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Sermon Notes

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## **Edification Through Clarity: Prophecy over Tongues**

### **1 Corinthians 14:1-19**

#### I. Central Concept: Edification through the Ministry of the Word in Love

##### A. The Doctrine Simply Stated

1. Paul is addressing the purpose of the spiritual gifts in the context of corporate life—especially corporate worship
2. He is deeply concerned that the Corinthian church should be EDIFIED to full maturity in Christ

*CSB 1 Corinthians 14:3 But the person who prophesies speaks to people for edification, encouragement, and consolation.*

*1 Corinthians 14:5 I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy. He who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may be edified.*

*1 Corinthians 14:12 So it is with you. Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church.*

*1 Corinthians 14:17 You may be giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not edified.*

3. The Spiritual gifts are all given for that purpose... they are a means to an end, not an end in themselves
4. What is “edification” It means “building up”... picture a construction site, like FBC has been all this year; workers have come in week after week... tearing down the old, clearing away the rubble, building up the beautiful new building—skilled

workers—carpenters, plumbers, electricians, painters, interior decorators—everything done according to blueprints done skillfully by the architect we hired to draw up the plans

5. So also the church of Jesus Christ—a spiritual entity made up of people—is likened to a spiritual STRUCTURE

***Ephesians 2:21-22 In [Christ] the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. <sup>22</sup> And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.***

Edification is done when human beings are converted through faith in Christ and made what Peter calls “living stones” in this spiritual temple; then those stones themselves are continually quarried and shaped and polished toward perfection in Christ—holiness, sanctification, spiritual development every single day of your lives

6. This EDIFICATION is done ultimately by God through the Holy Spirit; his central powerful tool is the WORD OF GOD... it is the WORD, the Scriptures, rightly divided, rightly taught, rightly exemplified, rightly applied, rightly lived out that enables each individual member of the Body of Christ to GROW toward our heavenly goal of total conformity to Christ... the WORD OF GOD transforms our MINDS and HEARTS, from which our LIVES follow in holiness
7. Spiritual gifts are given by the Spirit to aid in this overall building project... they are TOOLS in his powerful hands

#### B. The Corinthian Context

1. Supremely gifted church... “you lack no spiritual gift” (1 Cor. 1:7)
2. BUT extremely immature, sinful church, as we’ve seen through 13 chapters: factions, divisions, struggles with gross sexual sin, etc.
3. Recently converted from paganism... had much of the old Greek pagan mentality when it came to spiritual gifts
  - a. They greatly esteemed TONGUES above every other gift

- b. It was showy and spectacular; enabled the practitioner to be esteemed and honored and elevated, stoking his ego
  - c. From the pagan background, their religion believed in ecstatic frenzied worship patterns that involved drunkenness and frenzied activity which showed a mystical UNION with a god or goddess
  - d. When speaking in tongues came in as a part of the Christian worship, they effectively heard it with pagan ears and were using the gift of tongues in a disorderly, even frenzied way, prideful, self-serving, resulting in division and CHAOS
  - e. Especially damaging was their seeking of MINDLESSNESS, oblivion, that showed this mystical union with the divine
4. Paul has to effectively “put tongues in their place”... specifically below the clear, intelligible ministry of the Word of God

### C. Our Context

#### 1. 21<sup>st</sup> Century Evangelicalism

- a. Fundamentalism arose in response to 19<sup>th</sup> century liberalism; commitment to inerrancy; evangelicalism arose from fundamentalism
- b. 1905: The Azusa Street (Pentecostal) revival... the birth of the modern charismatic movement; speaking in tongues a huge part of it... a sign that you had received the “Baptism of the Spirit”
- c. Division within Bible-believing Christians on the “sign gifts”

#### 2. Southern Baptists: part of the broader evangelical movement

- a. Also divided on the charismatic issue
- b. The general leadership of the SBC has been hostile to the charismatic movement; the IMB had a big battle over tongues and the private prayer language when Jerry Rankin was President of the IMB

