

## "Bodybuilding 201" 1 Corinthians 14:1-12, Part 2

### Introduction

- When a plane takes off on its journey it doesn't climb to 30,000 feet in an instant. Take-off is gradual—both for the benefit of the pilot and the passengers. The same is true with preaching. In order for listeners to comfortably adjust to the subject at hand, take-off must be slow—a gradual, building ascent. However, this week is a bit different. More like a rocket launch. Instead of starting from the ground and gradually ascending to 30,000 feet, this morning I want to begin right where we left off two weeks ago—in the stratosphere. Please turn in your bibles to 1 Corinthians 14.
- As we think about tongues and prophecy, again, the hard part about these verses is not what they say but what they mean and how they are applied. For those of you who weren't here two weeks ago, the principle Paul sets forth in this section is the principle of edification. Clearly, the most important spiritual gifts are those that edify or build up and strengthen the body of Christ. The Corinthians had elevated speaking in tongues to the position of premier gift. For them it was the pinnacle of Christian spirituality. Paul reins 'em in. Their emphasis on tongues was way out of whack. Tongues is not the premier gift because it doesn't edify like teaching or for that matter, prophecy. Paul is not anti-tongues. But he does try to bring balance to their worship assembly—he urges them to emphasize the gifts that edify. And to make his point in 14:1-12 he compares tongues and prophecy and their respective abilities to edify the body of Christ. Paul's conclusion is that prophecy wins hands down when judged by the edification factor. Speaking in tongues edifies the speaker only whereas prophecy edifies a wider audience; it's the superior gift.

### Transition

This week our purpose will be to try and answer some of the questions raised a couple weeks ago but left unanswered. This week we're going to focus on prophecy in particular. Next week tongues speaking.

- Let's begin by putting this debate into perspective. For those of you who were here when we looked at 1 Corinthians 14:1-12 this will be somewhat of a review. It's worth going over again. Remember this slide? This is important especially as we think about this issue. Christians disagree about a number of different things. "How do we decide which theological views are *dogma* and therefore indisputable; which are *doctrine* and thus well-established; which are *theory* and open to vigorous debate; and which are mere *speculation* and warrant little more than curiosity?" And where do the miraculous gifts fall on this triangle? Dogma? Speculation? Somewhere in between?
- Those teachings worthy of the status dogma have the highest exegetical certainty (there is little debate as to what the biblical writers were actually trying to say), the greatest theological importance (Christianity rises or falls on it), the strongest biblical evidence (both in the quantity and diversity of verses), and the most uniform historical agreement (Christians throughout the centuries have generally agreed). Whereas those teachings which are speculation have the lowest exegetical certainty, the least theological importance, the weakest biblical evidence, the least uniform historical agreement. In other words as a particular theological view decreases in

certainty, importance, emphasis, or agreement it also slides down the pyramid from dogma toward speculation.

- When you talk about miraculous gifts, as a teaching of scripture, it probably falls in the realm of theory. Despite attempts by some to elevate it to the place of dogma or lower it to the place of speculation, with as much intellectual honesty as I can muster, I think it's a matter of theory. It's definitely not unimportant. But at the same time Christianity doesn't rise or fall on this issue. It's somewhere in the middle; something open for vigorous debate. I think that's just being intellectually responsible. What that means for us is that how we talk about this issue is different than how we'd talk about a doctrine or dogma. In other words, don't make this issue a bone of contention. To reword [Chrysostom's](#) quote, "In areas of dogma and doctrine, unity. In areas of theory and speculation, charity. In all things, Jesus Christ."

### Transition

All right, let's begin with probably the most important question first. Are the miraculous gifts valid today? Personally, I would say yes. In this room my guess is that its 60-40; 60% agree the gifts are valid for today, 40% disagree. I think that's awesome that we have that kind of diversity. We need each other. We need to sharpen each other. Divergence of opinion on matters of theory is, I think, healthy and very Free Church. Remember, we're talking theory, not dogma. I could very well be wrong about my conclusions on this issue. Wherever you fall out on this make sure your appeals come from Scripture and are well thought out.

