

# Transcription of 24ID3735

## 1 Corinthians 14 - Order in the Church

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All right. Let's open our Bibles tonight to 1 Corinthians 14 as we continue Paul's letter to the Corinthian church.

I think if you are new here or you haven't been with us, Paul wrote to a church he had planted in a most vile city, filled with adultery and idolatry and just a lack of morality. It was one of the vilest places in the Roman government, in the Roman Empire at the time. So quite a work that the Lord did in establishing a people there. On the other hand, it had been eight years since Paul had been there. He spent a year and a half planting the church. He was now in Ephesus, and news began to filter to him, first through letters, then through a visit of some friends. And then finally three elders showed up there in Ephesus and just said, "Look, we've got a lot of problems, and a lot of things are going on." And Paul wrote them three letters - we have two of them, the other one is just mentioned in chapter 5 - answering questions, really wanting to do the work of encouraging the saints. He loved the people. The church had done well for some time, but it was really struggling now.

And so, as you go through 1 and 2 Corinthians, not only are they corrective letters, but they are letters written from a man who loved the people, and he addresses everything that they asked about in great detail. So you find chapters rather than verses about specific topics, if you will.

From talking to them about everything they had come from the Lord and if God gave them to you, why are you bragging like He didn't give it to you, to realizing that we're all one in Christ rather than choosing sides and picking who's better and who do I admire more....there was just a lot of that kind of nonsense. Really, Paul called it carnality going on in the church, and Paul spent the first three or four chapters, really, talking to them about that.

Lately, beginning in chapter 11, he had focused on what happens when the church gets together like we are here. What goes on? What should we be looking for? What would God be looking for as you come in from work or dinner or wherever it is you were today and you sit down as a part of the body? And so this is a pretty long set of chapters - 11, 12, 13 and 14 - all of them having to do with church assembly when the church gathered. And the problems that Paul had discussed kind of carried over to the church in their meetings. There were spiritual gifts used, but not for God's glory but for drawing attention to myself and, "Look what I can do and look what you can't do and look what God has done with me." And so Paul began in chapter 11 to talk to them about the role of women in leadership in the church. He spoke to them about their potlucks being a place to feed the poor not serve yourself and show up drunk. Taking communion, make sure that you discern the Lord's body as you come; take it seriously. The Lord takes it seriously, as a memorial to His Son. He talked about the diversities of gifts in the body that God has given to us - ministry gifts and power gifts, if you will, to be used to profit everyone. Paul keeps beating the same subject, that we're all the same or equal in God's sight, and that's true as well when God gifts us.

In chapter 12, Paul compared a physical body to the body of Christ, and he pointed out that every part of your body is vital. You don't want to go on without portions of it. And Jesus is our Head, and He places us where He desires, and the Holy Spirit's kind of like the nervous system - He moves all of the pieces as He sees fit. But the problem for Corinth was they were very self-serving. They were self-indulgent. There was lots of pride, lots of factions and divisions and all of these things.

And so, in the middle of talking about church service, he stopped in chapter 13 and said, "And by the way, if it's not done out of a love of God in your heart for others, God doesn't accept it. You'll just be noise in His ears. There won't be a reward. God's not keeping track. Because everything behind ministry and outreach and service should be this love that God has placed in your hearts by His Spirit - the kind of love that He showed you that He had for you." And so may that be the motivation for your being available to be used to use the gifts that God gives you. May it not be a place where you go to find glory for yourself but rather a place to bring the Lord honor. He called it a "more excellent way." And because we were gluttons for punishment, we spent two weeks in that chapter just looking at ourselves. And it's not a pretty chapter if you're honest with yourself; that God does not accept anything you do unless it's grounded in His love - that's your motivation. And you would, I think, know for yourself.

We encouraged you a couple of weeks ago to read the first eight verses and put your name in where the word “love” is, and that’s not very pretty. You can put Jesus’ name in there, and that’ll work just fine. Kind of come to the point where we realize we fall far short of what God intends.

Last time we finished chapter 13, and before we come to this long chapter of chapter 14 tonight, but it really focuses on one purpose and that is: use what God has given you for the benefit of others; you’re God’s vessels that He can use for His glory. I think this is a chapter you should know well. It will direct the way that we gather together in smaller groups where God’s – especially these vocal gifts can be used. It’ll focus on the need for order. God is interested in order and also the heart of a servant. And with everything that he says, it goes back to always the same problem – people were serving in the church for their own benefit; everybody’s looking to make a name for themselves rather than to serve one another.

