

Rich Nathan  
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God's Empowering Presence  
1 Corinthians 14

## **Understanding the Biblical Gifts of Prophecy and Tongues**

This evening [morning] I am going to finish up my series on the Holy Spirit and finish up this part of the series that I have been doing which is on spiritual gifts. I think I feel good about what has been sown in this church. I believe that one of the things that I must continually do here as pastor is continue to stretch us and urge upon us the balance that is needed for us to be a fully biblical church. At times, I am going to be stressing the need for additional outreach and moving from the church toward the world. At other times, I will be stressing the need for us to grow in our worship of God and devotion of God. Recently what I have been trying to stress is learning more about moving in the power of the Holy Spirit.

I have said this over and over again—but my vision for this church is that we be fully biblical. And that means that we both know the Bible and we also do the Bible, and that we know and do the whole Bible. It has never been enough for me that we be known as a church that has great worship or great teaching or great children's ministry. Friends, my heart for this church is that we do it all and that we mature in our ability to send out missionaries to the world. And that that cylinder is working. I want to see a church that is working on all cylinders.

And certainly one of the main cylinders that you see in the New Testament church is that they were people who knew how to move in the power of the Spirit.

What I am going to talk about this morning is a few spiritual gifts that are remaining on the list of gifts in 1 Corinthians 12. This morning I am going to talk about the spiritual gift of prophecy and the spiritual gift of tongues. I don't know if I could be touching on more controversial gifts than these in the modern church. Churches have been split over these two gifts. Christians widely differ on their understanding of the meaning of these gifts. But like I told you throughout this series, the Bible is not all that unclear regarding what the gifts are and how they are to operate.

I think much of the confusion that the church has found itself in is that we come to the scripture with our theological baggage. We come to the scripture with our minds already made up about what we as a church will allow and what we won't allow and what makes us comfortable and what makes us uncomfortable. We come to the scripture with our prior theological commitments and then we shove the scripture into these commitments. But you know if you just allow the Bible to speak to you and to fill out your views rather than making your views fill out the scripture, you'll find that much of the teaching on prophecy and tongues is not all that confusing. The only tough thing is for us to do it, to obey it. Understanding what the Bible says is actually a fairly straightforward matter.

So, today what I am going to do is tackle 1 Corinthians 14 which is a chapter of teaching on prophecy on the one hand, and tongues on the other. I have called today's talk very simply, "Understanding the Biblical Gifts of Prophecy and Tongues." Let's pray.

Now, what I have done for years in understanding 1 Cor. 14 and you can do this in your own devotional life, is I have split a piece of paper in two and on one side I have

listed all the things that 1 Cor. 14 teaches us about prophecy and then on the other side, all the things that 1 Cor. 14 teaches us about tongues. Friends, I am telling you that if you will do this you will work out for yourself a rather complete understanding of these two biblical gifts—prophecy on the one hand and tongues on the other.

Now let's begin then with the first question: What is prophecy and what is tongues? Well, the apostle Paul gets right into that in 1 Cor. 14 saying,

“Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy. 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. But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort.”

What is prophecy then? Prophecy is speaking forth a message in a known language to men and women under the immediate inspiration of the Spirit. Look what Paul says in verse 3:

“Everyone who prophesies speaks to men...” Okay, so we are saying prophecy is speaking to men and women. “...a message in a known language” and we will find that throughout 1 Cor. 14 that it is a known language “...under the immediate inspiration of the Spirit.”

You say, “Rich, where do you get that from? Why is prophecy under the immediate inspiration of the Spirit?”

Well, verse 30 tells us that pretty plainly. If you actually look back to v. 29, the apostle Paul says, “Two or three prophets should speak and the others should weigh carefully what is said and if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop.”

Paul equates prophecy with a revelation from God. We are talking about a message that comes with immediate inspiration from the Lord. And in this way, by calling prophecy a revelation, we are distinguishing it from a prepared message. See, the mark of prophecy is spontaneity. There is an immediacy to the message. By prophecy, we are not talking here about the delivery of a previously prepared sermon. We are not talking about a word that can be summoned up to order or a skill that you just develop over a period of time. We are talking about a spontaneous utterance.