- Interestingly enough, the passage that's most frequently used to support the teaching that the miraculous gifts are no longer valid for today is the passage we looked at three weeks ago, 1 Corinthians 13:8-13. Turn to chapter 13. I'm going to move quickly, please keep up. The argument goes that tongues will be stilled or cease *when perfection comes*—see that phrase in [verse 10](#)? It's argued that *perfection* refers to the revelation of God's Word. When the perfect comes, when God's word is complete, prophecy and tongues and other imperfect gifts pass away.<sup>1</sup> In other words, as the last word of the last book of the New Testament was penned the miraculous gifts ceased.<sup>2</sup> The full argument is a bit more nuanced than that, but I think you get the gist of the argument.
- In response, I would say look at [verse 12](#). Context is king. In conjunction with verse 10 where Paul says *when perfection comes*, is verse 12 which says at that time we will also see God face to face. Contextually, it is hard to see how that phrase *face to face* refers to anything but Christ's second coming. That's one of the great joys of heaven—seeing God face to face. Revelation 22:3-4 *No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. 4 They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.* So I think it's a bit of a stretch to use this verse to appeal to the gifts ceasing.
- Additionally, I would say, Paul makes no mention of the completion of the Scripture in these verses. That's adding an idea to the text that's simply not there. So, I would say, if you're going to draw a conclusion about when the gifts cease from this verse it would have to be at Christ's return; which obviously means that all the gifts would still be valid for today.

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<sup>1</sup> Grudem, p. 1033.

<sup>2</sup> Grudem, p. 1037.

- The other key verse that's appealed to for the ceasing of miraculous gifts is Hebrews 2:3-4. *This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. 4 God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.* The line of thought goes that the miraculous gifts were given to confirm the message of salvation. And that "we should not expect [the miraculous gifts] to be done through others who were not firsthand witnesses to the Lord's teaching and ministry."<sup>3</sup> In other words, the miraculous gifts confirm the gospel message by the apostles. Apostles are no longer around so the miraculous gifts which accompanied their ministry of confirmation have been discontinued. *This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. 4 God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.*
- I don't disagree with the first part of that argument; that miraculous gifts confirmed the witness of the earliest Christians. However, as one of my teachers in seminary said, "the fact that the gospel message was confirmed by miracles when it was preached by those who heard Jesus says nothing at all about whether it would be confirmed by miracles when preached by others who did not hear Jesus."<sup>4</sup> These verses from Hebrews just don't say. And at any rate, I can think of numerous situations in thoroughly pagan cultures, not unlike New Testament times, where the gospel message does need confirming. Just a side note, if you're going to use this verse to argue for the ceasing of gifts then be prepared to say that all the gifts of the Spirit have ceased. Why? Because these verses don't just single out the miraculous gifts. All the gifts of the Spirit are mentioned in verse 4. And if some cease then according to the context, all would have to cease, not just the *signs, wonders and various miracles*. Are you with me?
- There's also an argument from church history—that the miraculous gifts ceased when the apostles died and that the gifts have been, for the most part, absent throughout church history. We don't have time to do a full historical survey but let me just say there is "increasing historical evidence that miraculous gifts were occurring throughout the history of the church in greater or lesser degree."<sup>5</sup> For those who believe the miraculous gifts continue, there is an argument from experience. We've all heard stories of people being healed, etcetera. If you're interested in doing some more study from church history on this subject, I can point you in the direction of some good resources. Just let me know.
- A few concluding thoughts before we look at prophecy in particular. We need to remember that false miracles are a reality. Caution is necessary. Pharaoh's magicians mimicked some of the things Moses and Aaron did. Simon the sorcerer amazed people with his magic in Acts 8:9-11. So just because something appears miraculous doesn't necessarily mean it's from God. I think some of the miraculous things reported nowadays by some ministries on the fringes are nothing short of Satanic smoke and mirrors that keep people from following God. In fact, Paul even warns in 2 Thessalonians 2:9-10 that *the coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, 10 and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing.* Great discernment is needed. *Test the spirits to see whether they are from God,* 1 John 4:1. And by all means, don't go out of your way seeking miracles. We all know what Jesus said about

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<sup>3</sup> Grudem, p. 367.

<sup>4</sup> Grudem, p. 367.