So we’re going to look at all of chapter 14 tonight, and I’m doing that only because it’s kind of one big subject; it’d be hard to break it up. So we’re going to leave about 11:00 tonight. No....(Laughing) I’ll talk fast.

Verse 1, “Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy.” In chapter 13 Paul said pursue love. He also adds that here in the beginning of chapter 14. In chapter 12 he said desire spiritual gifts. And now turning to the assembling of the saints, Paul says when you’re gathered together, your great desire should be to prophesy. The most valuable gift when the church gathers together is the teaching of God’s Word. It’s why we’re here, it’s what we do, it’s what we concentrate on. And if we’re going to have saints that grow and the lost that are reached, it’s going to be through the ministry of God’s Word and the power of His Spirit. And so Paul says love is important – it’s certainly your motivating factor – and desire. Desire to have the best “pneumatikos.” “Pneumatikos” is a single Greek word that just means spiritual gifts. But especially, in the case of gathering together, what we really want to do is come and share God’s Word with one another in a way that will line up with that word “prophesy.”

We read in verse 2, “For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries.” Now, as we go through these forty verses this evening, I want you to take notes for yourself at some point as you get important additional information – one upon the other – especially into this area of the gift of tongues that we would want you to take note of, starting here. You can write this down first: the gift of tongues is given by God so that men and women – His people – can speak to the Lord. In other words, speaking in tongues goes from man to God, and it is a part of those gifts that God gives to us. We are not able to understand the language; it is a mystery in which we speak, but it is from us to the Lord in worship, in prayer, in praise. Whatever it might be, it goes in that direction. So put that on your information for this gift as we gather insight about them throughout the chapter because there’s a lot here to kind of take in. So if you speak in an unknown tongue, you’re speaking to the Lord in a language people don’t understand. You’re saying good things, but no one’s profiting by them, and this is, after all, a public assembly.

Verse 3, “But” (by contrast) “he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men.” By the way of contrast and by comparison, prophecy is a far more desirable gift in the assembly because it can be understood. It can be received by those that are gathering. It takes the Word of God, and it delivers it to us for a couple of purposes. Number one – so that we might be edified. The word just means to be built up like an edifice. And it is ideal for us to grow in faith, to grow in our walks, to be convicted that we’re not doing something the way the Lord wants. It’s just a really good place to get edified. And if you come to church every week like many of you do, you put yourself in that position. You may walk in, just had a terrible day, and you go home and go, “Man, the Lord’s good! I’m so glad I went.” You may not have been glad when you were coming in, “Should have went home, I’m tired.” And here you are, and God meets you with His Word to encourage you, to edify you. The word “exhortation” is a call to faithfulness and godliness. It is a word from the Lord to push you in the direction of fellowship with God. It is that cheerleading, if you will, in many ways. Exhortation kind of being cheerleader in the Lord. “Come on, you can do it!” God is good. And then the word “comfort.” It is that promise of the Lord to – because of His love, because of His promises – help you to have a solid hope even though maybe there’s a lot of hopelessness around you. But yet you find your feet under you, standing on solid ground. God is faithful. And so you go home with the same problem but with a better understanding of who the Lord is that you look to and depend upon. So, file those truths away under the gift of prophecy as we gather insight into some of these gifts.

By the way, the New Testament tells us prophecy, by definition, is more than what we normally think of as a prophet foretelling the future. Now that’s used sometimes of the prophets in the Old Testament, but more often than not, just this word “prophecy” speaks of speaking forth God’s Word; not telling what’s coming in the future necessarily, but yet speaking forth what God

is doing and telling God's Word with a right message at the right time in churches primarily for that purpose. So I love the things we can accomplish. God certainly gives us the body to be strengthened by, to serve in, to be known by, to have our needs known, take our place, part of the body. But as the church gathers, we are here primarily to learn His Word and to be encouraged by it and comforted by it and challenged.

