

**WARNING:** We must beware, as we study this chapter, of undue barnacles of dogmatism. There is a strong tendency in the church to make the context and contents of this chapter of such an emotional nature as to forget the necessary sensitivity of spirit and humility of heart which is required for such glorious things as the Word of God and to recognize that we have not arrived at all knowledge and thus must tread with grace in all of our pursuits here.

I say this because the contents of this chapter have historically been highly schismatic. The one extreme says with absolute conviction and certainty that any expression of tongues and is anathema, a sign of self-centered experientialism, and a load of fakery performed by false teachers and doomed to discipline by the Lord. The other extreme says with absolute conviction and certainty that a believer or his church will never be blessed by God without such a gift, the apex of Christian experience and spirituality, and the security and evidence of God's delight, thus making the use of tongues the sign and seal of the presence and work of God in all things. These two extremes mark the edges of the chasm which exists within the church regarding the use of what are called, tongues. Books written about it, conferences held to defend positions, blogs written about the horrors of the other and the purity of mine, etc.

The great irony of this schism is that the major theme of chapter 14 is edification. This is the vital term and the vital purpose of the expression of all gifts within the church. In fact, I would say that an expression of spiritual nature is not a gift unless it is edifying to those around us in the manner which Paul instructs here.

Tongues to God are not helpful *to the church*. Speak with your mind when you are gathered together, in order to build up the Church. Jesus never spoke in tongues, but He did speak prophetically for the building up of those around him.

Tongues are a sign for unbelievers, but prophecy and understanding is a sign for the Church.

The context of chapter 14 is clearly the context of the gathering of the Church in public worship and teaching of the Word and prayer. Thus, the purpose of the public gathering is not for individual experience of God, but for the edification of one another by the Word of God through the ministry of the Spirit of God in knowledge and truth of the gospel.

Think about this. How often do we gather to worship on a Sunday expecting to encounter God in such a way that the people around us are built up? I think, and I will speak for myself here, that I tend to approach our gatherings for worship with an expectation of my own personal time with the Lord without thought as to how that very encounter may benefit those around me. Thus, I'm convinced that because Sundays are about my experience of God, then whether or not I am here is irrelevant to both the church and to my encounter with the Lord. Not so, says Paul! Our gathering together for corporate worship is intrinsically corporate, not individual. Our singing is intrinsically Godward and other-ward. That is why what we sing and how we sing matters. This time is not just about me and God! The way in which we speak to each other matters. The way in which we listen to the Word matters, because it is not just about me.

The purpose of our gatherings, says the apostle, and the purpose of our gifts is for mutual edification, an encounter with God through His Word and His Spirit that results in building up others around us. Any spiritual experience apart from this, when gathered together, is not helpful, to the point that Paul would rather speak a few helpful words from the Lord than 10,000 words in a tongue. Thus, there is a difference between the expression of a tongue and the gifting of a tongue, as we shall see.

When we understand that the mature man, or the “spiritual” man, is not a gifted person, but a fruity person, particularly the fruit of love which seeks the mutuality of flourishing and glorification of others in the knowledge of the supremacy and centrality of God’s nature and God’s works, particularly revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. The experience of ecstasy or feelings of intense happiness are not the goal of our time together. Thus, we start to understand the necessity and priority of such a standard of love. And every gift, every expression, every word and thought and deed within the gathered Church must be measured against this standard: Is what I am doing, what I am focusing upon, what I am pursuing and chasing and obtaining, going to build another up in the knowledge of the Son of God? (Eph 4:12) How?

The Corinthian church believed that the mature man, the “spiritual” person, was proven by a mystical experience of God’s Spirit which was unexplainable and with ecstatic incomprehensible expressions and speech, viewing such behaviors as unintelligible mysteries which are not meant to be known, but only experienced. It’s as if the emotional intensity of such fervor was evidence of God’s presence, regardless (and somewhat unimportant) of its incomprehensible gibberish.

