

Week 11: The Cure Applied to the Worship Gathering - 1 Cor 14:2-40

Pre-Work

- The use of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the setting of the Corinthian church gathering takes center stage in 1 Corinthians 14. To prepare you for Paul's guidance on this matter, please read this short essay on the topic by renowned New Testament scholar Craig Keener

"The Corinthian church was like much of the American church today: socially stratified, individualistic, and divisive. Although Paul commends them for their pursuit of spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 1:5, 7), he reproves them for a deficiency far more serious: they lack love, the principle that should guide which gifts they seek (1 Cor. 12-14; 1:10).

Spiritual gifts are for building up the body (1 Cor. 12), and love must coordinate our expression of spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 13). Thus prophecy, a gift that builds up others, is more useful publicly than uninterpreted tongues (1 Cor. 14). Gifts, including prophecy, are no guarantee of spiritual commitment, and one may prophesy falsely or even submit to the Spirit's inspiration without being committed to Christ (Matt. 7:21-23; 1 Sam. 19:20-24).

Paul reminds his friends in Corinth that they experienced ecstatic inspiration in Greek religion before their conversion, and points out that the message of Christ, rather than inspiration in general, is what matters (1 Cor. 12:1-3). Communicating the content of God's message, rather than how ecstatically one speaks it, is the important thing. This principle applies not only to tongues-speakers and prophets, but to well meaning preachers who mistake enthusiasm for anointing while delivering empty speeches devoid of sound scriptural teaching.

Paul then reminds his hearers that all the gifts come from the same Spirit (1 Cor. 12:4-11) and that the gifts are interdependent (12:12-26). Paul ranks the leading gifts (apostles, prophets, and teachers) and then lists other gifts without ranking their importance or authority (12:27-30). Paul urges this church to be zealous for the "best" gifts (that is, those that will best build up the church; 12:31), especially prophecy (14:1). Thus it is appropriate to seek spiritual gifts, but we choose which gifts to seek by

determining which gifts will help the body of Christ most. That is, we let love guide our choice (1 Cor. 13).

Paul covers this point in some detail. Even if we had all spiritual gifts in their ultimate intensity, we would be nothing without love (13:1-3). The gifts will ultimately pass away, but love is eternal (13:8-13). While noting the priority of love over spiritual gifts, Paul describes the characteristics of love (13:4- 8a). Many of the characteristics he lists (for instance, not being boastful) are precisely the opposite of characteristics he earlier attributed to his readers (see 5:2; 8:1). Thus while the Corinthian Christians were strong in Spirit-led gifts, they were weak in Spirit-led character. For this reason, Paul needed to emphasize the importance of the gift of prophecy, which edifies the whole church, over uninterpreted tongues, which edifies only the speaker (1 Cor. 14). Although Paul focused on what would serve the church as a whole, he was careful not to portray tongues negatively (14:4, 14-19, 39). He exercised this caution even though he could not have known that some later Christians, contrary to 1 Corinthians 14:39, would despise the gift.

The relevance of Paul's words to the Corinthian churches raises the question of whether Paul would have applied the same argument to all churches in his day. As many Pentecostals and charismatics note, some of his specific restrictions on gifts may have applied to the excessive situation in Corinth rather than to all churches. If, as is likely, most Corinthian house-churches seated only forty members, I suspect that the dynamics of spiritual gifts would apply differently there than in a congregation of two thousand members, where more limits would be necessary, or in a prayer meeting of five members, where fewer would be necessary.

Likewise, in churches today where spiritual gifts are suspect, prophecy would edify the church no more than tongues would, because even the purest prophecy, approved by other trustworthy prophets, would only introduce division.

Some charismatics insist that the public function of all the gifts, including tongues and prophecy, is so important that we should pursue them (1 Cor. 12:31; 14:1) even if it splits a church. Other charismatics, however, recognize that this view misses Paul's whole point. The purpose of the gifts is to make the body of Christ stronger, and if public use of gifts would divide a non charismatic congregation, charismatic members should honor the unity of the body first and foremost. This is not to say that they should not work through appropriate channels to bring the congregation to greater biblical maturity in the matter of spiritual gifts.

But while gifts are very important and biblical, they are not the most important issue in the body of Christ. The greatest sign of maturity is love.”

(Adapted from *Three Crucial Questions About the Holy Spirit*, published by Baker Books.)

Source: <https://craigkeener.com/the-purpose-of-spiritual-gifts-1-corinthians-12-14/>

- Please Read 1 Corinthians 14 in the translation of your choice. What statements stand out to you as unusual or disturbing?