So verse 4, "He who speaks in a tongue" (builds himself up) "edifies himself, but he who prophesies" (builds up or) "edifies the church." Now Paul compares these two, and Paul is focusing on this one problem in Corinth which was everyone seemed to love to have this gift of tongues all at once, and speaking out loud, all of them trying to draw attention to themselves without concern as to what and to why. Paul's not diminishing the value of a gift of tongues, but he is saying that in the public meeting, prophecy is of greater value. Now here's another point to your gift of tongues: he who prays in the spirit edifies himself. In fact, it is the only gift given by God that is used for your personal benefit. And it is only when it is used in a public assembly with interpretation (as we're going to read) that it becomes useful to everyone. But barring that - personal prayer - this gift is the only gift designed for personal benefit. It is in Psalm 84:11 that the LORD says that He is our "sun and shield; He will give us grace and glory." And then we will read this, "No good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly." It is my personal conviction that all of you should have the gift of tongues. I think it is important for our personal use. It is available for you to use for yourself to be able to pray and to worship, to pass the mental states of your understanding, if you will. It is distinct from its use in the public arena. I think if you read (1 Corinthians 12:30), "Do all speak in tongues?" it is in the context of the public assembly; and the answer would be, "No." Because not everyone is called to use that gift in a public setting for the purpose of others. But if it's just isolated to the gift of tongues, then I think it is the only thing that you have given by God by His Spirit that you can just use for you. You edify yourself. You build yourself up. Nobody else gets benefited by it. Nobody understands it. And we're going to read that time and again.

And so Paul says, in verse 5, "I wish you all spoke with tongues, but even more that you prophesied; for he who prophesies is greater than he who speaks with tongues, unless indeed he interprets, that the church may receive edification." As opposed to verse 3 and verse 4, you speak in tongues, you edify just you. The importance for Paul's forty verses is the church needs to be edified; everything God gives you should be used for the benefit of the church. It's of primary importance. Tongues can help accomplish that purpose in a public setting only with someone who would interpret - not translate - what is being said. Because until then, no one would understand a word that you're saying.

Also, if you go back to verse 2, we know the interpretation will be man speaking to the Lord, and we will, as we read, learn he will speak mysteries, he will speak in worship, he will speak to worship, to pray, and to praise the Lord. In fact, look at verse 14 for a minute. I'm jumping ahead, but it kind of goes along with our thought. Verse 14, "For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful. What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding." And then down in verse 17, "For you indeed give thanks well," (speaking in tongues) "but the other" (those who hear you) "is not edified" (or built up again). "I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all; yet in the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that I may teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue." Same argument. The church is to gather for the sake of ministering to the people. However, when you pray in tongues, you edify yourself; you do things well, you bypass your understanding, you speak mysteries in worship, in praise, you do it well before the Lord. But, at the same time, it doesn't benefit those who sit by. So Paul's interest in bringing this to the forefront, especially in light of the Corinthians' problems, is that they were to look at this time that we gathered for the purpose of encouraging each other and being built up and "cheerleaded" (if you are cheer-led) and taught, if you will. Let's focus on that, not simply displaying gifts for our own glory. So personal use of tongues is fine. But here it is about everyone hearing from you in the public assembly, and God wants to speak to His people. He wants to call the lost. He wants you to go home with a greater love for Him and grasp His Word than when you walked in.

Verse 6, "But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking with tongues," (and this, I think, was the big issue - the abuse in the church here) "what shall I profit you unless I speak to you either by revelation, by knowledge, by prophesying, or by teaching?" So, again, there is a limited effectiveness in this gift that everyone seemed to kind of have glommed onto. Apparently they loved this gift publicly. They all, "Look at me, man, I can speak in tongues. Aren't I spiritual?" People, "Wow, that's amazing!" And Paul's emphasis is there's no profiting those in attendance unless you can speak by revelation, you can speak through a word of knowledge or by prophecy, or through the teaching - certainly all gifts of God, but they all have one thing in common. They are to bring you closer to Him, teach you the truth, establish your goings. And, as a result, there should be order and priority in the church as it gathers together.