- c. A spectrum in the SBC: from open, bold embracing of the charismatic gifts to a staunch denial of their validity
- d. In the middle, some called “open but cautious” ... have never spoken in tongues, are very aware of excesses, cannot resolve the issue through simple exegesis; aware of the historical divide

### 3. FBC

- a. In my 22 years here, we’ve never had any controversy over this
- b. I would call myself among the open but cautious camp... I am skeptical of attempts made (even by some of my heroes, like Jonathan Edwards and John MacArthur) at a strong biblical case for cessationism... that the sign gifts, especially tongues, ceased with the completion of the NT canon
- c. My own mentors are divided on this: John Piper and Wayne Grudem are charismatics; John MacArthur is a strong cessationist
- d. We have the spectrum here at FBC... I know there are some brothers and sisters here that pray in a private prayer language (because you’ve told me so), but no one has made any argument for incorporating tongues and prophecies in our Sunday morning worship services
- e. FBC, under the leadership of this group of elders, is not remotely close to becoming charismatic on Sunday mornings... but neither are we going to speak against the validity of all charismatic gifts based on exegesis we’ve done
- f. Yet it is not hard for us to read the MAIN IDEA of 1 Corinthians 14: if tongues are ever to be used on Sunday morning in the corporate worship service, they MUST be interpreted right there and then; and the elders will most certainly want that ability to be demonstrated privately to our satisfaction before we would ever permit it a part of our service...
- g. Tongues can be faked... gibberish (mindless repetition of a very small number of phrases and sounds) can be acquired as a learned pattern; some other people have claimed the gift of

interpretation, and have said “He’s saying this, he’s saying that” but they were exposed as frauds

h. So, the elders would need rock-solid proof that the tongues are truly a work of the Holy Spirit... that would be by someone speaking a coherent language, and then someone else would have to interpret it in a way we are convinced is accurate

4. The SAME is true of prophecy for me... I believe that it is scriptural to make a prophet PROVE he or she is a prophet by predicting the future... independently verifiable prediction; how else can we know that someone really is a prophet? It is the Bible’s test in Deuteronomy 18:21-22. We are well aware that not all prophecies are predictions... but it is biblical that the GIFT ITSELF be vindicated in the person’s life by at least one verifiable prediction

D. Now... the Exegesis of 1 Corinthians 14:1-19!!

## II. Prophecy Edifies the Whole Congregation (vs. 1-5)

### A. Paul Strongly Elevates Prophecy Over Tongues

1. Tongues are UNINTELLIGIBLE if not translated; prophecy is clear to all and therefore edifies the whole church

### B. Pursue Love... and Spiritual Gifts

***1 Corinthians 14:1 Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy.***

1. The Greek word means “follow” “hunt”, “chase after with focus and intensity”
2. The “Love Chapter” is over; Paul knows that his definition of love is a perfect and timeless standard; therefore, Christians will have to pursue perfect love as a goal the rest of their lives
3. In the same way, he wants them zealous after spiritual gifts as well, to delight in them and love them... all of the gifts, not just the showy ones

### C. Especially **Pursue Prophecy**

1. Now this brings up an interesting question
2. If spiritual gifts are given by the sovereign God “as he wills” according to his wise plan and purpose, then why should we pursue or eagerly desire this or that spiritual gift? For example, would my yearning to acquire the gift of evangelism or the gift of faith mean that God would give it to me?
3. Some say that since God distributes them according to his own sovereign will, we should not pursue any gift; rather what Paul means here is that the church as a whole should be zealous in their ESTEEM for prophecy
4. However, I do believe that God can add a spiritual gift to a person any time; there is no time frame for when the gifts are given to each specific person. I used to think it was at conversion, like the equipment given out to a new recruit at the beginning of basic training. But I think God could add some key gifts to a person who is going out on a mission trip for the first time
5. Also, just because God gives something as a gift doesn’t mean we shouldn’t seek it from him in prayer; e.g. a prudent wife

***Proverbs 19:14 Houses and wealth are inherited from parents, but a prudent wife is from the LORD.***

- a. BUT I would still advise a young man who wants to get married to seek her in prayer before he ever meets her, and then seek her both in prayer and in loving courtship after he meets her
- b. So also all the gifts God gives can also be sought from his hand in prayer

D. “Especially” Prophecy OVER Tongues

1. Paul is saying that the Corinthians should especially be zealous after the gift of prophecy as clearly superior to the gift of tongues. WHY?

