

I CORINTHIANS

50. Why did he speak of the three things that abide?
51. What is the meaning of "faith" in this context?
52. Why can it not be "faith to remove mountains"?
53. What is the basis of Christian hope?
54. Why did Paul say that the greatest of these is love?

For Discussion

1. What is to be said about division in the church today that possesses the completed revelation of God's will, the Bible?
2. What place should the "most excellent way" have in the work of evangelizing the world?

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Analysis

- A. Paul indicates that he is not discouraging the use of the gifts, but that he is arguing for the necessity of correcting the misuse of the gift of tongues (1-19).
 1. In urging the church to follow after love, he says for them to earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially prophecy (1-5).
 - a) Follow after love, the most excellent way explained in chapter thirteen.
 - b) In doing so, earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially prophecy.
 - c) He explains what is accomplished in speaking in tongues without interpretation in contrast with what is accomplished for the church through prophecy (2-4).
 - (1) He points out what is done by speaking in a tongue (2).
 - (a) One speaks not to men but to God.
 - (b) No one understands.
 - (c) In the Spirit he speaks mysteries.
 - (2) He points out what is done by prophecy (3).
 - (a) One speaks to men.
 - (b) He speaks for the edification, exhortation, and consolation of the church.
 - (3) He contrasts the effects of the two (4).
 - (a) He that speaks in a tongue edifies himself.
 - (b) He that prophesies edifies the church.
 - (4) He tells why he would prefer to have them prophesy (5).
 - (a) In so doing, he does not discourage the use of

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- tongues. He says, "I would have you all speak in tongues."
- (b) Through prophecy the church receives edification.
 - (c) Greater is he that prophesies than he that speaks in a tongue except he interpret.
2. He presents a three-fold argument for the necessity of using the spiritual gifts in such a manner that the church may receive edification (6-12).
- a) The first argument: His own use of the gift of tongues.
 - (1) He assumes that he may be speaking to them in tongues.
 - (2) He asks the question: What profit would it be to the church unless it is by way of revelation, or knowledge, or prophesying, or teaching?
 - b) The second argument: Such instruments as the flute, harp, and bugle must be so used as to be understood. Note: Tongues had to be interpreted in order to edify the church.
 - c) The third argument: The tongue (the human organ of speech) must be so used that what is spoken can be understood (10-11).
 - (1) If what is spoken is not understood, it is like speaking into the air.
 - (2) Languages (voices) of the world must be understood; otherwise, it would be like speaking to a foreigner.
 - d) Conclusion: He says, "Seek that ye may abound unto the edification of the church" (12). Note: The argument that follows is for the necessity of translation so that the "tongue" may edify.
3. In giving instruction to the one using the gift of tongues, he presents a three-fold argument for the necessity of translating the message spoken in a foreign language (13-19).
- a) He instructs the one using a tongue to pray that he may interpret (translate) (13).
 - b) First argument: He assumes a case in which he might be praying in a tongue (14-15).
 - (1) In this situation his spirit prays but his understanding is not benefitted.
 - (2) He therefore determines to pray and sing with the understanding (this implies the necessity of translation as indicated in verses 5 and 13).

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- c) Second argument: He assumes a situation in which the "unlearned" (the one without these gifts) is unable to understand and say "Amen" (16-17).
 - (1) In this situation one is giving thanks by using the spiritual gifts.
 - (2) But if he doesn't know what is said, how can he say "Amen"?
 - (3) The result is that he is not edified. (This implies the necessity of translation).
- d) Third argument: Paul's own experience in using the gift of tongues (18-19).
 - (1) He thanks God that he speaks in tongues more than all the Corinthians (18).
 - (2) He tells why he prefers to speak in the church with his understanding, that is, he would rather speak five words to instruct than ten thousand in a tongue (19). (Implies necessity of translation).
- B. In appealing to the church to use the spiritual gifts as they were intended, Paul sets forth certain rules and regulations to be followed (20-40).
 - 1. He appeals to them to use the gifts as they were intended (20-25).
 - a) He indicates that this implies the necessity of taking a mature view of gifts (20).
 - b) He indicates the purpose of the gift of tongues by reference to a statement of the law (21-22).
 - (1) The statement of the law (Isa. 28:11-12).
 - (2) Tongues are a sign for unbelievers; prophecy is for (the instruction) of the believer.
 - c) His appeal for the proper use of the gifts (23-25).
 - (1) He assumes a situation in which "unlearned men" (those without the gifts) and unbelievers may enter the assembly while all are speaking in foreign languages. The effect will be that they say, "Ye are mad."
 - (2) He assumes a similar situation when all are prophesying and points out the result since the unbeliever or the one without gifts understood.
 - (a) He is approved by all.
 - (b) He is judged by all.
 - (c) The secrets of his heart are made manifest.

