

Gifts of the Spirit (Part 2)

Andrew de Kanter — March 19th, 2023

Good morning to everybody. So I wanted to start this morning with a question, and that question is this: have you ever had to childproof your home? Anybody ever have to childproof your home? Maybe you had to do it for your own kids. Maybe some other people's kids were coming over and you had to childproof your home. There's this protocol that we go through when we childproof a home, isn't there? First you have to identify those things that are potentially harmful, then you either put those things away, that's one thing you could do, but then behind locked doors, a locked cabinet, something like that.

Or you might, if that's not appropriate, then you might, and if the child's old enough, instruct them on how to properly engage with whatever that potentially harmful thing is. So like if you have like a dog, can dogs be potentially harmful? Yeah, they could be potentially harmful, but there also can be really fun to be around and kids love dogs and that kind of thing. So if the child's old enough, you might consider, instead of locking the dog away, you might instruct the child on how to engage with this dog. Now I mentioned all of this because, and the way that I'm picturing this message is we're entering into a house called the House of Spiritual Gifts.

And we're the kids in this analogy, okay? And there's a lot of shiny, exciting things in this house, but those same things can sometimes be potentially harmful. And so I wanna ask the Apostle Paul to educate us or inform us regarding the dangers that are in this house, but also how to engage with the things in this house in a way that is proper. Now, I especially want him to do this with the very controversial gift called the gift of tongues, and that's like the topic that we're talking about this morning.

Now those of you who have been here, you know that we've been walking our, making our way through the book of. And we've hit the pause button just for a little bit to talk about the works of the Spirit because a lot of that is going on in the Book of Acts and some, sometimes it's just good to like take a step back and say like, okay, what exactly is going on here? I'm unfamiliar with these ideas. So that's part of what we're doing. So this is the last sermon that we're taking away to do that. Then, Lord willing, will be back in the Book of Acts next week.

Now, last time we were together we entered into this house of spiritual gifts and we visited three rooms. One room we visited was labeled 1 Corinthians chapter 12, and there Paul helped us put together a working definition of what spiritual gifts are, and this is what we said.

We said that spiritual gifts are special enablements. Sometimes they include roles within the local church given to every Christian by the Holy Spirit and empowered by the Holy Spirit for two purposes: to glorify Christ and to build up the body of Christ. So Paul led us in on that in 1 Corinthians, chapter 12. Then he took us to another room labeled 1 Corinthians chapter 13, and then he told us this. Look, if you speak in the tongues of men and the tongues of angels, but you don't love people in the process of doing that, then you're using this spiritual gift in a way that it wasn't intended.

When the Spirit comes in and equips you to do something, what's gonna result is love. Love for God, love for others, the exaltation of Jesus, for the benefit of others to build up the body of Christ. So if you're using a spiritual gift in a way that is contrary to the character of the gift giver that's like a no-go, like, so he's, he let us know that in that room. So we're, you know, we're taking notes. Then we went to another room the third. Called 1 Corinthians 14, and then we just poked our head in last time. But we were there long enough for Paul to say, "Hey, look, when the church is assembled I prefer prophecy over speaking in tongues." And we talked a little bit about what that was, and he has a preference, a strong preference and maybe that's not even the right word but intelligibility over unintelligible.

And then we'll talk a little bit more about that later. So today we're gonna go back into this third room, 1 Corinthians 14, and we're gonna ask two questions and try to answer these two questions. The first question that we're gonna try to answer is, okay, what can we learn about tongues from this room in 1 Corinthians 14?

That's the first question. We're gonna spend the majority of our time on this first question. I let you know that now because two thirds of the way through the sermon and you're like, "man, we're still on the first point. Like, what is," you know, that might make you nervous but we're gonna spend the majority of our time there. Then we're gonna ask a second question. And the second question is, is the gift of tongues for today? And there's lots of opinions about this and I fully expect to offend every single person in the room uh, uh, anyway. But we'll, we'll, we'll kind of, we'll kind of walk, through this together, and I'm not the final word on this. And I think you already know

that.

But let's think about this first question. What can we learn about tongues in 1 Corinthians 14? To answer that question, we have to try to answer a couple other questions. One of them is very basic. What are tongues in 1 Corinthians 14? Are they the same as Acts chapter two? Is there a difference? Is there an overlap? How should we think about these things? So for that information, let's look at 1 Corinthians 14:2. There we read "for one who speaks in a tongue, speaks not to men, but to God for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the spirit." So we learn a couple things about tongues from this verse.

