

1 Corinthians 14:20-40 – “Order in The Church!”

There's one thing that Paul drives home as we finish up this chapter, and that is that God does all things decently and orderly. The Church in Corinth was having a heyday with the gifts of the Spirit, but it wasn't genuine. The motives were off, the focus was missing the mark. And so Paul brings further correction and direction regarding the gifts; and primarily the gifts that were most abused – speaking in tongues and prophecy.

1. A Sign To Unbelievers – 14:20-25

14:20 - *Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature.*

The idea here is that the believers in Corinth should be understanding toward the things that Paul is addressing. They've been acting somewhat childish in the use of the gifts (like a child that sees another child playing with a toy and then quickly wants that same toy regardless of what they already have in front of them).

These believers were grabbing a hold of gifts for their own pleasure and purposes.

Paul does say, it's good to be babes (be innocent) in areas of evil and malice, but when it comes to the gifts and the way the church and body is to function, then they should be mature. Be strong in understanding.

And we're going to need a lot of strength to understand these next verses, because we move into some of the more difficult passages in this book, if not the New Testament.

14:21-22 - *In the law it is written: “With men of other tongues and other lips I will speak to this people; And yet, for all that, they will not hear Me,” says the Lord. ²² Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophesying is not for unbelievers but for those who believe.*

Paul quotes loosely from **Isaiah 28:11–12**, *"For with stammering lips and another tongue He will speak to this people, ¹² To whom He said, “This is the rest with which You may cause the weary to rest,” And, “This is the refreshing”; Yet they would not hear."*

Now what's the purpose for quoting this passage here?

This passage in Isaiah was being spoken in judgment against Israel. If they were not going to listen to the Word of the Lord, then God would send a foreign nation against them in judgment. When Israel began to hear foreign tongues being spoken in their streets, then they would know judgment has come. This happened when the Assyrians invaded Israel.

Paul then links this account to say that **tongues** [then] **are for a sign, not to those who believe, but to unbelievers**.

And if you apply the purpose in Isaiah, then Paul would be meaning that tongues are a sign of judgment to unbelievers. In other words, it reveals they have not accepted or understood the things of God.

Now even back at Pentecost (Acts 2) when the Spirit was poured out and people began to speak in tongues, the foreigners visiting Jerusalem all heard them speaking in their own native tongue. But remember their response:

- **Acts 2:12–16**, *"So they were all amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'Whatever could this mean?'"* ¹³ *Others mocking said, 'They are full of new wine.'* ¹⁴ *But Peter, standing up with the eleven, raised his voice and said to them, 'Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and heed my words.'* ¹⁵ *For these are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day.'* ¹⁶ *But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:"*

Now Joel 2 wasn't fulfilled completely at Pentecost. It mentions things that will happen and will happen at a later time. It was partially fulfilled at Pentecost but will be completely fulfilled when Christ comes again.

So if Joel 2 isn't speaking of Pentecost, why does Peter quote Joel 2 to explain the moment of Pentecost?

Peter's using Joel 2 to prove that when God pours out His Spirit on men, miraculous things should be expected.

- Speaking in tongues, prophesying and the like are evidence that the Spirit of God is moving among His people.

It's thus a sign to unbelievers that God is at work. But if their hearts remain hard to the work of God, it becomes a sign unto judgment.

And notice, it wasn't the tongues that saved people at Pentecost initially, it was the message that followed. They kind of mocked the tongues at first and

wondered if they were drunk! It took the sharing of God's Word in a language most there understood to make sense of it all. That's what Paul has been highlighting here in 1 Corinthians 14. We need to focus on the understanding, so that all can benefit from what is said and done!

Nevertheless, tongues are a sign for unbelievers that something miraculous is taking place, it's an indication of God's presence to unbelievers. However, too much emphasis on tongues may have an adverse effect on unbelievers. Let's read on...

14:23-25 - *Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those who are uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say that you are out of your mind? ²⁴ But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all. ²⁵ And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you.*

If an unbeliever comes into a church gathering and everyone is speaking in tongues, what do you think their first impressions are going to be? ***You are out of your mind!***

- I remember as a young person thinking, if I invite a friend to church and they hear someone speaking in tongues, how am I going to explain that to this person? They're going to think they've come into a cult or something?

Prophecy on the other hand is going to offer something understandable, it speaks forth God's Word and reveals truth. Again, prophecy is primarily for the believer (vs. 22b). It was the teaching tool of this day.

But even if an unbeliever is there, they're going to hear what's being said and have an opportunity to respond to the truth being spoken. When truth is understood and comprehensible, here's what can happen:

1. They'll be ***convinced***. This word means to convict. They begin to see their flaws and shortcoming.
2. They'll be ***convicted***. This speaks of judging or being examined. It's like when a person is questioned by a judge in a court of law.
3. They'll be *exposed*. When you're hit with the truth of God's Word there's nowhere to hide. It's like that mirror that is held up where you suddenly see you as you really are.

