

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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What Should You Desire?

Follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy. For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries. But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort. He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church. (1 Corinthians 14:1-4, KJV)

We now turn to the final movement in Paul's instructive thesis on spiritual gifts. I think of Chapter 12 as "God richly gives His church the spiritual gifts that she needs for His service," Chapter 13 as "How do I/we regard and use His gifts?" and Chapter 14 as "Practical application. Use the gifts to serve the Lord by serving His people."

Follow after charity. We might place a note in the margin of our Bible beside this point, "Read and practice Chapter 13." Paul is gracious and realistic. I've known a few admirable saints in my time, but never a single one who fully practiced the high model of 1 Corinthians 13. Not a one. And that definitely includes the man I see in the mirror each morning. I strive to "*Follow after Charity*," but I acknowledge that I have not perfected the habit or for that matter even come close to it. So what do I intend to do about it? Tomorrow morning when I awaken I plan to ask the Lord for grace to try harder and labor to improve. Paul leaves no option for ceasing our labor, turning back, or, for that matter, accepting our present conduct as satisfactory.

...and desire spiritual gifts. These words take us back to Chapter 12. Although Paul doesn't specifically mention our motive in desiring spiritual gifts, the context of the last two chapters makes the point with clear emphasis. I've known a few men over the years who professed a spiritual gift, but their conduct and attitude did not convince me that they in fact possessed that gift. Over time in observing some of these fellows, it seemed quite likely that they "Desired" the gift for reasons related to personal benefit or gain, not for the service and benefit of the Lord's people. Revisit the body analogy that Paul used in the twelfth chapter. No body part strives for some other role in the body for personal gain. Each body part in our physical body is "Programmed" to perform certain functions. In a healthy body, each body part receives the resources from the body necessary to perform its function, and it works to do what it was designed to do. In the body of the Lord's church, the members are not puppets or machine parts. They are living believers. However, in a healthy church, a healthy believer will strive to know and to understand what the Lord has "Gifted" to him for the service of his

brothers and sisters in the faith. He will seek to perform that work for the praise of the Lord and for the service of his brothers and sisters without thinking, "What is in it for me?" or "When do I get my way?" Paul's point in teaching us to "*desire spiritual gifts*" is to put ourselves at the Lord's service and disposal, to seek His aid and direction to enable each of us to minister to the spiritual health of the body, not to advance our personal influence or position in the church. The believer who rightly desires a spiritual gift does so at his personal expense, a significant cost, not for his personal gain. Do we understand Jesus' meaning when He commanded that anyone who follows Him must deny self? You can't deny yourself and simultaneously promote yourself. Impossible.

I have also observed a number of men who professed a spiritual gift and who gave reasonable evidence that the Lord had given them that gift, but for various reasons they did not develop that gift to the point of edification. If we get lost in the details, we might not understand or learn from these cases. However, in most cases I fear that these struggling souls stopped short of the admittedly demanding requirement of self-denial necessary for any spiritual gift to grow and become fruitful to the individual and to others. Paul writes to the Corinthians, "*For we preach not ourselves...*" (2 Corinthians 4:5). The more a man spends pulpit time telling the congregation about himself the more he compromises his gift and his ability and opportunity to edify others. Bless these frustrated souls, perhaps they fail to read past this point in the verse to its conclusion. The logical necessity of not preaching self, but "*...Christ Jesus the Lord*," is an assault against the preacher's "Self," "*...ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake*." A servant never promotes himself directly or indirectly. He is wholly consumed by his service to his Master and his Master's people and interests. I've heard some of these men speak and wanted to privately tell them, "Get over yourself and get self out of the way." If they would take this self-sacrificing step, they might prove to be a great blessing.

...but rather that ye may prophesy. Even as we follow charity in all that we say and do, and desire the Lord's guidance in our pursuit of spiritual gifts,

Paul raises our sights. There is yet another activity that is higher and better if rightly built on those two foundations, "...but rather." Paul's "but rather" admonition does not ignore or deviate from the first two. They serve as the basis for "...but rather."

