



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

October 28, 2012

"The Spiritual Gifts Sermon"

The Rev. Dr. Dan Chun

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed! That's actually the very first verse, word for word, of 1 Corinthians 12.

1Cor. 12:1 Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed.

The Apostle Paul was writing to the very first church of the city of Corinth. It was like the First Presbyterian Church of Corinth. Well, I call it that since the early church was based on an elders system like ours. The word "Presbyterian," by the way means "elder-led" in Greek.

There was a great infilling of the Holy Spirit among the Christians in Corinth. Great things were happening among them, but the Christians were misusing and misunderstanding the gifts of the Spirit so Paul wrote the first of three long letters to the Corinthian Christians.

Here at our church, we have had a wonderful experience of the Holy Spirit since our church's inception in 1959. And since that time we have seen more and more evidence of the Spirit at work as people have come to Christ.

In the last ten years or so, we have seen more examples of people getting miraculously healed, people hearing God's voice, and

some people speaking in tongues. All supernatural events!

In fact, we are here at this location today because someone had a supernatural dream of me preaching here at Ko'olau, which led us to move here. Since then, we have had more teaching on the Holy Spirit. We've had a bigger prayer team and a consistent prayer ministry on Sunday mornings and at Healing Services. We have seen more and more miracles or, as the Bible calls them, "signs and wonders."

Miracles are not a sign of our goodness but of God's leading, goodness, grace, mercy, and power. We have tried more to live naturally supernatural, or see the supernatural as natural.

But it occurs to me that it is time for me to do another teaching on these spiritual gifts so that we not only continue to grow in knowledge of how to use them, but also so that we are not uninformed, as the Apostle Paul says. It's important that the whole congregation is kept informed, especially since we have picked up more than 500 people since we moved to Ko'olau.

I especially want to be clear on my position on the gift of tongues, a gift that can be incredibly useful but can also be divisive when used wrongly. For

some, this may be the first sermon you'll be hearing on tongues.

I will talk about spiritual gifts in general first. But even before that, let me talk about the whole concept of blessings. Why does God bless us supernaturally?

God blesses us for one main reason: so that we can be a blessing to others. We are blessed to be a blessing! Blessings are always for the purpose of serving God and other people.

If God gives you a gift for making money, it was always meant so you can be generous and serve God with your money. If God were to give you the gift of hospitality, it was so that you can make people feel welcomed and accepted at church. It's the same with the gift of administration; it was meant for you to help organize things for the sake of God and His purposes.

And same for the gift of healing; it's not given only for your benefit. (Oh, I have a headache. I think I will heal myself. Now I feel better! Oh, my back hurts. I will pray for myself. Ah, now I'm better!)

No, the gifts are for healing others and serving others. Although, I do admit that I have prayed for healing for myself before I preach, but that is not the main reason we get the gift of healing. It's for others.

God gives each of us gifts—at the time of conversion or later—that are so supernatural and stunning that only God could have been involved.

For many people here, we have been operating out of our own human power but not of the Holy Spirit. In fact, we can be so human minded and maybe even so proud of our human skills that we may not even think that the Holy Spirit exists. For many people the Holy Spirit is the most unknown, if not the anonymous, person of the Trinity.

But here's the thing. God wants us to always live in the Spirit and not in the flesh (which is just on human power). But living with the Holy Spirit means we are not in control and that there will be more mystery. Paul wrote in Romans 8:5-6)

For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.

God wants us to live in the Spirit—to have supernatural power and life a life of peace. Supernatural power and peace. Isn't that what we all want?

Okay, so God gives us His Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts for the purpose of serving God and others, and not for our own benefit.

Have you ever seen people operate out of the gifts God has given them? They are so good at what they do that it is like supernatural!

Here are three lists of spiritual gifts in the Bible, and they're not necessarily complete lists. First in Romans 12:

Rom. 12:6 We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith;

Rom. 12:7 ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching;

Rom. 12:8 the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

Then another list in 1 Corinthians 12:

1 Cor. 12:28 And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues.

1 Cor. 12:29 Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles?

1 Cor. 12:30 Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?

1 Cor. 12:31 But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.

Then in Ephesians 4:

Eph. 4:11 The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers,

Eph. 4:12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,

So the purpose of the gifts is clear: to equip the saints and to build up the church. **The gifts are for service and building up.** That's the first aspect of the gifts.