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- (d) He will fall down and worship God.
- (e) He will declare that God is among you.
- 2. He presents rules and regulations for the church to follow (26-40).
 - a) He gives general rules to be followed for the edification of the church (26).
 - (1) Two or three, and that in turn.
 - (2) One to interpret.
 - (3) If no interpreter, keep silence. Speak to self and to God (implying that the speaker and God understood what was said).
 - b) He gives specific rules for the use of tongues (27-28).
 - (1) Two or three, and that in turn.
 - (2) One to interpret.
 - (3) If no interpreter, keep silence. Speak to self and to God (implying that the speaker and God understood what was said).
 - c) He gives rules for the prophets to follow (29-33).
 - (1) Only two or three to speak; others to discern.
 - (2) One at a time; prophets can control their use of the gift.
 - (3) God is not a God of confusion, but of peace.
 - d) He gives certain regulations for women to observe (34-36).
 - (1) This is the same in all the churches of the saints.
 - (2) The women are to keep silence in the churches.
 - (3) The law indicates that they are not to speak but to be in subjection.
 - (4) They are to ask their husbands at home.
 - (5) It is a shame for a woman to speak in church.
 - (6) The apostle, implying that there were objections to this instruction, asks: "Was it from you the word of God went forth? Or did it come to you alone?"
 - e) He indicates that what he wrote is the commandment of God; ignorance of the fact does not change it (37-38).
 - f) He gives a closing word of advice on the matter (39-40).
 - (1) Desire earnestly to prophesy.
 - (2) Do not forbid speaking in tongues.
 - (3) Let all things be done decently and in order.

Text

14:1-19. Follow after love; yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy. 2 For he that speaketh in a tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God; for no man understandeth; but in the spirit he speaketh mysteries. 3 But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men edification, and exhortation, and consolation. 4 He that speaketh in a tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesi-

eth edifieth the church. 5 Now I would have you all speak with tongues, but rather that ye should prophesy: and greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying. 6 But now, brethren, if I come unto you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you, unless I speak to you either by way of revelation, or of knowledge, or of prophesying, or of teaching? 7 Even things without life, giving a voice, whether pipe or harp, if they give not a distinction in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped? 8 For if the trumpet give an uncertain voice, who shall prepare himself for war? 9 So also ye, unless ye utter by the tongue speech easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye will be speaking into the air. 10 There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world, and no kind is without signification. 11 If then I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be to him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh will be a barbarian unto me. 12 So also ye, since ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may abound unto the edifying of the church. 13 Wherefore let him that speaketh in a tongue pray that he may interpret. 14 For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful. 15 What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also. 16 Else if thou bless with the spirit, how shall he that filleth the place of the unlearned say the Amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he knoweth not what thou sayest? 17 For thou verily givest thanks well, but the other is not edified. 18 I thank God, I speak with tongues more than you all: 19 howbeit in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that I might instruct others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue.

Commentary

Misuse of the Gift of Tongues (1-19)

Follow after love.—Paul wrote First Corinthians to correct the disorders in the church. One of the most serious of these was the misuse of the gift of tongues. Jealousy over the possession and use of the gift was causing faction and division in the body of Christ. To correct this misuse of the gift, Paul showed the brethren a most excellent way, the way of love. In chapter fourteen he discusses two more serious misuses of the gift of tongues: (1) The unrestrained use of the gift without considering the necessity of edifying the church. This was to be corrected by properly using the gift of interpretation of

tongues, that is, by translating the message spoken in a foreign language for the benefit of the whole church that all might be edified. (2) All speaking in tongues when the church came together. This resulted in such confusion that men who did not possess the gift or unbelievers who might be present would say that they were mad. This misuse of the gift was to be corrected by following the rules which Paul gave so that all things might be done decently and in order.

yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts.—They were to pursue the course that love points out and to seek eagerly the things that belong to spirit. There would be no problem over these gifts if love governed their use. The gracious consideration of others forbids the spirit of jealousy that divides the body of Christ and prohibits the selfish use of the Spirit-distributed gifts that overlooks the need of the whole church for edification. These gifts were to be done away when they had fulfilled their intended purpose; but while there was a need for them in the church of the first century, they were to be desired and used according to the principle of love and regulated by the rule which the apostle gave for their use.

