

1 Corinthians 14C

- Today, we near the conclusion of Paul's teaching concerning spiritual gifts
 - I hope you'll agree we've learned a lot so far on this important topic
 - Among other things, we've learned that all gifts are important,
 - But they are not all created equal in their potential to edify the body
 - Therefore, there are going to be times when it may not be appropriate to put a certain gift to use in the body

During the French Revolution, there were three Christians who were sentenced to die by the guillotine. One Christian had the gift of faith, the other had the gift of prophecy, the other had the gift of helps.

The Christian with the gift of faith was to be executed first. He was asked if he wanted to wear a hood over his head. He declined and said he was not afraid to die. "I have faith that God will deliver me!" he shouted bravely. His head was positioned under the guillotine, with his neck on the chopping block. He looked up at the sharp blade, said a short prayer and waited confidently. The rope was pulled, but nothing happened. His executioners were amazed and, believing that this must have been an act of God, they freed the man.

The Christian with the gift of prophecy was next. His head was positioned under the guillotine blade and he too was asked if he wanted the hood.

"No," he said, "I am not afraid to die. However, I predict that God will deliver me from this guillotine!" At that, the rope was pulled and again, nothing happened. Once, again the puzzled executioners assumed this must be a miracle of God, and they freed the man. The third Christian, with the gift of helps, was next. He was brought to the guillotine and likewise asked if he wanted to wear a hood.

"No," he said, "I'm just as brave as those other two guys." The executioners then positioned him face up under the guillotine and were about to pull the rope when the man stopped them. "Hey wait a minute," he said. "I think I just found the problem with your guillotine."

- As this example demonstrates, there are times when it's best to remain silent rather than to use our gift

- In our last lesson, Paul was teaching about one such situation involving the gift of speaking in tongues
 - Speaking and interpreting tongues is a very unique gift in the body
 - Paul ranks it as the least important gift in terms of it's ability to edify other believers
 - It's low rank is a consequence of it's inability to communicate knowledge from one believer to another
 - Paul said that when communication is absent, the gift lacks a purpose in the context of the gather
 - In other words, we gather to extend edification from one to the other
 - And since tongues lacks that ability, it should remain a private experience, not a corporate experience
- Though we can understand and accept this truth, it still begs additional questions
 - Why did God place the gift in the body of Christ if it has so little potential to benefit the body?
 - What was it's intended purpose in the body?
 - And given it's low potential to edify, how common was it in the early church?
 - And how common should we expect this gift to be today?
 - Finally, if it does appear today, how do we know if it's real or proper to see it at work in the gathering?
 - Last week we ended as Paul was redirecting the church's interest in gifts away from the spectacular and toward the meaningful

1Cor. 14:18 I thank God, I speak in tongues more than you all;

1Cor. 14:19 however, in the church I desire to speak five words with my mind so that I may instruct others also, rather than ten thousand words in a tongue.

- In vs.18-19 Paul couples two statements that effectively sum up his teaching on the proper place of tongues in the body

- On the one hand, Paul is thankful for the gift
 - Every gift from God is something to be received gladly and with thanks
 - The gift of tongues is a certainly not something to be rejected or despised, neither by the individual who possesses it nor by congregation that receives it
 - So all gifts are to be appreciated
- On the other hand, Paul keeps this gift in it's proper place and perspective
 - Tongues is at the bottom of our priority list in the church
 - Meanwhile, Paul possessed far greater gifts, like prophecy, which is where he focused his time and interest
 - Consider the fact that there is not a single mention in all scripture of Paul using his gift of tongues
 - Yet at the same time, the New Testament is dominated by Paul's gift of prophecy, since he wrote most NT scripture
- So if tongues is of so little value relative to other gifts, why did the Lord see fit to place them in the body of Christ?
 - Paul answers that question now...

1Cor. 14:20 Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking be mature.

1Cor. 14:21 In the Law it is written, "BY MEN OF STRANGE TONGUES AND BY THE LIPS OF STRANGERS I WILL SPEAK TO THIS PEOPLE, AND EVEN SO THEY WILL NOT LISTEN TO ME," says the Lord.

1Cor. 14:22 So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophecy is for a sign, not to unbelievers but to those who believe.