The second aspect of the gifts is that **every gift is needed.** Hear these words from Paul:

1 Cor 12: 14 Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many.

1 Cor 12:15 If the foot would say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body.

1 Cor 12:16 And if the ear would say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body.

1 Cor 12:17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be?

1 Cor 12:18 If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be?

Hence, there are no unimportant gifts. One should not feel, "What a gyp! He got to be a hand, and I got to be an ear!"

Or, "He got to be a big toe and I am just a little toe!" But the little toe is really important!! Do you know how hard it is to walk without a little toe? The body would always be unbalanced!

Or, "Hey, he got to be a neck, and I got to be the okole." Can you imagine a body without an okole? How does one sit down?

All parts are needed! It's truly amazing to see people using their spiritual gifts:

How effective those with the gift of administration can be; how caring and welcoming those with the gift of hospitality are; and how helpful and encouraging those with the gift of wisdom are when they share with others exactly what is needed to be said.

Now Christians, whether supernaturally gifted or not in an area, should still seek to be good in ALL areas. For example, evangelism is something we should ALL be open to strive to be good at. Generosity is another one. We should all aim to be generous and not be stingy. Hospitality is another one. Whether you have the supernatural gift of hospitality, we should really be welcoming and hospitable to all.

The whole chapter of 1 Corinthians 13 says that all of the gifts must be packaged and motivated by love.

1 Cor. 13:1 If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

1 Cor. 13:2 And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

1 Cor. 13:3 If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

All gifts must be saturated with love. Love is the foundation. Love is the motivation. Love is the cause. Love should be the essence of EVERYTHING we say or do – everything!

But then Paul zeroes in on a spiritual gift that is often misunderstood and can be used in a prideful and hurtful way. It exists. It is real. It is supernatural, but it has divided churches and Christian fellowships, and has made entire denominations to be either pro or against it.

The entire 1 Corinthians 14 is about this one gift that is so supernatural and powerful that if used wrongly can hurt people and churches. I think it is time for me to say what I believe about this one gift, and how I want it used in this church. Not that something is going wrong right now but this is kind of preventive medicine so nothing does go wrong.

But before I speak about this one gift let me lay down one more foundation about all the gifts. Chapter 14 begins with this great verse:

1 Cor. 14:1 Pursue love and strive for the spiritual gifts, and especially that you may prophesy.

So the Bible says to go for all of the gifts. Some believe we have the potential for having all of them in some form. But if you want to really go for one, go for prophecy, says the Bible.

The gift of prophecy is not foretelling (like “I know you will turn left in three blocks,” or, “I know what stocks to buy.”) It’s more like speaking God’s truth into one’s life (like, “I’m sensing that you need help, and God has a word of encouragement for you,” or, “I think I may have some insight that may help you.”)

Sometimes people say to me after a sermon, “I really needed that. That sermon was written for me.”

I didn’t know that when I was writing the sermon, but God gave me a prophetic word to write that, knowing that person would be here. God knew it. I didn’t. But He spoke through me.

Sometimes prophesying means God giving you a picture, like how Don Parker had a dream of me preaching at Ko’olau, which made us check this place out.

But the gift of prophecy is not what I am about to talk about. The Bible says let us seek all the gifts, and that would include being open to receiving the gift of tongues.

And this is what I want to talk about in the context of all of the spiritual gifts. To be clear, the gift of tongues is NOT necessary for salvation. It doesn’t make you a better Christian than others. It’s not even a major doctrine, but I think it’s time for some teaching on it.

You will encounter people who have the gift or may want to talk about it. Perhaps you may have received the gift or you might want it. And you might be wondering what our church thinks about this spiritual gift.

The word “tongues” in the Bible is from the Greek word *glossolalia*. It is from this word that we derived the word “glossary.” Tongues is the supernatural spiritual gifts that comes upon people often as the result of prayer in which people start to speak in a different language, sometimes known, sometimes unknown.

The Bible sometimes uses the phrase “that they speak in the Spirit.” Let me read to you what the Apostle Paul says about tongues.

Remember that if you don't like what I am saying today, it's not my idea; it's what the Bible says.

1 Cor. 14:2 For those who speak in a tongue do not speak to other people but to God; for nobody understands them, since they are speaking mysteries in the Spirit.

1 Cor. 14:3 On the other hand, those who prophesy speak to other people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation.

1 Cor. 14:4 Those who speak in a tongue build up themselves, but those who prophesy build up the church.

1 Cor. 14:5 Now I would like all of you to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. One who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up.

1 Cor. 14:6 ¶ Now, brothers and sisters, if I come to you speaking in tongues, how will I benefit you unless I speak to you in some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching?