One, it's Godward speech. What does he say? "For one who speaks in a tongue, speaks not to men, but to God. So this kind of makes sense with what we saw in Acts chapter two. The content of what they were speaking was praises to God regarding the mighty works of God. If you look in Acts 10:45, there we saw tongues coupled with the idea of extolling. God, if you look a little bit later in 1 Corinthians chapter 14 verses 14 through 17, there Paul connects speaking in tongues with prayer, singing praises, and giving thanks to God. So unlike teaching or prophecy, where those are words that are going out to people, this is Godward speech. We're speaking words to God.

So I would expect, if I went somewhere and somebody spoke in a tongue, let's say, theoretically, and then somebody gave an interpretation, then I would expect that interpretation to sound something like Godward speech, praise to God, Thanksgiving to God. Maybe there's some exceptions, but it seems like from this verse, it's mainly Godward speech. Another thing we can say about tongues from this verse is that is unintelligible speak speech. What does it say? "No one understands him." Now, that's interesting, because in Acts chapter two, tongues are known human languages, but unknown to the ones speaking them, but understood by others present. These pilgrims that have come into Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost.

But then Paul, here in, really in all of 1 Corinthians 14, it seems like he's saying, "Hey, look, when tongues are not interpreted, no one understands what they are." So, huh. That raises a question, doesn't it? Are tongues always known human languages? And if so, why does he say no one will understand them, especially in this context of the city of Corinth, very diverse, cosmopolitan city where there's a lot of diverse languages. And then why would it require a supernatural gift of the Spirit known as interpretation to be able to understand it versus just like a gifted linguist? These are questions.

Or why this Paul, for example, in verses 10 through 11, use the example of foreign but known human language as an analogy to explain what uninterpreted tongues are, if that's what uninterpreted tongues are? If that, you know, they are foreign but unknown languages, in other words, like it seems a little strange. Normally when we use analogies we use, we don't use something that is identical to the thing that we're trying to clarify. . So it's like when we make a definition of something, when you use, you know, you're not supposed to use, if you're defining a word, you're not supposed to use that word in the definition.

So the, these are just questions, and the question that I have is, okay, is it possible that tongues are not always known human languages? I mean, could they be? I mean, I think they're always languages. I want, I wanna make that clear. I don't think that it's, meaningless babble. I it's languages, but could it be possible that they're angelic, let's say? Paul introduces that category in 1 Corinthians 13:1. That's in the context of rhetoric, so that's a little bit difficult. Could it be that these are known human languages that are encoded somehow that need to be decoded? D. A. Carson argues this. It's like these are just question. So well maybe we'll just leave it at that.

Okay. They're you know, unintelligible speech, godward speech. Unintelligible speech. Another thing that we learned from this verse is that their Spirit empowered speech. So what does it say? "He utters mysteries in the spirit." So the one speaking in tongues, he, it's the things that he's saying are unknowable until they're, interpreted. And they're also animated by the Holy Spirit. Now, when I say this, I don't mean that they are necessarily a static speech or completely outside the control of the person speaking them, because how else could Paul offer regulations later? Like, we don't regulate things that can't be controlled.

So it, it seems like, okay. It's at least in part, although it's something divine. So that's a mystery in of itself. It's like when we operate as Christians, there's kind two things happening. We're, we are acknowledging everything that I'm doing that brings glory to God, comes from the spirit. Nevertheless, I'm participating in what, what's being done, so it's not completely outside of my, I'm involved in the process. That's why Paul can regulate it, so it's not just un, you know, it's not just I'm sure that if we asked, if we pulled the Corinthians that he's talking to they would say like, we can't help it. You know, it's just what happens? It comes upon us and Paul's like, well no, actually I have these regulations for you.

So that, these are some things that we can say about tongues from this verse. Tongues are Spirit empowered, languages unknown to the speaker and to others unless they're interpreted. Either because they're angelic or because they're encoded somehow, others say, well, they just need to be translated. That's the part where I'm just not, ugh, those who say that these are always known human languages, they have answers to all my questions. I want you to know that. It's just that I'm not sure if I'm completely satisfied with it yet.

So, so, so, and I think there's an application to this as well, so your. I wasn't gonna say this, but, so I read 750 pages, and at the end of 750 pages, I am still unsure. And it's okay, . It's okay. Like I still know Jesus. So lucky. You know what I mean? It's okay. You can, we're not gonna have all of our answers, you know, the questions answered. And that's okay. And we don't have to agree on everything. That's also okay. So this, but this is where I am. You know, right now with regard to this, it seems like it's always Godward speech about prayer, praise, thanksgiving to God. So that's the best answer I can give right now regarding the question. Okay. What are tongues in 1 Corinthians 14? That's part of my answer to, okay, what can we learn about tongues in this room in 1 Corinthians 14?

