- Our study of spiritual gifts in this letter has been building to this moment
  - Paul's taught us about how they arrive, when they arrive, why they arrive and why they must one day cease
    - As well, Paul has cautioned the church against misusing gifts or misunderstanding their purpose
    - He's also encouraged the church to seek for the greater gifts so that the body might enjoy the most of God's love
  - But now in Chapter 14, Paul will address the specific errors this church has been making in their understanding and use of spiritual gifts
    - In particular, this church has developed an unhealthy fascination with the gift of speaking in tongues
    - They probably saw the gift at work in Paul or in new believers in the church, and it caught their attention
    - Later, after Paul left town, some began teaching that this gift was the most important spiritual gift, causing others to wish for it themselves
  - Eventually, the entire church was involved in an inappropriate and counterfeit version of the gift, hoping to create in their flesh what God had not chosen to do for them in the Spirit
    - Paul has heard of these problems, of course, so he is writing to correct them
    - So now Paul is ready to expose the mistakes and right the wrongs
  - Last week he introduced this final section with a comparison between the most important gift available to the church with the least important gift
    - The most important gift available within the church was the gift of prophecy
      - Only the apostolic gift is higher, and there were no apostles in Corinth at the moment Paul wrote this letter
    - The least important gift was the gift of tongues

> 1COR. 14:4 One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; but one who prophesies edifies the church.
> 1COR. 14:5 Now I wish that you all spoke in tongues, but even more that you would prophesy; and greater is one who prophesies than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may receive edifying.

- Paul supports his contention that prophesy was a greater gift than tongues on the basis of their ability to edify in the church
  - The gift of tongues works to yield edification in only the person who speaks, because not even the one speaking knows what he's saying
    - So when someone uses the gift in tongues, the edification opportunity is limited to only one person, and then only in a very limited way
    - The speaker is encouraged to see the Spirit working in them

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- And there is a strengthening of the spirit whenever the Spirit of God is shown working in us
- Gordon Fee commented on this feature of gifts

> "Contrary to the opinion of many, spiritual edification can take place in ways other than through the cortex of the brain. Paul believed in an immediate communing with God by means of the S/spirit that sometimes bypassed the mind; [but] in church he will have only what can also communicate to other believers through their minds."

- The gift of tongues can bring edification to the speaker at a spiritual level, but by itself it lacks the ability to transfer that edification to others
- But the gift of prophecy reaches many ears with powerful spiritual knowledge and spiritual insight
  - Not only is the speaker edified by what he has been given to reveal, but he can edify many more by sharing it
  - So the church is to seek after those who can bless them with prophecy far more often than seeking after someone who can speak in tongues
- In fact, the church should never trade the opportunity to be edified by God's word for the limited edification of speaking in tongues
  - In v.5 Paul makes a statement that sets up the rest of the chapter
    - He says he wished that they could all speak in tongues
    - Notice Paul chose the word "wish"
    - He said he wished that everyone in the church could speak in tongues, which means that not everyone did speak in tongues
    - If all did speak in tongues, then Paul would simply have said, "I'm glad that you can all speak in tongues…"
  - So, self-evidently, not everyone in the church possessed this gift, which is consistent with what Paul has said earlier
    - We only possess the gift that God assigns us
    - And He assigns a diversity of gifts in the body
  - So why does Paul says he wishes they could all have the thing they desired?
    - Paul is speaking to the church like a father speaking to a child who has an unrealistic Christmas wish list
      - "Son, I wish you could have a dinosaur for Christmas."
      - "Daughter, I wish you could have a pony."
    - Paul's sympathetic for their desire, but they have unreasonable and immature desires
  - Consider how Paul finishes the thought by saying that his greater desire for them would be they all could prophesy
    - It's no more possible for the church to all prophesy than it is that they all speak in tongues, but if he could give them something, it would be prophesy