***1 Corinthians 14:2-4 For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God. Indeed, no one understands him; he utters mysteries with his spirit. <sup>3</sup> But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening,***

*encouragement and comfort. <sup>4</sup> He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church.*

2. Again, the central goal of all spiritual gifts is EDIFICATION of the whole church...
3. The unintelligible, uninterpreted tongues are essentially MYSTERIOUS to everyone, even to the one who speaks them
4. In some way, the use of the gift gives a small amount of encouragement to the individual Christian... he “edifies himself” in that he knows that only by the Holy Spirit can he speak this language
5. But prophecy is INTELLIGIBLE to everyone who hears it, and therefore edifies the WHOLE CHURCH

#### E. What Is Prophecy?

1. Prophecy is a direct communication of the literal Word of God by the means of a human being... “Thus says the Lord”
2. The content could be anything... any message the Lord wants to give
3. All scripture is God-breathed and actually prophecies written down for all time; but many genuine prophecies were never written down, even in Bible times
4. Prophecy could refer to any time aspect—past, present, or future. When Moses wrote down the Book of Genesis, he was writing prophecy about the PAST. Many prophets spoke clear words of instruction or rebuke to a current issue; John the Baptist was a prophet who strongly warned King Herod that his marriage to his brother’s wife was adulterous; very much a CURRENT EVENT
5. However, by far the most significant form of prophecy is PREDICTION of the future... Moses gave to the people of God for all time the TEST by which a prophet should be validated:

*Deuteronomy 18:21-22 You may say to yourselves, "How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the LORD?" <sup>22</sup> If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message*

***the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him.***

6. I have not heard from John Piper or Wayne Grudem or Sam Storms or C.J. Mahaney or any advocate of the modern use of prophecy why we should not still look to this form of prediction as the way by which a prophet's words may be tested
7. Prophecy must also be tested by whether or not it conforms to the existing validated prophecies... the inerrant Word of God; the prophet must speak in proportion to THE FAITH

***Romans 12:6 Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith***

Literally "according to the analogy of the faith" ... *analogia* means showing a right relationship, properly aligned with; "the faith" is Christian doctrine

So a prophet must first be tested by **predicting the future**; then his prophecies must be continually evaluated to see if they are **doctrinally sound** by the standard of the Word of God

#### F. The Triple Focus of Genuine Prophecy

***<sup>CSB</sup> 1 Corinthians 14:3 But the person who prophesies speaks to people for edification, encouragement, and consolation.***

1. Edification: building up to maturity in Christ by right DOCTRINE... so there is a strong INSTRUCTION aspect
2. Encouragement: or exhortation... it is an APPLICATION aspect... putting into practice what you have learned; So... "Here is the truth; now DO IT..." or as Jesus said

***John 13:17 Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.***

3. Consolation: or comfort... prophets are able to soothe the fears of the people, to bring a word of consolation that brings joy in the midst of suffering and sorrow

***John 16:33 "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."***

If prophecy has been fulfilled and is now obsolete with the completion of the Scriptures, then preaching takes this place

These three things should be in every good sermon: INSTRUCTION, EXHORTATION, and CONSOLATION

So, this is the clear superiority of prophecy over tongues

***1 Corinthians 14:4 He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church.***

G. BUT... Paul is Not Throwing Tongues Under the Bus!

***1 Corinthians 14:5 I would like every one of you to speak in tongues***

1. He is not questioning the validity of the gift of tongues
2. Not at all... later he will say this:

***1 Corinthians 14:18 I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you.***

3. Nor is he questioning how the Spirit is apportioning gifts to various ones... he knows that not everyone will have the same gift
4. His point is, however much he would like everyone to speak in tongues, he would rather that they PROPHECY because it is much more impactful for the whole church

***1 Corinthians 14:5 I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy. He who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may be edified.***