Now here's Paul's illustration, verse 7, "Even things without life, whether flute or harp, when they make a sound, unless they make a distinction in the sounds, how will it be known what is piped or played? For if the trumpet makes an uncertain sound, who will prepare for battle? So likewise you, unless you utter by the tongue words easy to understand, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air." Now Paul uses an illustration, and I read these verses, and I think to Paul, are these guys that he's writing to just slow? I mean, he says pretty clearly what he thinks, and that Paul goes out of his way to illustrate to them how foolish this pursuing status through things that God has given you is and how we've missed out on the fact that we're here for us so that we can grow in the Lord. So Paul uses an illustration from music and with musical instruments to say, "Unless worship is played distinctively with order and the right notes, no one's even going to be able to say, 'What are you playing? What is that song? I've never heard that. Those are a horrible bunch of chords all in a row, if they're even chords at all.' " It'd be like the baby. You sit him at the piano, and he just bangs on the notes. "Isn't he talented?" "No. Those are meaningless sounds." So with the trumpet call. At least from the Old Testament, there were lots of trumpet sounds: some of them to call you to battle – everybody mans their stations; some to retreat and get out of Dodge as quickly as you can. You play the wrong notes, you could be running into trouble or running away from it right into some other trouble. You have to hear the right sounds. And that's Paul's purpose in bringing this to mind.

In fact, notice in verse 9 when he makes the application, he says in like manner teaching should be done in a church with words that are simple and easy to understand. And let's face it, speaking in tongues in a language you don't understand either does not qualify. It is like "speaking into the air." It does nothing. It accomplishes nothing. No one can follow it. It's like a muddled piece of music or some kind of indeterminate bugle call. It just leaves you kind of confused, "What do I do now?" So, if you're a Bible teacher or you're someone who is called or feels called to teach, underline the words "easy to be understood." I don't think the pulpit is a place to show off how many big words you know or concepts that somehow you can complex....things you can just pour out. Pastor Chuck used to say to us, "Teach the Word of God. Simply teach it simply." And it helped me, and I grew by it. And it doesn't matter if you're a college educator or a high school dropout. God's Word just gets through. It isn't a matter of intelligence. It's just a matter of openness to hear what the Lord has to say. But from the pulpit side, we should be putting the cookie on the lowest shelf. We should understand. And I see Paul doing that. "Yeah, you know, a piece of music, bugle....all right. We get it." But he's just illustrating the very things that he's calling us to do. So, in the church it should be clearly and easily understood. And speaking in tongues without an interpretation certainly doesn't help or serve anyone's purpose.

Verse 10, "There are, it may be, so many kinds of languages in the world, and none of them is without significance. Therefore, if I do not know the meaning of the language, I shall be a foreigner to him who speaks, and he who speaks will be a foreigner to me." So, look, there're a whole lot of ways to communicate in the world. Every language is understandable. We were in Brazil a few years ago, and Portuguese is a very difficult language. It's non-Ugaritic which means it doesn't really have any rules. So sometimes a word can be thirty letters long, and you can pronounce it with two syllables. And sometimes they're five letters, and you go to town trying to pronounce it. So we were lost. Fortunately we had somebody with us who spoke fluent Portuguese, lived in Brazil. But we went to McDonald's, and he wasn't with us. And I tried to order a hamburger, and the lady across the counter said, "You don't speak Portuguese?" I said, "No." "Why you here?" (Laughing) And I didn't have an answer for her. "I no understand.....English." There's really..... languages are beautiful, but if you don't get it, then you don't get it. It doesn't do you any good. Good argument, Paul.

So I always try to tell the youth ministry folks when you're teaching high school kids, you've got to teach high school kids on their own level. You really do have to reach your audience and know your audience. It's awfully good to know your audience, you know? And Paul said the same thing to them. "Look, if people come in here, they don't understand what you're saying, what good is that? We're trying to get to the place where they get to know the Lord that we love."

So he says to them, in verse 12, "Even so you," (again taking the physical, if you will, and the obvious to the spiritual) "since you are zealous for spiritual gifts," (or 'pneumatikos,' gifts of the Spirit) "let it be for the edification of the church that you seek to excel." If you really are that zealous about these gifts, be zealous to be used by the Lord to help the other folks in the church to grow, to be stronger, to be wiser. Make clear the things that the Lord is teaching. Make it simple. Tell them straightforwardly. Have your gift that they would grow or excel in the ways of the Lord. Rather than you being the loudest or being the known or being noticed or getting honor, "Oh, did you hear the brother sing?" (Pastor Jack claps) "Wow, he's somethin' else," you go home and love the Lord and be encouraged.

I think that the goal for any pastor should be that the people under his care should be the best fed and best taught congregation in the world. That should really be your goal: the best versed in Scripture, the best and able anytime and

everywhere to give an answer for the hope that lies within them (1 Peter 3:15). That's what our goal should be for you, that when you leave here every Wednesday night, you go home with your Bible, you've taken notes, you're learning and you're growing, and you're able to give an answer for your faith. That ought to be the prayer of every pastor in every church. It was certainly Paul's prayer, and he was, I think, disheartened and certainly broken-hearted that this church of his – that he hadn't seen for a while but - had so degraded itself into what he called a very carnal or worldly fellowship. And he prayed that it would get better.