While Paul wrote to correct the misuse of the gift of tongues, he did encourage its proper use as indicated by the following:

a) "Desire earnestly spiritual gifts" (verse 1). While prophecy was to be preferred because of the need of the church for edification, the gift of tongues was not prohibited.

b) "I would have you all speak in tongues" (verse 5). There is no suggestion here that he was attempting to discourage the use of this gift.

c) Since edification is the essential purpose of the gifts when used in the church, Paul says, "Let him who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret" (verse 13).

d) Paul thanked God that he used the gift of tongues more than all of the others, but he said that he would rather speak five words to instruct the church than ten thousand in a tongue. This clearly implies that if the foreign language was used in the church it had to be translated for the edification of those who did not understand. See verse 19.

e) Tongues are a sign to the unbelieving (verse 22). That's why its use in the church was prohibited unless the foreign language was translated that the church might receive edification.

f) When they came together each one had, among other things, a tongue or an interpretation. Paul says, "Let all things be done unto edifying" (verse 26).

g) Paul gives rules for the correct use of tongues and other gifts (verse 27).

h) "Desire earnestly to prophecy, and forbid not to speak with tongues" (verse 39). If nothing else were said in the entire chapter on the matter, this would be sufficient to prove that the assumption that the apostle was trying to discourage the use of the gift by the church at Corinth is not valid.

i) In the divine purpose of the gifts, they were to pass away when the perfect revelation had come. Until that time, they were to be used in accordance with the regulations given by Paul to prevent their misuse.

but rather that ye may prophesy.—The emphasis on prophecy did not forbid the use of the gift of tongues. Prophecy was speaking forth the message of God under the direction of the Holy Spirit as well as predicting events to come. Peter uses the expression, "the word of prophecy" to refer to the message proclaimed by the apostles (II Pet. 1:19). Since the message of the prophet was spoken in the language of the people for their edification, there was no need for translation. The message spoken while using the gift of tongues could be made equal to prophecy in edifying the church by translating the foreign language in which the message was spoken.

he that speaks in a tongue.—The gift of tongues which was distributed by the Holy Spirit enabled one to speak in a foreign language without previous knowledge or study. This was demonstrated on the Day of Pentecost when all heard in their own native tongue. It cannot be claimed, therefore, that the apostles while in a state of ecstasy were uttering unintelligible speech-like sounds. There is no indication that Paul used the term "tongue" in chapter fourteen to mean anything other than what it means in chapter twelve or in Acts two. Some have assumed that the gift at Corinth was different since the message had to be translated for the edification of the church. But tongues were for a sign for unbelievers throughout the apostolic period while the New Testament was being committed to writing. The unbeliever could understand the message spoken in his own language, but it could not edify the church unless it was translated. It is not possible to "translate" unintelligible sounds into intelligible language; non-sense cannot be "interpreted" so as to make sense.

Claims are made today that some perfectly sincere people who may utter speech-like sounds while under emotional stress are speaking in tongues. These persons, it is claimed, are speaking in a foreign lan-

guage; others may attempt to "interpret" what is being said. There are several things that should be considered in an attempt to evaluate this claim:

a) The Bible is the final, complete, and authoritative revelation from God. The modern missionary to a foreign land must learn the language before he can successfully work in the language of the people. Some missionaries even claim to have the gift of the Spirit to overcome the language barrier; nevertheless, they must patiently learn the language just as anyone else. This, it seems, invalidates their claim to be under the power of the Spirit of God.

b) The providence of God, which any faithful Christian can see by looking back over the pathway of his life, is not to be mistaken for direct guidance by the Spirit such as that enjoyed by the apostles. The light for our pathway is the Bible. God's blessings do accompany the one who walks in its light. See Eph. 1:7-10. The story of Joseph illustrates this truth in a beautiful way (Gen. 45:1-5). The light that guided him during the long period of trial in Egypt came from the moral instruction and knowledge about God which he received in his father's home. Later, as he looked back over his life, he was able to see the hand of God in the things that had happened to him.

c) The ability to speak in tongues was given to the apostles when they were baptized in the Holy Spirit. They in turn were able to impart these gifts to others upon whom they laid their hands. No one can claim to have contacted that source of transmission of the divine power today.

d) There is no point in attempting to speak in a tongue since the Bible must be translated into the languages of the world to be understood by the peoples of the world. One of the greatest of the missionary efforts today is the translation of the Word of God into the languages of the world that all may read the message of salvation and hope in their own tongue.

