

## 1 Corinthians 14

*14:1 Follow the way of love and eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit, especially prophecy. 2 For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to people but to God. Indeed, no one understands them; they utter mysteries by the Spirit. 3 But the one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort. 4 Anyone who speaks in a tongue edifies themselves, but the one who prophesies edifies the church. 5 I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be edified.*

Paul continues his discussion with “Spiritual Gifts”. Specifically, he goes into more detail on speaking in tongues and prophecy. As I have already said, speaking in tongues is not speaking gibberish, it is speaking a known language. The difference between speaking in tongues and speaking a language in which you have been educated is when speaking in tongues you don’t even know what you are saying. You speak the language as a gift from the Holy Spirit.

Paul starts off saying that it is ok to desire spiritual gifts, especially prophecy. Just as he has said in the last two chapters, pursue everything in love. Serve God to glorify Him and not to benefit yourself. In the previous chapters, Paul told us that the Holy Spirit gives you these gifts and God controls which gift or gifts you will receive. He also said that no gift is more important than any other. He says that if you speak in tongues then you are speaking to God. He understands all languages even unspoken languages. He can also interpret what is in your heart.

Paul says that if you speak in tongues, you are speaking in a language that is foreign to you. It is meant to communicate directly with God with others but without an interpreter or someone that understands the language, then only God can understand what is being said. The NLT says “*You will be speaking by the power of the Spirit, but it will all be mysterious.*”

In verse 3, Paul says that if you are prophesying then you are doing it to edify or lift up others. Specifically, you are speaking “*to men for edification and exhortation and consolation*” of them and not yourself. Spiritual gifts are not about you saying “Look at me!”

From Guzik’s commentary: “What does it mean for someone to prophesy? Many who believe miraculous gifts are no longer given by God regard prophecy as simply “inspired preaching,” and not “inspired” in a direct way. Paul will tell us much more about prophecy in this chapter. Yet, we know he does not mean prophecy is identical to preaching, because there was a Greek word available for “preaching” (kerusso), and Paul did not use this Greek word. “Preaching is essentially a merging of the gifts of teaching and exhortation, prophecy has the primary elements of prediction and revelation.” (Farnell, cited in Kistemaker)

Paul isn’t saying that one gift is more important but it comes down to the use of the gift. Both the gift of prophecy and speaking in tongues are most valuable when they are used to edify or lift

up the church. John MacArthur believes that the gift of speaking in tongues has not been given out in decades.

*6 Now, brothers and sisters, if I come to you and speak in tongues, what good will I be to you, unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or word of instruction? 7 Even in the case of lifeless things that make sounds, such as the pipe or harp, how will anyone know what tune is being played unless there is a distinction in the notes? 8 Again, if the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle? 9 So it is with you. Unless you speak intelligible words with your tongue, how will anyone know what you are saying? You will just be speaking into the air.*

In verse 6, Paul says that if I speak in tongues and I don't bring a message of importance from God, then what value is it. It is an important message from God if it is a message of "revelation or of knowledge or of prophecy or of teaching (NASB). He includes "lifeless things" like musical instruments. I enjoy listening to Deb play specials but they are most meaningful to me when I can identify the tune and either sing with her music in my mind or as Terry might tell you that I sing softly along her playing.

He uses another example of a musical instrument, the bugle. On the battlefield, it is used to give directions to an army above the fray. If bugler doesn't use distinct blasts of the bugle then no one will know what to do or where to go. The same thing applies to speaking in tongues. If no one can understand what you are saying then they won't know what the message from God is. There are churches today that say they are speaking in tongues. Years ago I had a conversation with someone who had been in attended one of these churches. He didn't want people to think that he didn't have the gift so he joined in with gibberish of his own. What benefit would there be for the Holy Spirit to give everyone in the church this gift?

Paul says in verse 9, that unless people know what you have said then you might as will be speaking to the air. God's message will be falling on deaf ears.

*10 Undoubtedly there are all sorts of languages in the world, yet none of them is without meaning. 11 If then I do not grasp the meaning of what someone is saying, I am a foreigner to the speaker, and the speaker is a foreigner to me. 12 So it is with you. Since you are eager for gifts of the Spirit, try to excel in those that build up the church.*

Consider the tower of Babel in Genesis 11:1–9. Man began to think that they could reach up to God if they built the tower so God destroyed the tower and "Lord confused the language of the whole world." To a small degree, the gift of speaking in tongues undoes what God did at that time.

If we do not speak the same language, then how can we understand each other? One of the first things that missionaries do is give the people of the foreign land copies of the Word of God in their own language. If they don't read the Word of God in their own language, how will they know what God is telling them?

In verse 11, Paul says that if we go into a church and don't understand what is being said then we feel like a foreigner or barbarian in a strange land. Paul uses the Greek word 'barbaros' and this word was used by the Greeks of any foreigner ignorant of the Greek language. It was translated barbarian because of the Persians who were known for their rudeness and brutality.