In a way, it is the pursuit of the trance, the mantra, the meld of modern mysticism and eastern spirituality, which purports to deliver peace without knowledge, joy without reason, and life without the mind. It is a common assumption in the church today that spirituality is such mindless, thoughtless, incomprehensible “mystery” which views logic, reason, and comprehension as obstacles to true worship and spiritual life. But Paul noted that such things are signs of immaturity, not maturity. It is the babbling of children, and that they ought to stop thinking and valuing and speaking like children when they are gathered together, for it is not useful for building the church. It is the Word of God proclaimed, heard and understood in truth, which builds the church.

1. Pursue Love – and Seek to Speak the Word of God
  - a. Chase down = persecute
    - i. An intense, unswerving, furious pursuit of something
    - ii. Love is the highest pursuit in regards to the previous two chapters
      1. It is the “more excellent way” and the rudder of the gifted ship, steering each strength and ability and power to its proper place
  - b. Diligently seek
    - i. Zeal – a desire or seeking that is strong, i.e. diligent
    - ii. The command is to diligently seek, submitted to love, the things of the Spirit of God, particularly to make known God
  - c. ‘particularly’ to prophesy
    - i. This word, translated ‘especially’ in the ESV, is actually a corrective phrase, *mallon de*, and has the idea of “rather, or rather, but rather”
      1. It has the idea of correcting a previous term or phrase with an intensive, greater, or more particular term or phrase
      2. Eph 4:28 – don’t *only* stop stealing, but rather labor hard (goes farther than cessation of stealing)
      3. Eph 5:11 – don’t *only* not take part in unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them (goes farther than mere avoidance)
    - ii. The correction is that we are not to simply seek every gift, but rather we are to diligently seek to prophesy
      1. This is not to say that the other gifts aren’t valuable, but that the Corinthians had been wrong to focus on tongues when prophecy provides more of what the Church so desperately needs (edification)
      2. Prophecy is more consistent with the principle of mutual glorification, other-edifying works and words, which bear the mark of love
    - iii. This command, to diligently seek to prophesy, must be taken in the light of the previous exhortation to pursue wholeheartedly to love well.
  - d. The definition of the gift of prophesy is aided by the revelation of its fruit in v3
2. Speaking in Languages Which Only God Understands are Not Beneficial to the Church
  - a. Note the causal words, which give reason as to why prophecy is superior to tongues in the gathered worship of the Church
    - i. There is a differentiation between the *exercise* of tongues privately and the *gift* of tongues
    - ii. The differentiation is that tongues are only a gift when they are understood and translated by somebody for the edification of the church
  - b. Only heard by God
    - i. Tongues are heard and understood by God
      1. This give evidence that the tongues which the Corinthians were practicing was a type of prayer which not even the speaker would have understood
      2. Some believe that this use of tongues is equitable with ‘praying in the Spirit’ (Eph 6:18; Jud 1:20) and ‘groans too deep for words’ (Rom 8:26)
    - ii. Paul’s statement of this type of speaking may be affirming, but it is not necessarily affirming, but may also be simply descriptive of what the Corinthians were doing