- When Paul begins with the phrase "don't be children in your thinking..." we see clearly he is still admonishing the church
 - The church has been thinking about spiritual gifts - and tongues, in particular - in a spiritually immature way
 - They have missed the big picture

- If they only understood the Lord's purpose in giving the gift in the first place, then they never would have gone so astray in their use of the gift
- Paul says it's ok to be like a child when it comes to knowing evil
 - In other words, if you're going to be ignorant about something, be ignorant about evil
- But when it comes to spiritual thinking, strive to be mature
- As usual, the church's immaturity is a result of a failure to understand the scriptures
 - Because the answer to why gifts exist in the church was given in the Old Testament
 - So often we act in wrong ways simply because we fail to open our Bible and understand what God has written for our benefit
 - In the case of speaking in tongues, God spoke beforehand about how and why things would come into the world
- So Paul explains this lesson from Deuteronomy and Isaiah, which takes a little explanation...it requires spiritual maturity
 - First, Paul quotes from Deut 28:49 where Moses wrote to Israel:

Deut. 28:47 " Because you did not serve the LORD your God with joy and a glad heart, for the abundance of all things;

Deut. 28:48 therefore you shall serve your enemies whom the LORD will send against you, in hunger, in thirst, in nakedness, and in the lack of all things; and He will put an iron yoke on your neck until He has destroyed you.

Deut. 28:49 " The LORD will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, as the eagle swoops down, a nation whose language you shall not understand,

Deut. 28:50 a nation of fierce countenance who will have no respect for the old, nor show favor to the young.

- In this passage, Moses warned Israel that in the future, they would not obey the covenant of Law
 - As a result the Lord would punish Israel by sending an enemy against them
 - This enemy would come by way of a powerful army that would enslave the people and destroy their nation

- Israel will know this day has come because the nation that attacks will speak in a language the people of Israel do not understand
 - In other words, the nation will know when their judgment had begun when they encounter an enemy speaking a tongue they do not understand
 - The prophecy was fulfilled when Babylon invaded speaking Akkadian, a language Israel had never heard
- More importantly, the Lord is establishing an important spiritual pattern: The appearance of an unknown tongue in Jerusalem was forever be a sign to Israel of God's judgment against their sin
 - The sign was established in Deut and it was confirmed for the first time in the days of Babylon
 - But that wasn't the end of the sign
 - God continues to use this sign to warn Israel
 - The Lord promised to use it again after Israel rejected their Messiah, as Isaiah foretold

Is. 28:11 Indeed, He will speak to this people

Through stammering lips and a foreign tongue,

Is. 28:12 He who said to them, "Here is rest, give rest to the weary,"

And, "Here is repose," but they would not listen.

Is. 28:13 So the word of the LORD to them will be,

"Order on order, order on order,

Line on line, line on line,

A little here, a little there,"

That they may go and stumble backward, be broken, snared and taken captive.

- The Lord had been warning the northern kingdom through Isaiah that a judgment was coming
 - But the people mocked Isaiah's warnings
 - So once again, in v.11 Isaiah warns the people that they should expect to hear from the Lord
 - But they will hear from God through the voice of strange people speaking in a language they don't understand
 - And that people will take Israel away into captivity

- That invader was Assyria
- The ultimate fulfillment of this prophecy of speaking on tongues comes in connection with the arrival of the Messiah in Israel
 - Peter gives us that connection, when he quoted from Joel at the moment of Pentecost

Acts 2:8 “And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born?”

Acts 2:9 “Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,

Acts 2:10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes,

Acts 2:11 Cretans and Arabs – we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God.”

Acts 2:12 And they all continued in amazement and great perplexity, saying to one another, “What does this mean?”

Acts 2:13 But others were mocking and saying, “They are full of sweet wine.”

Acts 2:14 But Peter, taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them: “Men of Judea and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give heed to my words.

Acts 2:15 “For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only the third hour of the day;

Acts 2:16 but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel:

Acts 2:17 I ‘AND IT SHALL BE IN THE LAST DAYS,’ God says,
I ‘THAT I WILL POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT ON ALL MANKIND;
AND YOUR SONS AND YOUR DAUGHTERS SHALL PROPHECY,
AND YOUR YOUNG MEN SHALL SEE VISIONS,
AND YOUR OLD MEN SHALL DREAM DREAMS;

Acts 2:18 EVEN ON MY BONDSLAVES, BOTH MEN AND WOMEN,
I WILL IN THOSE DAYS POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT
And they shall prophesy.

Acts 2:19 I ‘AND I WILL GRANT WONDERS IN THE SKY ABOVE
AND SIGNS ON THE EARTH BELOW,
BLOOD, AND FIRE, AND VAPOR OF SMOKE.

