Head and Heart
1 Corinthians 14

We're looking at 1 Corinthians and today at the subject of spiritual gifts. And we could spend weeks on chapter 14 alone. But chapter 15 is all about the resurrection, and next Sunday is Easter Sunday. So rightly or wrongly, we're going to look at this chapter in one go.

And that's dangerous, because this issue of spiritual gifts can be hugely divisive - especially for a church like us.

So, before we look at the Bible, I want to make a few introductory comments.

Firstly, Corinth was not an exemplary church. Our attitude should not be, 'ooh we should be more like Corinth!'

Secondly, the early churches were closer in size to what we think of as home groups. And the New Testament is remarkably short on directions for what church services should look like. Which means that in different places and different times somethings are going to be the same, but other things are going to look… different.

Thirdly, I dislike any titles that divide true Christians. One of the joys of being in a church like Westlake is worshipping with and learning from all these people who are different from me. But sometimes titles can help bring clarity.

And when it comes to the gifts of the Spirit, you can be a continuationist - and believe all the gifts of the Holy Spirit continue today. Or you can be a cessationist and believe some gifts, especially revelatory gifts like tongues and prophecy, have ceased. Or you can fall between the two - open but cautious. And we have that full spectrum. The crucial thing for us as elders is, is the Bible our or this person's supreme authority. And personally, I'm at the continuationist end, but people I hugely respect disagree. And some of you may be coming to Westlake precisely because crazy stuff isn't happening here. One of the other churches in Lausanne has the strap line, 'the place where miracles happen'. Well, we joke in the family that Westlake's the place where miracles don't happen!

But when it comes to the gifts, I'm coming from a continuationist perspective. So I don't know whether that makes me a Daniel in a den of lions, or a lion in a den of Daniels.

But I'm a continuationist because I believe that's what the Bible teaches. And that's to say that you can be a continuationist and still have the Bible as your supreme authority and *not* believe that everything that is said to be of the Holy Spirit is of the Holy Spirit. You can believe in the gifts of the Spirit and hear someone say, 'thus says the Lord' and think, 'oh no he doesn't!' Because spiritual gifts are not self-authenticating.

But fourthly, you can be a cessasionist and still believe that God speaks powerfully today - through his word; and that his word has the power to make the spiritually dead live - which is the greatest miracle of all, frankly. And you can still believe that he answers prayer, even prayers for healing, and miracles of provision. In other words, there is a whole lot more that unites true believers than divides us, provided the word of God remains our authority.

So, we can't cover everything in this passage, so we're going to major on what Paul majors on which is prophecy.

Love and Desire
Look at v1: 'Pursue love and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts.' Now, that word *pursue* can have different feels to it, can't it. You could say, 'he's pursuing his interest in stamp collecting.' But that doesn't suggest much passion, does it? But you could also say, 'he's so in love with her, he buys her flowers and chocolates, and just doesn't give up, he's pursuing her!' And that sounds a whole lot more passionate.

And the word Paul uses is translated elsewhere as to persecute. To go after, to hunt down, to seek out. Which sounds more energetic than stamp collecting, doesn't it. Corinth, Westlake, pursue love, go after love, make love the thing you're running after. In the way you think of and speak of and treat each other, in the way you handle spiritual gifts, let love be the thing that's controlling you.

And think how many disagreements in churches, or in friendships and families, would take on a very different feel if our fundamental disposition was to love the other.

But Paul doesn't say, 'Pursue love and forget about spiritual gifts. Move on.' Even in a church that was getting so much wrong about spiritual gifts he says, '*earnestly desire* the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy.'

Now we'll get to what he means by prophesy later. But 'earnestly desire spiritual gifts' comes with a challenge, doesn't it? Because we can stagnate in our Christian lives - our knowledge and experience of God - even what we expect of God - can plateau, and we can stop growing. The rings on our tree aren't increasing in number. We're not really applying ourselves to grow personally or to grow in those gifts that could help others grow.

So, whatever your position on gifts, what's the gauge of your spiritual desire reading? Are you stagnating, or are you taking steps to grow? Are you putting yourself in the place where your knowledge and experience of God can increase, through his word, through prayer, through gathering with his church?

And what about the gifts he's already given you? Maybe you've got leadership skills in church or at work, are you honing that? Maybe by reading a book on it? Maybe it's teaching, in home group or with the kids in Sunday school, or as part of your work. Maybe it's evangelism. Are you seeking to improve that skill so those you teach or reach out to understand more? Whatever your gift, ask yourself, what could I do to grow in it, so I have more to give to others?

