

Are the Sign Gifts Necessary?

A friendly blog debate about the necessity of spiritual gifts, particularly the 'sign gifts' such as tongues, healing and miracles.

Introduction Frank Turk

Jesse Phillips, a friend of the infamous Dr. Adrian Warnock, has apparently accepted the challenge to discuss the following statement:

Paul's first letter to the Corinthians refutes the notion that "sign" gifts are necessary for the on-going life of the church.

I will take the affirmative; Jesse will take the other side. After the string of non-starters here at D-Blog, I hope this one will prove informative and useful for the larger charismatic/cessationist discussion in the blogosphere.

Are the sign gifts necessary? Jesse Phillips

I have been asked by Frank to begin a new debate, taking the first answer in the following question:

Paul's first letter to the Corinthians refutes the notion that "sign" gifts are necessary for the on-going life of the church.

Although the original goal was 500 words, I was told that 1,000 words could be allowable. I have taken that liberty to exceed the original goal and make an answer of 948. I do appreciate the invitation, Frank, and hope that we can experience a good debate. Now to my answer:

The Corinthian church was divided. Paul addresses division at the outset (1:10) and throughout the letter. The divisions were surrounding the issues of leadership (1:11-17, 3:4-9), sexual immorality (5:1-2), civil law suits (6:1-11), marriage (7:1-16), eating food offered to idols (8:1-13), the Lord's supper (11:17-34) and spiritual gifts (12-

Yes



Name: **Jesse Phillips**
Blog: **Resurgence**
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Jesse takes the affirmative that the gifts of the Spirit are necessary for the life of the church.

No

Name: **Frank Turk**
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Frank denies that the gifts of the Spirit are necessary for the ongoing life of the church.

Format: Frank asks an initial question and Jesse makes an opening statement, and asks Frank his first question. Frank answers the question and asks Jesse a question. Each person answers the previous question and asks another question, for a total of five questions each. Then Jesse makes a closing statement.

Location: This debate took place on the Ask the Calvinist debate blog (<http://q-and-a-blog.blogspot.com>), hosted by Frank Turk.

This document has been formatted by Jesse Phillips and hosted on the Resurgence blog.

14).

The fundamental question underneath all of these divisions is this: what makes a person truly spiritual. Paul says that true wisdom and spiritual power is rooted in Christ and the gospel (1:18-2:14) and then addresses these specific issues of spirituality.

The Corinthians misunderstood the true nature of spirituality. In their minds, truly spiritual people disregarded the physical body (sexual immorality, no-marriage), and could eat food without respect to its sacrifice to idols, and spoke in tongues among other things. Paul corrects them and says that truly spiritual people actually can marry, are not sexually immoral and are sensitive to the weak conscious of others with respect to food sacrificed to idols, not flaunting their liberties to stumble others.

When Paul comes to chapters 12-14, he is addressing the issue of spirituality as related to spiritual gifts. His point is that tongues are not the defining mark of true spirituality. Why? According to his argument:

- A) Because God gives a "variety of gifts" (12:4), not just tongues
- B) Other gifts are also spiritual because they come from the same Spirit, the "same God who empowers them all in everyone" (12:6)
- C) The gifts were given as part of God's assembly of the church body (12:30-12:31) and therefore are meant for "building up the church" (14:12), not puffing up the individual.

The long and short of Paul's argument is that the Corinthians should not pride themselves as being very spiritual just because they speak in tongues. Sign gifts like tongues are not fail-safe proof of true spirituality. This is Paul's correction to the church at Corinth, which he summarizes by saying:

"If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge the things that I am saying" (12:37).

Now, to the question at hand: does Paul's teaching (that tongues are not measures of true spirituality) imply that they are not necessary for the on-going life of the church? Far from it. In fact, Paul's strategy of argumentation was to highlight the vital role that spiritual gifts (including these sign gifts) have in the daily life of the church: edification and encouragement.

The language of "building up" is all over these chapters.

- "...for the common good" (12:7)
- "...for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation" (14:3)
- "...so that the church may be built up" (14:5).
- "...strive to excel in building up the church" (14:12)

Follow the logic of Paul's forceful correction here:

- A. Corinthians are proud and use gifts selfishly to puff themselves up
- B. Paul says that these gifts should be used instead to build the church up

Therefore, if we deny that the gifts are at all necessary means of sustenance for the ongoing life of the church, we steal the thunder from Paul's argument, which is: "Foolish Corinthians! Don't use your gifts selfishly, use them to build up the church!" Paul's correction assumes that the gifts do serve an ongoing function, and that part of the insidiousness of the Corinthian abuse is that it fails this goal, and seeks only self-edification.

