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Andrew M. Davis

Sermon Notes

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The Gift of Tongues: Purpose and Proper Use

1 Corinthians 14:20-28

I. Goal of All Spiritual Gifts: Edification

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”

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. ²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

B. Problem in Corinth

1. Selfishness, pride, man-centeredness
2. Spiritual gifts a platform for EGO
3. Result: chaos on the Lord's Day
 - a. Paul has to reign these folks in greatly
 - b. Keep in mind the chaos in observation of the Lord's Supper

1 Corinthians 11:20-21 When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, ²¹ for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk.

- c. So also with their corporate worship... great DISORDER
- d. Paul has to reign in the use of tongues, commanding them to speak one at a time
- e. So also we will see he has to do the same with the gift of prophecy... one at a time
- f. Overall effect

1 Corinthians 14:40 But all things should be done decently and in order.

God is a God of order, not chaos

1 Corinthians 14:33 For God is not a God of disorder but of peace.

C. Last Week: Edification through CLEAR INSTRUCTION IN THE WORD OF GOD

1. The Word of God alone is given to edify the saints

2 Timothy 3:16-17 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

2. Our souls are justified (forgiven of all sins) by hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ by faith

Romans 10:17 Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.

3. So also our souls are EDIFIED (built up) to full maturity the same way... by the clear ministry of the Word of God

D. A Call for Maturity

1 Corinthians 14:20 Brothers, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults.

1. Paul wants them to grow up as a congregation
2. They were acting like spoiled children... imagine a kindergarten in which the teacher says to the class: "Boys and girls, I have to step out for a minute... I want you to be on your best behavior while I'm gone. Stay in your seats and color or write till I get back." Then the thirty little kids are left completely unattended for the next half hour. What kind of mayhem would eventually ensue? What kind of chaos and disorder? For the children will follow their own inner drives and desires, and will not reign themselves in
3. So also these Corinthians need to stop thinking like children, selfishly using their gifts for their own ego... and the other watching them for their own entertainment
4. He wants them to GROW UP... not in the area of evil; he would like them to have a child-like innocence about evil; sadly... they are exactly the opposite; experts in corruption, but like immature babies in the things of the Spirit

II. The Purpose of Tongues: A Sign for Unbelievers

1 Corinthians 14:21-22 In the Law it is written: "Through men of strange tongues and through the lips of foreigners I will speak to this

***people, but even then they will not listen to me," says the Lord. ²²
Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers***

A. Paul Here Gives the Purpose for Tongues

1. Reminder: "tongues" means languages... not incoherent babble, but actual fully formed languages spoken by the power of the Spirit without the speaker having studied or even understanding the language
2. A form of it happened on the Day of Pentecost... when the Holy Spirit descended on the praying church in the upper room in tongues of fire, and the people began speaking in recognizable languages that they'd never studied as the Spirit moved them
3. Then the apostles poured out into the streets and began preaching in one language but being heard and understood perfectly in many languages

Acts 2:7-11 Utterly amazed, they asked: "Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? ⁸ Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? ⁹ Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome ¹¹ (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs-- we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!"

4. Then as the church spread, the gift of tongues was a sign that the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the people hearing the gospel... it was an immediate and miraculous indicator that the people were believers and had received the gift of the Holy Spirit... at Cornelius's house; and again in Ephesus.
5. Here in Corinth, the church was made up mostly of Gentiles who had believed in Jesus and some of them had the gift of tongues as a part of their spiritual gift package
6. Paul wants them to understand God's purpose in giving them

B. The Quote from Isaiah

1. Paul lifts a quote from the prophet Isaiah... Isaiah 28:11-12

1 Corinthians 14:21 In the Law it is written: "Through men of strange tongues and through the lips of foreigners I will speak to this people, but even then they will not listen to me," says the Lord.