Class Notes

1 Cor 1:11

11 For I have been informed concerning you, my brothers *and sisters*, by Chloe's *people*, that there are quarrels among you.

- Chloe, a woman Paul trusts, has sent people to Paul to inform him of the divisiveness among the church at Corinth.
- They are at odds with each other

1 Cor 3:1-3

3 And I, brothers *and sisters*, could not speak to you as spiritual people, but *only* as fleshly, as to infants in Christ. **2** I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able *to consume it*. But even now you are not yet able, **3** for you are still fleshly.

- The Corinthian believers consider themselves extremely spiritual
- The divisiveness rooted in status culture meant Paul can only give them milk, not solid food...they are not yet able to think for themselves, which is why he has to give them all this situation-specific guidance

1 Cor 8:1b

Knowledge makes *one* conceited, but love edifies *people*.

- This is the principle by which the believers at Corinth *ought* to order their fellowship and how they approach freedom, rights, mission, and responsibility.

1 Cor 11:33-34

33 So then, my brothers *and sisters*, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. **34** If anyone is hungry, have him eat at home, so that you do not come together for judgment.

- Rule of thumb: put other people first, especially in the Lord's Supper, but always. To fail at this is to fail to discern the Lord's Body and increase the risk of sickness and death.

1 Cor 13:11-13

11 When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. **12** For now we see in a mirror

dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully, just as I also have been fully known. **13** But now faith, hope, *and* love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

- A mature faith in Jesus operates in faith, hope, and love. These will continue in the age to come, even when the dramatic spiritual gifts do not.

Chapter 14

1 Pursue love, yet earnestly desire spiritual *gifts*, but especially that you may prophesy.

- The Corinthians should desire all the spiritual gifts, not just tongues, which they seem to set above all the others. If they are to set any of them above the others, it is prophecy.
- What was prophecy?
- Who was permitted to prophesy? (1Cor 11:4-5)

2 For the one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to people, but to God; for no one understands, but in *his* spirit he speaks mysteries. **3** But the one who prophesies speaks to people *for* edification, exhortation, and consolation. **4** The one who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; but the one who prophesies edifies the church.

- **The Tongues to which Paul refers:**
 - Speaks to God, not people (think prayer language, not the event of Acts 2)
 - Incomprehensible to people (not the tongues of Acts 2)
 - Speaks “spiritual mysteries” (Acts 2 was praise)
 - For self-edification (Acts 2 was a reversal of the scattering of humans)

5 Now I wish that you all spoke in tongues, but rather that you would prophesy; and greater is the one who prophesies than the one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may receive edification.

- Prophecy (spontaneous exhortation/prediction/encouragement) edifies all, while this kind of tongues edifies the individual

6 But now, brothers *and* sisters, if I come to you speaking in tongues, how will I benefit you unless I speak to you either by way of revelation, or of knowledge, or of prophecy, or of teaching? **7** Yet *even* lifeless *instruments*, whether flute or harp, in producing a sound, if they do not produce a distinction in the tones, how will it be known what is played on the flute or on the harp? **8** For if the trumpet produces an indistinct sound,

who will prepare himself for battle? **9** So you too, unless you produce intelligible speech by the tongue, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will *just* be talking to the air.

- Musical instruments as a metaphor: If the notes are random (pre-concert), what is the tune to remember?
- Battle trumpet as metaphor: If the battle trumpet plays no known sequence, what good is it?
- The personal “prayer language” shown off in the gathering is talking to the air.

10 There are, perhaps, a great many kinds of languages in the world, and none is incapable of meaning. **11** So if I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be unintelligible to the one who speaks, and the one who speaks will be unintelligible to me. **12** So you too, since you are eager to possess spiritual *gifts*, strive to excel for the edification of the church.

- Human language as metaphor: just like a human language needs to be intelligible to be useful, so with the language we use in the gathering of believers.
- The best spiritual gift is to put others first, not to show off how spiritual I am.

13 Therefore, one who speaks in a tongue is to pray that he may interpret. **14** For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unproductive. **15** What is *the outcome* then? I will pray with the spirit, but I will pray with the mind also; I will sing with the spirit, but I will sing with the mind also. **16** For otherwise, if you bless *God* in the spirit *only*, how will the one who occupies the place of the outsider *know* to say the “Amen” at your giving of thanks, since he does not understand what you are saying? **17** For you are giving thanks well *enough*, but the other person is not edified. **18** I thank God, I speak in tongues more than you all; **19** nevertheless, in church I prefer to speak five words with my mind so that I may instruct others also, rather than ten thousand words in a tongue.