4. They'll be *humbled and worship*. Once you've seen yourself truly and seen God, the only action is to bow down in honor of Him.
5. They'll **report**. When the gifts are operating rightly, and the Word is going forth prophetically, unbelievers begin to see that God is at work. They can't deny that.

I've had people come to me after a message and say, *that word was exactly for me. I haven't told anyone about this situation, but you spoke right into it as though you knew everything going on.* Many pastors have had that experience, and that's not because we have your phone bugged. That's because the Holy Spirit is speaking through the Word, and we hope the gift of prophecy takes place and speaks into unbelievers and believers alike.

And this leaves people with the conclusion: **God is truly among you.**

Romans 10:17, "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

2.A Word To Believers – 14:26-33

14:26-28 - *How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. ²⁷ If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be two or at the most three, each in turn, and let one interpret. ²⁸ But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God.*

The gathering in this Corinthian Church must have been quite a sight to behold. Who needs local theatre when you've got this much entertainment happening. Paul's rebuke of them is based on everyone acting selfishly, rather than for the good of the body as a whole.

People were all wanting to be heard, but they weren't doing it from a heart to serve. Paul reminds them that all things should be done **for edification**; meaning that the church would be built up and strengthened and grow to maturity.

So Paul gives some needed regulations on the operation of the gifts, and especially tongues, as again it seemed this was the gift causing the most difficulties in the church.

Every person speaking in a tongue must do so in turn. Don't cut someone off while they're speaking. And there's no need to have more than three people speak out in tongues. If there's no interpretation of the tongues, then there's to be no more speaking out in tongues. Paul makes this very clear!

14:29-33 - *Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge. ³⁰ But if anything is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent. ³¹ For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged. ³² And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. ³³ For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.*

In the same way, prophecy was to be regulated too. At the most three were to speak out with this gift, and each in turn.

And this word is to be judged by others to see if it is accurate and of the Lord.

Perhaps the gift of discernment would be used here.

- This again contradicts what we see often with the modern prophet movement of today. Where people claim to be a prophet and in so doing claim authority in what they say to where it's not to be questioned.
- I don't agree that there are those that hold the office of prophet today. Certainly there can be those that operate in the gift of prophecy, but again, it must be tested. It will never contradict God's Word.

If one person received a word from the Lord to share while another was speaking, that person that's already had the floor must stop and give way for this new word.

...***the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.*** If a person received a word from the Lord (or tongues for that matter) they did not have to just start yelling it out as though they had no control. We see here in the Word that these things are subject to the prophets. They are to exercise self-control.

The Spirit does not put His subjects into some trance like state or cause you to lose control. We are in full control of our faculties, but we yield to the moving of the Spirit.

If you're a part of a church service where these things are being violated, then you know it's not of the Lord, because ***God is not the author of confusion but of peace***... All things are to be done orderly.

3.A Word To Leaders – 14:34-40

14:34-35 - *Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. ³⁵*

And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church.

First reading of this you might begin to question that Paul is being misogynistic, or that the Bible is very anti-women. None of this true.

We must take these verses in context of what we've been looking at. The context is all about using the gifts in the body of Christ, during the assembly, and the gifts being highlighted are these speaking gifts or teaching gifts.

- Remember Paul wrote in **1 Timothy 2:12–13**, *"And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. ¹³ For Adam was formed first, then Eve."*
- Again, this is not an issue of superiority or ability, but just simply God's ordained order. Which Paul takes us right back to creation to show this has been God's design from the beginning.
- In the body of Christ, there is equality among the sexes – we are all one in Christ. But God has established His order and has called the man to be the head.

What's interesting is that in 1 Corinthians 11:5 Paul did give allowance for women to prophesy.

- **1 Corinthians 11:5**, *"But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, for that is one and the same as if her head were shaved."*

So what's right here? When you put these Scriptures together, we see that women were permitted to operate in these gifts, but when it came to the public gathering of the church, women must refrain from taking an authoritative position in the church.

Remember in vs. 29 the church was to judge what was spoken by the prophets. Women were not permitted it would seem to engage in the judgment of what was said by others because to do so would be taking a position of authority. So they were to stay silent.

Some believe that the women in the church at this time were creating a lot of ruckus. It was customary in the Jewish synagogue to have women sit on one side and men on the other side. Even today the Western wall in Jerusalem is divided with a women's section and a men's section.

So it's believed that in this setting the women would be calling out to their husbands to get clarification or understanding on what was said.