Acts 2:20 I ‘THE SUN WILL BE TURNED INTO DARKNESS
AND THE MOON INTO BLOOD,
BEFORE THE GREAT AND GLORIOUS DAY OF THE LORD SHALL COME.

Acts 2:21 I ‘AND IT SHALL BE THAT EVERYONE WHO CALLS ON THE NAME OF THE LORD
WILL BE SAVED.’

- When the believing Jews began speaking in foreign languages at the first Pentecost, the people watching were asking what does this miracle mean?
 - Some recognized this was a supernatural act of God, but they couldn't make sense of what the sign meant
 - Yet others in the crowd dismissed it as merely a crowd of drunk people
 - So Peter stepped forward to explain its meaning and defend the word of God
 - He begins by saying these men aren't drunk, it's only 9:00 AM in the morning
 - Instead, this was an act of God in keeping with His word
 - Peter points to the prophet Joel for an explanation
 - In Joel, we read about a time to come in Israel when God would accomplish miraculous works on behalf of the nation
 - God would pour out His Spirit on Israel
 - And as a result of that out pouring, the people of Israel would experience supernatural manifestations of the Spirit
 - Prophecies, dreams, and visions
 - Moreover, the moon and sun would undergo miraculous changes
 - And the earth would also experience great turmoil
 - But in the midst of this calamity, all in Israel who call upon the name of the Lord would be saved
 - And it would culminate with the Lord's glorious reign on earth
- Interestingly, Peter offered Joel 2 as an explanation of men speaking in foreign languages in the day of Pentecost, but Joel doesn't mention tongues at all
 - Furthermore, the scene in Pentecost doesn't match the scene Joel describes
 - The sun and moon didn't change on the day of Pentecost
 - The earth didn't experience great turmoil

- All Israel wasn't saved and Jesus didn't set up the kingdom and reign on Earth
- Joel was describing the time of Tribulation, which is yet to come on the earth
 - When Tribulation arrives, it will be accompanied by all the great signs and wonders that Joel described
 - And it will culminate with Israel receiving the outpouring of the Spirit
- As a result of that outpouring, miraculous things will happen in that nation
 - The nation will come to faith
 - And their Messiah will return to save them, as Paul says in Romans 11

Rom. 11:25 For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery – so that you will not be wise in your own estimation – that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in;

Rom. 11:26 and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written,

| “ THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION,
 | HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB.”

Rom. 11:27 | “ THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM,
 | WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS.”

- So the prophecy of Joel is speaking about a time in the future when the Israel will experience salvation as a result of the Spirit
 - And it will lead to salvation for Israel and the beginning of the Messianic Kingdom on earth
- So if Joel 2 isn't speaking of Pentecost, why does Peter quote Joel 2 to explain the moment of Pentecost?
 - Peter's using Joel 2 to prove that when God pours out His Spirit on men, miraculous things should be expected
 - These men aren't drunk as some accused; they were simply responding to an outpouring of the Spirit
 - Speaking in tongues, prophesying and the like are evidence that the Spirit of God is moving among His people

- So Peter is using Joel 2 to defend the work of the Spirit
- But in Israel's case, the appearance of foreign tongues in the city of Jerusalem is always a very bad sign for Israel
 - Notice again Joel never mentioned foreign tongues spoken in Israel at the time of his events
 - That's because the sign of foreign tongues in Jerusalem is always a bad thing for Israel
 - It means God's judgment is coming upon them for their disobedience
 - In this case, the Lord Himself declared that this judgment was coming

Luke 13:34 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, just as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not have it!

Luke 13:35 "Behold, your house is left to you desolate; and I say to you, you will not see Me until the time comes when you say, 'BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!'"

- When the people of Israel rejected their Messiah, He declared that they would see their nation left desolate as a result
 - Moments earlier, the Lord had declared that this generation was guilty of lacking faith and demanding signs

Matt. 12:39 But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet;

Matt. 12:40 for just as JONAH WAS THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE BELLY OF THE SEA MONSTER, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

- So Jesus declared that the only sign they would see is their own Lord killed, buried and later resurrected
- Jesus was prophesying that this generation of Israel would be guilty of putting their Messiah to death
- And so this evil generation will be left desolate
- And so it was, 40 years later when the Romans arrived and destroyed the temple and the city of Jerusalem