Verse 13, "Therefore let him who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret. For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful." Or I'm engaging my relationship with the Lord, but it bypasses my intellect, if you will.

Verse 15, "What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding." So, hey, if you're going to be in church and you want the Lord to use you, and you have the gift of tongues, pray that you might have that gift of interpreting what you're saying and praying in the Lord so that when people hear that, they might, "Oh, that's exactly how I feel towards the Lord. That's exactly what I'm praying for. That's exactly how I understand the Lord." And now they can join you in that which God is doing in your heart.

And here in verse 14 is another insight into this gift of tongues: it is your spirit praying while your understanding and your insight and your reasoning remain unfruitful. The spirit bypasses your understanding. And I need this gift sometimes. I don't know about you. Do you ever get to the point where you go, "I don't know how to pray, I don't know what to do"? I had a guy a couple of months ago who said to me, "You know, I have this opportunity for this job." It was actually in Korea. "And I have this job offer in New York. What do you think the Lord would have me to do?" That's what he said to me. I said, "Oh, I'd go to Korea." No. I didn't say that. (Laughing) "I have no idea. I have no idea what the Lord wants you to do for Him." But what a great time to be praying in the spirit, that God might just hear your cry. You've got no reason, you've got no way to.... it's just all about faith because you really.... you know, sometimes prayer we argue with God, we try to coerce Him, we give Him reasons why He should do what we're about to ask Him. You can get in a lot of trouble that way. But praying in the spirit, you can't. You just cry out in a language you don't understand. And what does Paul say to the Romans in chapter 8:26-27? He said, "Likewise the Spirit helps my weaknesses. We don't know how we should pray as we ought, but the Spirit Himself will make intercession for us with groanings which we cannot utter. And He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is; He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God." So I also have this understanding: if I pray in the spirit, God intercedes in my prayers so that I might be directed to pray in a way that would please Him. So it's really a wonderful gift that you edify yourself, and yet it is all by faith because I'm told these things, and I can't prove them nor can I verify them. I can just believe what God says about them. And so it is an insight to prayer that the purpose of tongues is to pray although my understanding kind of stands on the sideline as I speak to God.

Verse 15 Paul then makes this conclusion. Notice, "What is the conclusion then?" about this use of this gift. There is simply a time to pray in tongues and sing in tongues. There's a time of personal prayer and worship. Go back to verse 2, verse 14, verse 17. And there is also a time to pray with understanding and to sing with understanding as in a public assembly when people come to be encouraged and learn and grow in their faith in Jesus.

Verse 16, "Otherwise," (and Paul's not letting this go because I think it's a big deal here – it was a real abusive church meeting, if you will), "if you bless with the spirit, how will he who occupies the place of the uninformed say 'Amen' at your giving of thanks, since he does not understand what you say? For you indeed give thanks well," (another insight) "but the other is not edified." Tongues is blessing the Lord in the spirit, giving thanks well (add that to your list of understanding of this personal gift). But in the assembly, no one can join you; they can't say "Amen" to you, they can't give you a high-five, they can't enjoy or stand with you. You're giving thanks well. God is using it, all right. It's simply not for anyone else. So this appeal to reason and order and time and place and not, again, putting yourself in a position where you like to act spiritual to draw attention to yourself. Paul goes on in verse 18, and he says, "I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all;" (He's a Texan, "than y'all") "yet in the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that I may teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue." We have on one of the pages of our Website a section that says, "The gospel in your own language," and we, over the years, have asked our different missionaries to present the gospel in that language for five or six minutes to invite folks to get saved. Now if you go listen to those, you'll go, "Oh, that sounds beautiful." You'll have no idea what it says. But if you speak the language.... and we've had people get saved just listening to someone in another language that I have no idea. But they do. And we have them in some interesting languages. You should go check it out sometime. If you speak a language that's not on there, and you're good enough to share the gospel, come tell me, and we'll put you in the pulpit, and you can share it, and we'll tape you. And we'll make you a star. No. (Laughing) We'll just put you on the Website so others can hear about the Lord from

you. But just make sure you're well enough versed, that you're fluent. Let's just go.....please be fluent if you're going to call me. And I don't think we have anybody in Portuguese, so if you've got a Portuguese guy, that would settle my heart to no end. That would really be good.