This makes sense with what Paul says, ***let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church.*** It was shameful only because it was keeping things from being done decently and in order. This is Paul's whole theme in this chapter.

Husbands, don't think you've got it so good now.

- "Paul said that since the wives are called to respect our authority, we in turn need to be ready to answer their questions. In other words, men are expected to be the teachers in their homes.

Husbands, if you desire a godly wife who respects your authority, then you had better give her something to respect.

We need to know our Bible, for that's our obligation." ¹

If anyone has any problem or dispute with Paul over these directions, he says:

14:36-38 - *Or did the word of God come originally from you? Or was it you only that it reached?* ³⁷ *If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord.* ³⁸ *But if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant.*

Were those in Corinth the originators of the Word of God? Paul asks this sarcastically as the Corinthians thought they could establish their own rules in the matter of spiritual things. Paul lets them know there is only one thing that is to guide us and regulate us regarding the operation of the gifts and the order in the church – the Word of God.

And these aren't just Paul's views that come across in the Word, this is the very ***commandments of the Lord***. It is to be trusted and followed.

14:39-40 - *Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues.* ⁴⁰ *Let all things be done decently and in order.*

Again, Paul does not ever attempt to discredit or suppress prophecy and tongues, but only to regulate them so that they operate in the right way. When these things are functioning properly and biblically it will be done in order and done to build up and strengthen the church. It won't look weird, but it will reflect Jesus and glorify Jesus. That's the purpose of the Holy Spirit, and so the gifts of the Holy Spirit will always point others to Jesus.

¹ <https://versebyverseministry.org/lessons/1corinthians-2013-lesson-14d>

During the French Revolution, there were three Christians who were sentenced to die by the guillotine. One Christian had the gift of faith, the other had the gift of prophecy, the other had the gift of helps.

The Christian with the gift of faith was to be executed first. He was asked if he wanted to wear a hood over his head. He declined and said he was not afraid to die. "I have faith that God will deliver me!" he shouted bravely. His head was positioned under the guillotine, with his neck on the chopping block. He looked up at the sharp blade, said a short prayer and waited confidently. The rope was pulled, but nothing happened.

His executioners were amazed and, believing that this must have been an act of God, they freed the man.

The Christian with the gift of prophecy was next. His head was positioned under the guillotine blade and he too was asked if he wanted the hood.

"No," he said, "I am not afraid to die. However, I predict that God will deliver me from this guillotine!" At that, the rope was pulled and again, nothing happened.

Once, again the puzzled executioners assumed this must be a miracle of God, and they freed the man. The third Christian, with the gift of helps, was next. He was brought to the guillotine and likewise asked if he wanted to wear a hood.

"No," he said, "I'm just as brave as those other two guys." The executioners then positioned him face up under the guillotine and were about to pull the rope when the man stopped them. "Hey wait a minute," he said. "I think I just found the problem with your guillotine."

Illustrations/Examples of Tongues:

"Jon Courson, was at the Lake Arrowhead Hilton for a Christian gathering in their conference room. Hotel rules dictated that the bar in the back of the room stayed open whenever it was in use. So here's this bartender standing in the back of the conference room polishing the glasses while Bible study, prayer, and worship went on.

Near the end of the meeting, a guy stood up and spoke in tongues. They all waited silently for the interpretation. When none was spoken, the guy leading the meeting said, "We thank the Lord for that utterance, but since there is not interpretation owing here tonight, that will be our only public utterance of tongues."

As soon as the meeting was over, the bartender walked up weeping — tears owing down his face. He said, "I must talk to that man who stood up and prayed.

How does he know my tongue? I'm Iranian, and he worshiped the True and Living God in perfect Farsi!" That night the bartender gave his heart to Jesus Christ. You can see that tongues are still a sign to unbelievers.

One more example: early in the days of Calvary Chapel, Pastor Chuck Smith was overseeing the praise and worship time of the church service. A woman in the congregation began to praise the Lord in tongues. Chuck recognized it as French from the little that he could understand, but couldn't give an interpretation. His wife Kay, who does not speak French at all, gave the interpretation — a beautiful statement of praise to God — the woman had been thanking God for her new life in Christ. After the service, a woman who was an unbeliever, but who had come to receive counseling, said, "Before we get to my problems, explain to me what was happening here tonight. Why did the one lady speak to God in French, and the other lady translate to the group what she said?" Chuck explained to her that it had been a manifestation of the gift of tongues, that neither of those women spoke a word of French. The woman said, "I lived in France for six years, and that woman was not only speaking it fluently, but with the aristocratic, upper class accent. And the translation was perfect!" That woman, too, received Jesus Christ as her personal Lord and Savior that Sunday night.”²

² <https://rondaniel.com/library/46-1Corinthians/Tongues.php>