<sup>5</sup> Grudem, p. 1043-4.

seeking signs for the sake of signs, right? Jesus said in Matthew 16:4 *a wicked and adulterous generation looks for a miraculous sign*. We're called to seek Christ. As Paul said in 1 Corinthians 2:2 *For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified*. Clearly what matters most is not the sign or wonder but knowing and experiencing Christ crucified. And spiritual gifts? "The gifts of the Spirit serve diverse means for a single end: to make visible the lordship of Jesus Christ as crucified and raised, and to build up the whole community."<sup>6</sup> If a so called miracle fails to do that, make visible the lordship of Christ, I don't care how miraculous it is, it's not from God.

### Transition

All right, let's spend some time talking about prophecy. What in the world is prophecy?

- Part of my purpose this morning is to demystify prophecy. Sometimes, and rightly so, there is great apprehension, even fear, about prophecy. We've heard and maybe even seen how this gift has been abused. It's been used to control people. People have a tendency to elevate prophecy above God's Word and run after the prophetic. All those imbalances and abuses reveal an improper understanding of what prophecy really is.
- You know what? Prophecy is not that big a deal. Here's how I define prophecy. I think that prophecy is a human report of something God has brought to mind for the purpose of edifying others. Let me say that again. Prophecy is a human report of something God has brought to mind for the purpose of edifying others. Have you ever had promptings from the Holy Spirit so strongly that you just felt compelled to say something to someone? That inner conviction that's then reported or shared, that's prophecy. Prophecy is a human report of something God has brought to mind for the purpose of edifying others. Let me see if I can explain.
- Let's start with the Old Testament. The primary purpose of Old Testament prophecy was a message given for a present need or situation. That's key. It's very important that we understand this aspect of biblical prophecy. It is first and foremost present oriented. I like how [Anthony Thisleton](#) describes prophecy when he says, "Prophecy is not in the first instance foretelling, but rather forth-telling—light for the present." There are countless examples of this. One would be Haggai's message given to the returned exiles for their edification so that they might rebuild the wall. Light for present circumstances. While there may be a future oriented component to biblical prophecy that is generally not the norm.
- What did Old Testament prophets do? Well, they called God's people to repentance, pronounced judgment, motivated God's people to action and proclaimed truth about God. And yes, at times, there was a future component to the prophet's words. Now here's the important thing. The most unique thing about Old Testament prophets was that they had the amazing responsibility of speaking and writing words with absolute divine authority. When an Old Testament prophet said "thus says the Lord" the words that followed were the words of God. 1 Kings 20:36, along with many other passages, clearly shows that to disobey a prophet's words was to disobey God himself. And of course, because of this, if a prophet's words did not come about, he obviously was not speaking on behalf of God because God cannot lie. The prophet was a false prophet was to be put to death, Deuteronomy 18.

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<sup>6</sup> *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, p. 301.

- But by the time we get to the New Testament something's different. Peter in his speech at Pentecost in Acts 2:17, quotes Joel 2, and clearly teaches that a time will come, the last days, when prophecy will be democratized—open and available to the common man or woman of God. *But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: 17 " ' And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; 18 even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.* We even see this democratization of prophecy in 1 Corinthians 14:31 where Paul says, *For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged.* This is important because New Testament prophecy, which has been democratized and opened to all who have the Holy Spirit, is different than prophecy in the Old Testament.
- This is extremely important that you hear me correctly on this. New Testament prophets, unlike the Old Testament, don't speak Scripture. They don't say "thus says the Lord." In the New Testament that function is reserved for Apostles. Jesus coined a new phrase "Apostle" because by the time of the New Testament the term prophet simply meant "declaring, proclaiming, making known."<sup>7</sup> The Apostles are the New Testament counterpart to the Old Testament prophets. That's significant because that means that prophetic speech in the New Testament is not the same as in the Old Testament. There are huge differences. Old Testament prophecy is different than New Testament prophecy. Similar? Yes. But not exactly the same. New Testament prophetic speech is not infallible. It's not meant to be the same as the Old Testament "thus says the Lord."
- For instance, Acts 21:4. Turn to Acts 21. In Acts 21:4 Luke writes *Finding the disciples there, we stayed with them seven days. Through the Spirit they urged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem.* Here it seems like Paul received a prophetic warning against going to Jerusalem. What does Paul do? He disobeys—he goes to Jerusalem. If New Testament prophecy was like Old Testament prophecy Paul would have been wrong. But Paul wasn't wrong. Why? Because Old Testament prophecy and New Testament prophecy are not the same. Part of the uncomfortableness that we often times feel about prophecy is because we're projecting Old Testament categories onto it. And many of the abuses of prophecy come about because people fail to take into account the differences between Old Testament and New Testament prophecy. People try to make it like Old Testament prophecy. But it's different. And it's not that big a deal.
- So let's try to zero in on the nature of New Testament prophetic speech. Prophecy is listed as a gift of the Holy Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12, 14 as well as Ephesians 4 and Romans 12. First, I think we can affirm that "prophecies in the church today should be considered merely human words, not God's words, and not equal to God's words in authority."<sup>8</sup> Prophecy is a human report of something God has brought to mind. The revelation of Scripture is superior to prophecy in every way. Got that? Scripture is superior to prophecy; they aren't even comparable. The place you and I need to go to first when seeking God's guidance is his Word. Not a prophet. It is misleading and wrong for someone, in reference to a prophecy, to say "thus says the Lord" or "the Lord told me to that you need to do this." That can and has led to all kinds of abuses and confusion and hurt. In the words of an Anglican charismatic,

