

1st Corinthians Chapter 14

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Introduction:

Paul now continues his discussion of the spiritual gifts after digressing to the superiority and permanence of love. For the Corinthian church, love does not negate the spiritual gifts, but does help making decisions on which gifts should be used privately and which used in the public assembly.

PROPHESYING IS GREATER THAN SPEAKING IN TONGUES

(1) Let love be your highest goal! But you should also desire the special abilities the Spirit gives -- especially the ability to prophesy.

- The gift of **prophecy** was useful to the *assembled church* because they did not have the New Testament yet. It was still in the making. So **love** says they should be doing what is best for the *assembled church*.

(2) For if you have the ability to speak in tongues, you will be talking only to God, since people won't be able to understand you. You will be speaking by the power of the Spirit, but it will all be mysterious.

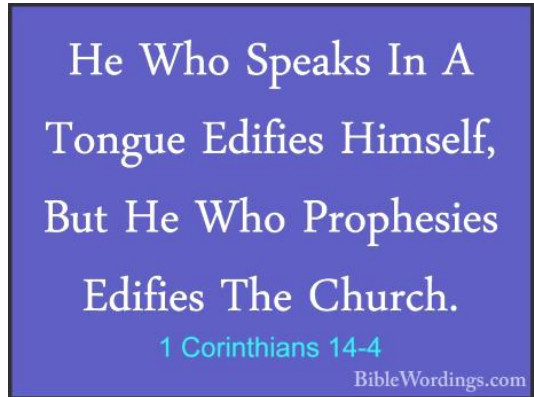
- The prized spiritual ability among the Corinthians was to **speak in tongues**. However, the listeners will not **understand**. It will be a mystery to the listeners. Only **God** gets it. For the **speaker**, it was an entirely subjective experience.

(3) But one who prophesies strengthens others, encourages them, and comforts them.

- The **prophets** were their inspired teachers. They taught God's will in the absence of the completed New Testament scriptures.

(4) A person who speaks in tongues is strengthened personally, but one who speaks a word of prophecy strengthens the entire church.

- The tongues **speaker** would be **personally** encouraged by his ability to **speak** in a foreign language, but the **entire church** was blessed by the **words** of the **prophet**.



(5) I wish you could all speak in tongues, but even more I wish you could all prophesy. For prophecy is greater than speaking in tongues, unless someone interprets what you are saying so that the whole church will be strengthened.

- **Speaking in tongues** was dramatic and encouraging to the person doing it, but **prophecy** is the gift that **strengthens** the entire assembly. Paul *was not down* on speaking in tongues for one person was **strengthened**, *but was up* on **prophecy** because all were **strengthened**.

PAUL REASONS THE INFERIORITY OF TONGUES

(6) Dear brothers and sisters, if I should come to you speaking in an unknown language, how would that help you? But if I bring you a revelation or some special knowledge or prophecy or teaching, that will be helpful.

- Paul illustrates his point by using himself as an example. Love should be doing what is **helpful** for the group.

(7) Even lifeless instruments like the flute or the harp must play the notes clearly, or no one will recognize the melody. (8) And if the bugler doesn't sound a clear call, how will the soldiers know they are being called to battle?

- For an **instrument** to benefit the listeners, it must make a **clear** sound and the **bugler** in the army must **sound** a definite **call** for the **army** to go to **battle**.
- Those who speak on behalf of God need to be definite in what they say. That person who is never sure, never convinced, never wanting to be counted should not lead God's people.

(9) It's the same for you. If you speak to people in words they don't understand, how will they know what you are saying? You might as well be talking into empty space.

- **Speaking** in a foreign language doesn't let us speak with our neighbors. It's like talking to **empty space**.

(10) There are many different languages in the world, and every language has meaning. (11) But if I don't understand a language, I will be a foreigner to someone who speaks it, and the one who speaks it will be a foreigner to me.

- By today's count, there are 7,117 **languages in the world**. The number was less in Paul's **world**. We use **foreigner** to describe someone of a **language** we don't understand.

(12) And the same is true for you. Since you are so eager to have the special abilities the Spirit gives, seek those that will strengthen the whole church.