e) Paul made it clear that the gifts were not to be used except "by way of revelation or of knowledge or of prophecy or of teaching." In the light of this rule, one of two things is certain: Their attempted use in the church today is wrong, or the Bible is not the completed revelation of God's will.

f) "Speaking in tongues" today is often carried on in the churches today in the absence of an interpreter. This is in violation of the regulation laid down by Paul for the use of the gift at Corinth. It is evident that the Holy Spirit would not lead one to do a thing today that violates what He caused to be written in the Bible.

speaketh not unto men, but unto God.—The gift of tongues, it seems, could be used by the one who possessed it to speak to God, although its primary purpose was to convince the unbeliever that God was speaking to him through this means. The message could not benefit those who did not understand it. Evidently men could use the gift in speaking to God if they so desired, but in doing so they left the church without edification unless they translated for the edification of the church. This was to be done by the speaker himself or by some other person who possessed the gift of interpretation. The one who used the gift of tongues was to pray that he might interpret for the benefit of those who heard him speak.

in the spirit he speaketh mysteries.—Some translators have assumed that the word "spirit" in this context refers to the human spirit as it does in verse fourteen where Paul says, "My spirit prays." But the gift of tongues was given by the Spirit of God. The one who used it was speaking under the power of the Spirit; his spirit was directed by the Holy Spirit. It seems better, therefore, to translate this verse, "in the Spirit, that is the Holy Spirit, he speaks mysteries." RSV so translates. The mystery that was spoken was that which would have forever remained secret if God had not made it known through His Spirit to the inspired apostles and prophets. See comment on 2:7.

he that speaketh in a tongue edifieth himself.—This definitely implies that he understood what he was saying under the power of the Holy Spirit. If edification for the church required that a message spoken in a foreign language be translated, it is evident that the edification of the one using the gift of tongues required his understanding of what he said in the tongue.

rather that ye should prophesy.—By translating the message spoken in a foreign language that was for the primary benefit of the unbelieving foreigner, the whole church might receive edification. If this was like pagan jargon uttered in ecstasy, how could it be so translated as to edify the church or anyone else?

greater is he that prophesieth.—See comment on 12:31. The prophet was of greater assistance to the church than the one who spoke in a tongue unless he translated the message spoken in a foreign language. This was contrary to the view held by some of the Corinthians who seemed to feel that the Lord had elevated those who had the gift of tongues above their fellows. This spirit of arrogance was causing strife and division in the church. The reminder about the superior value of prophecy should have had a wholesome effect on those who

were striving for power and position through the misuse of the gift of tongues.

if I come to you speaking in tongues.—This is the first of three arguments for the necessity of using the gift of tongues in such a manner that the church might be edified. It plainly implies that the message spoken in a foreign language had to be translated for the benefit of the church. Paul indicated that it was necessary for him to speak by way of revelation, or of knowledge, or of prophesying, or of teaching in order to help the church. This he could not do unless the church understood what he was saying; therefore, the message spoken in a foreign language had to be translated to be of benefit to the church.

pipe or harp.—The second argument implies the very same thing. There must be a distinction of sounds made by pipe or harp for one to know what was piped or what was played on the harp. Just so, the message spoken in a tongue had to be translated for the church to understand what was said. The use of the bugle illustrates the same need. "If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare for war?"

by the tongue.—This is the third argument in the series. While some think of "the tongue" as the gift of tongues, the context seems to indicate that it is the human tongue as the organ of speech. It corresponds to the other instruments that make sounds to communicate intelligible messages such as the pipe, the harp, or the bugle. It was necessary to use the human tongue, just as it was the lifeless instruments, in such a manner that the message spoken could be understood. To speak a foreign language that was not understood by anyone present was to speak into the air. Therefore, the message spoken by the gift of tongues (as it was uttered by the human tongue) had to be translated in order that the church might understand and be helped by it. Language has one purpose: to present a message that can be easily understood. The Corinthians were misusing the gift of tongues by failing to translate so that the church might receive edification.

