

Is It Finished? Clarity and Conviction about Miraculous Gifts

1 Corinthians 12–14 | 04.09.2016 | Body Life @OBC

This week begins a long concentrated look at the death and resurrection of our Lord.

And today is called Palm Sunday because it recalls the day King Jesus entered Jerusalem greeted with shouts of praise . . . only to exit Jerusalem on Friday condemned as a criminal.

Amazing we call this Friday . . . **Good Friday** . . . because this King died as a criminal . . . in the place of other criminals . . . completing a work that was planned before the world began.

And on the cross . . . he exclaimed . . . *TETELESTAI !! It is Finished!*

Indeed, this truth stands at the center of our faith.

Salvation does not come by working or adding to Christ's work.
Rather . . . it comes by full confidence in HIS FINISHED WORK.

/: **We glorify Jesus by trusting in what he has done, not by adding to his labors.**

We wouldn't glorify an architect by remodeling his newly-constructed home.

We don't glorify an artist by touching up a few lines on his painting.

And We don't glorify Christ by adding to his finished work.

When it comes to the cross . . . Protestants since the Reformation have stood on the principle of *Sola Fide* and *Solus Christus*— faith alone in the finished work of Christ alone.

But what about the work of the Spirit . . . are there ways in which the Spirit's work has been finished? Or do we assume that his work is endlessly ongoing, with no sense of completion?

To be sure . . . the Son has sent his Spirit to bring into effect his completed work.

On the cross . . . Jesus finished his work of humiliation . . . but now in glory, he sends forth his Spirit . . . to open eyes, open hearts, and raise the spiritually dead to life.

In other words, on the cross . . . Jesus finished his work . . . and now by the Spirit . . . we see the ripple effect of his completed work.

Thus . . . the Spirit does continue his work in our midst.

But like Christ . . . there is also an element of his work that is finished!

The Holy Spirit is the person who inspired the Word of God . . . and in the age of the apostles and prophets . . . he finished his work of REVELATION + INSPIRATION.

As we saw in 1 Cor 12 . . . the UC has one apostolic foundation & one prophetic Word.

Like a wise builder, the Son . . . as he built his church . . . did not lay down multiple foundations . . . rather, as the NT shows us . . . he laid down the foundation of his one church . . . by sending his Spirit to grant revelation to the first generation of Xians.

This revelation has been preserved in God's Word . . . and instructs about what the Spirit continues to do . . . and what he has already done and finished!

Indeed . . . if we are going to be a true Church . . . we must stand on the HS's foundation

And . . . as we wrap up our study of the spiritual gifts . . .

we need to make clear how standing on this foundation works . . .

and how the Spirit continues to work from this spiritual foundation.

Over the last 7 weeks we've made observations about Paul's instructions to the Corinthians.

And now . . . we need to tie those observations together

. . . and make some doctrinal applications –

. . . in fact, my aim is to make about 15 applications.

So . . . if you are taking notes . . . we have

3 presuppositions to evaluate

and 5 observations to consider from 1 Corinthians 12–14

From there . . .

We will answer the question . . . **What about the work of the Spirit is finished?**

Biblical and Practical Truths About Miraculous Gifts

Presuppositions

1. The continuation of a spiritual gift is not necessarily more spiritual . . .

The first thing we need to say is that the *continuation* of miraculous gifts is not necessarily more spiritual than the *cessation* of miraculous gifts.

I think charismatics are presented / present themselves as having a bigger view of God.

Some reason that to restrict tongues, prophecy, and miraculous signs and wonders to the apostolic age puts God in a box.

But this misunderstands what we believe . . . No cessationist denies that God does incredible things, answers prayer, and heals miraculously.

What we deny is the use of gifts that go beyond the Bible itself

→ We believe God intended gifts of revelation to provide in the early church an eternal word which is living and active . . . grant spiritual life with resurrection power.

We believe God works in the world with incredible power . . . but that he has also chosen to reveal himself through his word . . . and that he word is NECESSARY for knowing him.

Still... many insist they must experience all that the apostles did.

But I wonder . . . are they letting our culture's emphasis on subjective experience lead them.

Or . . . is it the spiritual equivalent of FOMO . . . **the Fear of Missing Out.**

Studies have shown . . . increased Facebook activity increases sadness.

Why ?? . . . Because of FOMO – people see what others are doing and they want the same . . . Facebook creates FOMO . . . **and so can over attention to miraculous Gifts**

Earnest Christians read Acts and hear about these incredible miracles, tongues, etc.

And they want to experience the same thing . . . and certain teachers tell them if they do not they are not experiencing God . . .

But . . . What if that's not God's plan?