2. Paul's use of this quote is not easy to understand, but let's do the best we can

3. Isaiah's context

- a. Isaiah was a prophet sent to the southern kingdom of Judah approximately seven centuries before Christ was born
- b. About fifteen years before Isaiah's prophecy, the northern kingdom of Israel had been taken away into exile by the Assyrian Empire because of their persistent wickedness
- c. God sent Isaiah as a prophet to the southern kingdom of Judah to warn them that the same thing would happen to them if they didn't repent of their sins
- d. However, the proud religious leaders mocked the word of God sent to them by the prophet Isaiah... they acted like he was speaking to babies and they mocked his prophecies

Isaiah 28:9-10 "Who is it he is trying to teach? To whom is he explaining his message? To children weaned from their milk, to those just taken from the breast? ¹⁰ For it is: Do and do, do and do, rule on rule, rule on rule; a little here, a little there."

The words they use were like sing-songy baby talk: "sav la sav, sav la sav; kav la kav, kav la kav"

They had no fear of the Lord or his word at all

Isaiah 66:1-2 This is what the LORD says: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Where is the house you will build for me? Where will my resting place be? ² Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came into being?" declares the LORD. "This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word.

- e. God had spoken a clear word to the Jewish leaders of Jerusalem, pointing to a place of safety and salvation from the coming judgment

Isaiah 28:12 he said, "This is the resting place, let the weary rest"; and, "This is the place of repose"-- but they would not listen.

- f. So God said he would JUDGE this arrogant rebellious Jewish nation with foreign tongues

Isaiah 28:11 Very well then, with foreign lips and strange tongues God will speak to this people

This is a clear threat that in the City of David, the capitol city of the Promised Land, Gentile conquerors would come and speak to each other in strange, incomprehensible tongues after having crushed the Jewish armies and conquered their city's defenses

The very thing God had warned about 800 years before that through the Song of Moses before they even entered the Promised Land:

Deuteronomy 28:49-50 The LORD will bring a nation against you from far away, from the ends of the earth, like an eagle swooping down, a nation whose language you will not understand, ⁵⁰ a fierce-looking nation without respect for the old or pity for the young.

4. This would be the Babylonians... who would come and speak babble in their streets, and they would not understand it
5. Jeremiah also warned about this same thing

Jeremiah 5:15-17 O house of Israel," declares the LORD, "I am bringing a distant nation against you-- an ancient and enduring nation, a people whose language you do not know, whose speech you do not understand. ¹⁶ Their quivers are like an open grave; all of them are mighty warriors. ¹⁷ ... With the sword they will destroy the fortified cities in which you trust.

C. So, Tongues Are a Sign

1. A sign of warning to unbelievers... that a supernatural being—Almighty God—has the power to invade and end their lives

2. To unbelieving Jews in particular, it was a sign of the final judgment of God on their city and temple through the Romans
 - a. Jesus warned very clearly about this, weeping over Jerusalem:

Luke 19:43-44 *The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. ⁴⁴ They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you."*

- b. In AD 70, that judgment finally fell under the sword of the Roman army
 - c. Cessationists like John MacArthur say that tongues were a sign to the unbelieving Jewish nation of this impending judgment on their religious system and on their national identity because they rejected Christ... once the temple was destroyed by the Romans in AD 70, there was no longer a need for that sign
3. But tongues are not only a sign of impending judgment... also of blessing
 - a. As I said... proof that the Gentiles like Cornelius that heard the gospel with faith were instantly included in the family of God
 - b. They were adopted children of God, sons and daughters of Abraham... without being circumcised first

Acts 10:44-47 *While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. ⁴⁵ The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. ⁴⁶ For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. Then Peter said, ⁴⁷ "Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have."*

- c. This is the rich blessing of the gospel spread to ALL THE NATIONS OF THE EARTH
4. Also a sign of authority, marking out the apostles

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

2 Corinthians 12:12 The things that mark an apostle-- signs, wonders and miracles-- were done among you with great perseverance.

