

3. Unusual Speaking gifts

1Co 14:1-9 Psa 19:1-11 Luk 4:16-30

Tongues, Interpretation, Prophecy, Word of Wisdom, Word of Knowledge.

Some observations to begin with...

1. It is very easy with all the gifts of the Spirit to think that the biblical lists are exhaustive (rather than a list of samples). Note however that gifts not mentioned in the Scriptures should be in conflict with the Scriptures
2. Note that there is a spirit world, other than the Holy Spirit which can duplicate these gifts. We need to be sure that what we are hearing has originated from God.
3. It is also possible to manufacture prophecies and tongues even without intending doing so.
4. We can easily read back into the Scriptures (eisegesis) from our own experiences and say, "What I have experienced is what is spoken of back then."

This may be true, but we must allow the meaning of the Scriptures to speak out to us first (exegesis) rather than impose our presuppositions on the Bible.

Having said that, I have to admit that some of the observations which follow are based on experience and speculation because of a lack of extra biblical information.

We should probably be careful not to define the gifts too closely.

I should mention that there are those who believe that these particular gifts died with the apostles, when the Scriptures were written down, causing the gifts to become unnecessary.

Without going into detail I have not found biblical evidence for such a view, and nor does such a view seem to hold much weight either from experience or speculation.

Let us then look at these speaking gifts...

Tongues

Despite being one of the less important gifts, opinions about tongues have divided church people considerably.

There are two extremes. Those who say that all modern manifestations of tongues are from the Devil, and others who say that you can't be a real Christian if you haven't spoken in Tongues. Neither view can be supported biblically.

What is Tongues?

At Pentecost it appears to have been Known languages, which raised curiosity in the hearers and brought attention to the fact that something from God was going on.

+BI *Rebecca Self, Chaparral, New Mexico. Today's Christian Woman, "Heart to Heart." Wrote...*

My family was visiting a church and the minister announced they had both Spanish and English Bibles for use during the service. My youngest son tugged at my sleeve and whispered, "Mummy, I want one of those Spanish Bibles."

"Don't be silly, you can't read Spanish," I quickly rejoined.

Holding out his own Bible to me, my kindergartner explained, "Mum, I can't read English either."

One thought that occurs is...

Wouldn't tongues be a shortcut for missionaries going overseas?

But the problem is that the Tongues speaker usually does not usually understand what he or she is saying – hence the need for an interpreter

A question that sometimes arises is...

Whether Tongues is an unknown, or heavenly language?

The biblical evidence for an unknown language is based partly on the King James Version's translation of "glossa" in 1Co 14 as "unknown tongue", (unknown is not in the Greek) and partly on 1Co 13, "If I speak in a tongue of mortals and *of angels.*"

Neither is a convincing biblical argument for an unknown language, yet research shows that this is the prevailing modern experience.

What is the purpose of Tongues?...

To enhance ones prayer life.

Paul says the tongues speaker does not speak to people but to God (1 Cor 14:2) and goes on to write (in this context of congregational worship) about self-edification.

To allow the Spirit to speak through a person where words fail.

It seems most relevant if the person wants to convey praise or to ask for something but doesn't have adequate words.

Perhaps where the Spirit prompts a person to pray for a need or some situation, that he or she is *consciously unaware of.*

As a sign to others.

Using a quote from Isaiah, 1 Cor 14:22 states that Tongues is a sign for unbelievers that God's judgement is coming. (Though whether non-Jewish unbelievers would today understand them in this context is debateable).

In another context Nicky Gumbel tells a story in the Alpha course of a woman who spoke to another in classical Russian, telling her that God really loved her. The young lady had been unconvinced of God's love until she heard it in a language that she knew, but which the speaker neither knew, nor understood. It convinced her that God was speaking directly to her.

As a message to the church directly from God.

This context requires **interpretation**

In this case tongues fall into the realm of **prophecy**.

A note for readers...

Prophecy (prof-e-sea) is the noun. The name of the gift
Prophecy (prof-e-s-eye) is the verb. The action of speaking.

Prophecy is a direct message from God, but it's not just telling the future.

A. W. Tozer (1897-1963) said...

+BI A prophet is one who knows his times and what God is trying to say to the people of his times.