What if God gave those gifts or revelation, tongues, prophecy for a season . . . not 4ever?
What if God wants his children to grow up nourished and instructed by that word?

Well then . . . trying to reproduce the special effects misses the Lord who has spoken.

Worse . . . people are primed to be misled by leaders who offer or require Spiritual Gifts in ways God never intended. . . . **So #1**

2. Most contemporary applications of tongues and prophecy don't match Scripture.

If EXPERIENCE is the driving force of worship . . . it will of necessity overrun Scripture.

And sadly, this is what we find in many Pentecostal and Charismatic churches—even more in ministries like IHOP or Bethel Church that stress a gospel of power > forgiveness

Historically, Pentecostal churches have said TONGUES are necessary for confirming the baptism in the Spirit. But as we saw in **1 Cor 12:12–13** this is biblically misinformed.

Baptism in the Spirit happens ONCE . . . when someone is born again by the Spirit.

Other charismatic churches have backed away from requiring tongues . . .

But still they direct their people to find God through other miraculous signs, contemporary prophecies, healing services, or private prayer languages.

Again . . . this sets up people to look for God in the wrong place.

What happens when the cancer remains . . . the child doesn't return . . . God is silent . . . or money runs out . . . **doubt arises . . . BUT it is doubt in promises God never made.**

So . . . Even before getting to a decision about miraculous gifts, we need to establish this fact:

Many—not all, but many—who stress signs and wonders aren't conducting themselves according to the Bible . . . The Bible may play a part, but it is not supreme.

This is backwards . . . in the Bible, the purpose of the miraculous gifts was clear – it was to confirm the Word, validate the messenger, and establish a foundation for the church.

3. The Purpose of Miraculous Gifts was to confirm the Word . . .

Apostles were identified and confirmed by miraculous powers . . . **2 Cor 12:12** – The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works.

Paul says something similar in **Romans 15:19** . . . For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience—by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God.

And most definitively, **Hebrews 2:4** speaks of the purpose for signs and wonders: The word of God “was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.”

So these explicit statements about the purpose of miraculous gifts must be kept in mind as we come to **1 Corinthians 12–14**.

And in these three chapters, we need to make at least five observations that further our belief that miraculous gifts are not a normative part of worship today.

1. THE FIRST OBSERVATION . . . 1 Cor 12–14 is a corrective to a misuse of spiritual gifts.

This is evident from the whole letter, which addresses divisions and complaints in Corinth.

Likewise passages like **12:1**, **13:1–3**, and **14:37** indicate Paul is writing to those Corinthians who identified themselves as “spiritual” but who are not mature in love.

To them . . . Paul is teaching how to use spiritual gifts for the common good.

And thus . . . the tone of this section is Corrective . . . not expressive.
 Regulative . . . not open-ended.

Therefore . . .

We should be cautious about appealing to 12–14 as our basis for any church activity.

2. Tongues are not as important as the Corinthians made them.

To some in Corinth . . . tongues was the highest gift.

But twice Paul makes tongues the lowest gift.

First, as he lists gifts in 12:8–10 and 12:27–30, he puts tongues and their interpretation last.

Then, in chapter 14, he makes an elongated argument that prophesy is more important.

It is odd . . . that a reader would go away thinking . . . I must seek tongues.

Because the whole aim of his writing is the just the opposite.

3. Paul doesn't forbid the practice of tongues, . . . rather he makes a four-fold checklist for their use

(1) All gifts are for the common good (12:7) . . . therefore, anything that fails to build up should not be practiced

Likewise, when Paul says in **14:4** that tongues edifies himself . . . this should be a warning bell not to use gifts for self-centered edification.

He's not making a place for self-edification . . . he is indicating that any self-focused use of gifts goes against the Lord's design.

(2) He does not teach a private prayer language.

This is easily missed because of the way the ESV translates 14:2.

What the ESV translate as Spirit (with a capital S) should be read as lower case 's.' Just as **v. 14** speaks of a man's spirit praying . . . so should 14:2 be rendered 'spirit'.

Paul is not commending tongues as a private prayer. He's indicting tongue-speakers for speaking in a way no one understands . . .

Likewise, 14:28 does not call tongue-speakers to speak to God and himself. Rather, Paul's point is to say, "Without an interpreter, don't speak. Keep it to yourself."

(3) He orders the service so that multiple tongue-speakers cannot act out of control. If Corinthians were used to frenzied worship, this would put an end to it. There was no place for multiple, spontaneous tongue speakers.

(4) And there was no place for tongues without interpretation. (1 Cor 14:27–28)

Paul teaches that any kind of worship devoid of the mind is not true worship.

Specifically, he addresses tongues devoid of interpretation. Unless there is an interpreter, it is never to be practiced.