Now, it is this immediacy of revelation that distinguishes prophecy from preaching or teaching. I know that a percentage of you have been taught that prophecy was the equivalent of teaching. In fact, in some places they actually say that this 1 Cor. 14 gifting of prophecy is essentially expository preaching. The kind of thing that I would do on Saturday evening or Sunday morning. But that is simply not true. What I do here on Saturday and Sunday by and large is deliver a prepared message, something that is the result of my study and prayer. There may be occasionally an immediacy of revelation where I deliver an utterly unprepared remark, but that is not the bulk of what I share with you on Saturday or Sunday. Prophecy is not preaching and preaching is not prophecy.

You say, “How do you know that, Rich?”

Well, I will tell you. If you look at the lists of gifts, Paul regularly distinguishes between prophets and preachers or teachers. In the New Testament, by the way, there is no difference between preaching and teaching as we would draw out in modern English parlance. In the modern church, people like to draw this major distinction between preaching and teaching. It does not exist in the New Testament. I am not saying it is not functional at all, I am just saying that we are not using New Testament language.

But in the New Testament, prophecy and teaching are clearly distinguished. If you look back at 1 Cor. 12:28, the apostle Paul said that in the church, “God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers or preachers.” If you flipped over to Ephesians 4:11-12, you would see that Paul, again, distinguishes prophecy from teaching where he says, “It was God who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, some to be pastors and teachers.” Prophecy is not teaching and teaching is not prophecy.

So, we must protect the gift of prophecy as a separate and distinct gifting that cannot be absorbed under the biblical gift of preaching or teaching. There is an immediacy of revelation in prophecy that does not exist in a general way in prepared messages that are given through preaching or teaching. But you know, we must preserve preaching and teaching from being absorbed under the umbrella of prophecy. There is a strain in the charismatic movement that suggests that because one is gifted in the prophetic, in receiving immediate revelation, that that person has instant authority and instant gifting to teach the word of God.

I want to make a parenthetical point here before we look at what the gift of tongues is and say this: in the Vineyard we have (not in this church so much as in the larger Vineyard movement and in the charismatic movement certainly) continually fallen into the error of believing that because someone was spiritually gifted to prophesy i.e. because someone could come up to you and tell you about your life, could read your mail, that person was given assumed authority to teach the Bible and to teach biblical doctrine. Some of the flakiest, the least doctrinally sound teaching I have ever heard was from people who had strong revelatory gifts, but no gift or authorization to teach the

Bible. Because someone can say, “Come Holy Spirit” and the Holy Spirit comes WHAM BAM, doesn’t mean that that person becomes an instant authority about the scriptures. And I think for the safety of the body, we must hold onto these two gifts as being separate. There is a gift of prophecy and there is a gift of preaching and teaching. And they are not the same thing and because you can do one doesn’t mean you can do the other.

You say, “Well, what is the gift of tongues?”

Paul tells us in v. 2: “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.” I think the preferred translation here of that phrase, “with his spirit,” is better put “by the Spirit.” Those of you who have the NIV see that an alternative translation for that last phrase is “by the Holy Spirit” and I really think that that gives a better sense of the Greek than “with his spirit” does.

What is tongues? Tongues is speaking forth a message in an unknown language. Notice it says “no one understands him.” It is speaking forth a message in an unknown language to God (notice it says, “does not speak to men, but to God”) under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit or by the Holy Spirit.

So prophecy is speaking a message in a known language to men and women under the inspiration of the Spirit. Tongues is speaking a message in an unknown language not to men and women, but to God. The direction of prophecy is from God to man. The direction of tongues is from man to God. Prophecy is a known language. Tongues is an unknown language. But they both find their source in the Holy Spirit. The

Spirit gives the revelation regarding prophecy and the Spirit gives the inspiration to speak regarding a tongue.

Now, let me deal with a couple of objections to prophecy on the one hand and then a couple of objections to tongues on the other. What are some of the objections to the current use of prophecy? Let me mention two of the biggest.

Some people suggest that if we prophesy, we are adding to the scriptures. They claim that if you have a revelation under the immediate inspiration of the Spirit that is like writing new scripture. They further claim that the writing of new scripture is clearly prohibited by Revelation 22. Revelation 22:18-19 says, “I want everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book, if anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book and if anyone takes these words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away his share in the Tree of Life and in the Holy City which are described in this book.”

