

## 1 Corinthians 14

### Verse 1:

--To sum up his movement from **12:31** to here, Paul basically encourages a more mature mindset: *The pursuit of love as the goal and the desire for spiritual gifts as a means*. Love does not need to be pursued at the expense of spiritual gifts, only in proper relation as the **more excellent way**.

### Verses 2-5:

--Having laid down the larger principles of unity and diversity in the body of Christ as well as the permanence and preeminence of love—Paul now gets to the practical aspects of their church services. No doubt these particular issues were a part of the questions in their letter to him.

--First Paul is going to show that prophecy is to be preferred over tongues in the public gathering for two reasons:

1) The speaker of tongues speaks to God but the prophet speaks to people (**2-3**).

2) Tongues edifies the individual but prophecy the church (**4-5**).

--Finally, **6-25** this is shown in numerous ways.

--**(2)** The gift of tongues is always seen as an expression of prayer or praise to God and not to men. There are no “tongues messages” to an individual or a church body.

--The Godward aspect of tongues is proven as Paul speaks about tongues in our present context: **15+18+28**; and also in every Biblical example that we see in Scripture: Pentecost: **the wonderful works of God (Acts 2:11)**; Cornelius’ house: **speak with tongues and magnify God (Acts 10:46)**; Ephesus: **they spoke with tongues (Acts 19:6)**.

--**(3)** Prophecy is used here in a wide of sense of speaking for the Lord. It is tough to make a strict definition as Paul uses three words here and then expands that further with four different descriptions in **6** (we also have numerous other examples all through the NT).

--**(4-5)** Paul’s main point is that love will look to edify others. And in the setting of the gathered church we should desire what would be most edifying for everyone present and not just ourselves.

--The gift of tongues has its place but that place is not in the gathering of the church because it cannot be understood unless there is an interpreter.

--Notice, Paul speaks of the gift as a good thing, but a good thing in perspective. He wishes they all spoke in tongues (not because they all could—this actually infers there were those that did not) in the same way he wishes they were all single in **7:7**. The idea being, to know the blessing of such a state.

### **Verses 6-12:**

--(6) Here the issues are twofold. Intelligibility and edification. Paul is saying, if I didn't come to you speaking things you could understand, what would I profit you? What if Paul came into the city of Corinth and only spoke in tongues?!

--(7-9) Here Paul puts forward a bunch a normal life examples to illustrate that sounds and languages must be understood to be helpful. Otherwise we are just *speaking into the air!* \*Sad history of the church in speaking God's truth in a way people couldn't understand in Latin, etc.\*

--(10-11) Here Paul is showing the problem is not that speaking in tongues is making random noises that have no meaning—only that speaking in an unknown language to God will be unintelligible to the those who don't know the language and therefore not edifying.

--(12) This brings us back to the practical considerations of **12:31-14:1**. The Corinthians were eager for *manifestation* but not *edification* which was the point of the Spirit's manifestation within the body—whatever the spiritual gift may be.

### **Verses 13-17:**

--(13) Notice, here Paul gives instruction to the tongues speaker in the gathering. Speak in tongues and then ask for—don't assume—interpretation. Why? Because otherwise no one else can be edified.

--That said, Paul, never downing tongues, says that he will personally do both! Pray and praise in tongues and with his understanding.

### **Verses 18-19:**

--The importance of these verses really cannot be overstated. This is such a unique revelation from this particular apostle.

--First, we don't ever see him receiving the gift of tongues. No mention when he received the Holy Spirit on the road to Damascus or was filled with Ananias' prayer (**Acts 9:6+17**).

--Second, this is his way of saying that there is virtually no reason why he would ever speak in tongues in the church gathering—without ruling out the possibility completely. Paul has the gift but we never see him using it publicly (and Paul constantly referred to his own life as an example for believers!).

--Third, we know that speaking in tongues was never Paul's focus. The teaching of the Word of God was as is seen throughout the entire book of Acts: (**2:42; 6:4, 7; 11:1; 12:24; 13:44; 15:35; 17:11; 19:20; 20:32; etc.**).