But I think we might apply the principle further . . . any form of worship—be it art, dance, sound, or song that does not address the mind and explain itself . . . is off limits.

Such arts and activities may serve the individual, but in church they must serve the body.

In fact . . . God has given us two dramatic acts for WORSHIP – The first is **baptism**, in which a believer reenacts his or her death with Christ by being submerged under the waters of judgment and brought up to display her new life in Christ.

The second is **Lord's Supper**, in which the church remembers the broken body and atoning blood of Jesus Christ through a commemorative meal. And even these dramatic acts need interpretation . . . so how much more anything else.

4. If we deny the continuation of tongues, we cannot deny tongues to the Corinthians.

This brings us to **1 Corinthians 14:39** . . . and Paul's refusal to forbid tongues.

Again, we must read this in light of Paul's historical context . . . which includes a few things.

- a. He himself spoke in tongues . . .** "I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you" (14:18) . . . so it's not surprising he did not forbid absolutely the gift of tongues.
- b. He witnessed tongues being spoken a short time before writing 1 Corinthians . . .**

Paul is writing from Ephesus (1 Cor 16:19).

Acts 18–19 tell us how Paul went to Ephesus after being in Corinth.

And what happened there?

The Spirit was poured out on the Apostles of John and they spoke in tongues.

So Paul knows that tongues were still occurring in his day.

Thus, he would be foolish to outright deny tongues in Corinth . . . since he had seen tongues since he left there.

5. That being said, if Paul cannot deny tongues, we have many reasons to believe that Scripture itself indicates their discontinuity.

What are these reasons?

First, they function differently than in Acts.

In Acts interpretation was not needed . . . in Corinth it is absolutely essential. In fact, without interpretation tongues was off limits.

In Acts everyone who experienced the outpouring of the Spirit spoke in tongues . . . not so in Corinth, where only some had the gift.

In Acts tongues occurred in the presence of the apostles . . . but once Paul left Corinth, there was no continuation of the apostle's presence.

This is why he urges prophecy . . . prophecy was an extension of the apostle's ministry. Prophecy was better than tongues, but still needed to be tested according to the apostles teaching . . .

In all these ways . . . we see the nature of tongues changing . . . and if we are honest it seems to be fading away . . . not gaining steam.

Likewise . . . Paul may be making a distinction between tongues (pl) and tongue (sing).

Some commentators make an exegetical distinction between Paul speaking in tongues and others who speak a tongue.

. . . The argument goes . . . that whenever Paul says "tongues" (pl) he is referencing the genuine gift of speaking prophecy in another language.

. . . However, when he says "tongue" he is referring to the illicit, non-cognitive utterance that the Corinthians were guilty of.

For me . . . this distinction too subtle. . . because it's not spelled out anywhere in the text.

Would Paul's audience have caught the difference? Maybe. Maybe not.

Were there pagan examples of ecstatic utterance in pagan shrines around Corinth? Yes . . . but I don't see Paul making a direct link with these shrines.

For me, this **plural/singular divide** is possible . . . but not the deciding factor for the chapter.

Rather . . . I see his endless list of qualifications as the means he uses to effectively stop the practice of tongues in Corinth.

Here's what I mean . . .

While Paul does not forbid the use of tongues, I believe it is safe to say his words indicate the closing of tongues.

How so?

Consider these facts . . .

- (1) No other epistle after 1 Corinthians includes tongues as a necessary gift or institution.
- (2) There is no evidence that the Corinthians continued to practice tongue-speaking.

While Paul returns to discussions about leadership and church discipline in 2 Corinthians, he says nothing about tongues.

- (3) ,Clement's 1st century letter to the Corinthians says nothing about tongues.

I take it, therefore, that tongues ceased shortly after Paul wrote this letter.

More theologically, it would make sense that this gift was temporary.

- (1) Remember . . . Paul quotes Isaiah (14:21) to explain the use of tongues . . . they were a sign of judgment . . . and one that may not have communicated anything to an increasingly Gentile Church.
- (2) Likewise, since these miraculous gifts were given to confirm the Word of God . . . they function much like the visible signs in the OT.

When Moses and the Prophets spoke . . . God confirmed the authority of their speech with signs & wonders.

In the OT . . . we don't have a long, continuous stream of revelation. . . but punctuated moments in redemptive-history when God inspired men to interpret his actions.

- (3) This is definitely what happened in the age of the apostles,

In John 14 and 16, Jesus promised his apostles the Spirit to remember his words and write down his gospel.

All that to say . . . while 1 Corinthians 14 does not absolutely forbid tongues to the Corinthians . . . I don't have any confidence that this is a gift that continues today.