Folks say that if we add to the Bible any additional words, then God will strike us with plagues. Now, I would say two things. Number one: Revelation 22:18 is not talking about the whole Bible, it is talking about the book of Revelation where it says, “anyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book, adds to this book” and the reason why I know that it is the book of Revelation and not the Bible is because John clearly refers to “hearing the words of the prophecy in this book” as the book of Revelation in chapter 1.

Let me go beyond that and say that no one who is an orthodox Christian would put contemporary prophecy at the level of writing scripture. I went through this a few weeks ago when I taught about hearing God’s word in scripture and then hearing God’s

word today through prophecy. Those of you who weren't here and would find this discussion helpful, you can pick up a tape on the subject of hearing God's voice.

But I would simply say again that those who believe that the gift of prophecy did not fade away, as we believe here in the Vineyard, also believe in the sufficiency of scripture as a doctrine. Let me tell you what the sufficiency of scripture means. The sufficiency of scripture means that the Bible, the written word of God, contains all, every drop of what God intends to communicate to us about salvation and the way of salvation, about right doctrine and about what is and what is not sin. I don't care how powerful the prophet is or how much he knows about your past or claims to know about the future, that prophet cannot add one drop to the written word of God about the way of salvation, about right doctrine or what is or is not sin. No one can come along to you ever, I don't care how many prophets, how big the church, how many church councils there are and say "this is sin and this is not sin."

On the other hand, the sufficiency of scripture does not mean that God cannot give us revelation about other matters. God can reveal to you a sin in your life that you were blind to. Philippians 3:15 says that God can reveal to you plans that he has in mind for you. That is not the formulation of new doctrine or a new way of salvation. God can reveal to you a calling that he has on your life. God can reveal to you a way of sharing the gospel so that you can effectively communicate it and see a person who was lost get saved.

The fact that I believe in contemporary revelation does not mean that I believe in adding to the words of scripture. At least not adding to doctrine. At least not adding to



some new idea of the way of salvation. At least it is not adding to the list of sins that we have in the scripture.

Some people object to the contemporary gift of prophecy and they say, “Rich, okay we will grant that there may be some contemporary revelation, but we demand that anyone who claims to have a prophecy be tested by the scriptural standard and if that prophecy is wrong then we will take them out and stone them.” Some people object to the contemporary gift of prophecy and say, “How come no one is getting stoned these days for uttering the wrong word of prophecy?”

You know, back in the Old Testament in Deuteronomy 18, God tells Moses in verse 22, “If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the Lord does not take place or come true, that is a message that the Lord has not spoken and that prophet has spoken presumptuously, do not be afraid of him.” And a little earlier in v. 20, he says, “A prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything that I have not commanded, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods must be put to death.”

People say, “Why don’t you apply what Moses and the Law clearly established? Well, I think, friends, that people who say that clearly have not distinguished between the role of the prophet in the Old Testament and the role of someone who prophesies under the new covenant. You see, in the Old Testament the prophet was the communicator of the right doctrine to the nation of Israel. The way that Israel had an accurate perception of God and his will was through prophets. If they messed up, even a little bit, then Israel would have had an inaccurate understanding of God and what God wanted of his people. The reason the penalty was so high in messing up in prophecy is because the effect of messing up was so grave. People would be misled regarding the nature of God and who

it is they are worshipping; what God requires of their lives. God said that the only one who is allowed to speak forth for him is his spokespeople the prophets, so they better get it right. It was no great privilege to be a prophet back then. You had to be absolutely sure you heard God's word before you announced it. And if you got it wrong, you were put to death.

Now, in the New Testament we see that there is a new office brought into the church, a new gift, regarding who sets forth our understanding of God and our understanding of doctrine, an office that did not exist in the Old Testament and that new office is the office of apostles. The person in the New Testament who announces who God is, who sets forth God's will infallibly, is the apostles. But in the New Testament the prophet is now permitted to make errors. We don't stone prophets under the new covenant. 1 Cor. 14:29 tells the new test. "Two or three prophets should speak and the others should weigh carefully what is said." Instead of stoning a person who may get it wrong, Paul calls forth weighing the prophecy, which means discerning the source of the prophecy. Is it God? Is it the person's own mind? Is it the devil? We discern the source of the prophecy when we weigh prophecy. But we also discern the significance of the prophecy. How important is this word for us as individuals or for us as a church?