In verse 12, it sounds like we get to choose our gifts. Again, they are chosen for each of us by God and given to us by the Holy Spirit. When we use our gifts we should use them to do God's will and to build up or benefit the entire church.

Guzik says "The goal must be mutual benefit at church meetings. So, if there must be tongues, there must be interpretation, so there can be edification."

Read verse 28 in this chapter, it says that if someone is speaking in tongues and no one present understands what he/she is saying then they should be quiet.

*13 For this reason the one who speaks in a tongue should pray that they may interpret what they say. 14 For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. 15 So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my understanding; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my understanding. 16 Otherwise when you are praising God in the Spirit, how can someone else, who is now put in the position of an inquirer, say "Amen" to your thanksgiving, since they do not know what you are saying? 17 You are giving thanks well enough, but no one else is edified.*

In verses 13 and 14, Paul says that if you are given the gift of speaking in tongues by the Holy Spirit, then pray that God also blesses you with the ability to interpret what you are praying or saying. When you have the gift of tongues it is communication between your spirit and God. Your mind doesn't even know what you are saying.

If you can interpret then your mind will know what you are praying or saying and this would benefit your mind. I have never experienced anything like what Paul is describing. In verses 14 and 15, Paul says if you have the gift of speaking in tongues then you should pray for understanding that way you will be praising God with your spirit and your understanding. Verse 16 says that if you don't have understanding and no one else understands what you are saying then how can anyone hearing you say "Amen". Amen is a term that says, "I am in agreement."

Verse 17, Paul says when speaking in tongues you are praising God but no one else is edified by what you are saying. Again, this works fine at home but not in the church because no one in the church is lifted up or even understands your praise.

*18 I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. 19 But in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue.*

In verse 18, Paul says that he has the gift of tongues and it is more powerful than anyone else's ability to speak in tongues. Paul sums up speaking in tongues or even preaching in verse 19. It is not the quantity of what is said but it is the quality. Whether the sermon lasts 10 minutes or 2 hours, it comes down to what is being said and not the length of the sermon. I have read books by some theologians that sound like they are speaking in tongues but they are speaking in English. Sometimes you can move people to Christ by saying less. Paul says he would rather hear five intelligible words than 10,000 spoken in tongues.

*20 Brothers and sisters, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults. 21 In the Law it is written:*

*“With other tongues  
and through the lips of foreigners  
I will speak to this people,  
but even then they will not listen to me,  
says the Lord.”*

Paul says in verse 19 for the Corinthians to stop thinking like children. How do children behave (and often so do adults)? They are selfish. Even from birth they want attention.

The following verses tell us about the behavior of immature Christians. (NASB)

*Ephesians 4:14 – “As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;”*

*Hebrews 5:12, 13 – “For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. 13 For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant.”*

*1 Peter 2:2 – “like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation,”*

*Jeremiah 4:22 – “For My people are foolish, they know Me not; They are stupid children and have no understanding. They are shrewd to do evil, But to do good they do not know.”*

Jesus said that in order to get into heaven you must come to Him as children. Paul says the same thing when he says, regarding evil be like children. Paul says but when it comes to thinking, think like an adult. How does God’s Word say they should behave?

*Matthew 10:16 – “Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves.” (Jesus speaking.)*

*Romans 16:19 – “For the report of your obedience has reached to all; therefore I am rejoicing over you, but I want you to be wise in what is good and innocent in what is evil.”*

*1 Corinthians 13:11 – “When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me.”*

In verse 21, Paul quotes Isaiah 28:11-12. Guzik says about this verse: “In Isaiah 28, the prophet Isaiah is announcing judgment to the people of Israel. They did not receive the word of the prophets who spoke to them in Hebrew, so now they will hear the voice of men with other tongues and other lips. The Assyrian invaders spoke a language the Israelites could not understand, and it was an example of judgment to the Israelites. "And yet, for all that, they will not hear Me" says the Lord.”

*22 Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers; prophecy, however, is not for unbelievers but for believers. 23 So if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and inquirers or unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind? 24 But if an unbeliever or an inquirer comes in while everyone is prophesying, they are convicted of sin and are brought under judgment by all, 25 as the secrets of their hearts are laid bare. So they will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, “God is really among you!”*

In verse 22, Paul says that speaking in tongues is also for nonbelievers. Read Acts 2:4-11. On the day of Pentecost, the disciples were empowered by the Holy Spirit with the gift of tongues. Everyone heard what they were saying in their own language. No interpreters were necessary because they heard the message in their own tongues. It wasn’t a strange language that needed interpretation.

Speaking in tongues requires that the message be delivered in something other than the common language, in the case of the Corinthian church the common language would have been Greek. If

the message is delivered in another language then only those people that understand the other language would benefit. The chances are those that speak another language would be foreigners or most likely nonbelievers.