1. In other words, Paul may be affirming such a use of tongues (as would be indicated by his desire stated in v5)
  2. Or, Paul could simply be describing the Corinthian use of such tongues and using such a use to make the point about its unintelligibility which makes it inferior to prophecy
  3. In either case, Paul is making it clear that without an interpretation that would benefit others around, then speaking in languages which only God hears, that is not understood by those others, is useless and unloving in the congregation and should be silenced (with an exception, i.e. interpretation/explanation)
- c. Only understood by God
- i. The content of this language is mysterious to men
    1. “mystery” is something hidden by the one who knows the mystery
      - a. The one who knows may be God, thus the Spirit speaking to the Spirit (Rom 8:27)
      - b. Or, the one who knows may be the speaker, and the mysteries spoken in unintelligibility are not revealed to those around
      - c. So, mysteries are hidden by the speaker (God or the tongue-speaker) from the congregation
    2. See Ephesians 3:1-10 (mystery used in 3,4,6,9) as examples of something hidden by God and now revealed by God for the edification of the Church and the glory of God’s ‘manifold wisdom’
  - ii. It is not that these ‘tongues’ are mere babbling, but that they are understandable form of communication, even if only God hears and understands
    1. There is question as to whether Paul thinks that the one speaking even understands what is being said (‘without my mind’, v14)
      - a. Again, this does not imply that he affirms mindless tongues, or language that one doesn’t engage the mind (we are to love God with all of our minds, according to Luke 10:27) but that he enters into the contextual usage of the Corinthians
      - b. But, you also cannot rule out such an interpretation of the Spirit speaking to the Spirit, apart from the understanding of the speaker
      - c. Romans 8:26 teaches that there are things of our spirit, i.e. innermost affections, which are “too great for words” – we do not know how to express them, so the Spirit of God ‘intercedes’ for us ‘with groans’ because He knows
    2. But the use of unintelligible tongues keeps things mysterious and are not, therefore, beneficial to the Church when there is not an interpretation, thus should be silenced
    3. In fact, in Acts 2 (Pentecost), when Jews and proselytes from various nations heard these ‘tongues’ they recognized their own native languages, and it was a ‘sign’ to them of the gospel moving from Hebraic Israel to the nations
      - a. Peter even connects this sign of tongues to ‘prophesying’ when he quotes from the book of Joel to explain the phenomena
      - b. “in those days I will pour out my Spirit and they will prophesy” (Acts 2:18)

- c. Thus, it is clear that these tongues were prophesying in various languages not known by the speakers (apostles), but known by the proselytes and Jews

3. Speaking Intelligible Words of God Edifies and Exhorts and Persuades Believers to Hope

- a. The intended hearer of prophesy is others within the gathered Church
  - i. Thus, what we do know about this concept, prophecy, is that its intention is to do the following three things: edify the Church, exhort the Church, and persuade the Church to hope
  - ii. Thus, the work of prophesying in the Church is profoundly rooted in the revelation of God's Word, i.e. the faith handed down to you concerning God's Son
  - iii. Any work of prophecy has this goal, and thus is a "sign to the church" while tongues are (somehow) "sign to unbelievers"
- b. The intention of the prophesy is to build others up
  - i. Same word Jesus used when He promised to "build my church" (Matt 16:18)
  - ii. Goal #1: Build them up in the knowledge of God's revelation in Christ
    - 1. Ephesians 4:11-14
      - a. 'unity in the faith, even the knowledge of the Son of God'
      - b. Prophecy reveals Christ Jesus, that all the promises of God find their 'yea and amen' in Him
    - 2. One of the goals and purposes of prophesy is to reveal truths previously unknown by the hearer, i.e. "reveal and explain mysteries"
    - 3. The goal of prophesy is to reveal Christ Jesus
      - a. "We proclaim Him!" (Col 2:27-28; Gal 1:16)
      - b. Colossians 2:8 – 'rather than according to Christ'
      - c. 1 Cor 1:23 – 'but we preach Christ crucified...'
      - d. Eph 3:8 – 'grace was given to me to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ to the Gentiles...'
      - e. Phil 1:18 – I don't care of their motives, if they preach Christ then I rejoice!
  - iii. Goal #2: Call us to action in the light of God's revelation in Christ
    - 1. This is exhortation, the revelation of truth and the call to act upon it
      - a. *Παρακλησις* – the same word used of the Holy Spirit (*Paraclete*)
        - i. The concept of this word is to come alongside of another person for the purpose of strength, encouragement, direction, perseverance, and guidance
        - ii. John 14:16,26 – "When the *Helper*, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you." (v26)
        - iii. John 15:26 – "the Spirit of truth...he will bear witness about me."
      - b. Encouragement to walk in the light of the gospel of grace, strength from God's faithfulness and promises are the means to motivation, humility from God's grace and mercy are the pattern to our pleading, all rooted in the character and works of God Himself