But then there's another question when we think about 1 Corinthians 14 and that is why Paul, are you against uninterpreted tongue in the church when it is gathered? And he gives actually two answers to that. One we're familiar with cuz we've talked about it before. He prefers intelligibility over unintelligibility. When the church gathers, the gifts are supposed to be employed in such a way so that the body is built up. But uninterpreted tongues don't build up the body because nobody knows what's being said. They're unintelligible.

So Paul says this in the latter part of verse five he goes on to say, the one who prophesize is greater than "the one who speaks in tongues unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up." And then a little bit later in verse nine, "If with your tongue you utter speech that is not intelligible, how will anyone know what is said for, you'll be speaking into the air." Uninterpreted tongues do not edify the body because nobody knows what's being said. That's his main point there. But then he gives another answer. And this one is a little bit more, it's a little bit more complicated and a little bit interesting, a lot of controversy of how to understand it actually.

So the second answer that he gives is tongues are a sign to unbelievers. So in other

words, unintelligible speech is meant to be a sign to unbelievers actually about God's judgment and not to edify believers when they're gathered. Let me explain what I mean. So if you look in verse 21, Paul says this, "in the law it is written by people, of strange tongues, and by the lips of foreigners will I speak to this people, and even then, they will not listen to me, says the Lord." So this is a loose quotation from Isaiah 28 verses 11 and 12. Then he goes on to say this verse 22, "Thus," this is Paul speaking now, "tongues are a sign, not for believers, but for unbelievers. While prophecy is a sign, not for unbelievers, but for believers. If therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say you are out of your minds?"

So this argument that Paul's making it was hard for me to understand exactly. What's, what is he exactly saying? I'm gonna try my best to give you what I think he's saying. So this quotation from Isaiah chapter 28, these words are given in the context of God's judgment coming upon unbelieving Jews or Israelites in the form of an invading Assyrian army. Did ancient Assyrians speak Hebrew? No. So they speak in a different language, and that's in fulfillment of a covenant curse from Deuteronomy chapter 28 verse 49.

So Paul, then he looks at that situation and then he derives a principle from it. And the principle is this: when you hear God's speaking to unbelievers in languages that they do not know, it is assigned to them that God's judgment has already fallen upon them and they're not gonna repent. That's what it's a sign of, and so then what Paul does in applying it to this situation, he's like, okay, therefore, if Tongues, un-interpreted tongues or unintelligible speech is being spoken and it's a sign that God's judgment has already fallen on unbelievers, then it would be inappropriate to bring in un-interpreted tongues in a situation like a church gathering where the main purpose of the gathering is to edify believers, and you're hoping that if any unbeliever stumble in that they turn to God, not away from God because they think all y'all are crazy. So that, I think that's what he's arguing.

And so on the basis of these two answers that Paul gives, he gives some regulations in verse 27 and 28 that, that Pamela read. He says, limit the number of tongue speakers. Don't speak in tongues unless someone is there to interpret the tongue. So it come, it goes from unintelligible speech to intelligible speech. And then he says, take turns. Don't do it all at the same. So these are the limits that Paul puts around speaking in

tongues in the public assembly. What about in private?

Now, there are reasons to believe that Paul both engaged in and encouraged others to pray in tongues in private. If you have the gift of tongues, and not all Christians have the gift of tongues. We learned that in 1 Corinthians, in the latter part of 1 Corinthians 12. So for example, in 1 Corinthians 14, four and five, Paul says, the one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but the one who prophesize builds up the church. Now I want you all to speak in tongues. Okay. But even more to prophesy, like, how are we supposed to understand this now?

I, when I, for a long time I read this first part, like, almost like pejoratively, like, like in a negative way. Like the one who speaks in a tongue builds themselves up. Yeah. They're all about themselves. But then we would have Paul saying like, yeah, I wish all of you guys were about yourselves. And I'm like, huh, that doesn't seem to work. But then at Jude, Jude 20 and 21, he says he encourages them to build themselves up, uses the same kind of language. So it's like, okay, how are we supposed to understand this? Paul's saying like, okay, yeah, at private that's, yeah, it's, I encourage you to do that cuz if you have that gift, it will build you up. That's, I think Paul's saying that. But when the church is gather, What we need to be focusing on is building others up. That's what I think he's talking about.