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    - In other words, if Paul had a magic wand and could use it to assign every believer in Corinth a specific spiritual gift, Paul says he wouldn't chose to award every believer the gift of tongues…
    - Instead, he would chose to award the gift of prophecy, because it's the greatest gift available in the body of Christ
    - He wants what's best for them, and like a child with an unrealistic Christmas wish, the church was seeking for the wrong priority
- Paul's point isn't that such a magic wand exists, that believers can actually obtain the spiritual gift they want
- Like the child who wishes for a dinosaur or a pony, it was unrealistic for the Corinthians to want for a common gift
    - But even if it were possible, their choice of the gift of tongues was misplaced
    - Instead, if a common gifting were possible, they should have desired for prophecy
    - It's a far more powerful edifying force in the body of Christ
- In fact, Paul adds that unless an interpreter is present in the body, the gift of speaking in tongues holds no prospect for edifying anyone beyond the speaker alone
    - As we covered last week, the gift of speaking in tongues is the ability for a person to speak in a foreign language they do not understand
    - The gift of interpretation of tongues is the ability to understand a foreign language that the person cannot naturally speak
    - When the gift of tongues operates with the gift of interpretation, the message of the speech can be relayed to the congregation
    - But without the gift of interpretation present, the gift of tongues loses any chance of edifying anyone beyond the speaker
- Finally, notice at the end of v.5 Paul says that the one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues
- He's reiterating the priority of prophecy over other gifts, especially tongues
    - And again the basis for that priority is measured in the degree of edification that takes place in each case
    - So moving forward in the chapter, Paul gives specific instructions for the use of gifts in the body according to this test
    - Gifts are to be used in a logical, disciplined way to ensure edification by placing gifts in their proper priority
    - While still making opportunity for every gift to operate within reasonable limits
- And the first set of rules regard how the gift of tongues may be practiced in the church gathering

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1COR. 14:6 But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking in tongues, what will I profit you unless I speak to you either by way of revelation or of knowledge or of prophecy or of teaching?
1COR. 14:7 Yet even lifeless things, either flute or harp, in producing a

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> sound, if they do not produce a distinction in the tones, how will it be known what is played on the flute or on the harp?
> 1COR. 14:8 For if the bugle produces an indistinct sound, who will prepare himself for battle?
> 1COR. 14:9 So also you, unless you utter by the tongue speech that is clear, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air.
> 1COR. 14:10 There are, perhaps, a great many kinds of languages in the world, and no kind is without meaning.
> 1COR. 14:11 If then I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be to the one who speaks a barbarian, and the one who speaks will be a barbarian to me.
> 1COR. 14:12 So also you, since you are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek to abound for the edification of the church.

- To begin, Paul describes a hypothetical situation in church gatherings in which the gift of tongues is put to use
  - Paul says if he should come into a church gathering in Corinth with a gift of tongues, he asks how could his presence in the gathering profit anyone?
    - By profit, Paul means spiritual benefit
    - Paul says his spiritual benefit to the body was dependent on sharing something meaningful with the rest of the body
    - He would need to share a revelation of God, a piece of spiritual knowledge, a prophecy, a teaching…
    - He must share something understandable, something that can be received and used by the hearers
    - Otherwise, his presence and his gifting is useless to the body
  - Paul's drawing upon the very purpose of a gathering
    - The church is gathered for the same reason a basketball team gathers on a court for practice
    - Basketball players can practice by themselves to a degree; dribbling, shooting, rebounding
    - But unless the team gathers, there are many aspect of the game that simply can't be perfected without teamwork
    - Likewise, Christians can work alone in developing disciplines of prayer, study, and the like
    - But there are many aspects of our Christian walk that simply cannot develop properly without teamwork
    - We need the gifts others possess to round out our spiritual development
  - But imagine if a basketball player showed up at practice and then proceeded to stand in the corner of the gym dribbling by himself
    - Of if he stood at the opposite end of the court shooting free throws alone