1 Cor. 14:7 It is the same way with lifeless instruments that produce sound, such as the flute or the harp. If they do not give distinct notes, how will anyone know what is being played?

1 Cor. 14:8 And if the bugle gives an indistinct sound, who will get ready for battle?

1 Cor. 14:9 So with yourselves; if in a tongue you utter speech that is not intelligible, how will anyone know what is being said? For you will be speaking into the air.

1 Cor. 14:10 There are doubtless many different kinds of sounds in the world, and nothing is without sound.

1 Cor. 14:11 If then I do not know the meaning of a sound, I will be a foreigner to the speaker and the speaker a foreigner to me.

1 Cor. 14:12 So with yourselves; since you are eager for spiritual gifts, strive to excel in them for building up the church.

1 Cor. 14:13 Therefore, one who speaks in a tongue should pray for the power to interpret.

1 Cor. 14:14 For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unproductive.

1 Cor. 14:15 What should I do then? I will pray with the spirit, but I will pray with the mind also; I will sing praise with the spirit, but I will sing praise with the mind also.

1 Cor. 14:16 Otherwise, if you say a blessing with the spirit, how can anyone in the position of an outsider say the "Amen" to your thanksgiving, since the outsider does not know what you are saying?

1 Cor. 14:17 For you may give thanks well enough, but the other person is not built up.

1 Cor. 14:18 I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you;

1 Cor. 14:19 nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind, in order to instruct others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue.

1) Tongues is often completely unintelligible.

Paul says no one will understand you when you speak in tongues. Have you ever heard someone speaking or singing in tongues? If you are uninitiated to it, it can really freak you out. You might think the tongues speaker is whacky, psychologically unhinged. You might think he or she is going nuts. I get that.

Tongues can sound repetitive and certainly doesn't sound linear like human language. Everyone seems to have a different one. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13:1, "Though I speak in the language of men or of angels..." Maybe tongues is the language of angels.

Now the Bible says that when you speak in tongues, it really is not as helpful as other gifts.

1 Cor. 14:9 So with yourselves; if in a tongue you utter speech that is not intelligible, how will anyone know what is being said? For you will be speaking into the air.

1 Cor. 14:14 For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unproductive.

1 Cor. 14:15 What should I do then? I will pray with the spirit, but I will pray with the mind also; I will sing praise with the spirit, but I will sing praise with the mind also.

So the Bible says that if one ever speaks in tongues in a congregation, there better be someone who has an interpretation. The problem with the Corinthian church was that people were yapping all the time in tongues that Paul had to say, Okay, time out! Only two or three at the most can talk but even then there has to be someone with the gift of interpretation. If not, don't do it."

So tongues is unintelligible but I need to say that

2) On rare occasions, tongues be can intelligible.

We saw it in the 2nd chapter of Acts when the disciples broke out in tongues on the day of Pentecost, and people said they were speaking in a known language. So it can happen though rarely.

Here's an example from the 21st century. Some members of our church went to Bangladesh for one of our mission trips. As they prayed in tongues, one of the Bangla women at the meeting said, "We didn't know you knew our language." Our church members didn't but their prayer in tongues turned out to be in the Bengali language. It was of great comfort to the women there who were being persecuted for their conversion to Christianity.

3) Tongues should always be for building up.

1Cor. 14:11 If then I do not know the meaning of a sound, I will be a foreigner to the speaker and the speaker a foreigner to me.

1Cor. 14:12 So with yourselves; since you are eager for spiritual gifts, strive to excel in them for building up the church.

Okay, for corporate times when we are in church, we are not going to be moving towards having people speak out in tongues, unless there is someone proven by the staff and elders that they indeed have the gift of interpretation.

So everyone who fears getting weirded out by that, don't be afraid. Remember, in Paul's time the church was getting way out of hand with the overuse and misuse

of tongues. And that's why Paul had to write to them through these epistles.

But overusing and misusing tongues is not our problem. It's not that we are using it too much. We hardly use it at all! The Presbyterian denomination is way off on the other end of the spectrum. Many don't even know about it, but this church does.

I don't want you to be misinformed, as Paul says. The gift of tongues does exist, and it is helpful because...

4) Tongues can build you up.

1 Cor. 14:4 Those who speak in a tongue build up themselves, but those who prophesy build up the church.

So how does tongues build us up? Two words: more bandwidth. What do I mean by that?

You know that with computers or digital signals, the bigger the bandwidth, the more information you can send. Sometimes in our despair, in our joy, or in our desire for direction, words may not be enough.