+BI Scholars can interpret the past; it takes prophets to interpret the present.

In the Old Testament – Prophets spoke in a time of crisis, esp when the Scriptures were lost or half forgotten. They spoke out against idolatry and injustice and called people back to the covenant often with the prefix... "Thus saith the LORD!"

In Early New Testament times – Prophets were ranked up there with apostles, evangelists and teachers. They were very important because the NT Scriptures were just in the process of writing.

I imagine such prophecy would largely have had to do with the gospel and how Christians were to live out their faith.

Paul in 1 Cor 14 says prophecy is for strengthening, encouragement, comfort and edification.

But we also read of Agabus in Acts, foretelling a famine – Result: the Christians were able to prepare for it.

Also Agabus foretells Paul's imprisonment.

Result: Paul still goes ahead, but knowing and having received

assurance that this is what God has in store for him.

Today prophecy is not likely to add to the canon of Scripture (There is no new gospel revelation for the worldwide church – we have what we need).

Prophecy today is more likely to be a message for a particular person, or church as to a course of action they should take.

+ I have been the recipient of such prophecy. Back in the mid-eighties I had a phone call from a lady who said that she had been sick and had had extra time for prayer. During that time God had spoken to her with a message for me. I didn't know her, and she had only heard of me. Broadly the message was an affirming one, and stated that God had some new area for us to move into and new things to teach me. After relaying it by phone she wrote the message and posted it to me. In other circumstances I might have dismissed it, but it came at a time when I had just shared with Susan that I thought that God had something else for us to do, and after repeated occurrences of Mark 10 cropping up all that week. The upshot was that after much prayer we finished up going to Sydney to train for ministry. The prophecy had been an impetus to moving on with God. (Interestingly I lost the letter, and only "by chance" rediscovered it prior to making a decision to come to Port Macquarie!)

As a direct message from God prophecy seems to overlap with

A Word of Knowledge

This seems to go beyond just being knowledgeable, though that is a gift too.

It is more an insight into a situation which could not be otherwise known.

+ I remember heard of a counselling situation where the counsellor was unable to make headway with the client. Suddenly the counsellor had a revelation about something in the client's life which provided

the breakthrough.

Word of Wisdom

There is a wisdom that is available to all of us...

James 1:5

If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you.

+ I remember as a child being impressed by the story of young Solomon asking for wisdom, and praying then that God would help me to be wise.

Wisdom has nothing to do with cleverness or social standing. It doesn't *necessarily* have to do with how knowledgeable or experienced you are.

However...

It does help to have knowledge and experience, and goes hand in hand with those things.

Wisdom is to know how to use the gifts, the knowledge experience and the insights that God gives, so that the church may be built up.

This wisdom here, appears to be exceptional wisdom overlapping with the gift of knowledge.

Conclusion

When all these gifts are boiled down, and especially when you read Paul's argument for interpretation to go with tongues, the bottom line is...

CLEAR COMMUNICATION OF GOD'S WORD TO HIS PEOPLE,
so that we may learn and grow together.

Remember that 1 Cor 14 must be read and understood in the

context of the church worshipping together and against the background of obvious chaos that prevailed in Corinthian worship, with their general lack of regard for one another (a theme of the whole letter).

This observation highlights the need for us to be mindful, in our worship, to build one another up, and to think about the impression that our style of worship makes on outsiders.

Rowland Croucher gave some sound advice for exercising these sorts of gifts in church.

In the “Signs of a Healthy Church,” DVD series, he suggests

That those with a word to go to the front of the church a sit.

The relevance of the word is then assessed by an elder/s

If relevant, the person is allowed to speak to the church

God’s Word is powerful.

By it he created the universe.

By it he speaks to us.

And Primarily God speaks through the Scriptures

But there are times when God speaks a special word of encouragement or guidance to his people (and even to non-Christians).

Paul exhorts his readers to earnestly desire the spiritual gifts for building up the congregation and always to his glory and praise.

A Prayer...

Father, fill us with your Spirit, and give us wisdom and discernment to hear your voice and to communicate your Word clearly and in the power of that same Holy Spirit. Amen.