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        - What if he never participated in the practice in such a way that he made the other players better or they helped him?
        - That's the problem with a church that placed emphasis on the gift of tongues at the expense of other gifts like prophecy
        - It's like a gym full of basket players all dribbling alone and by themselves
- So in v.7 Paul uses his own analogies…instead of basketball, he uses musical instruments
    - He says even lifeless musical instruments like flutes or harps can only benefit us if they play in harmony
        - If they were to play their own thing in the midst of an orchestra, they would disrupt the gathering
        - But if they play something sensible, they communicate something beneficial in concert with the other instruments
    - And a bugle only serves a purpose in battle if it plays a recognizable tune
        - Soldiers were told when to attack and when to retreat, when to flank or when to hold position by specific bugle calls
        - The bugle had the potential to aid the soldiers but only so long as it communicates something useful
    - Then Paul makes his application to the use of tongues in the gathering
        - He says in v.9 that unless the speech we utter in the gathering is clear, then who will understand it? The answer is no one
        - Paul says to speak without being understandable is to speak into the air
        - He is referring to sound waves
        - He means that sound may leave our mouth, but it stays in the air
            - It never lands on anyone's ears in a useful way
            - It never enters the brain
            - It's simply lost in the air
- Paul's speaking about two situations, both problematic, but one is worse than the other
    - First, Paul's alluding to a false form of this spiritual gift, a counterfeit
        - With so much interest in speaking in tongues in the Corinthian church, there was a peer pressure for believers to "acquire" this gift
        - Since we know that a spiritual gift is not available except to those God chooses to give it, any desire to obtain a gift is going to be a fruitless desire
        - Nevertheless, if the pressure is great enough, a Christian may resort to counterfeiting the gift to feel accepted or approved by their peers
    - Counterfeiting a speaking gift is impossible and easy at the same time
        - On the one hand, it's impossible to fake any spiritual gift in a meaningful way
        - If a spiritual gift from God could be obtained through the works of our flesh, then what does it say about spiritual gifts?

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        - The value of a spiritual gift would lose its significance if it was within man's ability to create it in his own power
        - It would lose its ability to glorify God
    - So it's literally impossible for someone to fake speaking in another language
        - If you don't know another language, you aren't going to fool anyone by trying to imitate it
        - If I don't know Spanish, I can't fake it by taking English words and putting the letter "o" at the end (i.e., dog-o, cat -o, etc.)
        - It's silly
- On the other hand, if I didn't realize that speaking in tongues means speaking in a real human language, then I might be fooled into thinking that any form of unintelligible babbling was speaking in tongues
    - In that case, faking it would be very easy
    - I see one person babbling in repetitive nonsense syllables, and I just mimic the behavior with my own mantra of babbling
    - Just like that, I'm told I have spoken in tongues, and in ignorance I accept what I'm told
- And that's what had begun happening inside the church in Corinth
    - Paul alludes to this behavior in v.10 when he reminds the church that there are many kinds of human language in the world
        - God produced an unknown number of languages at the Tower of Babel and most continue to this day
    - But every human language possesses meaning, Paul says
    - Every language has as its purpose the communication of thought, and so they all possess structure, syntax, and vocabulary
    - In other words, there is no tongue that consists entirely of nonsense babbling
- The second situation Paul's addressing is the inherent limitation of the gift of speaking in tongues
    - Even when it's used in a genuine way, the gift of tongues is still limited by its nature to edifying only the speaker
        - Since no one can understand what's being said, the gift of tongues has no edifying purpose in the gathering of believers
    - Notice in v.11 Paul says that when someone speaks to me in a language I can't understand, they are like a Barbarian to me and vice versa
        - A Barbarian was a Greek term for any non-Greek speaking person
        - Paul's point is there is no fellowship taking place between people who can't understand one another
    - It's like an instrument playing off tune in an orchestra
        - Or the basketball player practicing by himself in the gym
        - The gift of tongues has individual benefit, but it's not a team sport
        - It has no edifying purpose in the gathering

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- To conclude, Paul says in v.12 that since the church was zealous to possess and use their spiritual gifts, Paul says make your goal to see the greatest possible edification in the church
  - He says make sure the gifts abound for the edification of the church
    - Consider how to put them to use in a way that ensures the greatest possible edification takes place
    - This should be the aim of every church, every gathering, every time
  - Why do we spend roughly half of our main gathering in study of God's word?
    - Because there is simply no better way to edify the church
    - But neither is it the only way, so we also make time for other gifts to work in the gathering
    - Paul isn't asking for one gift to be used to the exclusion of all others, but he expects the church to give preference to greater gifts
- Therefore, since the gift of tongues has a very limited power to edify, Paul places severe restrictions on its use in any Christian gathering

> 1COR. 14:13 Therefore let one who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret.
> 1COR. 14:14 For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful.
> 1COR. 14:15 What is the outcome then? I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also; I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also.
> 1COR. 14:16 Otherwise if you bless in the spirit only, how will the one who fills the place of the ungifted say the "Amen" at your giving of thanks, since he does not know what you are saying?
> 1COR. 14:17 For you are giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not edified.
> 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.