Praying in tongues seems to help release all anguish and longing for an answer from God when we don't know how to pray anymore. The Bible talks about this as Paul wrote to the Roman church about this in Rom. 8:26:

"Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words."

After we have wet our pillows with tears, after our stomachs have churned, after we've lost hope, and we don't know what to say anymore to God, we can pray in tongues. We can be edified afterwards so that we get back on our feet feeling encouraged, and going in the direction God wants so we can serve and help others even more. We can also pray in tongues because our words are not enough to praise, worship, and thank God!

But sadly, tongues has often been used to separate people. Some believe that you have not fully received the Holy Spirit unless you speak in tongues. This creates the feeling of being a second-class citizen.

Some say that you must pray in tongues because you are missing out. A statement like that can make us feel inferior.

Sometimes it is our human pride that wants to flaunt it. "I'm going to pray in tongues out loud so people notice me and think I am really spiritual." That thinking is so wrong.

If we use tongues openly in front of people who are not used to it, it can basically freak them out, making the gift a hindrance more than a help. That's what the Bible says.

Many in our church speak in tongues, but I ask them not to when they pray for people because it might weird people out and make these people focus on the praying in tongues instead of the Lord.

We should never make the fact that we pray in tongues a badge of pride for it will be divisive in the body of Christ. It will make people feel like they're either the haves or have-nots.

So someone might ask, “Do you, Dan, speak in tongues?” The answer is: Yes. And some of you might say, “Wait a minute. You kidding me? I didn’t know that. I’ve known you as our pastor for 30+ years, and I didn’t know that.”

But isn’t that the point? Why did you need to know if I did or didn’t?

Tongues speaking at its best should be part of one’s normal portfolio of being a Christian.

Why would I want to be known as Dan, the tongues-speaking pastor? I only reveal it now because I believe the Lord wants me to for the good of the body at this specific time to educate and protect the church body.

Tongues is not to be what we are known for! We should be known for the fruit of the spirit, not spiritual gifts. The fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5 is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control.

I would rather people say, “There’s Dan. He has a heart for women and children in poverty and wants them to be released in Jesus’ name. He has an evangelistic heart and wants all people to know Jesus.

“There’s Dan. His pastoral heart makes him do worship service, healing services, and ministries for hurting people.”

Isn’t that what spiritual gifts are for? Tongues and all the gifts should just be part of the natural walk of the follower of Christ. It’s about being **naturally supernatural**.

We can all pray for all the gifts and see some pretty amazing

things. I do, as your pastor, want all of us to pray for gifts that we might not just know about God but also EXPERIENCE His signs and wonders. It’s what makes church exciting. It’s an adventure of ministry.

I should mention that the other pastors on our staff do not speak in tongues, but they are still filled with the spirit. Members who don’t speak in tongues are not second-class Christians. According to the Bible, we can still be filled with the Spirit with or without tongues.

Now, I understand tongues are kind of freaky.

Just two weeks ago, a friend of mine heard a teaching on tongues and was, in his words, “weirded out.” It freaked him out. He didn’t know if he liked the teaching or believed or wanted to speak in tongues.

He told me about it and also mentioned that he was going through some tough things, so I asked him if he wanted me to pray for him to just be filled with the Holy Spirit. He said yes. I prayed for that and that God would help him with his troubles. At the end of the prayer he said he felt God’s peace.

Four days later, he called and said that the morning after I prayed for him, after he woke up and while praying in his bed, he suddenly started speaking in tongues! And I said (the man of faith that I am), “Really?”

I like that story because it shows that tongues is indeed a gift. My friend didn’t ask me to pray for it. I didn’t pray for it. He asked me to pray for him to be filled with the Holy Spirit. But as he was filled with the Spirit, it just so happened that he was also given the gift of

tongues. He did pray for more of the Spirit in his life, and the result was it just happened.

If you want the gift of tongues or any other spiritual gift, the Prayer Team and I would love to pray for you for that today or any other day. I’ll stay up here and pray for anyone after the worship service.

But let us remember that tongues is a gift. It isn’t given to those who are first-class. It’s for anyone the Lord wants to give it, too. It’s not necessary for salvation. It doesn’t necessarily make you happier. Just like if someone gave you a lot of money as a gift, it all depends on what you do with it.

And let us not focus on the gifts, but rather the Gift-Giver! When we know and realize that God came to this earth, died for us, forgave us of all of our sin, and offers us new life, THAT is the MOTIVATION to want the Holy Spirit in our lives. We will be so thankful and so much in love with God that we will want to tell EVERYONE about Him. We will want to serve His church.

May we also bear the fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and self-control. And all of His followers say Amen.

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