So, verse 18 and verse 19, Paul says.....and he almost challenges these bragging Corinthians to say he is thankful he, too, practices this gift of praying in the spirit in the privacy of his prayer life; not to exalt himself but just to honor the Lord, to give thanks well, to speak mysteries and worship and thanksgiving. But he said, "When it comes to church, I would rather speak meagerly five words that people could understand – because God's Word brings life - than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue." And the word "ten thousand" is the word "myrioi" in Greek. It means myriads, and it is the largest word in Greek for numbers. They only go to ten thousand, which is why you'll sometimes read ten thousand times ten thousand because that's as high as it goes. But the point is no one can benefit from them at all, so why bother?

Verse 20, "Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature." Now Paul again continues his seeking to correct this misuse of tongues because that was a big problem. He draws an example from the Old Testament focusing – don't lose the context or these verses might confuse you – the focus is public assembly, the purpose for church gathering, the need for us to understand what's being said, and the value that we have coming with our Bibles and letting the Lord speak to us. So Paul says, in verse 20, that when it comes to these kinds of things, this propensity to speak in tongues without control, having lost the purpose of the church, he literally says, "You've got to grow up! You're acting like a bunch of babies. Look, if you want to be a baby, be a baby when it comes to malice. Or, if you don't want to know stuff, be ignorant when it comes to all the evil in the world, the things around us; know nothing or little of that. But when it comes to maturity, be understanding in your maturity. Look, common sense would tell you this isn't beneficial to everyone."

So he gives them an Old Testament example to undergird his teaching, and he says this, in verse 21, "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. 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." Now Paul takes a Scripture out of the Old Testament. It is a quote from Isaiah 28:11-12. The background of that verse: it is 725 B.C. It is three years before the Assyrians (the world power at the time) will come into the northern kingdom of Israel, which has been around since 931 B.C. And they haven't had a good king or haven't had a good day in the LORD; they've always rejected the LORD. He had sent them lots of prophets, and the LORD had said to them, "If you continue down this path – there in the north – you're going to be overcome." Now this isn't the promise to the south where seventy years of captivity will bring them back; this is to the north who will be wasted and never allowed to recapitulate, if you will, as a nation. So three years before the Assyrians come in, the LORD warns them of their overthrow. In fact, that warning had come way back in chapter 28 of the book of Deuteronomy in 1400 B.C., through Moses. The application here, in that context, is that the unbelieving and the rejecting children of Israel (which was most of the nation) would discover the judgment of God when they found themselves being ruled by a people they couldn't understand their language. And they would have to say to themselves, "How did we get here? I can't even understand what they're saying. And now I'm in captivity, and I can't be freed." And so the prophecies of Isaiah assured the few believers that God was still in charge. Those who trusted in the LORD also went into captivity and overthrow, but they saw God's fulfillment of His Word. So for them, it was an assurance. For the lost, it was a claim to this is really the words of the LORD. So God intended the prophecy of men like Isaiah, verse 22 here, to be an encouragement to the believers of his day, and tongues (in this case foreign languages) was a confirmation of the judgment of God upon the unbeliever for his years of rejection of God and his unbelief.

Now having said that - that's the illustration - Paul then turns to the church, but he takes, now, that lesson and he teaches it by contrast. And if you read it carelessly, you might go to verse 22 and say, "Gosh, he said the very opposite thing here in two verses; he contradicted himself." I assure you he did not. The one was an example limited to the culture in which it was. Paul, then, uses that to tell us, in context, verse 23, these things. He says this, "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? But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all," and that will be the work of the Lord. "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." So, addressing the saints in Corinth, Paul says what he's been saying for over twenty verses: that tongues in the church meeting will leave the visiting unbeliever or uninformed, which is interesting. One's an unbeliever. The word would say he's made up his mind whereas the uninformed just doesn't have enough information. So Paul even makes a distinction between those coming to church that have kind of put their feet down and dug in and said, "I don't believe in this," and then those who go, "I'm just lookin'." But Paul uses two different words to describe them, but he says that that person who comes in, and if he hears them speaking in tongues, both of them are going to leave

disappointed and still lost.