Paul does not tell the Corinthians to "cut it out". What he does is two fold:

1. Urges the use of the spiritual gifts (including sign gifts):

- "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit" (12:7), such as words of wisdom, knowledge, tongues, interpretation, prophecy, faith, healing, miracles or distinguishing spirits (12:8-11).
- "...earnestly desire the spiritual gifts" (14:1)
- "...I want you all to speak in tongues" (14:5a)
- "...but even more to prophecy" (14:5b)
- "...since you are eager, strive to excel" (14:12)
- "...pray for the power to interpret" (14:13)
- "I thank God I speak in tongues more than all of you" (14:18)
- "If all prophecy...God is really among you" (14:25)
- "Earnestly desire to prophecy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues" (14:39)

2. Reminds them of what they are for (edification):

We have already mentioned several verses that speak of edification, but we will list them all: 12:7, 14:3, 4, 5, 17, 26. In these six verses Paul mentions the edification, encouragement, building up of the church, his clear understanding of why the spiritual gifts were distributed among them, and why they should be exercised. Paul is always urging use, always reminding of their purpose, and always addressing pride and false spirituality.

Summary:

Regarding the question of the church's ongoing need: edification, encouragement and consolation are certainly ongoing needs of the church. My hermeneutic of chapters 12-14 which places these sign gifts in the context of edification, would make them appear absolutely essential to the ongoing life of the church.

The problem with the Corinthians was not that they exercised spiritual gifts, but that they used them selfishly.

They missed the entire purpose of why the spiritual gifts are given in the first place. The church today stands in need of edification, encouragement and consolation, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, including sign gifts of tongues, healing and miracles, when they are exercised can help to fulfill this need.

While certainly avoiding the false spirituality of the Corinthians, we should not assume that there is no purpose for these gifts at all, when the apostle so often acknowledges and teaches otherwise, and urges us to pursue the same:

- "Earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophecy" (14:1).
- "I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you" (14:18).
- "Earnestly desire to prophecy and do not forbid speaking in tongues" (14:39).

**Question 1 for Frank
Jesse Phillips**

Question: the final part of the assignment, as I understand, is to pose a question for Frank. My question is as follows:

On what textual basis can you prove that Paul instructed the Corinthians that spiritual gifts were not to be part of the on-going life of the church. For 1 Corinthians to "refute" the idea that the sign gifts are necessary, what 1 Corinthian text supports this claim

**Answer #1 for Jesse
Frank Turk**

I think your question misconstrues my position, so let's see if I can unpack the mistake and then still give an answer inside 500 words.

My position is that 1 Corinthians refutes the necessity of the sign gifts, not the presence of the sign gifts. It in fact leverages the alleged presence of the sign gifts to demonstrate that they are not the main object of church life. I think the perpetual presence of the sign gifts gets refuted in the Pastorals and in the letters from James and Peter, but one can't get an egg out of a terrier -- and the "egg" of "sign gifts not present" is not in 1 Cor.

Yes, as you point out, Paul claims to have spoken in tongues more than anyone else, and lifts up the gift of "prophecy" as to be sought out -- but there is such a massive refutation in that section of this letter of the primacy and necessity of sign gifts that to say Paul is here encouraging the church to adopt them as a necessity, as a way to demonstrate the blessing of the Holy Spirit, ignores literally half this passage.

Consider, for example, the contrast between 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 and 1 Corinthians 12:31-13:7. When Paul switches gears to "higher" gifts and a "better" way, he doesn't talk about how tongues and healing ought to be practiced or manifested. He talks about the fact that love trumps all the other so-called "spiritual" gifts.

What is also interesting is that he compares enthusiasm for the sign-gifts to the ways of a child, and compares the gift of love to what a man does when he gives up childish ways (1 Corinthians 13:11-12). And after exhorting the Corinthians to "earnestly desire ... that you may prophesy", Paul makes it plain that the objective of any gift ought to be building up the church both through edification and evangelism (14:6-12, 20-25).

So no: I don't think that 1 Corinthians can be used to refute the presence of sign-gifts. But Paul's purpose in writing this letter is to demonstrate to the church at Corinth what is necessary for their church to manifest that they are "to be saints together with all those who in every place ... enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge ... so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift" (1 Corinthians 1:2, 5-7). And in doing that, when he gets to what we are calling there the "sign gifts", Paul makes it plain that there is something greater than supernatural spectacles which is necessary for the church, contrasted against those things which may be present but are unnecessary for the church.