And you see this business of discerning or weighing laid out in 1 Thessalonians 5. Under the new covenant, we do not stone people who get a prophecy wrong. The ones who are entrusted with the doctrine of the church are the apostles. But when we hear prophecies, what we are to do with prophecies we are to discern, to weigh, to test. And 1 Thess. 5 sets that test out again. It says, "Do not put out the Spirit's fire. Do not treat

prophecies with contempt, but test everything. Hold onto the good and avoid every kind of evil.” So we go through a sifting process with prophecy.

Now, what are some of the objections to the current use of tongues? Well, some people say that to be a true biblical gift of tongues, it must be a known foreign language that is spoken. And 1 Cor. 14 is quite clear that the tongues that Paul is referring to are not known foreign languages. In verse 2, Paul says, “Anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men, but to God. Indeed, no one understands him.” By “no one understands him” he means no one. Not just the immediate listeners because they speak English and he is speaking French. He means no one. Even if a Frenchman came in he wouldn’t understand him because this is not a known language.

Paul’s whole point, by the way, in vv. 6-17 regarding the need for an interpreter of tongues is that tongues are not understood by anyone in the church without interpretation. The speaker doesn’t understand what he is saying in tongues and the hearer does not understand what he is saying in tongues. Look down at v. 14: “If I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful.” What Paul is saying is that “I don’t understand what I am saying.” So tongues is not a mental activity. I am not forming the syllables with my mind and then articulating them. Rather, I am praying out of the deepest part of my being with my spirit and by the Holy Spirit, but I don’t understand it.

And in v. 16, Paul says, “If you are praising God with your spirit, i.e. if you are speaking in tongues, how can anyone who finds himself among those who do not understand, say ‘Amen’ to your thanksgiving since he doesn’t know what you are

saying?” Tongues is not a known foreign language. It is unknown to the speaker and it is unknown to the listeners.

Now, I believe there was something unique that took place in the history of redemption by the tongues that were distributed at Pentecost. The tongues at Pentecost in Acts 2 were known languages. I want you to see this in Acts 2:6-11. Flip over there.

Acts 2:4, Luke writes, “All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit enabled them.” And then in v. 6, what were these tongues like? It says, “When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language.” And then in v. 8, Luke writes, “Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia...we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!”

Pentecost was a unique incident in the history of redemption. It is totally unrepeatable. But the tongues at that time were known languages, known foreign languages. And I believe that the reason that God gave these known foreign languages on the Day of Pentecost was to communicate two things. 1) God was communicating that the gospel that is going to go forth from the apostles is a universal message. It applies to everyone and so God communicated on the Day of Pentecost in everyone’s languages, the known languages in the world at that time. God was saying that this gospel message is no longer just for the Jewish people and he is no longer just choosing the Jewish people. Now the whole world fits into his chosen people. You are all a chosen race. You are all a people for his possession. The gospel was going out to the

world and God wanted the sign of that to be the preaching and proclamation in all of these foreign tongues.

The second thing that God was doing on Pentecost was he was reversing the curse that fell on the human race at Babel. We originally as human beings spoke only one language. There was only one original language. But if you read Genesis 11 as a curse on us because of our sin, God divided up the human race into various tribal groups and gave us different languages so that we couldn't communicate with each other. And our different languages have been a continual source of division.

At Pentecost, what God was saying was is "I am restoring the unity of the human race. I am healing divisions. I am going to break down ethnic walls. I am going to break down racial barriers. I am going to break down religious barriers and barriers between the genders and barriers between ages. I am breaking down all the walls by creating one body through the Holy Spirit."

Occasionally, God will give a known tongue or a known language to someone. I have, on a fairly consistent basis, heard people's tongues and some of the words that will be uttered in that tongue will be Hebrew. I have heard a number of people's tongues and they are praising God in Hebrew. They didn't know that. They never learned Hebrew. But I know Hebrew and I have heard them praising God in Hebrew.

And I have heard stories from some of you of God giving a tongue in a known foreign language that someone else then interpreted, but by and large, tongues are not known foreign languages.

Some people say, "Well, tongues always ought to be interpreted. If you are going to have a tongue, then you will need to have it interpreted, otherwise you need to shut

up.” But Paul does not say that in 1 Cor. 14. Look at v. 12; he says, “So it is with you since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church. For this reason, anyone who speaks in a tongue should pray that he might interpret what he says.”

