

26. Privilege and order for the gifts

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A couple of years ago, our older grandson Micah tore through his Christmas gifts in very short time. The boy was so excited to have all those toys. When he finished unwrapping his presents, he looked around and asked in a loud voice, "Is there more?" That didn't go well for his mama. Full disclosure: My daughter inherited my no-nonsense, straight forward attitude. My fault. She gave him the look that only a mom can give to her child. Micah got the signal. He quickly ended his question and did not pursue it anymore.

When we receive our spiritual gifts from the Holy Spirit, we need to be careful with them. We are not supposed to flaunt them, nor should we compare with others. According to the infinite wisdom and sovereign knowledge of our gift Giver, our God, He dispenses them to us for His glory, certainly not for our bragging right. We have an obligation to use them biblically and orderly.

Unfortunately, many of our charismatic denomination brothers and sisters use them without proper order and guidance from the Word of God; at the same time, the main denomination brothers and sisters treat the spiritual gifts that are mentioned in the Bible as if they are leprosy or demonic things. They both are wrong on their own interpretations.

In chapter 14, we will learn how to use our spiritual gifts – speaking in tongues and prophecies, biblically.

A. WHO IS GETTING BENEFITS FROM TONGUE AND PROPHECY?

1 Corinthians 14:20-25 Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature. 21 In the law it is written: "With men of other tongues and other lips I will speak to this people; And yet, for all that, they will not hear Me," says the Lord. 22 Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophesying is not for unbelievers but for those who believe. 23 Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those who are uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say that you are out of your mind? 24 But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all. 25 And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you.

Paul is still dealing with this question of speaking with tongues from the Corinthian Christians. He begins with an appeal to them not to be childish. This passion and over-evaluation of speaking in tongues can really cause a kind of childish pretentious show.

Paul here quotes from Isaiah 28:11-12 in v21:

Isaiah 28:11-12 For with stammering lips and another tongue He will speak to this people, 12 To whom He said, "This is the rest with which You may cause the weary to rest," And, "This is the refreshing"; Yet they would not hear.

In Isaiah 28, the prophet Isaiah announced judgment to the people of Israel. They ignored the word of the prophets who spoke to them in Hebrew language, so now

they will hear the voice of the Assyrian invaders who spoke a language that the Israelites could not understand, and it was an example of judgment to the Israelites. "And yet, for all that, they will not hear Me" says the Lord.

If you read v22 in comparison with v23 through 25, you might think that they are contradicting one another. Yes, they seem so. How are we going to solve this situation? If you are a Bible critique, you would be excited, but if you are a Bible student, you might stumped.

Please allow me to explain it to you. If you separate v22 from v20 and 21 that is connected to Isaiah 28:11-12, yes, there is a contradiction. As I explained it to you a few minutes ago, in 725 BC, when those stubborn Israelis ignored the prophecies from God's prophets, the Lord sent the Assyrian invaders who spoke the foreign tongue to teach them lessons as His judgment for those unbelieving Israelis to hear. Then, the apostle switches his attention back to the 1st century Corinthian believers and explains more that speaking in tongues are for the believers only, while prophecies are for everyone in v23-25.

B. ORDER IN CHURCH GATHERINGS

Unlike other spiritual gifts, there are guidances in speaking in tongues because of the abuse of the gift.

1) The proper way of tongue in church gathering

1 Corinthians 14:26-28 How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. 25 And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you. 26 How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. 27 If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be two or at the most three, each in turn, and let one interpret. 28 But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God.

It is easy for people of poor doctrine or immature character to dominate the group. It is easy for the group to focus not on the truth of the Word, but on how one "feels" about the gift. The goal of coming together as a church is not to be entertained, nor are we even to be "pleased" with a "blessing." We gather for edification, for the spiritual building up that we need to live lives that glorify Jesus Christ outside the four walls of the church.

The bottom line and the main purpose of these spiritual gifts is mentioned in v26b.

In v27, the Holy Spirit puts the cap on the amount – "two or at the most three, each in turn" of speaking in tongues in public meeting. This is not about praying by yourself. If the tongue has an interpretation, there is a potential for blessing others. Yet, Paul is not encouraging it in unlimited numbers in public area.

Some of you might have experienced this kind of church services:

You are in a church service where the pastor encourages everyone to pray in spirit and the entire congregation, except a few people, start to go crazy with speaking in tongues as if you are in the middle of a foreign country open market place. Some hollow, some yell, some wave their hands in the air, some jump up and down, and

some rattle their mouths in the language you've never heard before. My wife and I have been there.