- If you speak in a tongue in the gathering, pray for the ability to interpret. Otherwise, you only edify self and not others, including the stranger.
- Paul speaks in these kinds of tongues “more than you all” but uses normal language in the gathering.

20 Brothers *and sisters*, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking be mature.

- In terms of innocence, be children, but regarding wisdom, be mature. “Knowledge” puffs up (this is childish); love edifies (this is mature)

21 In the Law it is written: “BY MEN OF STRANGE TONGUES AND BY THE LIPS OF STRANGERS I WILL SPEAK TO THIS PEOPLE, AND EVEN SO THEY WILL NOT LISTEN TO ME,” says the Lord. **22** So then, tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophecy is not for unbelievers, but for those who believe. **23** Therefore if the whole church gathers together and all *the people* speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are insane?

- “Tongues a sign to unbelievers” - a negative sign; a sign that the people in the church seem insane.

24 But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all; **25** the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so he will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you.

- Spiritual speech /prophecy in a known language or an interpreted tongue can be impactful because the unbeliever can comprehend it.

26 What is *the outcome* then, brothers *and sisters*? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. All things are to be done for edification.

- Up to 40 people in a home (typical fellowship in Corinth); both men and women participate *for the purpose of edifying others*
- However, if everyone has something, it can get out of hand, even in the very small Corinthian fellowship, so they need some “milk rules”

27 If anyone speaks in a tongue, *it must be* by two or at the most three, and *each one* in turn, and one is to interpret; **28** but if there is no interpreter, he is to keep silent in church; and have him speak to himself and to God.

- If you are going to have tongues operating in the gathering, do it in an orderly fashion with interpretations; otherwise keep silent. Why keep silent? Because it is considerate of others

29 Have two or three prophets speak, and have the others pass judgment. **30** But if a revelation is made to another who is seated, then the first one is to keep silent.

- If there are prophecies, do it in an orderly fashion and let others decide if it is true; if someone else begins, let the first one keep silent in consideration of others.

31 For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted; **32** and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets; **33** for God is not *a God* of confusion, but of peace.

- Everyone can participate but not for self - for others, and yes, you can control the gift.
- “Clanging cymbal” confusion vs divine peace/wholeness.

As in all the churches of the saints, **34** the women are to keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but are to subject themselves, just as the Law also says. **35** If they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church. **36** Or was it from you that the word of God *first* went out? Or has it come to you only?

- A quote from the Corinthians, an interpolation?
- “Women speaking to each other” when all the tongues and prophesying is going on, asking husbands when formal Greek language spiritual instruction is being given
- “Improper”/inappropriate - just as in the other instances, everyone talking at once, in this case women, is not considerate. Just as the tongue speakers or prophets, the women who were talking during the gathering should keep silent in consideration of others.

37 If anyone thinks that he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord’s commandment. **38** But if anyone does not recognize *this*, he is not recognized.

- Everyone wants to talk to promote their spiritual rights: some want to loudly burst out in tongues, some want to shout prophecies over others, some women want to chat during all the confusion or ask for clarification. Everyone wants to be recognized; but true recognition is in being considerate of others.

39 Therefore, my brothers *and sisters*, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. **40** But all things must be done properly and in an orderly way.

- To be clear, Paul does not forbid tongue speaking; he is asking for order and love. Sometimes the best way to edify others is through silence.

"Paul had just affirmed that the Corinthians were getting drunk at the Lord's Supper and that the prophets and tongues speakers were all talking at once! It seems that some of the women gave up and started chatting. Who could blame them? Yet all needed to work together to create the required "decency and order" necessary for meaningful worship. The women are consequently called on to "be subordinated," but to whom? Clearly Paul means "be subordinated to the worship leadership," and the reader knows that the leadership includes men and women prophets. Also relevant is the fact that 14:26-36 lists three groups of people who were disturbing worship. These are: 1. The (male and female) prophets are told: Don't all talk at once. Be silent in church. 2. The (male and female) speakers in tongues are told: If there is no interpreter, be silent in church. 3. Married women with Christian husbands (who attend) are told: Don't ask questions during the worship and don't chat. Ask your husbands at home and be silent in church. Each of these groups is told to be silent when it disturbs worship. Paul is not telling the female prophets discussed in chapter 11 to stop prophesying!" ~Kenneth E. Bailey, *Paul through Mediterranean Eyes*

Reflections