For what reason? He is talking about the need to have interpretation when you speak your tongue in a church. But it is possible to speak in tongues privately without the need for interpretation. Vv. 14 and 15 suggest that. “If I pray in a tongue my spirit prays, my mind is unfruitful. What shall I do?” Should I just get rid of speaking in tongues because I have no interpreter and my mind is unfruitful? Paul says, “No.” V. 15, “I will pray with my spirit, I will pray with my mind also. I will sing with my spirit. I will sing with my mind also.”

In other words, I will speak in tongues privately. I will be praying with my spirit, but I will also pray privately with my mind in known human languages. I will pray in English. And then I will sing in tongues and I will sing in English. And if you want to see this private use of tongues, what is called a devotional use of tongues, clearly stated over against a public use of tongues, you can find no clearer passage than verses 18-19 where Paul says, “I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. But in the church, I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue.” He draws the distinction between how he values the gift of tongues and speaks in tongues more than any one of the Corinthians, and remember the Corinthians spoke in tongues a lot. Anyone who would say, “Oh, tongues is just a low gift and it is not very important and we shouldn’t put much emphasis on it and the church today is just crazy about tongues.” Well, I would remind that person that Paul said that

he spoke in tongues more than the Corinthians and the Corinthians spoke in tongues a lot. And since we are called upon to imitate the apostle Paul, knowing that Paul didn't do worthless things, Paul seemed to put a value on speaking in tongues and we should also.

Would that many of us spoke in tongues as much as the apostle Paul. Yet, he said that in church, his goal is not to speak a bunch of unknown foreign languages to people because that does not encourage other people. In church he wanted to speak known languages. He wanted to talk in English so that people could be encouraged.

So, what I am saying to those who say that you must have an interpretation if you are going to speak in tongue is, yes you do need an interpretation if you speak in a tongue *publicly*, but privately, there is no need to have an interpretation because you are not attempting to build up or edify someone else. Privately, your only concern is really yourself. And as we are going to find out in a moment, tongues has an important value of building up or edifying yourself.

You say, "Well, then what is the purpose of prophecy and what is the purpose of tongues?" The purpose of prophecy is laid out in verse 3 of 1 Cor. 14, "But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort." Again, prophecy is a message to men and women. And it is a message under the immediate inspiration of the Spirit to men and women. It is a revelation. And what is the purpose of that revelation?

Paul says three things: It is to strengthen and to encourage. Its better translated "to exhort." To strengthen, to exhort and to comfort. To console.

By strengthening people, we mean prophecy could be a message that strengthens people's faith by talking with people about how great God is, how strong God is, how

able God is. Prophecy can strengthen people's faith, especially when people are low in faith. God is able. The message comes. It could be in strengthening people's faith that they are going in the right direction or that what their activity is is exactly what God wants them to do. Prophecy has a strengthening aspect.

Prophecy can be for the purpose of exhorting. And by exhorting we mean that prophecy can have an admonition, a warning, attached to it. A disciplinary tone regarding certain activities. And Paul does that in 1 Cor. 1 where he says, "I exhort you let there be no divisions among you."

A word of prophecy can come along and speak to a person about their sins. There can be a warning attached to it. Watch yourself, Satan is trying to test you or to sift you the way Jesus spoke to Peter. Watch yourself. You are right on the edge. You are about to take a step and if you take that step it could be disastrous for you. You are going to fall into the pit. Don't do that. Don't walk away from your marriage. Don't walk away from your commitments. Guard your heart.

Prophecy strengthens. Prophecy can exhort. It can admonish and warn about the disastrous impact of certain decisions of a road taken that would veer you and vector you away from God. Prophecy, third of all, can comfort. We are talking here about a word of sympathy where there is hurt in the church, where there is suffering. There is this word of consolation and comfort that comes. As Paul says, "If one suffers, we all suffer with them." And so to a person in pain, a word of prophecy might come, it could just be a simple word, "God sees you and he wants you to know that he loves you and that he cares." "God is aware of your situation. He knows what it is like to lose someone that he loved because God watched his son die. He knows what you feel like." These are the



purposes of prophecy. To strengthen, to exhort, to comfort. These are the various ways that God wants to bring a message to us.