So what about, and here's another example, 1 Corinthians 14, 18 and 19. There Paul says, "I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you." Okay. Alright, Paul. Nevertheless, in church, "I would rather speak five words with my mind," and I'm taking that to mean intelligibly "in order to instruct others than 10,000 words in a tongue." So evidently, Paul speaks in tongues a lot, but he doesn't wanna do it in church. So then the question becomes, well, where is he speaking all these tongue if he doesn't wanna do it in public? In private. I mean, you know, I'm sorry if this is difficult for some people, but I mean, I just, it's like, okay, yeah, that's, it seems to be like what Paul is engaging in.

Now, one of the difficulties in 1 Corinthians chapter 14 is that we come to 1 Corinthians 14 and we're kind of doing it today. I hope, hopefully we're reading it in context that was my aim. But oftentimes it's normally just cold for verses to find proof text to be able to like advance whatever position that you have on these types of issues. But to understand what Paul is talking about, regarding tongues in 1 Corinthians 14, we have to understand that Paul is not, he's not really giving a systematic theology on tongues.

He's actually addressing a problem. And the problem isn't that with tongues in general, the problem isn't speaking in tongues in private.

The problem is, is that people in the Corinthian Church were immature. They were divisive. They thought they were super spiritual, and so they wanted to exercise their spiritual gifts in a way that said like, "Hey man, look at me. Look how spiritual I am," without any regard as to whether or not it was loving to the people around them or edifying them. So their problem was a love problem. They were using a spiritual gift in a way that was out of sync with the character of the gift giver, because when the Spirit comes in, he produces love. Love for God, love for others in a way that exalts King Jesus and edifies the Church. That's the main, that's the main point that he's trying to get at.

Like tongues is just like the reference point in some ways. That's my best attempt at answering the question. Okay. What can we learn about tongues and 1 Corinthians 14? But we have another question that we're trying to, a answer too, is the gift of tongues for today? Now, I wanna say upfront that different Christians have different answers to this question, and I think it would be a good idea to just drop some of the caricatures. Like the choices aren't, oh man. I don't be offended by this. I hope either. But the choices. TD Jakes, John MacArthur, those are your only choices. Like which one of those do you wanna be? Like, those aren't the only choices. And you, like, there are Bible believing, Spirit loving Christians on both sides of this equation, like J. I. Packer doesn't agree with John Piper on this.

Are you gonna tell me that J. I. Packer doesn't love God or follow the Spirit, please don't do that to me. Like, are you gonna tell me that John Piper doesn't love the Bible? That's insane. You know? So, okay, so let's just drop, yes, there are people who fit the stereotypes there are, but let's, for the sake of unity, let's just drop the name calling in the caricatures and let's just talk about, okay, no, we still have this question. And if Paul were here, he would by this, say by the way, say to us, in our current situation, he said, "you may have the, even if you have the best arguments for and against the continuation of the gifts and you do not have love, it's meaningless. It gains nothing. And you ought to repent." That's what he would say to us.

But nevertheless, there's still the question. Is the gift of tongues for today? There are some who say no, and there are some who say yes. Those who say no are called cessationists because they think that tongues have ceased, they've stopped. They have

biblical arguments, they have arguments from church history and they have arguments with reference to modern abuses. Okay, so let's talk about the biblical arguments that they have. So the biblical argument would go something like this, and there's whole books written on it. Some of, so if somebody was here who wrote that, you know, book or you know, they're gonna be offended by this little, little, little, you know, little thumbnail sketch I'm giving regarding their argument. But it goes something like this. Signs and wonders and miraculous spiritual gifts, were given in the first century, they had a particular role in the history of salvation to accredit the ministry, to like give validation to the ministry and message of the apostles and their close associates.

And they're, they definitely have verses to support this, so listen to Hebrews 2 beginning in verse three. The subject here is salvation in Christ. And the author of Hebrew says this regarding salvation in Christ that it was quote, "declared at first by the Lord." That's the Lord Jesus, "and it was attested to us by those who heard," the apostles and our close associates, "while God also bore witness by," okay, so he's I'm giving you the message of the gospel, and now I'm going to, I'm gonna do something else with the message of the gospel, "while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of this Holy Spirit distributed according to his will."

So Hebrews two, three, and four. Same kind of message is found in Acts dotted throughout there. You see that in Acts 5:12. Acts 6:8, Acts 14:3. Also in Romans: Romans 15, 18, and 19, different places you see these kinds of ideas, but that's not where the argument obviously stops for them, they would say, and that was vital vital for the first Century Church until the church was built on a foundation of the apostles and the prophets, Ephesians 2:20. But once that foundation was laid, and they would include in that foundation the completion of the New Testament. Once you have the completion of the New Testament, you no longer have any need for miraculous gifts. That's the argument.