### III. The Problem of Unintelligibility

Paul Heightens His Argument Here in the problem of the unintelligibility of tongues if they're not translated

He does it by means of some everyday life illustrations

A. Even If Paul Himself Did It... It Would Be Close to Worthless

***1 Corinthians 14:6 Now, brothers, 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?***

So imagine the great Apostle Paul coming back to Corinth to resume his powerful ministry. He goes into their worship service on the Lord's Day, and begins speaking in a tongue without any interpretation at all... everyone would be bewildered and frustrated

They yearn for a clear word from God... the greatest theologian in the history of the church, the man who **WROTE THE BOOK OF ROMANS!** Here at your church service... and you're getting unintelligible words!

It would be of no value if he did not bring the three things I just gave you: **INSTRUCTION, EXHORTATION, and CONSOLATION**

#### B. Illustration #1: Musical Instruments

***1 Corinthians 14:7 Even in the case of lifeless things that make sounds, such as the flute or harp, how will anyone know what tune is being played unless there is a distinction in the notes?***

1. We've all heard an untrained child sit at a piano and start banging on the keys...
2. The notes are clear enough, but they make **NO MUSICAL SENSE**; they are **MUSICAL GIBBERISH**; there is no rhythm, no time; there is no chord progression; indeed, there are no chords at all; the sounds are random and chaotic
3. Similar to the random sounds made by the wind on some chimes or wooden flutes hanging on a line around a Buddhist temple... random noise
4. But true music follows **RULES** and even if it's not your style—even if its fusion jazz or Renaissance or Baroque or extremely modern... it still follows rules and has an order and beauty to it

#### C. Illustration #2: Trumpet in battle

***1 Corinthians 14:8 Again, if the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle?***

1. In the Civil War, units learned clear trumpet signals by which a company would be commanded to advance or retreat; even into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, everyone knows reveille and taps... the sounds at the beginning of the day and at the end
2. So also the civilian population of London during the Blitz by the German Luftwaffe, learned two air raid sounds... the pulsating rhythmic alarm that rose up again and again in a wail, telling everyone that bombs were about to be dropped on their city... everyone ran immediately to the subterranean shelters; then there was a long, slow, rising wail that gave the ALL CLEAR sound that it was safe to come out and resume their lives
3. Paul's point: if these signals are not clear, who will know what to do on the battlefield?

***1 Corinthians 14:9 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.***

#### D. All Language Has Order

***1 Corinthians 14:10-11 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 he is a foreigner to me.***

1. No language is gibberish... that is how we must test even private prayer languages; is there actually a wide-ranging vocabulary and grammar and pattern to it? Or is it just gibberish, empty phrases repeated again and again?
2. But even if the unknown tongue is definitely a high-level, organized language, if there's no translation, it's as though it's gibberish to the UNTRAINED EAR
3. The word "foreigner" in verse 11 is literally "barbarian" in the Greek (*Barbaros*... because the words sound like "bar-bar-bar")

#### E. The Point Repeated for Emphasis

***1 Corinthians 14:12 So it is with you. Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church.***

#### IV. The Goal of Worship: A Fruitful Mind AND a Fruitful Spirit

##### A. Pray for Interpretation

***1 Corinthians 14:13 For this reason anyone who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret what he says.***

1. It doesn't matter who does the interpretation; but without it, the gift has to stay out of the corporate worship setting

##### B. Uninterpreted Tongues Make the Mind Unfruitful

***1 Corinthians 14:14 For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful.***

1. This is the key "private prayer language" verse, if private prayer languages are indeed valid
2. Alistair Begg points out that later, Paul will say that he speaks in tongues more than anyone, but seemingly not in church

***1 Corinthians 14:18-19 I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. <sup>19</sup> But in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue.***

- a. Begg asks "If Paul is not doing all this speaking in tongues in church, then where and when is he doing it?"
  - b. It would imply that he does it in private
  - c. I am not so sure; I think Paul in verses 18-19 is saying that any tongue spoken in church without being interpreted is close to worthless... five clear words are better than 10,000 uninterpreted words... that's an incredible statement!!
3. I cannot finally resolve this... People who truly believe that their private prayer language is from God will not be dissuaded from it by 30 seconds of reasoning on my part... nor am I seeking to do it based on sound exegesis of this difficult passage