Let me tell you what are not typical purposes of prophecy. Foretelling is not a typical purpose of prophecy. I know that when most people think of prophesying, they think of telling the future. Prophecy in the New Testament is not mainly predictive. It is not mainly, “I’m going to tell you about the future.” Prophecy occasionally has that element in the New Testament, but it is very rare. Most prophecy is to strengthen, to exhort and to comfort.

I think you should be very, very cautious when someone claims to have a word about the future. Your attitude ought to be, “Well, we will see if that comes to pass.” Most of the prophetic books, most prophecies about the future, turn out to be dead wrong. People predict stock market crashes. People predict elections. People predict earthquakes. Revivals. Outpourings. My experience in this, and I have been at this for 22 years, my experience is that most of the time, most of the prophets, even those who are very gifted, are wrong. Prophecy is not primarily foretelling. It is forth telling. It is speaking forth a message from God in a known language for people’s strengthening, exhortation and comfort.

And the other thing that we must be very cautious about is directional prophecy i.e. a message that claims to tell you what God wants you to do in terms of a certain direction in your life. Marry this individual. You are called into this ministry. The Lord wants you to move to this city. I have seen people make some of the worst mistakes because they heard a word of prophecy and acted on it.

You know, I don't believe that we can ever turn over responsibility for our decisions to someone else. Friends, let me let you in on a little secret. You are responsible, every one of you, for the personal decisions that you choose to make with your life. You will never be able to pass the buck to a prophet and say, "Well, on the Day of Judgment, God, the reason why I left my job was Joe the Prophet told me to." The Lord would say, "No. You are responsible for what you do with your career." "Well, the reason why I married Sally was because I was told to." "No. You were responsible for your decisions. You can't hand that responsibility off to a prophet."

You say, "Well, is there no room for receiving revelations concerning future direction?" Oh, there is room. But let me tell you how I understand directional prophecy. I understand it to be an underlining of what God is already saying to me. I am responsible for my life and to hear from God myself. What prophecy does is highlight a message that the Lord is already speaking to me. It is a yellow highlighter in my life.

You know, when I was considering leaving my job as a professor at OSU and pastoring on a full-time basis, I had this stirring already going on in me. This was happening over months and years. God was already speaking to me. And then prophecies came along and they highlighted what God was saying and it was like the Lord said, "Rich, this is me." That is what prophecy does. It says, "This is me." Yes, you are already considering making this move. You are already praying about it and you have already weighed it. And then a prophecy comes along and says, "This is God and it underlines it." But if the first time you ever think about a matter, you never considered going to foreign missions before, the first time that that thought ever dawns on you is when someone comes along with a prophetic word, I would hold that with a very loose

hand and say, “Well, God is going to have to talk with me about that first before I listen to this prophetic word.”

On the other hand, if you are saying, “O God, O God. Is it your will for me to go to India, I really want to serve you. I want to give my life to you. I feel drawn to foreign missions. Should I go to India?” And someone comes along and says, “You know, I feel impressed that you are to go to India.” Boy, I would listen to that because that is an underlining. It is directional prophecy.

What is the purpose then of tongues? We looked at the purpose of prophecy, that was v. 3. The purpose of tongues is v. 2: “For anyone who speaks in a tongue doesn’t speak to men, but to God. Indeed, no one understands him. He utters mysteries with his spirit,” or as I said, by the Holy Spirit.

We see that the purpose of tongues has to do with the person speaking to God. And what is it that they are speaking to God? Verse 14 says, “If I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, my mind is unfruitful. What shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, I will pray with my mind. I will sing with my spirit. I will sing with my mind.”

The first thing that we see regarding tongues is that tongues is a way of praying. Verse 14: “If I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays.” And he goes on and talks about praying with his spirit. Tongues is a way to pray. It is a way to pray for your own needs. It is a way to pray in intercession. You can pray with your mind in English about things that are of concern to you. But sometimes you will find that praying with your mind in English is not sufficient. You are not getting at the depth of concern or you might not know what to say or how to intercede. And at those times, praying in the Spirit, that is praying in tongues, is very helpful.

I have often prayed for people and just not known how to pray or what to pray. So I pray in tongues. Sometimes I am so burdened and I feel so bad, I feel so depressed and I don't know what the problem is or how to get myself out from under it, so I pray in tongues. One purpose of tongues is prayer.