Head and Heart
Look at v14-15: 'If I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful. What am I to do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also; I will sing with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also.'

So, in a church where they were putting way too much emphasis on the spiritual and especially on tongues, Paul doesn't say 'stop' he says - 'yes, your spirit, and your spiritual response matters, but so does the mind.'

And one of the dangers churches and us as individual Christians face, is that we move to either extreme. Either we're all head, all mind, and our faith becomes very cerebral, a matter of propositions, and doctrines to be ticked off as believed, and we become dismissive, even condescending, of those who are more expressive. Or, we become all heart, and the life of the mind isn't valued, and we don't think deeply about God or about what Jesus has done for us, and our approach to his word, or the songs we sing, become superficial. We believe, but we couldn't rightly say what we believe or why we believe it.

But Paul refuses to divide head and heart: it's never *either-or*, but *both-and*. When Jesus was asked, what's the greatest commandment, he replied, 'love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.' That our response to God should always be our whole self. That in response to all Jesus has done for us, in response to God's incredible, mind-blowing, emotion-stirring love for us, our minds should be blown, our emotions should be stirred. We should try to intellectually grasp and understand the depth of the gospel, that the Son of God would die for us, and then respond to that in prayer and song with hearts overflowing with joy.

It's always head and heart.

But, if the head *does* matter it means, when you come to church, you've got to be able to understand what's being communicated.

Intelligible and Controlled

Su, my wife, grew up in Japan, and speaks Japanese. I don't. So Su could express her love to me in Japanese and tell me how much I mean to her, and I wouldn't have a clue what she's saying. She could be ordering Sushi and bubble tea for all I know.

For something to mean something to you, you've got to be able to understand it. And in v1-25, Paul is making the case that if you want to help others grow, in fact, if you want to grow, what goes on in church has to be intelligible. Verse 6, 'Now, brothers, if I come to you speaking in tongues, *how will I benefit you* unless I bring some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching?'

Now, whatever you think the gift of tongues is, Paul's point's clear. He's not denigrating tongues, he's saying that growth comes through understanding. Through grasping God's truth. Through the mind. And prophecy which brings some revelation, and teaching which imparts knowledge, do that because they're understandable.

And any musician or soldier could tell you that, Paul says. Verse 7, 'If even lifeless instruments, such as the flute or the harp, do not give distinct notes, how will anyone know what is played? And if the bugle gives an indistinct sound, who will get ready for battle?' I mean, if a piece of music is to be a piece of music, if it's going to do anything to you, for you to appreciate it and go, 'hmm, that was lovely' there has be a difference between the notes, there can't just be noise. And the army on the field of battle, if the bugler fluffs it, all his comrades will be stood there scratching their heads - was that the call to advance, or retreat?

So while Paul *doesn't* say, 'don't pray in tongues' he *does* say, don't do it in church if there's no interpretation. It has value for you, privately, personally, but for the church gathered, earnestly desire to impart God's truth to people in ways they understand, so they can grow.

But the same is true as we try and explain the gospel - what Jesus has done for us - to people. That's part of what Paul is talking about in v16-17 and 22-25 where he talks of 'outsiders' and 'unbelievers'. That when we pray and speak, we want to communicate the gospel in ways that people who don't yet understand can understand.

So, whatever your views on gifts, ask God for greater skill, for more wisdom and insight and sensitivity, to explain things to others - whether that's our kids, or youth or neighbours or friends, in ways they understand, so they get the gospel and come to faith and grow in faith.

But, as well as being intelligible, in v26-40 Paul says that whenever any of us speak in church, it's going to be under control. It's going to be ordered, not chaotic. Verses 31-32: 'You can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged, *and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets. For God is not a God of confusion but of peace.'* And v40, 'All things should be done decently and in order.'

The other day Hannah was cycling through Bern and at one of the major intersections, the traffic lights were down. And you could imagine how chaos - especially at rush-hour - would quickly follow. And there'd be honking and people pushing their way in - and eventually gridlock. But a single policeman took control of the situation. And through his hand signals and body movements he had everyone moving.

And Paul's saying, when a church pursues love, it won't look like chaos at the crossroads, everyone pushing in. Love will express itself in a right order, in people giving way, in self-restraint, so that the most people possible can be built up and encouraged.

Now, when I was a doctor, I had two colleagues at opposite ends of the spectrum when it came to their desks. One literally had no surface to work on because of all the piles of patient notes and books and papers on his desk. The other was so meticulous his desk was spotless, except for his finely sharpened pencils lying in a neat row at the top. And when it comes to different views on the gifts of the Spirit, the danger is we can end up either with chaos, or with everything in neat rows.