Now, they would support that argument by looking at church history and noting there really aren't a lot of examples of people speaking in tongues in church history until about the early 1900's at the beginning of the Pentecostal movement. So that would be one thing they would add to that. Then they would add an argument from modern abuses, and they would say, "when we look at modern examples of how this is practiced in different churches, many times, not, maybe not all the time, but many

times it bears very little resemblance to 1 Corinthians 14,” so they have that concern. On top of that, linguists have studied tapes regarding people speaking in tongues, and it doesn't seem like they ever come together to be any kind of identifiable language or even a pattern of a language.

And so they, so you ask them, do you guys think that tongues are still for today? They're like, no I don't think so. And so some of 'em are very mean about it, and some of them are very charitable about. Thomas Schreiner is very charitable about it. He wrote an amazing book called “The Spiritual Gifts” that I would recommend to you. So there's, there are those who say no. There are those who say yes, they're called continuationists. Can you think of why? Like the, because they think the tongues continue.

Now, here's the thing. A lot of them agree with the cessationists with regard to church history and with regard to modern abuses. They would say, yeah, you're right. There's not a lot of examples in church history of people speaking in tongues, although there are some they would add, although there are some, and maybe it's under reported and that they have their arguments about why that would be, and then they add onto that, and we are also grieved when we see modern abuses of gifts that elevate the person exercising them and don't exalt Jesus Christ or edify the church. We are also grieved about that. But then they would all, then they would point to the Bible and they would say, but we really don't see a passage in scripture that tells us explicitly that this has ended.

And in fact we, it doesn't seem like we should expect that, especially when Paul tells us to earnestly desire the spiritual gifts and not to forbid them. And the one passage that seems to say that they have ceased, you could argue that that is the greatest scriptural evidence for their continuation. Now I'm talking about 1 Corinthians 13 and they're beginning in verse eight we read, this is Paul, “love never ends.” He's talking about the priority of love over the spiritual gifts. That's the context. “Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away. As for tongues, they will cease. As for knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes,” this is like the key phrase in this, “the partial will pass away.” and skipping down to verse 12, “for now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part then I shall know, even as I have been fully known.”

So everything revolves around this phrase “when the perfect comes.” What's that? Is it

the second coming of Jesus or is it the completion of the New Testament? So I'm gonna, I'm gonna read verse 12 again, and then you tell me what you think. "For now, we see in a mirror dimly... the partial will pass away, but then when the perfect comes face to face." Alright. "Now I know in part... the partial will pass away... then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known." So the continuationist is gonna say, that certainly sounds like the second coming of Christ to me. And then if you look in 1 Corinthians one nine or one seven, I think it is, that's corroborated. It's like these things cease in the appearing of the Lord.

So when we enter this house called "spiritual gifts" and we see on a table "gift of tongues," what's that? We pick it up and we say, what do we use this for? There's gonna be Christians, in the house, loving Christians, beautiful Christians. I used to agree with this wholeheartedly. and argue for it vehemently, there's gonna be Christians who said, oh, no no. We took the batteries out of that because it was getting crazy up in this house, it was getting crazy up and we took the bat. We, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. We do not use that.

And there's gonna be, other Christians are like, no, no, no, no, no, no. We use it and we do whatever we want with that. You know, like, and sorry, that's a little bit of a caricature. But what I'm saying is if I'm right, and this is definitely open to criticism, if I'm right about 1 Corinthians 14, then what Paul would do in that situation is he would come along and say, okay, okay. Alright, guys, you know, stop fighting each other. Like if God has given you the spiritual gift, then use it. Don't forbid speaking in tongues. 1 Corinthians 14:39. But I think you would add, but use it responsibly as I outlined in 1 Corinthians 14. And above all else, if you hear anything today, take this with you, above all else, if the Spirit gives you a gift what it's gonna look like in practice is love; loving God, loving others, exalting Jesus Christ our king. That's how we're built up. Let's pray together.

Father we're thankful for your love. We're thankful for your patience as we try to figure out what you have said. Lord, we wanna know what you've said. Lord if there's a gift that you're, you mean to give us and we've said no, maybe because we're scared, Lord, help us to rethink that. Lord, if there's experiences right now that we're trying to defend but actually aren't from you, Lord, I pray that you would grant repentance, but Lord, above all else, Lord, would you come and fill us with your Holy Spirit to the point of overflowing so that we might love one another? I prayed this in Jesus' name. Amen.