D. Why Only a Sign for Unbelievers?

1. Paul says that tongues are a sign for unbelievers, not for believers
2. He says prophecy is for believers, not for unbelievers
3. Why?
 - a. I think the theme of judgment that is linked to the Isaiah quote, with the Moses quote behind it is a clear historical warning to unbelieving Jews to come to faith in Christ
 - b. God is powerful; he controls human history! He can raise up the Babylonians and bring them against the temple in Jeremiah's day; he can raise up the Romans and bring them against the temple in Paul's day... even more terrifying, he can end all of human history when Jesus Christ returns at the head of an angelic army
 - c. Be warned, and flee to Christ while there's time
 - d. But even for Gentile unbelievers, the tongues are a sign and a warning/invitation as well
 - e. Something supernatural is going on here, and you are on the outside looking in

III. The Chaos of Tongues vs. the Clarity of Prophecy

1 Corinthians 14:23-25 So if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and some who do not understand or some unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind? ²⁴ But if an unbeliever or someone who does not understand comes in while everybody is prophesying, he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all, ²⁵ and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, "God is really among you!"

A. Paul Pushes to Extremes

1. The first century church usually met in houses, not all at once, altogether
2. But imagine that the whole church DID come together in one place
3. AND imagine also that everyone in the church was speaking in tongues AT THE SAME TIME with NO ONE INTERPRETING!
4. Imagine an unbeliever or an untrained person (perhaps a novice in Christianity... a recent convert who knows nothing but the basics of the gospel)... imagine such a person coming into this chaos

B. Conclusion of the Chaos: You Are All Out of Your Minds!

C. But if Prophecy is Going On... a Whole Different Outcome

1. The unbeliever would hear the incisive word of God being unfolded
2. He would hear the clarity of God's holy law...
3. He would be sharply convicted of his sin
4. He would feel that his own secret sins are being laid bare, exposed... his conscience would be smiting him

Hebrews 4:12-13 For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. ¹³ Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

5. Then, the unbeliever would hear of a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who died on the cross for sinners just like him
6. And Paul says he would fall down in their midst and declare, "Surely God is in this place!!"

D. Clear Example: The Conversion of Charles Spurgeon

Charles Spurgeon was a teenager who was under sharp conviction of his sins, but had not yet heard the gospel clearly explained and pressed to his soul

On a fateful snowy day, he ended up in a Primitive Methodist Chapel where the regular preacher did not show up. A layman got up and expounded this text:

Isaiah 45:22 Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.

This simple man ardently pressed the text home... "Look unto me" means LOOK UNTO CHRIST

"Look unto Me; I am sweatin' great drops of blood. **Look unto Me; I am hangin' on the cross. Look unto Me, I am dead and buried. Look unto Me; I rise again.** Look unto Me; I ascend to Heaven. Look unto Me; I am sitting at the Father's right hand. **O poor sinner, look unto Me! look unto Me!"**

Then the man zeroed in on Spurgeon:

Just fixing his eyes on me, as if he knew all my heart, he said, "Young man, you look very miserable." Well, I did, but I had not been accustomed to have remarks made from the pulpit on my personal appearance before. However, it was a good blow, struck right home. He continued, "And you will always be miserable – miserable in life and miserable in death – if you don't obey my text; but if you obey now, this moment, you will be saved." Then lifting up his hands, he shouted, as only a Primitive Methodist could do, **"Young man, look to Jesus Christ. Look! Look! Look! You have nothing to do but look and live!"**

I saw at once the way of salvation. I know not what else he said – I did not take much notice of it – I was so possessed with that one thought . . . I had been waiting to do fifty things, but when I heard that word, "Look!" what a charming word it seemed to

me. Oh! I looked until I could almost have looked my eyes away.

E. Every Christian Worship Service Must be Seeker Sensible

1. For many years, American evangelicalism has had a movement known as the “seeker sensitive church model”... basic concept is that everything in church on a Sunday morning should be geared to the seeker... the not-yet-converted person, to make him or her as comfortable and attracted as possible to Christ; the music, the lighting, the language used, the whole experience should be “seeker sensitive”
2. Others have reacted strongly against this and have said Sunday morning is for believers, not for the unbelievers; we need to feed the flock with the solid word of God. The rest of the week is for evangelizing, but Sunday morning is for the church
3. I believe that Sunday morning IS INDEED PRIMARILY for believers... that the church be fed God’s Word and grow into full maturity
4. But I think this text says we should be READY EVERY WEEK for the unbeliever to come into our service and be ministered to with the gospel... like Spurgeon was
5. And when the seeker comes, they should understand what is going on to some degree... and not think “You are out of your minds!”
6. So every single week, we aim to be **seeker sensible**... and preach the word of God so clearly that their hearts will be cut open by the word of God and they will be convicted and fall down and come to Christ!