But Paul is saying, the gifts of the Spirit, and the way you exercise them, are always going to be in line with God's character, and God is not a God of confusion, but of peace. But that doesn't mean he's British - it doesn't mean everything has to be kept buttoned up and straight-lipped. When Jesus told Nicodemus he needed to be born again by the Spirit, Jesus said, 'The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes.' (John 3:8). In other words, Nicodemus, you can't box in the Spirit.

And yet, at the first Pentecost, when the disciples were so full of the Spirit that people thought they were drunk, they proclaimed the gospel in words the crowd could understand. And Paul is saying, do the same. Don't behave in ways that people walk in and think you're crazy. Out of love, behave in ways that mean people hear and understand the gospel. The gifts of the Spirit do not control you, you can control them and out of love you must.

Upbuilding and Tested

Now, it's hard to miss Paul's emphasis in this chapter isn't it, because he keeps on hammering away at it: Verse 3, 'The one who prophesies speaks to people *for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation*.' Verse 4, 'The one who prophesies *builds up the church*.' Verse 5, 'So that *the*

church may be built up.' Verse 12, 'So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, *strive to excel in building up the church*.'

So Paul's preference for prophecy over tongues is because it encourages and comforts and convicts us of sin and, as it does, it builds up the church.

But that begs the question, what is prophecy? What does it look like? And there are multiple views on this, so I'm just going to give you mine! Prophecy is a message of encouragement, or comfort, maybe of correction or direction, that the Lord brings to your mind for someone else. You might be sat in church, and you notice your friend, and the Lord brings a Bible verse to mind for them and you go share it with them. And they say, 'I really needed to hear that.' It might be you're sat here and you can't get this other person out of your mind, so you go pray for them and encourage them in God and they go away encouraged. It might be when you pray in a time of open prayer and you quote a scripture, or there's something you say, and someone else is sat here and they go, wow, that really spoke to me. It might be someone speaking from the front and they say something and for the rest of the week you can't get it out of your head - you feel like the Lord's speaking to you about this.

But like we saw last week in chapter 13, it's like looking through a glass dimly. It's imperfect. It's not-authoritative teaching. And as the Lord's people, we're never told to be under the authority of 'prophets' but of elders. And in the lists of qualifications for elders, prophecy doesn't get a mention, but being able to teach does.

And because it's us expressing something we think the Lord has laid on our hearts, and because we are fallible, the way we perceive it, or express it, or interpret it is also fallible. And that means we test it: v29, 'Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said.' And in 1 Thessalonians Paul writes, 'Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies, *but test everything*; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil.' (1 Thess 5:19-22). So just because someone says, 'thus says the Lord', doesn't mean it is.

But why does Paul say *don't despise prophecies*? Probably because people were 'prophesying' stuff that was way off-beam, and you don't have to be around churches for long before you realise some pretty weird stuff goes on, and when that happens the temptation is you throw the baby out with the bathwater. Instead Paul says, test it, weigh it.

And in Acts we get a case study of Paul doing just that.

In Acts 20, Paul says to the elders of the church at Ephesus, 'I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me' (v22-23). So, in some way, the Spirit's prompting Paul to go to Jerusalem and he senses some danger. But then in Acts 21 various believers warn him against going: 'Having sought out the disciples, we stayed there for seven days. *And through the Spirit they were telling Paul not to go on to Jerusalem*.' (21:4) And a man called Agabus even binds his feet and hands with Paul's belt and says, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'This is how the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the gentiles' (21:11). So everyone's sensing the same thing: Paul's journey is dangerous, and is going to end in his imprisonment. But while everyone else interprets that as meaning Paul shouldn't

go, Paul sees that as the wrong interpretation. He tests it against God's directions and calling on his life.

Now, that's great for Paul - he was an apostle. But we're not. So how do we test the insights, and hunches and impressions we think might be from the Lord? By the one reliable standard we have: by God's infallible and never wrong Word. By the teaching of Paul and the other apostles, by the Old and the New Testaments.

And it's as this Word dwells in us richly, as his Word increasingly shapes our responses to life, the universe and everything, that the Spirit will have a reservoir of his word in our hearts and minds to draw on, that he can prompt us with, and bring to our minds, to encourage and comfort and challenge each other with. And as we do, we'll grow, and the church will be built up. And it'll be truly word and Spirit, head and heart.