**Q#1 for Jesse
Frank Turk**

1 Corinthians 13 is a place where many Charismatic folk make a stand and say that Paul's view on the end of signs is escatological -- that is, that Paul is here saying that when Christ comes again, that's when the signs will cease because that's when we'll be perfected.

Do you agree with this view? Why or why not?

**Answer #1 for Frank
Jesse Phillips**

Yes, I do believe that Paul is speaking of the second coming (not with the completion of the canon, for instance).

Why do I believe this? Because the alternative interpretation has some difficulties to it, among other reasons. As I understand it, cessationist hermeneutic holds that prophecy is rooted in divine revelation and it is authoritative. Therefore, "when the perfect comes" refers to the perfect completion of scripture, prophecies and tongues and knowledge "will pass away".

This is difficult to reconcile for the following reasons:

A. Not all prophecies given during biblical times were recorded as scripture. The 70 elders prophesied in Num 11. So did David's worship leaders in 1 Chronicles 25. Even King Saul prophesied 1 Sam 10:11. But in each of these cases their words were not recorded in scripture and therefore cannot be considered to have scriptural authority. Therefore, we cannot equate prophecy to speaking authoritatively on the same level of scripture. There are various levels of authority when it comes to prophecy, depending on the circumstances and purpose of God.

B. Paul says we know and prophecy in part in 1 Corinthians 13:8. But according to the cessationist understanding, prophecy is rooted in divine revelation and invested with divine authority. If this were the case, the Corinthians were prophesying the infallible, authoritative words of God. Would Paul have warned them that they only knew "in part" and could only prophesy in part?

C. 1 Corinthians 13:10 says that the partial will pass away. In context the "partial" means prophecy, tongues and interpretation. Paul considers prophecy partial and passing away. If prophecy was the infallibly speaking of God's authoritative words, it cannot be considered partial, or God's very words would be only partial, and the sufficiency of scripture would be called into question.

D. In Paul's own experience, there were varying degrees of authority when it came to prophecy. He didn't regard the prophecy of Agabus to be completely authoritative (Acts 21:10-14) and it proved to have some inaccuracy (Acts 21:11 versus Acts 21:33, Roman commander, not Jews, bound Paul).

For these reasons, I think Paul had something else in mind regarding prophecy other than the authoritative speaking forth the infallible words of God through divine revelation. When he talked about prophecy he didn't seem to be speaking of an activity that was closely related to the completion of the canon. Partial words based on limited revelation, described by the apostle to be imperfect are hardly necessary for the completion of God's word. So Paul wasn't referring to the completion of the canon when prophecy would stop, for it was in little need of this sort of imperfect prophecy in order to be completed. The imperfect, fallible prophecies based on partial revelation he encountered in Corinth and other places would stop when Jesus came and all was revealed at the second advent of Christ

**Question #2 for Frank
Jesse Phillips**

I would like to know if you think the gift of healing continues today. I think we all acknowledge that with God all things are possible, and he can alter someone's physical state by a work of his providence. How would you build a biblical case for the cessation of the gift of healing and

the continuation of God's providential "healings"? If I misunderstand your position, please provide the appropriate nuances my question lacks.

**Answer #2 for Jesse
Frank Turk**

One of the real problems with the larger debate over cessationism, Jesse, is that the continualist side frequently makes the mistake of conflation – that is, they (usually unintentionally) confuse two things which are similar but not identical and treat them as if they are exactly the same.

The question of whether miracles occur at all is one such question. The standard syllogism regarding miracles in this case is this:

- [A] The sign gifts are miracles
- [B] Miracles still happen today
- therefore-
- [C] the sign gifts still happen today

Let's be clear about a few things (as clear as we can inside the 500-word limit):

{1} I don't know of any cessationist who would say, "no miracles happen today". In fact, all the reformed cessationist I know of would classify the regeneration of men's hearts to repent as a miracle – something impossible except for the intervention of God.

{2} I would be willing to stipulate any number of medical miracles you care to propose – I have no bias against the fact that God is able and frequently willing to cure anyone of anything at any time in any place.

{3} I would also be willing to stipulate that God answers the prayers of the church when it is His will to heal people -- either through the work of medical professionals or by something less rational and less mundane such as a clean bill of health prior to any human treatments. God answering prayer sovereignly is not the same as a sign gift.

{4} What I am certain does not happen today at any time is something resembling Acts 3:1-10 or Acts 9:32-35 -- that is, for the sake of establishing the apostolic nature of one's ministry, one is given the power to command healing, and that command is fulfilled immediately.