And a second purpose of tongues and I think the major purpose of tongues is praise. V. 16, "If you are praising God with your spirit, how can one who finds himself among those who don't understand say 'Amen' to your thanksgiving since he doesn't know what you are saying. You may be giving thanks well enough, but the other man is not edified."

Tongues is a form of praise and thanksgiving. Do you know everytime tongues is mentioned in the book of Acts, it is a form of worship and a form of praise? It is a way to say, "Hallelujah, Hosanna in the highest, praise God, thank you Jesus" from the depth of your being. As Charles Wesley's old hymn says:

"Oh for a thousand tongues to sing,

My great Redeemer's praise."

Very often we feel like our worship is so inadequate. And that is when tongues is so helpful—to praise in the Spirit. If you look up the instances of tongues in the book of Acts, they always involve praise. On Pentecost, even when the apostles were speaking in known foreign languages, they were speaking forth the mighty deeds of God. Acts 10 when the household of Cornelius begins to speak in tongues it says in Acts 10:46 that they were all speaking in tongues praising God. It is speech directed to God. So we are talking about prayer and praise.

And tongues has another purpose. It edifies or builds oneself up. Remember prophecy's purpose is to build up the church. To strengthen the church. To exhort the church. To comfort the church. The purpose of tongues is not for the church. The purpose of tongues is for oneself. And in verse 4 it says that: "He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church."

Prophecy builds up the church and tongues builds yourself up. It builds you up in your inner man or woman, in your spirit. I think what is being referred to here is spiritual warfare. There are times when you are under attack and feel really tempted or really pressed upon by spiritual forces of wickedness and you find that you just can't deal with it. "I feel so overwhelmed. I feel so weak inside. I need to be strengthened in my inner man. How can I be strengthened to deal with this body so that I don't implode?"

Pray in tongues. It edifies you and builds you up. I think we see a hint of this spiritual warfare use of tongues in the book of Jude. I want to read to you these verses. I am not saying this is a direct reference to tongues. I am saying that this may be an allusion, an indirect reference to tongues. Throughout the book of Jude, Jude is talking about spiritual warfare and about battling with evil men and with those who oppose us in the faith. And then he says: "But you dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit." And I think clearly that one of the ways that we build ourselves up in our most holy faith is that we pray in the Holy Spirit. And part of praying in the Spirit is praying in tongues. There is a warfare dimension to tongues.

Another reason I think tongues is given, is it serves as objective evidence of the Spirit's coming. If you are taking notes, you can look at Acts 10:44-46 where tongues is a sign, an objective evidence of the Spirit's coming.

You know, I have seen this in the life of an individual. They are prayed for and the Holy Spirit comes and fills that person's life. The person begins to speak in tongues and the fact that they now have the gift of tongues and can speak in tongues says to that person that, yes, I did have a real experience with the Holy Spirit back in March, back three years ago, back ten years ago. It is objective evidence. It is a proof that the Spirit came.

What is not the purpose of tongues? Well, I don't think tongues is to serve as the initial evidence or the only evidence of the Spirit's coming. The Spirit comes and does whatever the Spirit wants to do. The Spirit can come and give you gifts of healing. The Spirit can come and give your prophecy. The Spirit can come to encourage you. The Spirit can come to speak to you about God's love for you. Tongues is one way that you know that the Spirit has come, but it is not the only way.

And it is certainly not the sign of spiritual maturity as some would want to make it out to be. It speech to God. It is for prayer and praise. It is designed to build you up particularly when you are battling in warfare and it does provide evidence of the Spirit's coming, but I don't believe that it is the initial evidence. Nor do I believe that it is the sign of instant maturity, that you have somehow arrived.

Well, what kind of sign is prophecy and tongues?

Verses 20-25 says:

"Brothers, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults. 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. Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers;

prophecy, however, is for believers, not for unbelievers. 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? 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, and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, ‘God is really among you!’”

Here is what Paul is saying. He is saying that if believers speak in tongues in church without interpretation, they are acting and thinking like children. He says, “Stop thinking like children. Stop thinking like infants.” And then he quotes a prophecy from Isaiah 28, “In the Law it is written: Through men of strange tongues and by the lips of foreigners I will speak to this people and even then they will not listen to me.” In the context of Isaiah 28, God is warning the rebellious people of Israel that the next words heard from him would be the words of foreigners that they couldn’t understand. What God was saying in Isaiah 28 was that the Assyrian army was going to come as an agent of God’s judgment on the people, so he takes this as the principle that when God speaks to people in a language that they don’t understand, it is evidence of a sign of God’s judgment. And he applies that to the situation of speaking in tongues without interpretation. It is a sign, but it is a sign of judgment on unbelievers. In other words, it is a negative sign. Unbelievers come in. They hear a bunch of people talking in tongues. They don’t understand it. They hear only unintelligible speech. They think you are mad. They are not saved and in this case, they continue to be cut off from God and fall under the judgment of God.

