



Position Paper

The Gift of Prophecy and Tongues

This position paper will help make sense of what the scriptures say about these gifts and how Crossroads Church Aspen will pursue and practice these gifts. We invite everyone to study deeply this position paper as well as our others and interact with the biblical text led by the Spirit. We invite everyone to discuss their thoughts and questions about this paper with the elders or other leaders at our church.

Cessationism versus Continuationism

The first thing we need to understand is the lens by which we are coming to this discussion and how we interpret the scriptures. There are two basic positions on how the spiritual gifts are viewed. We will only be giving a brief overview of these two positions, since there are many nuances to each position. The first is called *Cessationism*. This is the theological stance that the sign and wonder gifts including prophecy and tongues ceased during the apostolic age and now having both the O.T. and N.T. we have no need for these gifts today. The second is called *Continuationism*. This is the theological stance that believes the sign and wonder gifts along with prophecy and tongues still exist today and should be pursued and practiced by the Church. We are *Continuationists* here at Crossroads, believing these gifts were gifts to the Church for all eras, critical for the ministry of the Gospel and for the glory of God until Christ's return. We see no biblical justification whatsoever that they ever were meant to cease in the Church Age. With that said, obviously there are times in church history where they were more prominent than others, usually tracking with seasons of pursuit and revival and seasons of apathy and dryness.

Defining the Gift of Prophecy and Tongues

When Paul is writing to the believers at Corinth about the pursuit and practice of the spiritual gifts, he states;

“Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. ²For 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. ³On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation. ⁴The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but the one who prophesies builds up the church. ⁵Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up.
(1 Cor. 14:1-5)

In chapters 12-14 of 1 Corinthians, Paul describes specifically nine gifts that should be operative within the church. His priority in communicating with the Corinthians is to make sure that they have the right motivation for pursuing and using spiritual gifts. He wants them to know that the main emphasis while the Body is gathered is that each person should be using their gift to build up one another in the Body. For too long we have taken a very individualistic approach to the gifts and have missed the primary reason that God has given these gifts to the church.

The gift of prophecy can include prediction of future events, but it primarily refers to the gift that Paul exhorts all believers to pursue and practice in the church body for the building up of one another. This gift is simply the reporting of a certain divine revelation to an individual or to the whole church. It is never to contradict the written Word and scripture reveals that it should be tested by those who hear. It is the speaking of human words of a message that God through the Holy Spirit revealed to someone. Paul not only encourages this gift, but commands believers to not only pursue it, but to also practice it. At the root of this gift, is a desire to hear God’s voice and leading and be a messenger of love and exhortation to others.

Some scriptural examples are:

1 Corinthians 14:3

1 Corinthians 14:24-25

Acts 2:1-21

Acts 13:1-3

Acts 21:4, 10-14

1 Timothy 4:14

Unfortunately, the gift of tongues has been even more controversial than the gift of prophecy. Sadly, there are many instances of abuse that have occurred in the church throughout history where close guidance to biblical instruction was ignored. And this is the exact reason Paul wrote to the Corinthians. They were elevating this gift and mishandling the gift within the church worship service. However, it is important to understand that Paul never prohibits the gift but only provides proper handling of the gift. (1 Cor. 14)

Sam Storms in his book, *The Beginner’s Guide to Spiritual Gifts* states, “The gift of tongues is simply the Spirit-energized ability to pray, worship, give thanks, or speak in a language other than your own or one you might have learned in school...The primary thing that concerned Paul in 1 Corinthians 14 was the edification of believers in the church (1 Cor. 14:3-6, 12, 17, 19, 26).

But others can be built up and fortified in their faith only if they understand what is being said. This is why he insisted repeatedly that tongues in the assembly must be interpreted.”

- Tongues can be a known foreign language as most likely seen in Acts 2 at Pentecost when the many Jews from foreign lands were visiting Jerusalem for Pentecost.
- Tongues can also be an unknown language, “tongues of angels” mentioned in (1 Cor. 13:1) along with tongues of men.
- Tongues as a heavenly language is prayer, worship and intercession to God not to men and is mysteries in the Spirit. (1 Cor. 14:2)
- Tongues builds up the person individually unless there is present the gift of interpretation so the whole body can be edified. (1 Cor. 14:3-5)
- Paul desired that all speak in tongues but even more to prophecy so the body could be built up. (1 Cor. 14:3-5)
- Paul rejoiced in his gift of tongues, which he practiced privately both in prayer and singing with his spirit, but in the church kept quiet unless there was an interpreter. (1 Cor 14:12-19)
- Paul’s final exhortation to the Church about prophecy and tongues was, “So my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. But all things should be done decently and in order.” (1 Cor. 14:39-40)
- The overall message of 1 Corinthians chapters 12-13 is the pursuit of love and the gifts of the Spirit together for the upbuilding of the body of Christ.

Some scriptural examples of this gift are:

Acts 2

Acts 8

Acts 9

Acts 10

Acts 19

Romans 8:26-27

1 Corinthians 12-14

Ephesians 6:18

Jude 1:20

Pursuing and Practicing the Gifts of Prophecy and Tongues

At Crossroads we desire to honor the biblical instructions about the gifts of prophecy and tongues. We believe that the beautiful powerful gifts of the Spirit are to be pursued and practiced and incorporated into ministry so we can better minister like Jesus did in love and power. We recognize the shepherding responsibility of the elders of the church to oversee this

process and make sure it closely aligns with scripture and order. The following are a few guiding principles for the oversight of the spiritual gifts, especially prophecy and tongues:

- We are committed to “equip the saints for the work of ministry” which includes the practice and pursuit of the spiritual gifts.
- We are committed to not only believe what the scripture says about the gifts but pursue and practice the gifts of prophecy and tongues. It can be dangerous to just believe the gifts exist without pursuing and practicing the gifts. The danger is that this can create a separation between belief and behavior. We would never just believe but not obey any other biblical command.
- We take seriously the command in 1 Thess. 5:20-21 to not despise prophecies and at the same time to test everything according to the written Word and appropriateness. (1 Cor. 14:31-32)
- We are committed to provide space in our Sunday morning service for the Spirit to move among the people and at the same time to oversee the focus being on the building up of one another.
- When a spiritual gift is manifested in the worship service we are committed to shepherd the process biblically and also take adequate time to explain the process.
- We are committed to provided other groups and environments outside of Sunday morning for the church to pursue and practice the spiritual gifts.

For more detailed information about the spiritual gifts refer to Sam Storms book, *The Beginner's Guide to Spiritual Gifts*.