God is active; God works. God is not a far away God who is sort of observing out plight. But the question at hand is whether or not the church has the power to command healing as a necessary function of its existence -- and I deny that this is a necessary aspect of the mission of the church.

Let's be clear that we are not talking about the miraculous in general in this question of the necessity of sign gifts for the church: we are talking about particular gifting which a person is given which they actually have some ability to dispense. You and I would agree that someone gifted with administration, for example, doesn't have a gift that sort of comes and goes -- God doesn't periodically releases a budget or an insurance strategy for a church through that person from time to time. We would say instead that God gifts the person, and the person actively, obediently uses that gift.

It's a little less than convincing to say that sign gifts are not that reliable or frankly pragmatic in God's plan for the church.

Question #2 for Jesse Frank Turk

I appreciate your answer #1 -- though as you can imagine, I disagree with it. My objection would be wholly grammatical.

In your view, as I understand you, the sign gifts are a given which Paul says will last for all time and end in the eschaton, but not love -- love is eternal. However, the grammar in this passage, particularly v. 8 and the use of the conjunction "εἴτε", indicates possible but not necessary circumstances -- meaning "if they are present, they will end". That's the way the NASB and KJV translate this verse, btw -- "if" or "whether".

In that, Paul's point is that love is necessary for the church but these gifts are not. These gifts are possible but not essential -- love is essential.

How would you respond to this objection?

Answer #2 for Frank Jesse Phillips

I would agree with your grammar and grant that the KJV is acceptable in the way that it translates the verse. I would disagree that the Greek conjunction can carry the theological weight of the inference you draw from it, given the grammatical-historical and literary context of 1 Corinthians 13.

Let me explain: There are at least two possible inferences you can draw from the statement, "If the gifts are present they will end."

- 1: Therefore they are unnecessary
- 2: Therefore let love (which won't pass), not pride, motivate you to exercise them

So, which interpretation is right? Let's consider A) the grammatical-historical context, and B) the literary context:

A) Historical context: The Corinthians were definitely experiencing these things. Paul was talking to a church that was very charismatic, and saying, "If prophecies are present..." But there was never any question of their presence at Corinth. This is where we must bridge the gap between ourselves and the original hearers.

The Corinthians didn't doubt whether or not prophecy, tongues and the other sign gifts were present or necessary. So, let me demonstrate what I believe the "charismatic" Corinthians would have understood Paul to say, versus your inference:

Corinthians: "If the gifts exist they will pass, but love remains" --> "Well, the gifts do exist, and you're saying they'll pass, so explain what you mean about love?" (Paul goes on to do this in 1 Corinthians 14, see point B below)

Cessationist: "If the gifts exist they will pass" --> "Okay, so they are unnecessary"

And our hermeneutic must interpret the actual meaning of a text as its original intent by the author to the original hearers. Therefore, I think the cessationist inference is premature, given the literary context of 1 Corinthians 14, to which we turn:

B. Literary Context: Chapter 13 falls directly in between chapters 12 and 14 (obviously!), two chapters which happen to be two of the most in-depth teaching on the gifts and encouragement to exercise the gifts in all of scripture. In my original answer post I mentioned eight different verses that specifically encourage the exercise of these gifts by all the Corinthians (12:7, 8-11, 14:1, 5a,b, 12, 13, 18, 25, 39).

What Paul does is he answers the question I posed above: "What's the big deal about love with respect to these gifts?" Well, love should motivate us to do all that we do. And it should be our love for the church (not pride or a desire to make ourselves appear more spiritual or 'in touch' with God), that motivates us to take advantage of the great potential the gifts have to edify, exhort, encourage and build up the church (12:7, 14:3, 4, 5, 7, 17, 26).

Summary: So, I agree with your interpretation of 13:8, which says "If the gifts are present, they shall pass." I think Paul uses that to say, "But love remains. Therefore lovingly and earnestly desire (14:1) to use the gifts while they remain to edify this great body."

Question #3 for Frank Jesse Phillips

Suppose someone came to you and said, "Paul tells me to earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially prophecy."

My question has two parts:

1. What would be your initial reaction to that person?
2. How would you interpret 1 Corinthians 14:1 and apply it to this person (suppose they brought it up in your conversation)?

**Question #3 for Jesse
Frank Turk**

The answer to your two-part-question is rolled up together. My initial reaction to that person is to ask them, "Well, what do you think Paul is saying there?" And I'd ask because this person, as many people often do, is citing half a verse completely apart from the context of the verse without understanding the real force of Paul's statement.