I shall be to him that speaketh a barbarian.—That is, a foreigner. Paul is thinking of the one who speaks a foreign language and who would be like a foreigner to him if he did not understand the language that was spoken.

seek that ye may abound unto the edifying of the church.—This is the conclusion of the first series of arguments. The gifts are not to be used in the church for the private benefit of the one who possessed

them. But this was being done in the church at Corinth with the result that the church was being divided over the gifts which were intended to benefit all the church.

pray that he may interpret.—This begins the second series of arguments for the necessity of interpreting the message spoken in a foreign language. The first series proved the necessity of edifying the church through using the gifts. It also implied the necessity of translating messages spoken in foreign languages. The individual who used the gift of tongues was to pray that he might also interpret. This would indicate that the message was capable of being translated into the language of the people.

if I pray in a tongue.—This is the first point in the three-fold argument for the necessity of translating the message spoken in a tongue so that the church might understand. Paul says, "If I pray in a foreign language my spirit prays." As an intelligent being he prays under the control of the Holy Spirit. Since the gifts were distributed the Spirit of God, we are to understand that the Holy Spirit exercised control over the spirit—the person—of the one who was praying. Paul assumes a situation in which one might speak without the message being understood by the hearer. But the speaker himself would also need to understand what he was saying under the control of the Holy Spirit or his understanding too would not be fruitful. Such praying wouldn't help even the one who prayed. What was one to do in such a situation? Paul answers his question: "I will pray with my spirit (under the control of the Holy Spirit) and I will also pray with the understanding (by translating the foreign language). The same applies to singing, for he was to sing under the control of the Holy Spirit and to translate that he might understand. This shows that the one who used the gift had to understand what he was saying just as those who heard had to understand to be edified.

he that filleth the place of the unlearned.—This is the second argument for the necessity of translating the message spoken in a tongue. By "unlearned" we are to understand that Paul meant the one who did not possess the gift of tongues. See footnote in American Standard Version. The word signifies one who did not belong to a class of specialists. Peter and John were called "ignorant and unlearned men" by their persecutors (Acts 4:13). They were not school men and they were not priests, but it would be wrong to think of them as ignorant in the sense in which we use the word. There were some in the church at Corinth who did not have the gifts. Paul was thinking of such peo-

ple in this case. What were they to do when they heard some one speak in a foreign language? How could they say "Amen" if they did not know what was said? It was necessary to translate that all might understand. Some think of the "unlearned" as being outsiders—not members of the church. The contrast is between those who did have the gift of tongues and those who did not. It would seem, therefore, that by "unlearned" Paul is speaking of the church members who did not have the gift. The point of the argument is the same which ever view of the word is taken.

the other is not edified.—The purpose of the gifts was to edify those who heard. Even the gift of tongues that was primarily a sign for the unbeliever was to be translated for the benefit of both the speaker and the one who heard.

I speak with tongues more than you all.—This is the third point in the argument for the necessity of translation. Far from discouraging the use of the gift, Paul says that he used it more than all. But he placed a limitation on its use: it had to be translated if it was to be used. That is why he says that he would rather speak five words in the church that he might understand than ten thousand in a tongue (foreign language) that no one understood. He argued for the necessity of translating the message spoken in a foreign language. The misuse of the gift of tongues was to be corrected by observing two rules: Use them to edify the church and, in order to do this, translate messages spoken in a foreign language.

Rules For Using Spiritual Gifts (20-40)

Text

14:20-40. Brethren, be not children in mind: yet in malice be ye babes, but in mind be men. 21 In the law it is written, By men of strange tongues and by the lips of strangers will I speak unto this people; and not even thus will they hear me, saith the Lord. 22 Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to the unbelieving: but prophesying is for a sign, not to the unbelieving, but to them that believe. 23 If therefore the whole church be assembled together and all speak with tongues, and there come in men unlearned or unbelieving, will they not say that ye are mad? 24 But if all prophesy, and there come in one unbelieving or unlearned, he is reproved by all, he is judged by all; 25 the secrets of his heart are made manifest; and so he will fall down on his face and worship God, declaring that God is among you indeed.

26 What is it then, brethren? When ye come together, each one hath a psalm, hath a teaching, hath a revelation, hath a tongue, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying. 27 If any man speaketh in a tongue, let it be by two, or at the most three, and that in turn; and let one interpret: 28 but if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God. 29 And let the prophets speak by two or three, and let the others discern. 30 But if a revelation be made to another sitting by, let the first keep silence. 31 For ye all can prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be exhorted; 32 and the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets; 33 for God is not a God of confusion, but of peace.

As in all the churches of the saints, 34 let the women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but let them be in subjection, as also saith the law. 35 And if they would learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home: for it is shameful for a woman to speak in the church. 36 What? was it from you that the word of God went forth? or came it unto you alone?