What does it mean to "prophesy"? Our superficial mindset likely thinks of foretelling the future. Is this correct? Does Paul encourage every believer to strive to become a future-teller? Read the entire chapter. Use the chapter to frame a sense of what Paul means by this word? What is the outcome that he describes from this activity?

Kittel's Theological Dictionary of New Testament Words defines the Greek word translated "prophesy" in this verse:

(Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (Abrid) "....."it would seem that the original sense in Greek is 'one who proclaims...."

While Kittell and other respected New Testament Greek dictionaries agree that the word at times did refer to "Foretelling" future events, the primary use of the word was more immediate and practical. Someone created a cliché that describes the word well, "**Forth-telling, not foretelling.**" If you review the Old Testament prophetic books, you will see occasional predictions in which God enlightened and directed the prophet to record specific and accurate facts regarding events yet future, often specifically related to Jesus and His coming. However, a far more frequent and typical work of the prophet was to speak God's words clearly and faithfully to the people of that age. The prophet's primary message was always a faithful communication of God's word to and for His people. The prophets' most frequent theme was not what would be hundreds of years in the future, but rather "**Thus saith the Lord...**" for the people who lived with the prophet in his day. What God had to say to His people at that time and place was the primary theme of every Old Testament prophet's message. This view of "Prophesying" perfectly matches Paul's development of the word in First Corinthians 14.

For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries. God is not limited by any language. He knows the hearts and minds of every being. What is the "unknown tongue" of which Paul writes? Review the very first appearance of the supernatural miracle of tongues in the first thirteen verses of Acts 2. Pay close attention to this verse.

*Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them **speak in his own language.** (Acts 2:6)*

The true God-given miracle of tongues transcended known human languages, but it did not at all appear in any form of mystical utterances.

God used known human languages to manifest His power on that day. However, in the Corinthian Church this supernatural power was not available, and Paul imposes logical rules of clear communication to promote edifying knowledge and convincing testimony of His presence and truth to those present. I do not know any other human language than English. If someone in my presence were to offer audible prayer in another language, I would not understand what they were saying. God would know what they prayed fully. The entire fourteenth chapter presumes that this supernatural gift or power has ceased. Not once in the chapter does Paul direct the Corinthian Church to pray for the true Acts 2 gift of tongues. He directs them to follow a wholly different and very sensible and logical alternative. Simple; either provide a translator or do not ask the person to speak in a known human language that others in the church cannot understand.

In this simple approach to a communicative and God-glorifying church gathering, speaking in the known language of the congregation is necessary and required by Paul. If the church desires to hear from a person who does not speak the dominant language of the church, find someone who can translate his words into the known language of the congregation. Then all the church will understand what he says and be instructed and edified.

But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort. He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church. Notice the synonyms that Paul uses to describe what he intends for us to understand as "Propheying."

1. **Edification.** To edify is to grow people in their spiritual knowledge and life. If you edify someone in the faith, you leave that person stronger in his faith, better informed in his knowledge of the truth and of His God, and better equipped to live out his faith than he would have been apart from that "Edifying" encounter.
2. **Exhortation.** In the New Testament this word was normally translated from a Greek word that finds its English equivalent in such words as "Paramedic." A "Paramedic" is a person who has been trained to work with and under the guidance of a medical doctor. "Para" as a prefix means to stand or to work beside another. Thus, when one believer "Exhorts" another believer, he is not telling that believe what to do. He is calling that believer to come and stand beside him in his own walk. "Come stand and walk with me." Exhortation in this Biblical sense requires leading by example, showing the way by one's personal practice.
3. **Comfort.** We live in a hostile world to godly Biblical faith. Any encounter with this world leaves the godly believer ragged, torn, and discouraged. We need these wondrous

moments of "Comfort" to remind us that we are mere pilgrims in this world, that we have a better home to which we are going.

Why not allow these three words to define Paul's intended meaning of "Prophesying"?

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Worship service each Sunday 10:30 A. M.
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