Verse 24 and in verse 25, on the other hand, if everyone that they talk to in the fellowship has a word from the Lord to share, you know, you talk to someone in the hallway, in the bathroom, in the coffee store, out in the parkway, and you, "Hey, brother, how you doin'?" You know, the Lord did this in my life," and you're able to share, then the unbeliever or the uninformed will be convicted by God's Word, they'll understand it, their sins will be revealed, they will be led to the cross and worship. We read in Hebrews 4:12 where it says, "For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart." God's Word goes out, it does a lot of good. But it can be understood. And that's Paul's argument to us so that we don't miss it. Again, the emphasis is on speaking to be understood, ministering to those who gather, and reaching both the believers by teaching and the unbelievers or the uninformed through evangelism. And you can look at verse 4 or 5, 6, 12 and 19 here. I mean, you can just kind of pile them up together.

The conflicts come when you compare what Paul says in verse 22, "Tongues are a sign for unbelievers, prophecy for believers" with verses 23, 24 and 25. Yet if you look at the verses that precede verse 22, the context is the issue. Paul has been saying this all along, that the gift of tongues is great for personal prayer but in church, prophecy is better. And if you want to be mature, be mature in that area.

From the Old Testament example, the book of Isaiah, Paul shows them that God had used tongues – in this case, a foreign language – to be a sign in Israel to those who hadn't taken God seriously, and this warning now comes to pass as they hear voices they can't understand. At the same time, believers saw the prophecies of Isaiah, and they were encouraged that God was in charge. Tongues, indeed, is a sign to the unbelievers in that day who refused to hear God's Word. But in the church – in the church which exists to preach the gospel and teach the saints – we're gathered to answer questions from the lost, to reach the lost. And so it would be crazy not to be in a position where they could understand what's being said. So he makes a comparison – he uses one to illustrate the other. I don't think it should be that confusing.

Verse 26, Paul concludes this chapter with some very practical rules or regulations, if you will, that the Holy Spirit put upon his heart to help these church meetings to do well. Verse 26, "How is it then, brethren?" (How you doin', bro?) "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" (the purpose of) "edification." He couldn't have said that enough, could he? Whatever you do, build up the body, bless the people, help them to grow. No matter what you bring, use it for that purpose, and let that drive your decision-making. Whether it's a worship leader or a Sunday school teacher or an usher, whatever you do, do it so that God might be honored in this place.

Verse 27, "If anyone speaks in a tongue," (boy, it must have been a problem here, huh?) "let there be two or at the most three, each in turn," (not all together) "and let one interpret. But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God." We remember when we started that tongues is a prayer from man to God. That's the direction that it goes. So Paul said, "Limit the gift of tongues, even with interpretation, to two or three people in the body; not speaking at the same time. And make sure that there is someone with the gift of interpretation when you do. And if there isn't someone, or you don't know, then don't do it. Just keep it to yourself because that would upset the whole idea of the order in the church and the purpose for which we gather."

Here're a few presumptions that I think that you should take away from these verses. For one thing, the early church met in homes. There is really very little evidence of a church building until about 312 A.D. or so when Constantine began to do his dumb stuff. So the groups were smaller. There were lots of home churches. In fact, if you read through the epistles, you will constantly read of home churches. Right? The church is at your house, the host in your fellowship....and maybe there are 30 or 40 people in a church which helps us for a couple of reasons. Number one – you get to know who everyone is. This presumes that, when you go to a believers' meeting where people are using their vocal gifts, you understand if there's someone there that has this gift or not, and you know to be quiet if they're not there. So a believers' meeting – an afterglow – with seven or eight hundred people is almost impossible. I know they do it. You that grew up in Pentecostal churches know. It gets very chaotic. But it's hard to follow the rules of God (here established in this church) if you try to do that because there's just not enough knowledge or accountability. You can spout off and run off. You're accountable to no one. But in these little churches, what you say, you're going to have to live with, and people are going to come back to you. "The Lord told me to say this." And the next month it didn't turn out.... "Well, the Lord told me." "Yeah, but bro, it didn't turn out, so we got rocks. We're

gonna....” No. You know what I mean? You’re going to have to learn to hear God’s voice. Accountability. But there cannot be accountability when you gather thousands of people together and try to have a believers’ meeting. It just gets out of hand. Rather these small groups made you familiar with people. And the injunction would require that you do know the group. And, like I said, anything beyond that would be unrealistic and certainly lack the ability to follow these instructions.