- Paul instructs the believers at Corinth to seek gifts that **strengthen the whole church**.

THEIR GIFTS WERE CONNECTED WITH PRAYER

(13) So anyone who speaks in tongues should pray also for the ability to interpret what has been said.

- The tongues-speakers should **pray** for an added gift: the **ability to interpret** what they just **said**. This tells us that the **tongues**-speakers did not know what they were saying without an added **ability**.

(14) For if I pray in tongues, my spirit is praying, but I don't understand what I am saying.

- Paul is saying that his **spirit** is involved in **praying**, but his intellect doesn't comprehend.

(15) Well then, what shall I do? I will pray in the spirit, and I will also pray in words I understand. I will sing in the spirit, and I will also sing in words I understand.

- Paul deems it necessary for his **spirit** to **understand** what he is **praying** and **singing**.

(16) For if you praise God only in the spirit, how can those who don't understand you praise God along with you? How can they join you in giving thanks when they don't understand what you are saying?

- Paul speaks of a unity in group worship. Like a group dinner where there is sharing of food, so in worship, there is great encouragement in understanding how the other person **gives thanks**.

(17) You will be giving thanks very well, but it won't strengthen the people who hear you. (18) I thank God that I speak in tongues more than any of you.

- One aim of worshipping together is receiving spiritual **strength**, but that is missed if it is just a show-off period for a tongues **speaker**.

TONGUES AND THEIR CHURCH MEETING

(19) But in a church meeting I would rather speak five understandable words to help others than ten thousand words in an unknown language.

- Paul has the ability to **speak** in foreign **languages** but chooses to speak **five words** that can be **understood** than **ten thousand** that cannot be deciphered. His goal is to **help others**.

(20) Dear brothers and sisters, don't be childish in your understanding of these things. Be innocent as babies when

it comes to evil, but be mature in understanding matters of this kind.

- Some possibilities in life should be ignored, but this matter is one where **maturity** is required.

(21) It is written in the Scriptures: "I will speak to My own people through strange languages and through the lips of foreigners. But even then, they will not listen to Me," says the LORD.

- The quotation is drawn from Isaiah:

So now God will have to speak to His people through foreign oppressors who speak a strange language! God has told His people, "Here is a place of rest; let the weary rest here. This is a place of quiet rest." But they would not listen.

(Isaiah 28:11-12 NLT)

McGarvey draws these lessons:

1. It was no especial mark of divine favor to have teachers who spoke an unknown tongue.
2. Tongues were for unbelievers and prophecy for believers.
3. Tongues were a sign that God was teaching, but the teaching itself was better than the sign.
4. Tongues, unless understood, had never been profitable; i. e., had not produced conversion.

GOD'S PURPOSE FOR TONGUES SPEAKING

(22) So you see that speaking in tongues is a sign, not for believers, but for unbelievers. Prophecy, however, is for the benefit of believers, not unbelievers.

- To summarize: God's intended use of **tongues** is a **sign** for **unbelievers**. It was not a means of communication with them. By contrast, the gift of **prophecy** is for the **benefit of believers**.

(23) Even so, if unbelievers or people who don't understand these things come into your church meeting and hear everyone speaking in an unknown language, they will think you are crazy.

- **Speaking** in tongues at the **church** assembly will cause visitors to question your sanity. The early **churches** were not exclusively for believers. **Unbelievers** attended also.

(24) But if all of you are prophesying, and unbelievers or people who don't understand these things come into your meeting, they will be convicted of sin and judged by what you say. (25) As they listen, their secret thoughts will be exposed, and they will fall to their knees and worship God, declaring, "God is truly here among you."

- The gift of **prophesying** had the reverse effect. Casual listeners were **convicted of** their **sin**. They heard God's word and were convicted. Jesus had promised the Holy Spirit would do this:

And when He comes, He will convict the world of its sin, and of God's righteousness, and of the coming judgment. (John 16:8 NLT)

- In the church of our century, there is fear of **convicting** visitors of **sin**. The fear includes the fear they won't return. Sometimes leaders in the congregation will criticize the preacher for preaching against **sin**. That's what he *suppose* to be doing.