What Paul actually says is, "Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy." This statement is a bridge from Paul's exaltation of Love as the higher gift to the application that Love plus Truth edifies the church and wins people with the Gospel, not merely a raw command. And in that respect, Paul is correcting the false notion that the demonstration of gifts is some kind of personal blessing from God to you.

Consider, for example, 1 Corinthians 14:5, 10-12, 18-19. Paul is making a stand here regarding the purpose of all spiritual gifts – and clearly saying that unless a gift is demonstrating love, which in this case is manifested in "building up the church", he'd rather not see it at all.

And this, by the way, is again the point: it is possible that there are all kinds of sign gifts in any given church. They are not necessary.

In the particular case of prophecy as Paul mentions it here, we have to think about what he means – does he mean "a word on-par with Scripture, from God's mouth, with the objective of giving out new revelation," (that is: a sign-gift; a direct act of God full of authority and demanding action) or does he mean something else?

You yourself admit that you think he means something else. But if we can agree that Paul is not here talking about Isaiah-type prophecy, then what is he talking about? It turns out he's talking about something akin to preaching and teaching, both of which require Scripture as the foundation for their message.

For example, 1 Corinthians 14:31-33, 36-37 makes it clear that prophecy dispels confusion, encourages learning, and edifies both the believer and the unbeliever in

the context of when the church comes together. And Paul takes special pain to note that when such people speak up, they are going to make a note of what he has written -- which, you have to admit, is Scripture.

So with Paul, I say yes: let's prophesy. Let's speak truth which dispels confusion founded on the Scripture. Let's not, however, try to leverage that to say speaking in tongues or alleged gifts of healing are in the same league or of the same necessity in the church. Paul rejects that, and we should, too.

**Question #3 for Jesse
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One of the interpretations you gave for what Paul says is "since the gifts will pass away, they are unnecessary". Problematically, my point was that Paul makes the gifts a possible state by saying "if they are present", not "because they will pass away".

Let me hone in on that. Your view is that the gifts are necessary for the church, but I'll bet you don't think every believer has every gift.

Must every believer manifest every sign-gift, given Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 12-14, or does Paul presuppose that not every believer will manifest every sign-gift? How do we know this from the text?

**Question #3 for Frank
Jesse Phillips**

You asked about whether or not Paul presupposes every believer would manifest every gift. My short answer is no. How can we show this from the text?

1 Corinthians 12:29-31. Do all speak in tongues? Do all prophesy? I think these are rhetorical questions and Paul clearly does not assume that all will exercise every gift.

So, I'm not sure how much more needs to be said on that, so allow me a divergence with my remaining words:

First: You say, "it is possible that there are all kinds of sign gifts in any given church. They are not necessary."

My point is that Paul makes them absolutely necessary by pointing out their potency for edification, encouragement and building up. These things are very great needs for the church, and the gifts serve this essential purpose.

Second: You mentioned, "It turns out he's talking about something akin to preaching and teaching"

I see that you understand prophecy to be almost the same as, or very closely related to preaching and teach-

ing. The biggest issue I have with this understanding is that there are many references in scripture in the New Testament, that seem to understand prophecy as forth telling and distinct from teaching and preaching, often based on non-scriptural revelation.

1 Tim 1:18 - Paul mentions the prophecies spoken about Timothy. Apparently someone prophesied about Timothy that he would wage good warfare and hold the faith. Was this 'prophecy' akin to teaching and preaching? We don't get the impression that scripture was being expounded, but that some revelation about the specifics of Timothy's future was spoken, for Paul said to Timothy the prophecy was "about you."

1 Corinthians 14:24-25 - Paul envisions a church where all are prophesying, an unbeliever enters, the secrets of his heart will be disclosed and he will repent. Prophesying cannot mean teaching or preaching, because Paul elsewhere does not think that everyone in the church should preach, rather a limited number of elders and deacons (1 Tim 3) should teach/preach and James says that few should preach (James 3:1). Yet Paul says wide spread prophesying could lead to repentance. Further, prophesying is connected here with revelation of specific details of a persons life not specified in scripture. Prophecy seems in this instance to be more tied to spontaneous revelation about specific circumstances of a persons life (secrets of his heart disclosed), not the preaching of God's revealed word.

I would also suggest the prophet Agabus who foretold a future famine (Acts 11:28) and Paul's future arrest (Acts 21:10-11), as well as Ephesians 4:11, where the office of prophet is differentiated from the pastor/teacher, Joel's prophecy that daughters would prophesy (Joel 2:28-29, Acts 2:18, 1 Corinthians 11:5-6, where women seem to be able to prophecy as long as they are "covered") contrasted with the fact that Paul prohibits from women teaching and preaching, as other verses in which would seem to drive a wedge between prophecy and preaching/teaching and indicate that these things are different ideas.