--Look at what was said of Paul and Barnabas in Iconium:

**\*Acts 14:3: Therefore they stayed there a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.\***

--The miraculous was given to witnesses to the truth of the Word of God.

### **Verses 20-25:**

--(20) Here again, Paul points to their overemphasis of spiritual gifts as a mark of their spiritual immaturity. It is a childish characteristic to hold worthless things as more valuable than they really are.

--Unfortunately, this mindset is still all over the church today! God knew we would need these chapters because 2000 years later there are many Corinthian type churches of real believers who are making the same mistakes.

--One thing important to note is that in just a few verses we are going to see that Paul can clearly conceive of a Spirit-filled gathering of believers without anyone speaking in tongues. He cannot conceive of one though without the reading and preaching of the clear and understandable Word of God. \*Many other churches today cannot! Sad for those who are made to feel immature because they do not have the particular "gift" that only God can give!\*

--(21-25) Now this section is confusing. I will give it my best shot.

--Paul quotes from the law—**Isaiah 28:11-12**—where the people of Israel did not heed to clear messages of the prophets and God promised then to send them the Assyrians who would speak a language they did not understand. And that foreign language would be a sign to them.

--Now, the confusion comes with the application. How does that work in the body of believers?

--I think, Paul is showing that the sign of foreign tongues did not cause obedience. It only showed God's hand to the people of Israel. In the same way, tongues are a sign to unbelievers of God's hand but still cannot cause obedience. On Pentecost the gift of tongues shocked the crowd—but they thought the disciples were drunk—it was Peter's sermon that brought them to an understanding of the truth.

--So too, if an unsaved person walks into a church service and hears everyone speaking in tongues today, it will be a sign, but he will say our God has made us crazy—like at Pentecost. But if they come in and hear the truth of God spoken in their language—like at Pentecost—they will be convicted and personally realize the Divine Presence in their own heart.

--Paul's point being that tongues are a sign (whether responded to positively or negatively) but signs do not cause obedience (as Jesus constantly made clear in His day). Prophecy though makes the truth of God real in a human heart and brings about obedience.

### **Verses 26-33:**

--(26) Here Paul is going to lay out some general rules for the gathering of believers. I find his touch clear yet restrained. You can tell that Paul wants to shepherd but not lord over them or create a specific church liturgy.

--He is going to lay down three general rules for the house of God in the rest of this chapter:

- 1) (26) ***Let all things be done for edification.***
- 2) (33) ***God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.***
- 3) (40) ***Let all things be done decently and in order.***

--I must also say here, there are many commentators that read this verse and make suggestions about how Paul never intended a church service where people sit down and listen to someone teach the Bible. Obviously, they say, he had something more lively in mind.

--In reply, I would say a couple of things. First, they are clearly ignoring the whole context of the passage and of this verse in particular. Paul is rebuking all the Corinthian activity as a childish manifestation of overemphasis and as something *not edifying*.

--In a few verses he is going to rebuke them for ignoring what takes place in every other fellowship and acting like they are the church that originated the very Word of God.

--We may not know exactly how the early church ran their gatherings but we do know there was much more to them than simply what is being addressed here. Paul is talking specifically about the use of spiritual gifts—not the rest of what happens which may have been going on the right way. Things such as prayer, praise, the reading of the word, teaching, communion, care of widows, etc. (**Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; 1 Tim. 4:13; 5:9-10; etc.**)

--To say something positive though; at least the Corinthians were willing participants in the service and that is a rebuke to our often cold, insecure, and self-conscious personal contributions.

--**(27-33)** Paul is careful to make it clear that only *one person* should be talking in the service. What is being said should be *heard*.

--Paul is also careful to make it clear that the work of the Holy Spirit is not out of control. Self-control is the fruit of the Holy Spirit and anything done out of control is not the fruit of the Spirit but the fruit of the flesh. God is not the Author of confusion or unrest. ***The spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.***

--Also, on the other side of the coin from the Corinthians, no one should ever fear being filled with the Holy Spirit because He will always work self-control and peace in a life. We don't have to fear being out of control or confused by a work of the Spirit in our lives.