IV. The Proper Use of Tongues: Orderly Procedures

1 Corinthians 14:26-28 What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church. ²⁷ If anyone speaks in a tongue, two-- or at the most three-- should speak, one at a time, and

someone must interpret. ²⁸ *If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and God.*

A. Paul Gets Very Practical... and Orderly

1. The concept here is that the people of God come not as an audience but as active participants
2. Now this concept has had a wide range of applications in many different traditions
3. The Quakers and Brethren and other church traditions have no paid clergy, no prepared messages... they just assemble and have a free flowing service with no plans at all
4. Other denominations are very hierarchical, like the Roman Catholics, with a clear clergy and a barrier and a great feeling of formality
5. We have to keep asking if the Lord wants more church participation and how to do that
6. Perhaps we at FBC could read these words more in terms of the Home Fellowships; keep in mind that the early church met in houses as we've said

B. Also... this is not a Comprehensive Order of Everything

1. Paul mentions only SOME aspects: a hymn, a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue, an interpretation
2. Notice what is NOT mentioned: public reading of Scripture, preaching, teaching, corporate prayer, the Lord's Supper
3. So... this is not meant to be an exhaustive list

C. The Purpose is the Same: ORDERLY EDIFICATION

1 Corinthians 14:26 All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church.

D. The Four Rules for Orderly Use of Tongues

1 Corinthians 14:27-28 If anyone speaks in a tongue, two-- or at the most three-- should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. ²⁸ If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and God.

1. Only two or three persons should speak

- a. Even if dozens of the Corinthians had this gift, they should not all come to the service expecting to use their gift
- b. This is to have a relatively small role in the service

2. They should speak in order, one after the other

- a. Not all at once as happens sometimes

Illus. Victory Chapel outreach in Salem, MA... only charismatic service I've been to... everyone spoke in tongues out loud and simultaneously... din of cacophony and disorder

3. What they say should be interpreted

- a. The words have to be brought over clearly into the minds of the rest of the church
- b. One person should do all the interpretation for everyone

4. If there is no interpreter, they should not speak... just keep silent in the church and speak to themselves and God

E. Clear Implication: The Use of Tongues is Subject to the Control of the People

- 1. This was not ecstasy... body snatching by the Holy Spirit, as we'll also see next week with prophecy

1 Corinthians 14:31-32 For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged. ³² The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets.

- 2. So also with tongues

V. Applications

A. Primary Goal Right Now: The Clear Proclamation of the Gospel

1. As I mentioned earlier... every week we want to be aware of unbelievers coming in from the outside
2. We want to be sure that you hear the words of life
3. The GOOD NEWS of the gospel
4. It is GOOD NEWS only if you know the BAD NEWS first... that all of us are sinners and fall short of the glory of God
5. We have seen the corruption of the human heart exposed in 1 Corinthians 13

1 Corinthians 13:4-6 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

But no one keeps this!!

6. More than that, we are commanded to LOVE GOD with every fiber of our being all the time... with all our hearts, souls, minds, and strength... but we DON'T
7. Christ came to save us from our sins

1 Peter 2:24-25 He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. ²⁵ For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

B. Use the Gifts to Edify the Body

C. What About Tongues?

1. Spoken last week

2. The elders of FBC would have to travel a journey with the doctrine and exegesis and with actual displays of this gift before we ever used it in a Sunday morning service
3. Most specifically, it would have to be a proven language validated with an actual translation (interpretation) of the tongue
4. Until then, we will study tongues in Scripture alone!