Question #4 for Frank Jesse Phillips

You called prophesying "akin" to preaching and teaching. Do you mean that prophecy is the same thing as teaching/preaching, or that it is similar but different than teaching and preaching.

Depending on your answer: If you think it's exactly the same, how would you object to my view that it is different, in particular the passages I cited in my last answer?

If you think it's similar but different, how would you nuance the differences?

Answer #4 for Jesse Frank Turk

Lexically, the Greek verb represented here as "prophecy" has about 7 distinct meanings according to the common lexical sources. Almost all modern translations follow the KJV and translate the word as "prophecy" in every case. In a case like this, context is king and tells us how to take the meaning of the word.

It is almost utterly transparent that in 1 Corinthians 14, Paul is contrasting the "sign" gifts with the "teaching" gifts, as I alluded to in my last answer by noting that Paul transitions from the higher gift of love to the matter of pairing love with the truth of the Gospel, the truth of Scripture. His point is that the sign gifts -- particularly "tongues" -- is frankly a gift prone to confuse men but that the church should seek to dispel confusion and edify both believers and non-believers.

In that, when Paul is affirming that one should seek to "prophecy", he places that kind of talk in the same company as teaching. (1 Corinthians 14:27-33)

It is important at this juncture to also underscore that Paul is making it clear that the sign gifts only build one's self up while the prophecy/teaching gift edifies the whole church (cf. 1 Corinthians 14:4) This is frankly the final line of demarcation for what is necessary for the church and what is only possible -- Paul makes it clear that it is possible for a person to possess the sign gifts, but it is necessary for the sake of the church to have those who can, impromptu, teach and encourage others with truth. It's the same kind of contrast he makes earlier in this same letter when he admonishes that all things are "lawful" but not all things are "helpful".

That's a stark contrast. And frankly, this view of Paul's direction of how to employ gifts makes more sense than to call this a passage which extols the church to employ the sign gifts as a necessity. Corinth was a church in dire trouble, and part of its problem was that it was a church where the allegedly-spiritual pleasure of the individuals in it were being pursued above and beyond the welfare of the church. People sought status by trying to pick the most impressive teacher; they sought status by being super-selective regarding with whom they would take the Lord's supper; they sought legal status by suing each other in civil court. And frankly, they sought status by trying to demonstrate gifts rather than demonstrating love and truth.

Paul's call to them is to seek love and truth, not signs and wonders. This is capped specifically in 1 Corinthians 15 when Paul says effectively that because they have forgotten the Gospel, they make all these other mistakes.

My plea to any charismatic enthusiast is exactly the same: you are forgetting the Gospel for the sake of an alleged experience, to attain a status in your own eyes, or others' eyes, or perhaps you may think it is in God's eyes. Pursue love, and seek to speak the truth as a gift to the whole church. This is what is necessary for the church.

**Question #4 for Jesse
Frank Turk**

I'm glad we can see eye to eye that not every person receives all the sign-gifts.

Paul makes a pretty radical affirmation in 1 Corinthians 14:28 . This is about a gift you are saying is necessary for the church, yet Paul says explicitly that this gift in the presence of the church needs either to be interpreted in order to be used publicly, or else it must be kept private - frankly, for the sake of order and edification.

How is it that a gift necessary for the church must be kept private for the sake of order? That is, how can this gift, which not everyone will manifest, be an open source of confusion for the church when it is manifested in the church if it is necessary for church life?

**Answer #4 for Frank
Jesse Phillips**

I disagree that Paul's discouragement of the use of uninterpreted public tongues means that tongues is absolutely unnecessary. Part of the value and necessity of tongues is that when they cooperate with the gift of interpretation, they have immense potency to edify. Interpretation harnesses the power of the tongue and converts it to useful edification for the gathered body, like a solar panel would take the power of the sun and convert it to useful energy for a house.

"Now 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 Corinthians 14:5).

What's the implication of the conditional phrase "unless someone interprets"? The one who prophesies is NOT greater than the tongues-speaker provided there's an interpretation.

In other words, Paul is correcting the regular use of uninterpreted public tongues. But, if there's an interpretation, if that power of tongues is harnessed in the proper way, there is tremendous potency for tongues to edify the whole body. Therefore, tongues is necessary if we want the church to be edified in this way.

So, I don't think that only prophecy edifies the whole

church, while the others only edify individual believers, as you say. All the gifts, used properly, edify the whole church, including tongues and interpretation.

