knows this will be a sensitive topic and so he begins with tender words and a host of illustrations.

*“Now, brothers and sisters, 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?”*

### Paul, the Apostle

His first illustration is himself. If he, the Apostle Paul, who was specifically commissioned by Christ, and their teacher, the one so invested in their faith, if he came to them and spoke in tongues what good would it do? They would not understand him, they would not be edified.

### Musical Instruments

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<sup>7</sup> Ironside 243.

In the same way, Verse 7: *Even in the case of lifeless things that make sounds, such as the pipe or harp, how will anyone know what tune is being played unless there is a distinction in the notes?* This would have had particularly meaning for them since they had in their city one of the great ancient music halls which could seat a crowd of 20,000.<sup>8</sup> Even musical instruments have to follow order and rules to be understood and beneficial, how much more a word from the Lord for the church.

#### Trumpet: Battle Commands

An additional example is that of a trumpet communicating battle instructions for the troops, verse 8: *Again, if the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle?* In other words if there is no clear communication how will the troops know whether they are to attack or retreat.

#### Languages

Now he drives the point home in verse 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.* <sup>10</sup>*Undoubtedly there are all sorts of languages in the world, yet none of them is without meaning.* <sup>11</sup>*If then I do not grasp the meaning of what someone is saying, I am a foreigner to the speaker, and the speaker is a foreigner to me.* <sup>12</sup>*So it is with you. Since you are eager for gifts of the Spirit, try to excel in those that build up the church.*

#### Specific Instructions for the Gift of Tongues

Speaking in tongues in corporate worship is not helpful if no one understands. The church does not benefit. Paul now gives specific instructions in verses 13-33.

The first is to pray for an interpreter. That is the only way the whole church body benefits. Paul also seems to refer to the benefits to an individual speaking in tongues as part of their own personal private time of prayer and praise apart from public worship. This is one of those areas that is controversial. Some Commentators, such as John MacArthur argue these verses absolutely do not support the idea of the use of tongues in private.<sup>9</sup> Others see Paul's words as supportive of this exercise.

Gordon Fee is an American-Canadian Christian theologian and an ordained minister of the Assemblies of God (USA). He is a respected New Testament scholar. In his commentary on 1 Corinthians he writes:

“At a time in history when there is a broad range of opinion about speaking in tongues in the church, both its validity and its usefulness, the point of this text needs to be heard again—on both sides of that question. It is sheer prejudice to view Paul here as “demoting” tongues as such. Uninterpreted tongues in the assembly, yes; but for the edification of the believer in private, no. Anyone who would argue that what is spoken to God by the Spirit for the edification of a believer is of little value is hardly reading the apostle from Paul's own point of view. On the other hand, there is a tendency on the part of some Pentecostals to fall full into the Corinthian error, where a “message in

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<sup>8</sup> MacArthur 374-375.

<sup>9</sup> MacArthur 374.

tongues," interpreted of course, is often seen as the surest evidence of the continuing work of the Spirit in a given community. Paul would scarcely agree with such an assessment. He allows tongues and interpretation; he prefers prophecy."<sup>10</sup>

### Grow Up

Paul admonishes them to grow up. He seems to be getting particularly annoyed.

*<sup>19</sup>But in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue. <sup>20</sup>Brothers and sisters, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults.*

You wonder if the believers in Corinth had taunted Paul a bit about speaking in tongues as a mark of spiritual maturity or some other test. Paul continues to remind them that tongues must be interpreted to be useful to the body in corporate worship. Five words are not many, for example, "In the beginning God created" is five words, contrast that with 10,000 words which would be the equivalent of two and half of my lectures. About 25 pages or 1 hour and 15 minutes of talking. That is a huge difference. Five intelligible words versus 25 pages.

### Further Instructions for Orderly Worship

Verses 26-33 provide additional instructions. There are lots of things happening in a worship service: hymns, teaching, the Lord's Supper, as well as tongues and prophecy. Tongues and prophecy were not to be the total service. Only two or three people at the most were to speak in tongues and then only with an interpreter. If there was no interpreter the speaker was to be silent and speak only to himself and God.

The same instructions applied to be those with the gift of prophecy. Only two or three were to speak. If one received a revelation while the others were speaking, the first was to sit down and let the other speak. They were to take turns. The prophet and those who spoke in tongues were not overpowered by the spirit so that they lost control, but were able to exercise control by taking turns and following an order of worship.

Commentator John MacArthur notes that in the Greco-Roman culture, pagan worshippers would drink and dance themselves into a frenzy until they were semi-conscious or unconscious. They also combined sexual immorality and perversions of all sorts in their worship.<sup>11</sup> Sounds a bit like the golden calf episode in their history. Perhaps Paul was trying to make sure they understood the distinctions of Christian worship.