GOD'S INTENTION IN THE CHURCH MEETING

(26) Well, my brothers and sisters, let's summarize. When you meet together, one will sing, another will teach, another will tell some special revelation God has given, one will speak in tongues, and another will interpret what is said. But everything that is done must strengthen all of you.

- The church **meeting** is defined. The **meeting** was not a pre-planned production presented by one person. There

were no smoke machines but many saints participated. One will **sing**, one will **teach**, one will have a **special revelation** from **God** (remember there was no New Testament). Someone may **speak in tongues** and someone else will **interpret** what was just said.

(27) No more than two or three should speak in tongues. They must speak one at a time, and someone must interpret what they say.

- As in all generations, there were some participants who loved to be up in front and Paul curtailed this. **Two or three speaking in tongues** and being **interpreted**.

(28) But if no one is present who can interpret, they must be silent in your church meeting and speak in tongues to God privately.

- If there is no one to **interpret, speak in tongues** at home.

(29) Let two or three people prophesy, and let the others evaluate what is said. (30) But if someone is prophesying and another person receives a revelation from the Lord, the one who is speaking must stop.

- Again, Paul is laying down the rule that **prophets** can control their presentation. If another person receives a **revelation from the Lord**, the first **prophet** must be quiet.

(31) In this way, all who prophesy will have a turn to speak, one after the other, so that everyone will learn and be encouraged.

- A main purpose of the church assembly is for **everyone to learn** and be **encouraged**.

(32) Remember that people who prophesy are in control of their spirit and can take turns. (33) For God is not a God of disorder but of peace, as in all the meetings of God's holy people.

- There must have been some who would like to have dominated the group's attention and Paul warns against this when he says **"take turns."**
- **Paul Butler** applies these principles to church life today:

The church today, though not possessing miraculous gifts, will do well to learn a lesson from the fundamental principle Paul teaches here. The principle is decorum, orderliness.

Worship does not, in fact should not, have to be spontaneous, to be worship! Of course, worship must come from the heart. And, simply following a regimen of worship ceremonies does not insure that worship is being done. But neither does spontaneity! Paul is saying to these Corinthians (and to all Christians) that God is not pleased with any worship service that is disorderly and confusing. The worship of God must be intelligent, instructive, maturing, and orderly (according to a design, with regularity). If spontaneity must suffer, then let it suffer.

This is true of "youth sessions" as much, or more, than "adult sessions." How can Christians learn to "order" their lives if they are taught that the worship of God is some exercise in spontaneity, impulsiveness, and confusion?

THE ROLE OF WOMEN AT CHURCH

(34) Women should be silent during the church meetings. It is not proper for them to speak. They should be submissive, just as the law says.

- If an English-speaking Bible reader began reading here, he or she might come to the conclusion that Paul was forbidding **women** to **speak** in **church**. But that view ignores both the context of **speaking** in tongues and the definition of being **silent**.

- The *Amplified Bible* was translated by **Mrs. Francis Siewert**, (Litt. B., B.D.,M.A., Litt.D.) and she translated with the same idea so this is not a male thing.
- **Jack Cottrell**, noted for his holistic view of Scripture, responds to this concern:

But what about the teaching that women must “remain quiet” and “keep silent”? Does not Paul specifically say that “they are not permitted to speak”?

Here it is important to see that the Greek words in 1 Tim. 2:11-12 and in 1 Cor. 14:34 are different. In 1 Tim. 2:12 the word is “*hesuchia*,” which does NOT mean “be silent” (contrary to the NIV translation), but to have a quiet, submissive demeanor or attitude. This same word is used also in verse 11, “Let a woman QUIETLY [with a quiet spirit] receive instruction.” Thus this passage does not forbid women to speak in a church service.

But what about 1 Cor. 14:34? Here the Greek word for “keep silent” is “*sigao*,” which DOES mean literal silence; and the Greek word in the phrase “not permitted to speak” is “*laleo*,” which is the ordinary word for oral speaking or talking. However, the context of the verse shows that Paul is referring to a specific kind of speaking, namely, the public use of the miraculous spiritual gifts of speaking in tongues and prophesying.