The reason why we don't have a bunch of tongues going on here in this church is because Paul says that when that happens you are just acting like babies. You are acting like infants and this is not a good thing. It is a negative sign. It is a sign of judgment and unbelievers won't be saved by that. On the other hand, prophecy is a positive sign. He says, "If all prophesy and an unbeliever comes in, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed and falling on his face he will worship God, exclaiming, 'God is really among you.'" Believers realize that God is active among them to bring blessing and unbelievers are brought to Christ as their sins are revealed and they understand that God is at work in the church. Paul encourages us to speak in tongues privately. It edifies us. But publicly he says don't talk in tongues without an interpretation because no one will understand and it is like a sign of God cutting off communication to you.

What are the regulations on prophecy? How should it work? Let's read verses 26-33:

"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. If anyone speaks in a tongue, two—or three at the most—should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and to God. Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop. For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged. The



spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets. For God is not a God of disorder but of peace.”

Here are the regulations. We need to understand verses 26-33. He was talking to people who were functioning in small house churches. All that he is talking about regarding spiritual gifts is written in the context of house churches that were meeting in homes. They would gather together in these homes and even if it was a large home, and had an open square, it could only hold 35 or at most 50 people. People would take a meal together and then they would gather for worship and take communion together. And he says in that context all of you come together and you all bring something, one of you should bring a song, one of you brings a teaching, one of you brings a prophecy and one of you brings a tongue. Everyone contributes.

The rough equivalent of what is going on in 1 Cor. 11 to 1 Cor. 14 is what we do in our small groups. We come together in small groups and it is in that context that the body, all of us, get to exercise spiritual gifts.

But 1 Cor. 12-14 has very limited application to large church celebrations or to a church this size with 2400 people coming on Saturday and Sunday. All of us can't bring a song. All of us can't bring a prophecy. All of us can't bring a tongue. We would be here from now until 1997, just lining up at the microphone.

Some people say: “Rich, why don't you have more tongues here at Vineyard or more prophecies on Sunday morning?”

I answer in two ways: 1) I think these regulations and these scriptures are written for home fellowship groups. Our primary purpose for meeting on Sunday mornings is to worship God, to hear from the word of God and to minister to one another through

healing prayer. 2) The gifts that are brought forth in a public celebration for a church of 2400 ought to be mature, strong gifts of whatever kind they are. You know, the Bible draws a distinction between strong gifts and weak gifts. Apollos was said to be strong in preaching. And Paul talks about prophesying in accordance with the measure of your faith. You can have a strong, mature gift of prophecy or a weak gift of prophecy.

Personally, I believe that where we learn to teach when our gifts are weaker would be in a small group. Where we learn to lead worship would be in a small group setting. Where we learn to prophesy would be in a small group setting. But if you are going to get up here and lead worship, you ought to have a fairly mature and strong gift of leading worship. And if you are going to get up here and preach on Sunday morning, you ought to have a fairly mature gift of preaching. And so it is with prophecy and with tongues and interpretation. Not everyone who thinks they have a word ought to be getting up in front of a whole church of 2400 people and delivering a word.

So the way we manage 1 Cor. 14 here is we say if you think you have a word, you come up and ask me, ask one of the pastors, we check it out and talk about it. And sometimes you will get the microphone and sometimes you won't. But there is plenty of room for the exercise of spiritual gifts. All of us, bringing all that we have, in our 135 home fellowship groups.

What are the regulations on tongues? Privately, in the use of tongues there are virtually no regulations. Paul says in v. 18: "I speak in tongues more than all of you." It is a very common thing he does in private. But in public, he says in v. 5: "He who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may be edified."

In public, we don't speak in tongues unless there is an interpreter because our goal in public is to build up the church, to give them an understandable, intelligible message.

Conclusion: Encouragement to seek both gifts.