37 If any man thinketh himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him take knowledge of the things which I write unto you, that they are the commandment of the Lord. 38 But if any man is ignorant, let him be ignorant.

39 Wherefore, my brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues. 40 But let all things be done decently and in order.

Commentary

be not children in mind.—They were to take a mature view of the purpose of the gifts. Gifts did belong to the childhood period of the church as indicated in 13:11; they were not marks of spiritual maturity. But more than this, some in the church were acting like children in the possession of the gifts. As a result, there was jealousy among brethren in the Lord. The possession of the gift was not a sign of God's preference of one above the other, for God is not partial. But it was well to be like babes in malice for babes have none, but in mind Paul wanted them to be mature men.

By men of strange tongues.—That is, those who speak in foreign languages. This word defines "speaking in tongues" and justifies our assumption that speaking in tongues was not some unintelligible

speech-like utterance, but rather that it was speaking in a foreign language. In calling upon the Corinthians to take a mature view of the gift of tongues, Paul reminds them that their primary purpose was to be a sign for the unbeliever, while prophecy was for the edification of the believer. He illustrated his point by a reference from the law (a general term for Old Testament). See Isa. 28:11-12.

According to the quotation from Isaiah, the prophet was answering the quibbling of those who rejected the message of the prophet. They said it was childish, precept upon precept, line upon line. The Lord said that since they wouldn't listen to the prophet, they would have to listen to foreigners and then they really wouldn't understand. Paul uses this to show that tongues were not primarily for the church, for they couldn't understand without having the message translated. But just as in the time of the prophet when the stranger was to speak a foreign language, so those who used the gift of tongues were to speak a language capable of being translated for the edification of all.

Wherefore tongues are for a sign.—The gift of tongues was for a sign to cause the unbeliever to see that God was speaking to him in his own language through one who would not be expected to know his native tongue. See Acts 2:11-13. Prophecy, on the other hand, was for the edification of the believers. Prophecy was not "a sign" for the believers. They needed no such sign since they were already believers. These words, given in italics in the American Standard Version do not occur in the Greek text and should not be inserted in the English translation.

will they not say that ye are mad?—Paul assumes a situation in which the whole church is assembled and all are speaking in tongues. Into this assembly there came certain "unlearned" men or unbelievers. They were two classes who did not understand what was being said through the gift of tongues. The "unlearned" is the church member who did not possess the ability to speak in tongues. See comment on verse 16. Some have assumed that the unbeliever in this case was a foreigner who could have understood the foreign language since Paul had indicated that tongues were a sign for unbelievers. But it is a mistake to assume that all unbelievers were foreigners, and in this case it is evident that they were not, for they did not understand what was being said and therefore joined with the "unlearned" in saying that all were mad.

But if all prophesy.—Paul then assumed a similar situation in which all were prophesying. In this case all understood and were edified. The result was that all declared that God was among them.

Let all things be done unto edifying.—Whether one had a psalm, or a teaching, or a revelation, or a tongue, or an interpretation, his object should be to edify the church. This was the first of the list of important instructions given for the guidance of those who possessed spiritual gifts in Corinth.

If an man speaketh in a tongue.—Instead of all speaking at once with the resulting confusion that would cause men to say, "You are mad," they were to use common sense and Christian courtesy and limit the speakers to two or three and that in turn. One was to interpret, but if no interpreter was present the one with the gift of tongues was to be silent. He could, however, speak to God in private in the tongue.

let the prophets.—The same rule of common sense was to govern the prophets. Others were to discern, that is, they could decide correctly concerning what was heard. It may, however, refer to the gift of discerning of spirits (12:10). Courteous consideration for another who might have a message for the group was to determine which one was to speak. The gift was to be used that all might learn and be built up in the Christian life.

the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.—The prophets own spirits—that is, the prophets themselves—were used by the Holy Spirit to deliver the revelation from God, but the prophet could exercise self-control in the use of the gift. This is solid evidence that they were not involved in some ecstatic experience in which it was impossible to control their speaking. The reason for exercising such control was clear: God is not a God of confusion, but of peace.

As in all the churches of the saints.—This refers to those who made up the church. See comment on 1:2. Saints were those who had been separated from a life of sin and who had dedicated themselves to the service of the Lord. There was no place among "saints" for jealousy and discourtesy that led to the sin of strife and division. It would be well to restore the use of this term in the church and live up to its evident meaning.

let the women keep silence in the churches.—This was to apply to all the churches of the saints. See notes on 11:1-16 about the relation between man and woman while praying or prophesying in the church. This, however, has to do with wives and their husbands. Several things are indicated for their guidance: (1) Wives are to be in subjection—have respect for their own husband (I Pet. 3:1-6). This is not the subjection of a slave, but the giving of honor that is due the husband who in turn is to love his wife (Gen. 1:16; Eph. 5:21-33).