In apostolic times women had such gifts and could use them outside the public assembly, (1 Cor. 11:5; compare v. 18), but not in the assembly or church service as such. That is the point of 1 Cor. 14:34; see 1 Cor. 14:26-33, where the word “*laleo*” is used three times for this special kind of speaking. (This prohibition would apply, of course, only as long as the special gifts existed in the church.)

- One more item: “**submissive just as the law says.**” The **law** may have included the entire Old Testament and we can look at God’s instructions to Eve:

Then He said to the woman, "I will sharpen the pain of your pregnancy, and in pain you will give birth. And you will desire to control your husband, but he will rule over you." (Genesis 3:16 NLT)

Eve was to be submissive in authority to Adam and women in general are to be submissive in authority to men in general.

(35) If they have any questions, they should ask their husbands at home, for it is improper for women to speak in church meetings.

- Women were not to take control of the public assembly by **asking** questions or **speaking** in tongues. In the assembly, they were not to be teachers of the Scriptures but that does not include small meetings where they may contribute along with the rest. In the private meeting with Apollos in Acts, Priscilla is mentioned before her husband Aquila which causes some to believe that she was actually the leader of the meeting.

When Priscilla and Aquila heard him preaching boldly in the synagogue, they took him aside and explained the way of God even more accurately.
(Acts 18:26 NLT)

(36) Or do you think God's word originated with you Corinthians? Are you the only ones to whom it was given?

- Some at Corinth might want to dispute Paul’s conclusion but he cites **God’s word** as his authority. They didn’t write it and they weren’t the only people to receive it.

(37) If you claim to be a prophet or think you are spiritual, you should recognize that what I am saying is a command

from the Lord Himself. (38) But if you do not recognize this, you yourself will not be recognized.

- Paul is suggesting that someone at Corinth may claim to be **a prophet** and say that Paul is wrong. He affirms his authority as coming directly from the **Lord Himself**. If a **prophet** makes such a claim, then ignore him.

(39) So, my dear brothers and sisters, be eager to prophesy, and don't forbid speaking in tongues. (40) But be sure that everything is done properly and in order.

- Paul repeats his earlier comments about the public assembly and includes the requirement that everything be **done properly and in order**.



Next, we move to the theme of the resurrection.

MIRACLES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT BOOKS

Arranged by Charles Dailey

Book	Date	Miracles?	Comments
Galatians	49	No	Two miracles are mentioned as past. 1:15,16; 2:2.
Matthew	50	No	Only as past events during Jesus' Ministry.
1 Thess.	51	Yes	<i>Past</i> , as in 1:5. <i>Present</i> as in 5:20
2 Thess.	51	No	But Satan's representatives will work miracles. 2:9-10.
1 Cor.	54	Yes	They were current in this church. 1 Corinthians 1:5,6; 12:7,29,30; 14:26
2 Cor.	55	No	But 1 Corinthians shows that they had them. Also 12:2 and 12 speak of past ones.
Romans	56	Yes	Several of the gifts listed in 12:3-6 are miraculous and <i>current</i> . <i>Past</i> : 15:18-19.
Luke	59	No	But Luke carefully details Jesus' miracles of 30 years before.
Colossians	60	No	
Ephesians	60	No	In 3:3 and 4:6 Paul speaks of past miracles.
Philemon	60	No	
Philippians	61	No	Notice that Epaphroditus was sick and was not healed by a miracle. 2:25-27.
Acts	61	No	Luke told of those that had happened during events in Acts.
1 Peter	62	No	
1 Timothy	64	No	The gift of 1 Timothy 4:14 was probably the gift of the evangelistic office. Eph. 4:7 - 12.
Titus	65	No	
2 Peter	66	No	
2 Timothy	67	No	1:6 probably refers to Ephesians 4:7 + 12; 4:20 reveals another sick preacher.
Mark	68	No	16:19-20 speaks of the confirming miracles as past.
Hebrews	69	No	2:3-4 speaks of the miracles as past.
Jude	75	No	
John	85	No	But John carefully details Jesus' miracles of 55 years before.
1 John	85	No	The anointing of 2:20 is received by each believer. Compare Acts 2:38.
2 & 3 John	90	No	
Revelation	96	No	

Three books show active miracles.

None are recorded as happening after A. D. 56