4. It may well be that Paul had a private prayer language
5. But his point here is that, even in that case, his MIND IS UNFRUITFUL if he never understands the words he is saying

C. True Worship is a Combination of the MIND and the HEART

***1 Corinthians 14:15 So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind.***

1. The mind understands, then the heart SINGS it back to God
2. As Jesus said plainly to the Samaritan woman

***John 4:24 God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.***

- a. Not vapid, empty emotionalism on the one hand; not cold dead orthodoxy on the other
- b. As Alistair Begg said, “Not the crematorium nor the carnival”
- c. Rather, we learn sound doctrine... it is clearly unfolded to us by the ministry of the word; then our hearts are delighted in it and we sing

D. Without Intelligibility, How Can We Say “Amen”?

***1 Corinthians 14:16-17 If you are praising God with your spirit, how can one who finds himself among those who do not understand say "Amen" to your thanksgiving, since he does not know what you are saying? <sup>17</sup> You may be giving thanks well enough, but the other man is not edified.***

1. “Amen” is a Hebrew word meaning agreement and commitment
2. “I stand on that”... or “Truly truly”
3. In corporate worship, all manner of truth is being presented... the true worshiper is AGREEING IN HIS HEART with what is being said, then out comes thanksgiving and praise and worship
4. But if someone has no idea what was just said, how can he AGREE and DELIGHT in it?

### E. Unintelligible Words are Worthless

***1 Corinthians 14:18-19 I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. <sup>19</sup> But in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue.***

1. Paul's own speaking in tongues is established here... a bit of a surprise, since we never see him do it anywhere in the New Testament
2. But he is identifying with those whose gift it is... he is not throwing them under the bus; he delights in the gift of tongues and uses it more than anyone else does
3. Five accurate clear words can change your life forever: **“Jesus rose from the dead!”**
4. But 10,000 unintelligible words would be tedious and empty beyond all measure... close to worthless; 10,000 words is far more than a full sermon! This sermon on Microsoft Word just passed 5000 words... and its already too long!

### V. Application

#### A. Let Everything Be Done for Edification

1. See the TRUE building project at FBC... not the “More than a building campaign”
2. This building will someday be destroyed
3. The true work is going on in souls of people... the transformation of human beings by the ongoing ministry of the Word

#### B. See the Value of the Clear Word of God!

1. All true worship begins with God's written Word

***Psalm 119:105 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.***

2. The word “clear” in heaven

***Revelation 4:6 Also before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal.***

*Revelation 21:11 [The New Jerusalem] shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.*

*Revelation 22:1-2 Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb <sup>2</sup> down the middle of the great street of the city*

The more we can make the Word CLEAR here on earth, the better!!

3. The clear, understandable word must be preached

- a. For me as a preacher, I need to be sure I don't use obscure phrases and eloquent vocabulary that will actually hide the clear truth of the gospel

Charles Spurgeon, one of the most intelligent and eloquent preachers in the history of the English language reigned himself in every week by preaching his sermon first to a chamber maid of limited education; if she didn't understand something, he rephrased it

4. Note the pattern of life transformation: MIND, HEART, BODY...  
understand, believe, be, do

C. SO... for the rest of your life, seek a Sunday morning FEAST in the Word of God

1. Don't settle for less than the clear Word of God; there are a lot of charlatans out there... entertainers who are tickling ears
2. The ministry your soul needs is a clear exposition of the Word ...  
INSTRUCTION, EXHORTATION, CONSOLATION
3. If that is not happening week after week, go somewhere else

D. Prophecy and Tongues May Well Both Be Obsolete... OR NOT

1. Either way, we must follow the clear rules laid out here:  
uninterpreted tongues must never be used in public worship
2. Priority must always be given to EDIFICATION through the intelligible ministry of the Word of God

E. Come to Christ!