Speaking in tongues in a church meeting that does not observe these biblical guidelines is wrong. It might be well motivated, it might be done with a good heart, but it is still wrong, because it goes against the plain teaching of the Bible. I don't care if it is their preferences or their denominations' styles or they've been doing it this way for many years. It is still wrong, because it is against the Word of God, period.

This time let's make it in a right example:

Let's say during our Sunday morning service, one of you felt that you need to speak in a tongue, so you stand up and speak. Then, I would say, "OK, we heard that person's tongue. Now we will wait for an interpretation of the tongue." With that, we will wait for it in silence. If there is a proper interpretation, then we would thank the Lord for the tongue and the interpretation and move on. But if there is no interpretation of the tongue, we would ignore that tongue and move on.

Before you think that I am harsh to say this, I am only teaching you what the Bible tells us to do. Am I right?

2) The proper way of prophecy in church gathering

1 Corinthians 14:29 Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge.

Even as tongues are to be regulated in meetings of the church, so is the gift of prophecy. The whole meeting should not be given over to prophecy, but only two or three should speak at any given meeting.

No "word from the Lord" is to be received without careful consideration by the leadership of the church present at the meeting according to 1 John 4:

1 John 4:1 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

Let's make another example:

If someone prophesied in the church service, and you put it against the Word of God. You came to a conclusion that the prophecy of the man is a rather off base and not biblical. So you asked him a question regarding the authenticity of the prophecy. If the person gets angry with you and tells you how dare you to doubt the God's anointed, don't worry. If he is truly God's anointed, he expects you to judge his prophecy according to this verse. As a matter of fact, he should be glad that you are judging it according to the Bible.

3) What is the standard a prophecy should be judged by?

1 Corinthians 14:30-32 But if anything is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent. 31 For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged. 32 And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.

- It should be judged according to God's established and revealed Word. God will never contradict Himself. Thank God for the edification and exhortation and comfort prophecy brings, but don't let it eclipse God's eternal Word.

- There is another standard to judge prophecy by: the standard of agreement. 2 Corinthians 13:1 states a principle repeated at least 6 times in the Bible. God will confirm His Word to the heart of the leadership who are present at the meeting.

2 Corinthians 13:1 This will be the third time I am coming to you. "By the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established."

In v32, Paul explains that no one is "overwhelmed" by prophecy. They are still in control of the exercise of the gift, even when the Holy Spirit is moving upon them. The Holy Spirit does not take control of a man like a demon does in demonic possession.

How do we explain the actions of those who shout, thrash, and jump or act weird, supposedly under the self-claimed inspiration of the Holy Spirit? Most likely they are doing this to get attention from others and to make them think that he is a super spiritual person, all the while others are thinking that he is a wacko.

We judge the success of a meeting not by if tongues or prophecy were present, but by if God's people learned, were encouraged, and were built up and equipped.

If you have a charismatic Christian background, I know what you are thinking by now. You are coming up with a Bible verse from 1 Thessalonians 5:19 – "*Do not quench the Spirit.*" Again, if you isolate that verse, you can apply it. But you are making it into a pretext format which is no proper way to use a Bible verse. If you keep that verse in context, you would notice that the apostle Paul was giving fast commands one after another:

1 Thessalonians 5:16-21 Rejoice always, 17 pray without ceasing, 18 in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. 19 Do not quench the Spirit. 20 Do not despise prophecies. 21 Test all things; hold fast what is good.

In v17, he tells us to pray without ceasing; in v18 giving thanks; in v20, not to despise prophecies, in v21, test all things. According to the context, it is NOT about speaking in tongues.

Listen, we can quench the fire of the Spirit by our doubt, our indifference, our rejection of Him, or by the distraction of others. This has nothing to do with somebody who is told to draw attention to themselves by exercising the spiritual gifts without following the guidelines from the Word. That is a sure way to quench the Spirit.

1 Corinthians 14:33 For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.

If there are confusion and disorder at a church meeting, it isn't from God. God may do things we don't understand, and things that seem strange or unpredictable to us, but there will not be a general atmosphere of confusion or weirdness.

C. APPLICATIONS

1) Speaking in tongues and prophesying in church gatherings must be done in order according to the Bible.

Speaking in tongue should not be more than three at maximum by taking turns. If there is no interpretation, the person who spoke in a tongue should keep silent.

2) Prophecy also can be done in church gatherings, maximum of three with judgment by others according to the Word of God.

3) Everything – speaking in tongues or prophesying – must be done in order, because our God is the God of order, not confusion.