- i. 1 Tim 2:2-4 – “...we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict. For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive...” (2b-3a)
  - c. All good prophecy includes exhortation: “Because God is \_\_\_\_\_ and has done \_\_\_\_\_, then do \_\_\_\_\_” (example: Col. 3:12 “Therefore, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, put on compassionate hearts, kindness...”)
- 2. Thus, the gift of prophecy includes a call to action based upon the promises of God to believers, not merely information
  - a. Prophecy is not merely facts, but also the explicit call to respond to such facts of God’s revelation by trusting it and walking according to it
    - i. Different than mere evangelism, for it is certain of the application of God’s promises to the Church
    - ii. We cannot promise the world the things which are only promised to those who belong to God through faith in Christ Jesus (Example: RISEN movie, “brother”)
    - iii. Prophecy does not assure an unbeliever that they have the promises of God, but prophecy does assure a believer with those promises and encourages them to act upon them
  - b. When God reveals the way things are supposed to be, we are to walk in such righteousness, i.e. trust and obey
  - c. When God reveals the supremacy of His Son, we are to walk in humility before Him
  - d. When God reveals the future of His people, we are to walk in joyful hope
- 3. This call to action is always the bridging of God’s Word with our current situation in life
  - a. Thus, prophesying works to bridge God’s declaration, promises, commands, and explanations with our current value systems, fears, ethics, confusions, etc.
  - b. Thus, prophecy is not a *general* call to walk in the light of God’s truth, but a *particular application* of its significance and its application
- iv. Goal #3: Persuade their hearts to hope in the light of God’s revelation in Christ
  - 1. To bring comfort or relief to a distressed or depressed person by showing the reason for hope
  - 2. Thus, it is persuasion to hope in God by recalling and reminding and reasoning the truth of God’s character and His works
    - a. Prophecy is to be manifested in such a way that God’s Word is shown, proven, and explained to be helpful to the believer who is struggling with fears or sins or despair or confusion...
    - b. Prophecy is not pulling words out of the air to make people feel better, but rather that we are so biblical in our thinking that our words bridge the Scripture, God’s revelation of truth in Christ Jesus, and the particular fear/anxiety/despair/sin of the believer.

- i. It is truth applied to deception which has darkened our *hearts* by renewing our mind with the gospel
      - ii. Who can speak to the future better than those who know God's promises?
      - iii. Who can speak to the suffering better than those who know the crucified and risen Lord?
      - iv. Who can speak to the worried better than those who know the God who holds all things together by the power of His Word?
    - c. This is why Paul wants them all to prophesy, because it means that they know God as He has revealed Himself and they know the significance of that revelation to all of life!
  - 3. Prophecy does not merely announce God's truth and call to act on it, but it also strives to reason between the two
    - a. Thus, prophecy is reasoning, logical, meaningful and purposed in its consistency with truth
    - b. It is not merely mysterious, nonsensical, or reliant upon "my heart" as the means of motivation or action, but upon God's Word as the foundation for the 'why' and the 'how'
    - c. Tongues are mysterious and without reasoning, and therefore do not edify or build up the Church when gathered together
      - i. This is why I believe that Paul minimizes tongues as that 'with an unfruitful mind' as somewhat derogatory, not exemplary
  - c. These are the goals of the proclamation of the Word of God!!
- 4. The Gifts are to Edify Others, Not Oneself, When Gathered Together
  - a. Contrast of those edified
    - i. Tongues – to God – edifies speaker
    - ii. Prophecy – to Men – edifies the Church
  - b. Does this imply that tongues are inherently self-centered? No.
    - i. But it does make them inferior and unfit for the corporate worship of God, *because corporate worship is God-ward and also other-ward*
    - ii. Self-edification is absent from corporate worship
      - 1. Yet, to build oneself up *through prayer*, is not something that is inherently wrong.
      - 2. Rather, it is that type of "when I am weak, then I am strong" principle
      - 3. Prayer weakens us because it is God-reliant and Self-deflating, for by the nature of request we acknowledge our powerlessness and God's ability
        - a. It requires His mercy, His grace, and His willingness to help
        - b. It requires submission and subsistence to His glory, eternity wisdom, righteousness, and 'fatherliness'
    - iii. Thus, the self-edifying nature of praying in tongues, privately, does not imply self-centeredness any more than praying in one's own language is self-centered as it builds us up in faith, humility, and God-dependence.
      - 1. Rom 8:26
  - c. Paul's point is that *in the gathered church* is not the time to edify oneself, but to edify others