Verse 29, “Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge.” I find it interesting. You know, these traveling evangelists will blow into town, rent an arena, get as much money as they can, and they will spout whatever they want. And then they’ll leave. They don’t have to live with what they say. They’re gone. If you’re a pastor, if I teach something on Wednesday, I’ve got to live with it Sunday because you’re going to come back and go, “Hey, you know what you said the other day?” So you’ve got to live with what you teach, which is accountability. That’s the way that it should be. But notice here, the same thing. “Let two or three speak, and let everyone else pass judgment.” Is that the Lord or not? Two or three seems to be sufficient to accomplish God’s Word.

Note both in the gift of tongues with interpretation and in teaching, there is this limit that is set. However, when it comes to personal ministry – not the gathering, if you will, of the people – then you read, in verse 30, “But if anything is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged.” So Paul sets the stage. When it comes to the group assembly, one or two, two or three’s enough. One can prophesy, everyone can judge. But when it comes to personal ministry, everyone’s got the ability to share God’s Word with each other, and there’s no restriction whatsoever. So, may the Lord then use you.

Verse 32, “And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.” (I underlined that twice in my Bible.) “For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.” When I first got saved, and when the Jesus Movement was in full swing, we’d oftentimes – even in teaching on Sunday nights at Downey – would have somebody in the middle of my teaching stand up and start speaking in tongues. And I would do this, “Dude. Sit down. I’m talking right now.” And they would say this, “Oh, the Lord fell upon me. I couldn’t help myself. I had to share.” So I always read verse 32, “the spirit of the prophet is subject to the prophet.” You don’t have to speak. You can be quiet. So be quiet! (Laughing) But, you know, sometimes we’re so spiritual, we can’t.....we have to.....God interrupts Himself. It’s really weird. I don’t know how that works. “The Lord took over, I was out of control.”

Well, according to verse 33, don’t blame God if you rudely interrupt somebody when they’re speaking or stand up in a service, and you want to draw attention to yourself. God is a God of order and structure. He’s not the author of confusion. But what happens so often is there is that lack of self-restraint, and so people don’t care. They just, “Oh, I just got caught up in the Spirit....” Whatever. It’s not necessarily the Holy Spirit. You know, there’s a spirit out there, that’s for sure. Hmmm.

Verse 34, “Let your women keep silent in the churches,” (guys, underline that one) “for they” (Laughing) (just kidding) “are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. 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.” Let me give you some clarity here. (Laughing) Back in chapter 11, Paul had spoken about the role of women in spiritual leadership. Here he addresses the issue of discussion or questions, and the word literally is disputes over something that has been said or something that has been aired. Unlike the pattern in the synagogue before the church was born, where women would sit on one side of the arena or the synagogue and the men would sit on the other, in the church, Paul’s advice was that they should just quietly sit with their husbands. And if they have questions (and the word is really arguments), that rather than bringing them up in the service or things they just didn’t get clearly, go home, talk to your husband, head of your household, your spiritual leader, and work them out. Don’t work them out on the floor publicly in a public setting. That’s all that that is really meant to say. According to 1 Corinthians 11, the sisters in the Lord were free to pray, free to prophesy, free to speak in the assembly. But here the word “speak” in verse 35 is the Greek word “laleo,” and “laleo” means to argue. So I think it’s the contentiousness of someone in the middle of the service going, “Hey, I don’t agree with that!” “Honey, sit down.” “No, no. I’m not sittin’ down. This is important to me.” It probably happened there.....I’m assuming Paul was addressing things that were going on in the church. No slight to the ladies.

Verse 36, “Or did the word of God come originally from you? Or was it you only that it reached? 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. But if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant.” Atta boy, Paul. (Laughing) Kind of Paul’s authority, right? He doesn’t do this too often, but when things need to be dealt with, as an apostle he certainly spoke, and he didn’t diminish his words. If you’re spiritual, you admit this comes from the Lord; and if not, you’re ignorant. That’s pretty powerful.



Verse 39, "Therefore brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues. Let all things be done decently and in order." Hey, all forty verses. Good for you folks. Yay. (Clapping)

Next week we want to spend the week looking at the resurrection from the dead and your glorified bodies. And bring a wish list of what you hope it looks like. Lots to learn from the Bible.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson  
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