(2) Let them ask their husbands at home. This implies the necessity of the husband assuming his responsibility in the matter of Christian teaching in the home. (3) This was to be observed because of the culture of that day, for it was a shameful thing for a woman to speak in the church. In our culture, it is not a shame for a woman to speak in public provided she can do so and maintain her womanly dignity. (4) The instruction seems to have involved the misuse of gifts. Just what the problem was, we may not know, but the Corinthians did. Paul gave the regulations to protect the church from the misuse of the gifts. Perhaps some would disagree with him, but he reminded them that the gospel did not originate with them nor did it come to them alone.

the commandment of the Lord.—What was said by the inspired apostle was the commandment of the Lord and it was to be obeyed by His church. In all probability, there were some in Corinth who were claiming that they were prophets or even apostles, but if such a one disregarded this truth and failed to agree with what God said through the inspired apostle Paul, he was not to be recognized as a true leader of the church. Ignorance of this fact did not change the matter; God's commandments for the church were delivered through His apostle.

desire earnestly to prophesy, forbid not to speak with tongues.—As the chapter began, so it closes: the gifts were for the benefit of the church in the absence of the completed revelation of God's will and were to be used to accomplish the task for which they were distributed by the Holy Spirit. They were not to forbid the use of the gift of tongues; it was to be used in accordance with its purpose and the rules given to regulate its use. In this way, all things could be done decently and in order.

Summary

Chapter fourteen concludes the three-chapter discussion of the subject of spiritual gifts. It is the longest of any of the discussions of problems with which the apostle deals in the epistle except that of division. These two issues were related in that the misuse of the gift of tongues was causing jealousy and strife in the church.

In attacking the problem, the apostle did not discourage the use of the gifts, but argues for the necessity of correcting the misuse of them. In the thirteenth chapter he had pointed out the most excellent way of

love that would correct the sin of jealousy over the possession of the gift of tongues. In this chapter he presents two more corrective measures to overcome the misuse of the gift of tongues. The gifts were to be used to edify the church, whether prophecy or tongues. The gift of tongues was not to be used unless the message spoken in a foreign language was translated so that all the church might receive edification. Prophecy which required no interpretation was to be preferred in the church. Tongues were primarily intended as a sign for the unbeliever.

Paul presents two series of arguments in support of these corrective measures. Each series has three steps in it. The first series shows the necessity of using the gifts to edify the church. Even Paul wouldn't benefit the church by using the gift of tongues unless he translated so that the church might be edified. Then he shows how such instruments as the flute or harp must give understandable sounds if they are to benefit those who hear. Just so, the gift of speaking in foreign languages had to be accompanied with the gift of interpretation (translation) to be of benefit to the church. His third argument indicated that the human tongue must be used to speak a message that can be understood or the one speaking will be speaking into the air and those who hear will be like foreigners to him. Therefore, he declares, "Seek that ye may abound unto edification of the church."

In the second series, he argues for the necessity of translating the message delivered in a foreign language. He assumes a case in which he might be praying in a foreign language. Unless he understands what he is saying, his spirit is praying under the control of the Holy Spirit, but he is not benefitted. Therefore, he argues that the one speaking in a tongue must translate in order for the gift to be used in a profitable manner for the speaker and for those who hear. In his second argument in this series, he thinks of those who may not have the gifts—the unlearned—and who are not able to say "Amen" to what is being said because they do not understand the language. Therefore, it must be translated for the benefit of those who do not have the gift. Then he adds a word about his own experience in using the gift of tongues. He thanked God that he spoke in tongues more than all, but adds, "in the church, I had rather speak five words with my understanding, than I might instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue." The message simply had to be translated to make it profitable for the whole church.

With this basic issue established, Paul proceeded to present certain rules and regulations to govern the use of gifts. They were to be used

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in accord with God's purpose. The church was to take a mature view of them instead of the childish attitude they had allowed to govern their thinking. The gifts were not a mark of maturity; they belonged to the childhood period of the church, but they were not to be allowed to become a source of jealousy and strife in the church. Christian courtesy toward others was to regulate their use. If all spoke at once and no one understood, the "unlearned" and the unbeliever would say that they were mad. But if the rules were observed, all would know that God was in their midst. For this reason they were to limit those who spoke to two or three, and these were to speak in turn; others were to listen and be benefitted by the message. No one was to speak in tongues unless there was one present to translate. Paul plainly pointed out that the prophets could control themselves in the use of these gifts. He reminded them that God is not a God of confusion, but of peace.