5. Therefore, it is Better to Speak Intelligibly to Build Up the Church in the Knowledge of God
  - a. We have that phrase, *mallon de*, here again, correcting Paul's desire for the Corinthians to speak in tongues by particularizing it to prophesying
    - i. "I desire you all to speak in tongues, rather, I desire that you might prophesy."
  - b. Just like love is the greatest of the virtue triad of 13:13, so also prophecy is the greatest between tongues and prophecy
    - i. Same comparative word "greatest"
    - ii. It's not as if faith and hope are abolished, or negatives, but rather that love is superior by its God-centered nature
    - iii. In the same way, it's not that tongues are not to be used or exercised, but that in the context of the gathered church, they do not edify others, and therefore are inferior *by that measure*
  - c. The governing principle of the gathered church is edification of others, even in worship
    - i. Thus, tongues are to be appreciated, but to be exercised in the gathered church they must be translated for the edification of others
      1. The language is unclear as to who translates, the speaker of the tongue or another
      2. I am of the opinion, by means of the language, that the speaker must interpret himself or be silent in the congregation regarding his prayer to the Lord.
    - ii. Note the final admonition in 14:39-40, "Earnestly seek to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak tongues, but all things must be done properly and be according to structure."
  - d. The means of edification is the Word of God proclaimed, men called to action on the basis of that Word, and encouraged to hope in God's grace. This is our discipleship strategy at EBF: preach the gospel about Jesus to one another, call each other to act accordingly, and encourage each other to hope in God's gospel promises to us in Christ Jesus.
    - i. This is why in v6 the content of what benefits the Church and edifies is revelation, knowledge, prophecy, and teaching
    - ii. That which benefits Man is the content of the gospel: it is an announcement of historical fact and divine promise, not a seeking of experience, a fact by which we call one another respond to the supremacy and glory of God with faith, hope, and love.

Conclusion: The glory of God is at the heart of the gospel. Faith sees and savors "the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Cor 4:4) and two verses later, equitably, "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." God's glory revealed in Christ and his work is essential to what the gospel is and to what God's glory is. This was never Plan B for God, but was purposed from the beginning for the glory. For this purpose the universe was planned. Everything leading to it, and everything flowing from it, is explained by the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Therefore, the gathering of the saints to worship the Lord is not about you and God, your experience of God and your feeling of His presence. The gathering of the saints, the work of all ministry and life, is for magnifying God's great renown and building up those around you in the knowledge of Christ Jesus through the exposition of the gospel. Do you gain from this? Surely! Yet, what we do is not to be centered on our experience of God, but upon the edification, exhortation, and encouragement to

hope in the promises of God in Christ Jesus. These are the intended purposes of the Word of God proclaimed. Are others being encouraged to see and savor Jesus by my actions and words on Sunday, or is it about me feeling better? Are others moved to hope in God's faithfulness and promises, His works and words because of what I do and what I say in my home group or my Bible study? Or, is it all about my experience of God? Is my time of prayer with others my own treasure hunt of God's presence, or am I seeking by my words and actions to proclaim Christ to others that they might rejoice in His goodness, be humbled by His grace, be moved to repentance and obedience to His righteousness, and be encouraged to hope by His extravagant love for us in Christ Jesus?

It is a good question to ask every time we gather together, in small groups or in corporate worship on Sunday: Is what I am doing, saying, and intending, something which builds others up in the knowledge and worship of God in Christ Jesus, or is it only between me and God? Let us drop our individualism in worship and seek the mutual glorification of one another in all that we do together. How do we grow into the likeness of Christ? By the Spirit of God applying the Word of God through the prophetic proclamation of the glory of God so as to encourage the saints by His goodness to hope in Him because of His potent and wonderful character and works through His Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.