#### **Verses 34-35:**

--Now these verses are confusing because if they are a total ban on all female speech they are in conflict with what Paul already wrote in **11:5-6** about women prophesying and praying.

--Paul is not giving a full ban on all speech. In fact, he basically already made a total ban on the interruptions of the service for *men and women* when he made it clear that only one person was to be talking at a time.

--Paul is assuming they already understand the other things he taught them. He does this in a similar manner when he speaks about obedience to government in **Romans 13** where he gives no excuse but assumes they will understand the limitations of the governmental obedience he is calling them to. Paul also was martyred while not obeying the government.

--This is also like Jesus' instruction on judging in: **Mt. 7:1 + Jn. 7:24**. This is not a contradiction. Jesus is saying there is a right and wrong way to judge.

--This command to women is a similar situation. There is a correct way for women to speak in the service and an incorrect way. So the question is: *If this isn't a total ban on women talking, what specific type of speech is Paul prohibiting?*

--The Greek word for **speaking** is *laleo* and is used over 300 times in the NT. It is common speech such as to: talk, chatter, question, argue, etc.

--Also, this is a ban **in the churches** where Paul has already exhorted them to willingly reflect the order that God established when He created men and women.

--Paul again references **the law** (which he just did in **21** with it being Isaiah) and is no doubt bringing again to mind Genesis and creation as he does in chapter **11** and **1 Timothy 2**.

--Paul even uses the same language of *shame* as he did in chapter **11** when he speaking about their lack of understanding when it came to the order of God in creation between men and women and how it would be shameful for a woman to just shave all her hair off and ignore God's distinctions.

--So this is a prohibition for women in the church to question, argue, or speak into the judgment or ordering of the church doctrine. They were freely meant to and gifted to participate in the meeting but they were not allowed to control or manipulate the meeting.

--It was the men, as the elders of the church, who were to judge the prophecies and order the speakers and shepherd the meetings. That role is always given to men who are gifted by the Holy Spirit as the elders of the church.

--The women were to reflect their submission to that God-ordained order by remaining silent as that happened in the church, and if they had questions, going home and speaking to their husband first if they had some issue or lack of understanding. \*I also think we probably don't understand how much of this Paul had to deal with on a normal basis! He was overturning so much of Jewish and Gentile culture!\*

### **Verses 36-38:**

--This is a very stern rebuke. Obviously, there were those in the church that felt they could do whatever they wanted in the gathering and totally ignore apostolic teaching for pseudo-spiritual experience.

--Speaking in tongues was not (and is not!) the needed proof of spiritual Christianity. Submission to apostolic teaching was and is still today.

**\*Acts 2:42: And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.\***

**\*1 John 4:6: We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.\***

--Paul leaves no doubt that the written Word of God was Jesus' commands. Teaching His commandments was what Christ sent them out to do in the Great Commission. The apostles knew that they were writing Scripture—as we see Peter admit he knows that Paul's writings are on par with the rest of Scripture.

**\*1 Peter 3:15-16: *And consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.*\***

--So ignore those that choose to be ignorant. Those that willingly choose ignorance will be ignored—by God and the church!

#### **Verses 39-40:**

--Those churches or organizations who put someone out of the church or fellowship or ministry because they speak in tongues are wrong! You cannot forbid. (Paul did not forbid but he did instruct.)

--There should be decency and order to the house of God *because* there is decency and order in the people of God by the Spirit of God.

--The Greek word for ***decently*** is only used two other times (**Rom. 13:13; 1 Thess. 4:12**) and is translated *properly*. The idea is that our services should reflect what is proper to our profession as Christians! Is that true of our prayer, praise, teaching, fellowship, and love of God and others?

--The Greek word for ***order*** is mostly used in relation to priestly orders such as in **Lk. 1:8** and the numerous references in Hebrews to Jesus as being after the order of Melchizedek. It reflects organization and arrangement.

--Paul would praise the Colossians believers for the order of their faith!

**\*Colossians 2:5: *For though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ.*\***

--So every representative house of God should reflect edification, peace not confusion, decency and order in all of their gathering.