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<sup>7</sup> Grudem, p. 1051.

<sup>8</sup> Grudem, p. 1055.

“prophecies which tell other people what to do—are to be regarded with great suspicion.”<sup>9</sup> All prophecies are to be weighed and sifted, 1 Corinthians 14:29, and subjected to the authority of Scripture.

- Second, as we talked about two weeks ago, prophecy is meant to edify and instruct and encourage. It's not supposed to cause fear or unease. Prophecy is given as a gift that builds up the church. I love what Luke records about Judas and Silas in Acts 15:32 when he says *Judas and Silas, who themselves were prophets, said much to encourage and strengthen the brothers*. There is often times a didactic or teaching component to prophecy which builds and strengthens the church. Prophecy is not purely teaching; it's listed as a separate gift of the spirit in 1 Corinthians 12:28; so it's different than teaching. The clear explanation and application of scripture, planned and thought out, that's teaching. However, there is frequently a teaching component to prophecy. When you feel compelled to share with someone what you've learned from Scripture because you want the other person to be edified and encouraged and strengthened; that's prophecy.
- Third, there is no evidence that all prophecy has to be spontaneous. In Jeremiah 1, Old Testament tradition has it that Jeremiah reflected on the almond tree and the boiling pot before speaking as prophet.<sup>10</sup> I know this from my own experience, preparation and reflection can actually aid spontaneity so that you're able to choose on the spot from a wealth of previously considered thoughts.<sup>11</sup> I think you can have sustained reflection and still have prophecy.
- Again, I think prophecy is a human report of something God has brought to mind. So when we say things like “I think the Lord is putting on my mind that...” or “It seems to me that the Lord is showing us...” that's prophecy. When God helps us to understand something or call something to mind or grasp a teaching of scripture which is then reported and shared, for the edification and strengthening and encouragement of the body, that, I think is prophecy. It is different than Old Testament prophecy. It is not infallible speech. It is subject to the authority of Scripture. And it must somehow point to Christ—give glory to Christ. Has it been abused? Yes. Is discernment needed? Unquestionably yes. Could I be wrong about this and the other miraculous gifts? Sure. Let's just make sure we're all like the Bereans on this issue or on any issue that's open to vigorous debate. Acts 17:11. *Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.*

## Conclusion

- How do you conclude a message like this? Balance. In the words of one wise saint, “If you have the Spirit without the Word, you blow up. If you have the Word without the Spirit, you dry up. If you have both the Word and the Spirit, you grow up.”<sup>12</sup> May God bring all of us to complete maturity in Christ so that we aren't tossed about by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching.<sup>13</sup> Pray with me.

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<sup>9</sup> Grudem, p. 1059.

<sup>10</sup> *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, p. 302.

<sup>11</sup> Blomberg, p. 272.

<sup>12</sup> Don Lyon, *Leadership*, Vol. 5, no. 1.

<sup>13</sup> Ephesians 4:14