"What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up. If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret" (1 Corinthians 14:26-27).

**Question #5 for Frank
Jesse Phillips**

I will now post my final question for Frank: Frank, you said: "Paul is making it clear that the sign gifts only build one's self up while the prophecy/teaching gift edifies the whole church", and you used 1 Corinthians 14:4 to justify this point.

Yet, I raised the point that in the very next verse Paul provides an exception, "unless someone interprets, so that the church may be edified" (14:5). This would make it clear to me that a tongue does have power to edify, provided that it is properly used in conjunction with interpretation, so that the content of the tongue is understandable. Sign gifts, therefore, when used improperly perhaps only edify the individual, but when used properly do edify the church.

How do you respond to this objection?

**Answer #5 for Jesse
Frank Turk**

That's not really much of an objection, Jesse – no offense. I'll take the hit on word count to paste the passage in here just to put it all in one place without the pop-ups: Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. 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. On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their up-building and encouragement and consolation. The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but the one who prophesies builds up the church. Now 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.

The underlined parts are words which emphasize a point – "especially", "even more", "is greater than". And what gets emphasized? The up-building, encouragement and consolation of people by speaking to them.

This is why it's just critical not to disconnect this passage, in spite of the artificial chapter breaks, from the one

which comes before it in Paul's discourse on love as a "higher way". Love is the motive and the context in which we take action, and the kind of action we choose speaks to whether we are doing "love" or not.

Love is the higher way; edification of the body demonstrates love. It's interesting, I think, that Paul doesn't say that those who "prophesy" have an obligation to meet some propriety test, some rule of order test which seeks other gifts to confirm it, but tongues do. When Paul then breaks into 1 Corinthians 14:20-25, he doesn't leave any doubt that while the gift of tongues may be lawful or even possible, it's not hardly useful in and of itself and therefore must be under some other kind of restriction.

It is not necessary for the life of the body of Christ – not as the gifts which console, encourage and build up are necessary. Did Paul say some had it? Sure he did – but he was clear to say that it is a gift which is subordinate to greater gifts, particularly love and speaking truth, and ought not to be used without the covering or support of those other gifts. That makes the gift not necessary for the life of the church.

Here's the syllogism:

[A] Gifts which are necessary for the life of the church can stand alone in their use.

[B] Tongues must not stand alone in their use.

-THEREFORE-

[C] Tongues are not necessary for the life of the church.

Question #5 for Jesse Frank Turk

First off, thanks to Jesse for his participation here. After he answers this question, he also gets the opportunity to give a 1000-word summary of his view of what happened here.

Let's take my last question to give you the opportunity to grandstand a little. My view of the activity of the church in the last 2000 years is that, overwhelmingly, the vast majority of churches did not display the sign gifts -- healing, prophecy in the "thus saith the lord" sense, tongues (both angelic and human languages), and interpretation (both angelic and human languages).

If the sign gifts are a necessary part of the ongoing life of the church, what should we make of all these churches which have never displayed the sign gifts once?

Answer #5 for Frank Jesse Phillips

Before I "grandstand", I would like to examine the logic of your syllogism. You say tongues are unnecessary be-

cause they can't edify alone, but are under the restriction of interpretation.

Your logic is as follows: Thing A (tongues) cannot accomplish Effect C (edification) without help of Thing B (interpretation). Therefore, tongues is unnecessary for edification. Does this always work? Let's apply it to something else, like procreation: A woman (thing A) cannot accomplish procreation (effect C) without the help of a man (thing B). Therefore, a woman is unnecessary for procreation.

Clearly this doesn't always work. It only works if Thing B (man/interpretation) can accomplish the effect (procreation/edification) alone. Can an interpretation edify alone, without any tongue? No, because it would not be an interpretation if there was no foreign tongue to interpret.

Now, to answer your question about church history. I'm afraid 500 words is insufficient to do this answer justice, but I will suggest some historical movements that have experienced these things, and you can be the judge as to how "sporadic" it has been:

John Wesley and the Methodist revival: Revivals in Virginia and Kentucky in the late 17 early 1800s was one of the earliest outbreaks of these tongues and healings manifestations on US soil, in which tens of thousands (2,000 Methodists in Georgia alone, Edward Dromgoole), of people were experiencing these things. In August of 1801 there were as many as 25,000 gathered at Cane Ridge, where they were speak in unknown tongues [2]. Let me also refer you to Finney's conversion and the revivals of the 1820's.