Still, Questions Remain . . .

What about testimonies from the mission field about tongues and miracles?

- Here's what I'd say . . . I'm hesitant to affirm those experiences b/c of all that Scripture says about the miraculous.
 - o Miraculous signs are given to confirm the word of God.
 - o The revelation of prophets must be rigorously tested.
 - o The work of the apostles and NT prophets is clearly completed.
- For me and for our church, we are going to always interpret experiences based on the word of God. And Scripture is clear . . . miracles are in service of the Word.
- That being said, someone will come up to me after service with a counter-example, a situation in a far away place . . . and ask me to make a decision on its validity.
Here's what I will say . . . "I don't know what happened . . ." I need more info.

Another example has to do with dreams & visions of Jesus, esp. in Muslim contexts.

- Again, my answer is somewhat agnostic. I'm not sure what's happening there.
- Technically speaking dreams and visions are different than spiritual gifts and Scripture does show that God has led his people with dreams . . . but that was before Scripture.
- **Could Jesus be revealing himself through dreams as a step towards the gospel?** Perhaps . . . but we must affirm w/o compromise . . . faith only comes by the Word of Christ. No one is saved apart from the gospel.
- **ATST . . . I'd ask in return:** Could demons be masquerading as angels of light? Certainly, **2 Cor 11:14** speaks of this reality.
- And . . . could God allow demons to fake his presence . . . and then turn around and reveal himself to people thru his Word?
- Again, if we let Scripture guide us . . . we see in 1 Kgs 22 God permitting a demonic spirit to lie to Israel's king – and this lying spirit is used by God to fulfill his plan of judgment.
- So let us not forget . . . God's ways are higher than ours . . . and he often uses crooked sticks to draw straight lines

That being said . . . Scripture leads us to believe that when the period of revelation ended, so did miraculous signs and wonders . . . like tongues, prophecy, and on-the-spot miracles.

Therefore . . . as a Bible church . . .

We do not deny God the power or prerogative to perform miracles.
We affirm in our SoF . . . that Scripture is his enduring means of revelation
We deny continuation of miraculous signs and wonder, tongues and prophecy.

This doesn't mean someone who believes tongues and miraculous gifts cannot feel welcome here . . . learning and growing as a member . . . but you should know we won't seek miraculous signs, practice tongues, or teach that miraculous gifts continue.

Rather . . .

We as a church are committed to the faith once for all delivered to the saints

The gospel of Jesus Christ that preserved for us in this book

If we are honest . . . we don't have an answer for every situation out there concerning strange spiritual happenings . . . and I don't think we need to.

What we have in front of us is an eternal, unchanging, life-giving word . . . the finished revelation of God in Christ . . . and the completed message of truth from the Holy Spirit

What should we say about the miraculous gifts? Are they finished?

Based on all we've seen in 1 Corinthians 12–14, I propose we think of these miraculous gifts similarly to the finished work of Christ.

Saving faith depends absolutely on the finished work of the Son.

Jesus died on the cross to finish what you or I never could.

He died to secure your forgiveness and to give his righteousness and life.

This is what we will celebrate this Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday.

And in a similar way . . . our faith depends on the finished work of the Spirit.

What is this finished work? It is the full revelation of God given to the apostles + prophets

For all of its messed up people and problems . . . Corinth is a church whose particular issues are built into the foundation of God's universal church.

No church on earth can exist apart from a knowledge of Corinth and Paul's words to them

Like what Jesus said of Mary – that her act of anointing Jesus would be told . . . wherever the gospel is proclaimed (Matthew 24:13) . . . **so it is with the 1st letter to Corinth.**

This letter is a building block for Christ's universal church.

It is not given as a manual for reproducing healings, tongues, prophecy . . . rather, as Paul moves to the resurrection in chapter 15 . . . this letter was confirmed by God's divine revelation in their midst . . . and now its inspired words have been preserved in writing.

This writing . . . this living word . . . is what builds up the church.

The church does not create the word . . . but the Word creates the church.

Scripture is what builds, purifies, and enlivens the church . . . this is what happened in the Reformation, when men like Luther, Calvin, Zwingli recovered the word

This is what happened in 1st Great Awaken. ... when the word was preached w/ power

And this is what has happened any time a church has experienced revival or revitalization . . .

It is the Word of God, confirmed by miraculous signs in the 1st C that does the work

And the proof of its working . . . is the powerful spiritual life granted by God, enabling sinners to repent and believe.

Friends, this is the miracle of God – resurrection from the dead . . . Spiritual life granted to men dead in sin.

This is what we believe . . . and this is what we will proclaim.

And until Christ returns . . . may he fill this church with his life-giving Spirit.