“In Isaiah 28, the strange tongues were not a blessing, but a curse. Paul is warning,” (Guzik)  
"Take heed that it be not the case now: that, by dwelling on the gift, ye forget the Giver; and what was designed for you as a blessing, may prove to you to be a curse ... God may curse your blessings." (Clarke)

What Paul says in verse 23 is common today for people that visit a church that speaks in tongues. With what is going on in the church, the visitors would believe that the church members had lost their minds.

I talked to a coworker that had visited such a church and he didn't want others to think that he wasn't a believer so he made up his own language and joined in. He never returned to the church and to this day considers it one of the strangest things that he has ever encountered.

In verses 24 and 25, Paul compares the previous picture of a church to one where all of the members of the church are prophesying. He says that the opposite might happen, the visitor would become convicted of his sin and think that God was moving in the church. Then the visitor might fall down and worship because God was present in the church.

*26 What then shall we say, brothers and sisters? When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the church may be built up. 27 If anyone speaks in a tongue, two—or at the most three—should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. 28 If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and to God.*

In these verses, Paul addresses the order of service or at least getting control of the order of service. Can you imagine a worship service today where it is made of what I would call popcorn style preaching or worship. When someone felt led to participate, they would just jump up and sing, preach, teach or testify. Paul believed in a worship service in which many participated. He didn't expect it to be what it has become today, passive. Today, we come to church to be taught, encouraged, preached at but not to participate. I referenced verse 28 before. If someone has something share through the gift of tongues, Paul says if there is no interpreter present then he/she should just sit down and use the gift at home. Again, the purpose of the worship service is to glorify God and to edify or build up the congregation. If what is being contributed through song or preaching does that then allow it.

*29 Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. 30 And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop. 31 For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged. 32 The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets. 33 For God is not a God of disorder but of peace—as in all the congregations of the Lord’s people.*

“Though Paul is far more positive about the use of the gift of prophecy in church meetings than the use of the gift of tongues, he still believes prophecy should be regulated. The gifts of the Spirit are never to be made the focus of congregational life. Worship and the Word are the focus, and the gifts flow under God's direction around the focus of worship and the Word.”

Paul says what Pastor Brian always says, “Judge for yourselves.” Make sure that the message that we hear is accurate according to the Word of God. Just because you trust the person speaking, prophet or preacher, make sure the speaker is preaching the Word of God.

“Prophecy in the early church resembled contemporary preaching in many ways. It was a message from God to his people, delivered in the language of the people. Prophecy benefited people in countless ways and was used in the service of love.”  
(Holman New Testament Commentary - 1 & 2 Corinthians).

In these verses, Paul is trying to get the Corinthians to get some order into their worship services. It sounds strange to us but their services seemed to be all over the map with chaos, people talking while others are talking. This type of service would make it about the people and not about God. Paul said in verse 32 that *“the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets.”* He is saying that God is still in control but God gives the prophecies so let those with the same gift decide who should speak. 1 John 4:1 says, *“Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”* Who better to judge what is being prophesied, than those with the gift of prophecy.

In verse 33, Paul says that there should be order in a worship service because God is not a god of chaos or disorder but a God of peace.

*34 Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. 35 If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.*

Now we hit a tough couple of verses. As you read these verses remember that Paul is speaking to a church in the first century. Women are slightly higher in status than slaves. As I said before, Paul is talking about the worship service and not salvation. He is trying to maintain order in the worship service. I can’t imagine what the service would have been like if you have



multiple people prophesying or preaching and then you add others interrupting and asking questions in the middle of the service.

Why did Paul single out wives? My take on this is that considering the status of women and the fact that women were not being educated the same way that men were at this time. Many people think that Paul was anti-women but I think God through Paul started the first women's movement. He told wives to not ask questions while her husband was speaking but to wait until they got home. Again, it would reduce the disorder in the worship service.

*36 Or did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached? 37 If anyone thinks they are a prophet or otherwise gifted by the Spirit, let them acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command. 38 But if anyone ignores this, they will themselves be ignored. 39 Therefore, my brothers and sisters, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. 40 But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.*

In verse 36, Paul is saying "Where did you learn of the Word of God. Did God teach you and then you passed it on to me?" Evidently, there are some in the Corinthian church that believe that they don't need Paul or that Paul is wrong about what he has been teaching them. Additionally in verse 36, Paul is saying that the Word of God didn't come to only the Corinthian Christians. It is for all. There have been men throughout the ages that controlled the reading of the Word of God so that they could control the interpretation. One way was by printing it in a different language, like Latin to prevent everyone from reading it.

In verse 37, Paul says to let those with the gift of prophecy verify that he is speaking the truth. Paul received his information from God so let those who also get their information from God confirm it. In verse 38, Paul is making it known that those that don't believe what Paul is writing should be ignored by them and will be ignored or not recognized by Paul.

In the final two verses of this chapter, Paul summarizes what he has said in this chapter. It is better to develop the gift of prophecy over the gift of tongues and the worship service should be orderly.