Holiness --> Pentecostal churches: From the holiness movement to the Church of God all through the mid 1800's until the 1900's, millions of believers took part in these revivals and camp meetings, during which these signs you say are so sporadic took place. A Welsh revival had also been growing during this time in which 30,000 people had been converted and experienced speaking in tongues/experienced healing.

Azusa: Leaders from these respective movements met at Azusa street, where the most notable historical example of an outbreak of tongues, healing and miracles took place. It is this event that the millions of Pentecostal/Charismatic Christians today, who speak in tongues and experience healing trace their heritage.

Our church: During corporate repentance from sin many of our youth were baptized in the Spirit, began speaking in tongues. Our church has a healing team which on numerous occasions has seen God answer these prayers and provide healing that goes beyond medical explanation. email me sometime and we can discuss these things.

There are 217,000,000 "denominational Pentecostals". If we add other "Charismatics" and "Third Wavers" this number reaches 413,000,000. [1]. Most would say they speak in tongues and many would say they have seen/experienced miraculous healing.

This was a poor answer, far too short to capture the extensive history. Read my footnotes. This sort of thing is wide spread historically: what do I make of those who have not experienced these things? Read Luke 11:13. Ask him!

[1] Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition, Vinson Synan
[2] College Life in the Old South, Coulter, p. 194-195.

Final statement by Jesse Jesse Phillips

Are the gifts necessary?

I must admit that when I first heard this question, I realized I'd never thought seriously about it that way. I think I've always thought that they are, but why and how? The benefit of this exercise is that it requires us to return once again to God's word for fresh illumination to the many questions raised from reading it. I have found this whole exercise spiritually refreshing, as well as intellectually stimulating. Thank you, Frank, for the opportunity to participate here.

I think both sides would agree that the primary concern for Christians is to edify the church, not build up themselves, put themselves on some inside-track of super-spirituality based on some Gnostic, hidden knowledge reserved for an elite few. No, the goal is love, and love motivates us to edify, build up and encourage others. On this we agree.

We disagree in that I believe all the gifts when properly used can edify the church, whereas some would think that only certain gifts edify the church, whereas some simply edify the individual. So, it is on this conclusion, that all the gifts edify the church that I make this final summary of my thinking and plea to pursue this edification:

Are the gifts necessary? Only if we desire the church to be edified in every way possible, in each way that God has told us it could be so. If we don't desire a church to be edified in every way possible, if we are content that the church can be edified in the safe ways, while avoiding those means of edification that are fraught with potential abuse, then I admit the gifts are not necessary for the life of a church.

But if we desire the church to be edified in the full variety of ways God has given for it to be built up, the spiritual gifts are necessary. Why? Because Christians need to feel good about their super-spirituality? No, because God has

invested into the gifts the inherent power to accomplish this essential task of encouragement. A church that does not pursue the gifts cannot be fully edified, or it would mean nothing for God to offer gifts that edify. Can we answer the wisdom of God who offers gifts to edify by saying, "No thanks, Lord! You offer something dangerous. We'll content ourselves with the safe ways of edifying your bride."

What irony, that we would neglect a God-ordained means of edification of His bride, out of the pretense that we are trying to protect it. Protect it from what? Protect it from abuse and excess. Carry on nutritionist; keep telling the church that she may not eat this dish lest she become a glutton. By implementing a diet of strict abstinence, for fear that eating from this portion of God's table will lead to gluttony, you have shown great practical wisdom, even greater caution than Paul, who never once told the Corinthians they should not pursue the gifts. That apostle, for all he did well, surely missed an opportunity to reprimand those Corinthians for being zealous for the gifts, and could have saved himself a lot of trouble, if only God had given him such advice, and told them to get on to better things like love and abstain from these sin-fraught gifts that lead to so much trouble.

But Paul never did this. He recognized that even gluttons must eat. Even people who have abused gifts must still pursue them. Even people who have seen the gifts used for all manner of evil must still view them as necessary.

Why? Because the church must be edified. The gifts must be pursued. We who are earnest for the church to be edified must leave no stone unturned. The church must be edified through the preaching of the word. The church must be edified through the fellowship of the saints. The church must be edified through the sacraments. The church must be edified through fasting and prayer and the spiritual disciplines. The church must be edified through singing and through evangelism. And yes, the church must be edified through the charismata.

Be vigilant! Let the building up of the church consume you. Do not pursue all means of edification except one. Do not cease at the last point, though it may be the hardest and most dangerous. Press on. Rooted in love, earnestly desire the spiritual gifts that the church may be edified in every way possible, that the bridegroom may avail to the bride the full measure of divine nourishment.