

Day 96, 1 Corinthians 14

by David Servant

David Servant explains the difference between praying in tongues and speaking in tongues, and how Paul's instructions in 1 Corinthians 14 apply to church gatherings.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:11, 1 Corinthians 14:15, 1 Corinthians 14:26, 1 Corinthians 14:28, 1 Corinthians 14:34

Topics: "Spiritual Gifts", "Church Order"

Description

David Servant delves into the early church gatherings in Corinth, emphasizing the active participation of believers in sharing what the Holy Spirit gave them, as highlighted by Paul's instructions on speaking in tongues and prophecy. He explains the distinction between the ability to pray in tongues granted at Spirit baptism for personal use and the spontaneous 'gift of tongues' for public benefit, clarifying the importance of the 'interpretation of tongues' to avoid disorder. Paul's guidance on women keeping silent in the churches is interpreted as addressing specific disruptions rather than a blanket restriction on women speaking, aligning with his previous mention of women praying and prophesying in the same letter.

Transcript

The early church gatherings were not characterized by the majority passively listening to a trained clergyman. Rather, there was participation among everyone who shared what the Holy Spirit gave him. Thus it could be said, as Paul did, "When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation" (14:26).

There was, however, some disorder at believers' gatherings in Corinth. Specifically, there were three groups that were speaking when they should not have been. Some, for example, were publicly speaking in tongues without any interpretation, which provided no benefit to the gathering. Paul instructed such folks to "keep silent in the church" (14:28). They should speak to themselves and God.

Why would God give someone the ability to speak in tongues without the accompanying gift of "the interpretation of tongues" that Paul listed in 12:10, especially since one who spoke publicly in tongues without an interpretation was out of order?

The only possible answer, and one that harmonizes with the experience of millions of Christians, is that the ability to pray in tongues is different than the spontaneous "gift of tongues." The former is something that the Lord grants believers when they are first baptized in the Spirit. That supernatural ability operates any time they will it from then on, just as Paul indicated in 14:15, while the genuine "gifts of tongues"

operates only as the Spirit wills (12:11). The former is for private use by believers in their personal devotions for self-edification, and they do not know what they are praying (14:14), whereas the latter is for the public benefit of the church, and is always accompanied by the "gift of the interpretation of tongues" (otherwise God would be the source of disorder).

All of this is to say that there must be two kinds of speaking in tongues. In Corinth, Spirit-baptized believers were speaking out in tongues, but not because they were suddenly anointed by the Spirit to do so, which would be a manifestation of the "gift of tongues." Rather, they were publicly speaking out in tongues using their ability to pray in tongues, given to them from the time they were baptized in the Holy Spirit.

In this light, Paul's rhetorical question that we read in chapter 12, "All do not speak with tongues, do they?" (12:30), is easy to harmonize with other scriptures that lead us to believe that speaking in tongues can be experienced and enjoyed by every believer once he or she is baptized in the Spirit. Paul's question referred to the spontaneous "gift of tongues," not to the ability to pray in tongues.

Paul really encouraged the practice of prophecy and then he corrected two other groups who were speaking out of order---certain prophets and certain wives. I don't believe that Paul's instruction to women to "keep silent in the churches" (14:34) was intended to keep them completely and continually silent any time the churches gathered. He had already written in this very letter about women publicly praying and prophesying (11:5). Paul was specifically addressing wives who were interrupting the flow of the gathering by conversing with their husbands.

Keep in mind that in this same chapter, Paul also told two other groups to be "silent"---out-of---order tongues speakers (14:28) and certain prophets (14:30). In neither case did he mean that they were to remain completely and continually silent any time the churches gathered.

Granted, this chapter in Corinthians raises as many questions as it answers. Some statements within it seem so contradictory from one verse to the next that some commentators think Paul was quoting from the letter that the Corinthians had written to him, and then immediately correcting what they wrote. For example, they believe that the words about women in 14:34-35 are a quote from the Corinthians' letter, and the verse immediately following is Paul's rebuttal: "Was it from you that the word of God first went forth? Or has it come to you only?" (14:36). That is, "Who are you to be making up such regulations about women not speaking? Are you the final authority from God on the matter?" Many women approve of that interpretation!

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