### Women in Church

As if this passage did not have enough challenges for us there is the issue of women speaking in the church, beginning in verse 34.

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<sup>10</sup> Fee 659-660.

<sup>11</sup> MacArthur page 370.

*34 Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. 35 If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church. 36 Or did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached? 37 If anyone thinks they are a prophet or otherwise gifted by the Spirit, let them acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command. 38 But if anyone ignores this, they will themselves be ignored. 39 Therefore, my brothers and sisters, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. 40 But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.*

This appears to be an abrupt shift in topic, but as we have seen from the last few chapters, Paul is instructing within the context of spiritual gifts. It would seem possible that is the context here, although some scholars debate that.

Many have offered explanations for this instruction regarding women from the ridiculous to the plausible. One theory is that Paul can't remember what he wrote in 11:5 where he talks about women praying and prophesying in church. Note again in verse 39 he refers to both brothers and sisters when he says be eager to prophesy. It seems highly unlikely that Paul with his command of rhetorical arguments would make such a mistake.

Another theory which seems to align with our modern day visceral reaction to this verse, notes that this instruction should just be assigned to ancient culture. However, that begs the question can we just assign anything we don't like to ancient culture?

Another theory suggests that there was a group of women in this church who were disruptive and creating chaos in the worship by asking questions. So they argue these instructions were specific to this church and not others.

Obviously we aren't able to sort all of this out at the end of this lecture and I frankly don't have the expertise to address this issue in depth, but perhaps we can make a few observations.

Did you catch there are three groups here that are told to be quiet? I didn't either until I read a chapter in the book, God's Good Design where the author notes that the same Greek word for silent (sigao)<sup>12</sup> is used to refer to those speaking in tongues in verse 28 where there is no interpreter they are to keep silent. Also in verse 30, the one who is prophesying, if another receives a prophecy while the first is speaking the first is to be silent. And then women are told to be silent.

One of the more logical theories was that Paul was speaking about spiritual gifts, as this directive is nestled in the instructions related to the gift of prophecy. Verse 29 says that those with the gift of prophecy should speak and the others should weigh carefully what is said. Perhaps the women were not to weigh in on this judgement regardless of their gift. Think of the difficulty if a women were put in a position to judge the prophecy spoken

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<sup>12</sup> Smith, Claire. God's Good Design: What the Bible really says about Men and Women. Matthias Media, Kingsford, Australia. 2012, page 92. Print

by her own husband. God has created an order in marriage and within the church. You may have to spend some of your outside reading time on this topic.

### Modern Day Application

#### Do the miraculous gifts still exist?

Let's conclude by wrapping up with some modern day applications. The obvious question is do these miraculous gifts still exist today? Some argue they were only to authenticate the message of Christ and the apostles and once the written record was complete there was no longer a need for these authenticating gifts.

Ironside makes this helpful observation, "While we are not told of any special limit, so far as time is concerned, yet we know from Scripture and church history that most of the so called miraculous gifts passed away shortly after the Bible was completed. They are not needed now as they were at the beginning. 'Yet, if the Spirit so wills, He might give them today under special circumstances'.<sup>13</sup>

Carolyn Osiek author of "Christian Prophecy: Once Upon a Time?" speaking about prophecy notes that, "If today in many of our contexts, it does not take the same form as it did in the Pauline churches, that is only because the prophetic Spirit is sufficiently agile to adapt to changed cultural assumptions and behavior."<sup>14</sup>

However, if these gifts are still in use today there are specific scriptural instructions for their use:

- Must be combined with love.
- Not given to every Christian.
- Not a proof of salvation or spiritual maturity.
- No more than two or three speakers each with the gift of tongues and prophesy are permitted to speak.
- Tongues require an interpreter.
- You can control yourself when exhibiting the gift of tongues or prophesy. These gifts allow you to follow instructions to take turns and to keep silent.
- Tongues are not to be forbidden. (verse 39).

The practice of spiritual gifts can be as divisive today as it was in the 1st Century. We can spend a lot of time and energy arguing about them and causing a great deal of chaos in the church. It seems the overall message we can take away is that if these gifts are still present, they should be used as prescribed in this chapter.

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<sup>13</sup> Ironside pages 241-242.

<sup>14</sup> Carolyn Osiek, "Christian Prophecy: Once Upon a Time? CTM 17 (1990): 296-297 quoted in MacArthur 249.

First Corinthians 13: 8-13 tells us that all the gifts will eventually pass away, but love will remain. "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters". (1 John 3:16) Let us serve the Risen Christ with love, unity, and the spiritual gifts he has bestowed upon us.

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