- First, if a Christian possesses the gift of tongues and desires to contribute to the gathering with their gift, they are commanded to pray for the opportunity to interpret their own speech
  - The fact that interpretation may be obtained through prayer in this manner demonstrates that interpretation is not a distinct spiritual gift
    - Instead, the gifts of tongues is a general category of gifts that includes the ability to speak and/or interpret foreign languages
    - So a person with the gift of tongues may have the ability to speak in a foreign tongue and at other times they may possess the ability to interpret
    - They might be moved by the Spirit to interpret someone else's foreign speech

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        - Or as Paul says here, they can be moved by the Spirit to understand their own foreign tongue
    - Therefore, Paul tells all who possess these gifts of tongues to pray for interpretation before they use their gift in the gathering
        - The reason they should pray in this way is so they might ensure their gift edifies others
        - Paul uses himself as an example saying that if he should speak in tongues without the ability to interpret his own speech, his spirit is edified but his mind is left out of the loop
        - As Gordon Fee said earlier, there is an edifying effect in the spirit that doesn't transfer to the brain
    - So in v.15 Paul says what should be the outcome then? In other words, what would be the better alternative?
        - The better alternative is to have both our spirit and mind engaged in the spiritual service, allowing both to be edified
        - So Paul preferred to pray in a way that both his spirit and mind were engaged
        - He preferred to sing in a language that both his spirit and mind could understand and agree with
- In other words, Paul says even if he might pray or sing in a foreign tongue, he would prefer to pray and sing in a recognizable language so that others would be edified through his service
    - Notice in v.16 Paul says that the effect of praying or singing in a common language is to trigger an "Amen" from the others in the gathering
        - Ministry is happening in that moment, as evidenced by another person's agreement in the expression Amen
        - It means someone is feeling blessed at my display of faith and worship
        - It means someone is learning something through my teaching
        - It means someone else is moved to bless the name of the Lord because of what He did through me
        - That's edification
    - But edification depends on communication, so unless we are blessed to be able to interpret our own speech, we should refrain from sharing it
        - We might still exercise our gift of tongues in private, because it still brings us personal benefit
        - In v.17 Paul says it's well enough for us to give God thanks through our gift
        - But it goes nowhere else
- As an apostle, Paul possessed the gift of tongues, so he uses himself as an example of the proper use of the gift
    - In fact, Paul says he was glad to have the gift more than anyone else in the church
        - Paul makes this claim to establish his credibility on this issue
        - His motive for placing restrictions on the use of the gift was not spite or jealousy
        - On the contrary, Paul was the greatest practitioner of tongues in the church, he says
    - Nevertheless, Paul restrained his use of the gift

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- In fact, he says he would rather speak five words in an understandable tongue rather than speak 10,000 words in a foreign tongue
- He's exaggerating to make a point, of course, but it's still a very strong statement
- Paul's emphasizing that there is virtually no value to be found in allowing someone to speak in a foreign tongue in the body during the gathering
- If someone else has even five intelligent words to offer the congregation, that person should be given priority over a person with the gift of tongues
- Because the opportunity to edify is entirely in favor of the understandable speech

- When we return, we'll finish the chapter looking at how Paul instructs the church to restore order to a service that's deteriorated into a free-for-all
  - We'll learn that order and purpose must reign
    - But in the meantime, if you should have an experience today in a church where the gift of tongues is supposedly in use, remember Paul's counsel in the first half of Chapter 14
      - Is the speech a true foreign language or repetitive babbling sounds?
      - If it's babbling, it's not a result of the Spirit; it's just the flesh deceived into a mimicking behavior
  - And if you're ever in a church where you've been pressured to join in to such behavior, then consider Paul's words
    - Consider whether this is a place you should congregate
    - For if the church has ignored such clear instruction in scripture on this topic, where else have they been deceived?
    - We must use the discernment we've been given by the Spirit

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