

EAGERLY DESIRE THE GIFTS, BUT . . .**1 Corinthians 14:1-25****(1 Corinthians 14:1-25)**

Intro: We spent the past two weeks talking about agape love – the love God has for us and what he desires we have for one another. It is other-centered, unconditional, and limitless. Because of that it is very contrary to the ways of the world, but Christ Followers are already conditioned to going against the ways of the world, so we're good to go, right?

Three weeks ago, we talked about Paul's discussion of the Gifts of the Spirit in Chapter 12 and pointed out how we each have at least one of those gifts to serve the Kingdom and the Church by furthering the kingdom and building up the Church. He then pointed out that love is the necessary ingredient in each Christ Follower's giftedness for maximum effectiveness. And that is why he begins our text with *Follow the way of love and eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit* 1 Corinthians 14:1a. Love is going to inhabit his reasoning as it relates to a struggle that was going on in Corinthian worship gatherings.

As we have studied 1 Corinthians over the past 6 months, and especially over the past couple chapters, especially chapters 10 and 11, we have seen that congregational gatherings too often degenerated to free-for-alls. Communion had become a get-it-while-it-lasts potluck with little regard for the last to arrive. Also it seemed that parishioners were speaking out of turn and inappropriately. Paul simply wants to bring order to their worship so that everyone grows into disciples who bring joy to God and souls into the Kingdom. So he took aim at a prevalent and highly desired gift and compared it to the preferred gift and he makes them an example as he covers them in our text for this week and next. He says eagerly desire the gifts, BUT . . . there is one that outshines the others. First the good gift and then the great gift.

Tongues are for the personal blessing of the speaker

- The Brethren in Christ are not a group that are necessarily known for the manifestation of the gift of tongues, at least not in comparison to other groups, like Pentecostal and Charismatic fellowships. Those groups are exciting and warm and vibrant and live with an expectancy for what the Holy Spirit will do in their midst and through their witness. But one of the faults they often have is the mistaken belief that the gift of tongues, which is the ecstatic utterance of unknown words when under the influence of the Holy Spirit, is the indication of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit or even salvation itself. This belief comes from the understandable conclusion from Paul's wrap-up of 1 Corinthians 12 where he says, *Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? Now eagerly desire the greater gifts.* 1 Corinthians 12:30b-31a The implication is tongues are the least of the gifts when compared to the others. The logical progression makes sense. If you are a Holy Spirit filled person, you should at least speak in tongues is the conclusion. But that forgets the fact that the Holy Spirit uses his gifting through Christ Followers as **HE** sees fit. Not everyone has the same gift.
- The gift of tongues came upon the Church on the Day of Pentecost where we read in Acts 2 that people spoke in different languages, and the people surrounding them heard the Gospel message for the first time in their own languages. This has happened as missionaries who were trying to break through to a new people group were able to speak in a language they themselves had never learned. Fred Holland spoke of how this happened for him as he worked in southern Africa.
- And then there is the experience of the Holy Spirit coming upon a believer who is praying or singing or speaking and words come from them that they and the others around them do not in any way recognize. Paul is saying that when this happens there needs to be an interpretation in order for the benefit of the unknown words to be realized. In this way, tongues are for the personal blessing of the one speaking.
- But in Corinth – the gift of tongues was greatly sought after. For one thing, it was part of pagan worship and so it was familiar to them. For another it was attention grabbing. If a person was speaking in tongues, this drew notice and it was obvious the Spirit was with that person. Who wouldn't desire that? Who would turn down the chance for confirmation of the Lord's presence in their life? The problem with that is, it is inward focused. Paul is saying we must seek the gifts that build EVERYONE up – any gift to be of value must benefit the whole congregation.
- This is because . . .

Worship is a symphony and NOT a cacophony

- Worship in Corinth was apparently a noisy and confusing experience. There was a lot of speaking in tongues and a lot less preaching because, as I said, tongues tend to be inward focused. It is, in Paul's understanding, God speaking to individuals. Worship, on the other hand, is God's people focusing in on God himself. He is the audience, we are the orchestra. When Emily was in the high school orchestra playing cello, they played Jean Sibelius's *Andante Festivo* at a competition in Cleveland and received the highest mark. I knew they won. And it's not because I was a proud dad and a proud fan of the Ashland High School Orchestra. It was because it was a beautiful piece done magnificently. It was me sitting on the edge of my seat with tears in my eyes powerful. I still feel the emotion when I think of it and it has to be 12 or 13 years ago. In worship we are the symphony, God is in his private box, sitting on the edge of his chair soaking up the sweetness of our worship.
- Paul's description of Corinthian worship is clearly not a symphony – instead it was a cacophony. A mess of disparate noises and unknown language, begging the question, if you don't know what you're saying, how will it be helpful for others?
- Worship is Ron or Linda on the piano. Corinth was Grady on a piano. Paul used the example of music with *Even in the case of lifeless things that make sounds, such as the pipe or harp, how will anyone know what tune is being played unless there is a distinction in the notes?* 1 Corinthians 14:7. If you're pounding on the keys there is just noise. In verse 8 he uses the example of a bugle call, unless it's a tune the soldiers or cavalymen recognize they have no idea whether to stand down, advance, or retreat. Tongues without interpretation are just noise. They don't even benefit the speaker. So, even though tongues can be a great blessing, they can also cause confusion. The greater and more desirable gift will instead bring infusion. Paul tells us . . .

The gift of prophecy builds up believers in their faith and leads non-believers into faith

- Don't be confused by the word prophecy. Many see it as described by one of its definitions – which is foretelling – that is, telling what is coming in the future and it definitely is a gift that the Holy Spirit does give. But it is not the prophecy Paul is referring to here. Prophecy here in our text is forth-telling. By that we mean bringing the word of God to the people of God. All Christ Followers are to exercise this gift of prophecy. Others are called to a further step of actually being a preacher, like me, preparing regular messages from the Word of God and therefore from God, for the people of God.
- Prophecy regardless of who it is, be it from a preacher or any Spirit driven Christ follower has at least three functions and all of them are other-centered:
 - It will build up by helping Christ Followers to know the truth and to walk in holiness each and every day. This means getting into the word of God and unpacking it.
 - It will encourage others. This has always been crucial for Christ Followers and it really is these days. Following Jesus is increasingly unpopular and in some cases dangerous. We need to help one another keep on keeping on.
 - It will comfort. Last week or the week before I talked about preachers who bludgeon with their words rather than bringing hope. The Bible is a message of hope and not a truncheon. Our message needs to be the same as that of Jesus when he quoted Isaiah *The LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners,* Isaiah 61:1. And to . . . *comfort those who mourn,* Isaiah 61:2b and . . . *bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.* Isaiah 61:3. This is reaching out with the shalom of God to a hurting world.
 - Prophecy is something every Christ Follower can and should do.
- In addition to building up the church, and as we can see from Isaiah 61 is that prophecy is also all about bringing the Good News of Jesus Christ to the lost. Toward the end of our passage Paul points out that tongues would only be confusing to an outsider, the clear Gospel message, on the other hand, will pull them into belief. Prophecy is clear and understandable.

- Paul says don't be childish and hang on to the lesser gift. It is a bad example to those who will be easily confused by unintelligible noise. Instead lay out the truth and they will know the conviction of the Holy Spirit and be ready to turn their lives over to the God and worship him in Spirit and truth.

Conclusion: So, eagerly desire the gifts, all of them. But, desire the greatest gift of prophecy, which, as it is applied with the love only God gives, will build up the Kingdom as fellow believers grow and new believers come to faith. Amen.