A difficult problem is presented in his reference to women who were to keep silence in the church. This was the rule in all the churches of the saints. There was, in all probability, some trouble that had arisen in connection with the misuse of the gift of tongues. Wives were to have proper consideration for their own husbands who were to assume the responsibility—not authority—for teaching at home. Respect for each other in public and at home was necessary then and now. It is a shame for a wife or a husband to be discourteous to each other at home or in the church. What Paul wrote was the commandment of the Lord.

He closed the chapter with this exhortation, "Desire earnestly to prophesy," and adds, "forbid not to speak in tongues." These gifts had a place in the early church, and when their purpose was fulfilled they were done away. Now we have the whole revelation of the Lord in the Bible. Let us follow Paul's closing word also by doing all things decently and in order.

Questions

1. What are the two principal phases of the subject of spiritual gifts which are discussed in this chapter?
2. How is the discussion of this chapter related to what is said in the two preceding chapters?
3. In what way is the subject of spiritual gifts related to the discussion of division?

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4. What are the three major abuses of the subject of tongues which Paul discussed in this section?
5. What corrective measure does he suggest for each?
6. What evidence is there that Paul was not discouraging the use of the gift of tongues?
7. What was the essential purpose of the gifts when used in the church?
8. Why did Paul indicate that the church should desire prophecy above the gift of tongues?
9. What did he recommend in order to make tongues of equal value to the church?
10. What was speaking in tongues?
11. How does the gift which was used in the church at Corinth compare with the gift as used on Pentecost?
12. In the light of Paul's teaching on the subject of spiritual gifts, what differences are evident between the gift of tongues and the present day utterance of speech-like sounds under emotional stress?
13. What is the difference between the guidance which the Holy Spirit gave the apostles and the providence of God which the faithful Christian can observe by looking back over his experiences?
14. How was the ability to speak in a foreign language distributed by the Holy Spirit?
15. How is the modern missionary forced to meet the language barrier?
16. How was it possible for the one who used the gift of tongues to speak to God and not to men?
17. What is meant by speaking mysteries? By whom was it done?
18. How was it possible for one who spoke in a tongue to edify himself?
19. Why, then, was not the church also edified?
20. Why was the one who prophesied greater?
21. What bearing does this have on the problem of jealousy over the gifts?
22. What is the issue in each of the two series of arguments for the correct use of tongues?
23. What are the three arguments in the first series?
24. What are the three arguments in the second series?
25. In verse nine, what is meant by "the tongue"?
26. What is meant by "barbarian"?

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27. Why would the use of the gift of tongues cause one to be like a foreigner?
28. What did Paul mean by the expression, "my spirit prays"?
29. What is meant by "unlearned"?
30. What is Paul's point about saying "Amen"?
31. Why did Paul thank God that he spoke in tongues more than all?
32. Why, then, the comparison about five words with understanding and ten thousand words in a tongue?
33. What did Paul mean by the remark, "Be not children in mind"?
34. How explain the quotation from Isaiah about men of strange tongues?
35. How does this show what was done by speaking in tongues?
36. To what did Paul refer by "law"?
37. What was the primary purpose of the gift of tongues?
38. What was the purpose of prophecy?
39. Why should we delete the italicized words, "is for a sign" in the English text?
40. What is the difference between "unlearned" and "unbeliever"?
41. Why would they say, "Ye are mad"?
42. Why would the same ones say, "God is in the midst of you"?
43. What rules were to be observed in determining who was to speak in the church?
44. What proof is there that the prophets could exercise self-control in using the gift of prophecy?
45. What bearing does this have on some instances of supposed speaking in tongues today?
46. What is meant by "churches of the saints"?
47. Why did Paul use it in this connection?
48. Why did he say, "let the women keep silence in the churches"?
49. What responsibility of the husband is implied by the apostle's instruction for the wife to ask her husband at home?
50. Why did he say that what he was saying was the commandment of the Lord?

For Discussion

1. What should our attitude be toward the Bible as the guide-book to heaven?
2. Have you found anything lacking in it?
3. Do you know of instances where attempts to speak in tongues have caused division in a local church?