- Therefore, the Lord gave the church in Jerusalem the ability to speak in foreign tongues as a sign to Israel that it was about to be destroyed for its unbelief
 - Just as Moses said to past generations
 - Whenever the people of Israel hear foreign tongues spoken in the city of Jerusalem, they should know that the Lord is predicting judgment
 - It is a sign to the unbelieving Jew that their Lord is about to act against them
 - And yet, the sign will always go unheeded
 - For the Lord is determined to carry through with His judgment once the sign is given
 - So looking back at 1Cor 14:22 Paul says the gift of tongues was given to the church as a sign to Israel of coming destruction upon the city
 - It's purpose was to warn unbelieving Israel in the days prior to the destruction of the temple and the city
 - When the early church gathered prior to AD 70, it did so largely in Jerusalem and it did so publicly
 - In that context, the sign of tongues was at work to warn of coming judgment
 - But Paul says tongues serves no purpose as a sign for the believer
 - We have no need of the sign, for we are not going to be caught in God's judgment
 - Therefore, the practice of signs is to be limited by its purpose
 - If the church wanted to be spiritually mature in their understanding of this gift, then they needed to understand this background
 - They needed to know what tongues meant and who it was for
 - That it meant judgment, and it was for unbelieving Israel
- Obviously, the sign has lost it's purpose today, at least for the time being
 - The destruction of AD 70 has already come and unbelieving Jews are not present in our gatherings generally speaking

- Consequently, any display of tongues today in a corporate gathering runs counter to its purpose
- In fact, any manifestation of tongues in the gathering without unbelieving Jews present cannot be a true manifestation
- Otherwise, we would be saying that the Spirit was working contrary to the word of God
- Unfortunately, that's what's happening in some church today
 - Large gatherings are all taught to mimic tongues through babbling, which is not tongues at all
 - And in doing so, they are directly disobeying Paul's instructions in this text
 - And even worse, they are bringing shame to Christ and His word by causing the unbelieving world to think that Christians are bizarre and gullible
- This is exactly Paul's concern as well...

1Cor. 14:23 Therefore if the whole church assembles together and all speak in tongues, and ungifted men or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are mad?

1Cor. 14:24 But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an ungifted man enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all;

1Cor. 14:25 the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so he will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you.

- Paul says if the whole church acts together to speak in tongues, those who visit will think the church is insane
 - In Paul's example, he's not distinguishing between a mimicking or the real thing
 - He's saying that either situation is equally wrong
 - Of course, mimicking tongues is always wrong, because it's not a spiritual work
 - It's a work of the flesh which profits no one
 - But even if it were possible for an entire church to speak in tongues, it would be wrong for the entire congregation to do so
 - It does nothing to advance the mission of the church

- We are called to be ambassadors for Christ, to witness to the truth and to invite others to know the salvation we have
 - We can't fulfill that mission by speaking in words no one can understand
 - Furthermore, misusing the gift in tongues just makes us into a spectacle that the unbelieving world mocks
 - Nothing good comes from acting in disobedience to the word of God
- Instead, Paul says if we give priority to the proper gifts, like prophecy or teaching, we have a hope to influence the unbeliever
 - We can edify the ungifted (i.e., the one who needs our gift) and we convict the unbeliever
 - They hear what's taught and they understand the truth of the word
 - And then their heart is changed and they respond to the word
 - And in conviction, they fall on their face and seek for salvation

Rom. 10:17 So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

- The question is what do we want out of church?
 - Do we come here to show off our gift?
 - Do we seek a chance to stand up and dance and make a scene and cause everyone's eyes to turn our way?
 - Do we want for that attention?
- Or do we want to see people convicted and changed?
 - Do we want believers to learn about Jesus? To become more like Him?
 - Do we want unbelievers to be pierced in their hearts by the word of God, as we were?
 - Do we want to see Christ glorified and the church growing
- If we want for the latter, then we should follow the words of John the Baptist

[John 3:27](#) John answered and said, “ A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven.

[John 3:28](#) “You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, ‘ I am not the Christ,’ but, ‘ I have been sent ahead of Him.’

[John 3:29](#) “He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice. So this joy of mine has been made full.

[John 3:30](#) “He must increase, but I must decrease.

- John understood how spiritual gifts truly worked
 - A man can have nothing spiritual except that it has been given him from Heaven
 - And by that gifting we become useful to Christ
 - But only if we understand that we must diminish, so that Christ may increase
- Next week we’ll conclude Paul’s examination of how gifts are to operate in the church
 - Paul will finish his correction on gifts by giving us a model for how the entire worship service should proceed
 - A model that fits very well with our desire to include a wider variety of individuals in the conduct of our church service