

Chapter Fourteen

THE PROBLEM OF EDIFICATION IN THE MIDST OF DIVERSITY (14:1-40)

IDEAS TO INVESTIGATE:

1. Who is supposed to “earnestly desire the spiritual gifts”? Are we, today, to desire them?
2. In what way were the Corinthians apparently using “speaking in tongues” so that the tongues were unedifying?
3. What is the significance of the Old Testament prophecy from Isaiah in this context?
4. Why did Paul state, “. . . and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets”?
5. Is it really “shameful” for a woman to speak in church?

SECTION 1

Preaching by Prophecy (14:1-12)

14 Make love your aim, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. ²For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit. ³On the other hand, he who prophesies speaks to men for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation. ⁴He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church. ⁵Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. He who prophesies is greater than he who speaks in tongues, unless some one interprets, so that the church may be edified.

⁶Now, brethren, if I come to you speaking in tongues, how shall I benefit you unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching? ⁷If even lifeless instruments, such as the flute or the harp, do not give distinct notes, how will any one know what is played? ⁸And if the bugle gives an indistinct sound, who will get ready for battle? ⁹So with

yourselves; if you in a tongue utter speech that is not intelligible, how will any one know what is said? For you will be speaking into the air. ¹⁰There are doubtless many different languages in the world, and none is without meaning; ¹¹but if I do not know the meaning of the language, I shall be a foreigner to the speaker and the speaker a foreigner to me. ¹²So with yourselves; since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church.

14:1-5 Prophecy is Understandable: It will be profitable at the start of this chapter to reiterate the fundamental principles of Biblical hermeneutics. (1) The true interpretation is what the *author* intended to say; (2) The Bible is written in *human* language. If human language is to mean anything at all it must (granting differences in structure) *mean the same thing to all* human beings; (3) Each passage must be understood in the light of its *historical* background, its *grammatical* structure, and *parallel words* or passages; (4) Each word, paragraph, chapter, is to be understood according to its *context*; (5) And each passage is to be interpreted in the light of the *whole scheme of redemption* (the entire Bible). Remember, Paul *expected* the Corinthians to understand him and God expects *all* human beings to *understand* the Bible alike.

The teaching of this chapter was initially given to *promote unity* among Christians, in the first century, in Corinth. Unity could only result when all the Christians at Corinth understood and obeyed the will of God as expressed in this teaching. Understanding and obeying the will of God revealed in the scriptures is *still* the only basis for Christian unity. Let us exert every mental and spiritual effort possible to understand and obey the will of God in this chapter.

Miraculous gifts served their purpose (integration of cultural differences among believers and verification of apostolic doctrine) and ceased. But that does not mean the *generic* principles taught in chapter fourteen (which is, all things done to edify, and done decently, in order) are irrelevant to the believers today. God's principles are always true and never change. The *administration*, or application, of those principles may, due to time or culture, serve their purpose and cease. This was the case with miraculous gifts. Both miraculous gifts and love come from God. Paul expected the Corinthian church to practice both in the will of God. Chapter fourteen gives some practical way that love controls the use a person makes of his gifts.

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The Greek word *prophetes*, prophecy, is literally, “forth-speaking.” In this context it must mean more than just predicting the future, since all *teaching* in the first century church did not involve the necessity of predicting the future. The word *propheteian* in Romans 12:6 may not include the miraculous element at all since it is listed with the “functional” (Gr. *praxin*) gifts; it probably means simply, preaching. There was a “school of the prophets” in the Old Testament (also called “sons of the prophets” II Kings 2:3, 5, 7, 15; 4:1, 38). Prophets with the miraculous power to predict, did not have to go to school to learn how to predict! Evidently the title “prophet” could be applied to a person learning to “prophesy” in the sense of preaching.

Yet, in the context of I Corinthians, chapter 12-14, “prophecy” is clearly to be understood as a miraculous gift. Here it is more than merely preaching or teaching by natural faculties. Whether it was teaching and preaching, or predicting, or both, it was under the inerrant direction of the Holy Spirit in order to deliver to the first century church an infallible message from God.

The Greek text of 14:1, like the Greek of 12:1, says, *zeloute de ta pneumatika, mallon de hina propheteuete*, literally, “be zealous for the spiritual things, and rather, in order that you may prophesy.” Once again, as in 12:1, the word “gifts” (Gr. *charismata*) is omitted. The most spiritual thing to want is the desire to edify others—that is done by teaching.

The apostle warns that speaking in a *tongue* (Gr. *glosse*, language) usually resulted in utterance of a non-understandable mystery. The Greek word *musterion*, mystery, means, “that which is unrevealed,” not that which is unknowable; it would be knowable if revealed, or interpreted. The word “unknown” (supplied in KJV) is not in any Greek text, and should not have been supplied since it is *not* stated anywhere in the New Testament that first century “tongues” were non-human, unknowable utterances. Of course, God knows all human languages, dialects, phonics or “tongues,” (see Rev. 5:9; 7:9; 9:11; 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; 16:16; 17:15 where “tongue,” *glosson*, is used clearly to mean, human languages). When one of the Corinthian Christians spoke with “other tongues” (Gr. *heterais glossais*, Acts 2:4; and *heteroglossois*, I Cor. 14:21) he did not speak to his fellow Christians because he was speaking in a *foreign language*, but he did speak to God since God understands all languages. When a Christian in the Corinthian church spoke in a language they never learned, they did so from the supernatural gift God gave them. When

there was no interpreter present, they exercised that gift only for God's benefit (since it had not been translated, it was understood by no one else—not even the speaker). God gave the speaker words and information directly from heaven in a language the speaker had not studied or spoken natively. When there was no translator present, speaking in language foreign to the speaker resulted, for the speaker, in a purely *subjective* experience. Thus, the gift of tongues was experiential only for the speaker—and that only in a limited sense if he does not have the gift of interpretation. Paul is pointing, in this context, to the *superiority* of the gift of prophecy over the gift of tongues. Thus to speak only for personal experience is to abuse the gift.

Contrary to the very limited, often self-centered, profitableness of "tongues," the gift of prophecy, since spoken in the vernacular of the audience, speaks to all for edification, encouragement and consolation. Prophecy did not need a translator; it could be understood by all.

Paul was willing that tongues be practiced by all the Corinthian Christians as he would qualify their use in 14:6ff. However, the Greek word *thelo* (14:5) translated "I would," "I wish," or "I want" is a present active indicative verb and is better translated, "I am willing." He was "willing" that tongues be spoken *only* if interpreted; but he was "more" (Gr. *mallon*, "rather") willing that the gift of prophecy be exercised. The one who prophesied was *greater* than the one who spoke in an untranslated language, because prophecy edified everyone. If the untranslated language was translated, then the church was edified. And, we note, the words "some one" in the RSV are not in the Greek text. The one who speaks in the untranslated language is to interpret (Gr. *ektos ei me diermaneun*, "except unless he interprets"). The moment language was translated and understood by the whole church it became, in essence, a prophecy (a revelation, a teaching). What, then, was the need for speaking in foreign languages? As we shall see in another section, this gift was primarily and exclusively to be used as a *sign* for unbelievers and the spiritually immature.

14:6-12 Prophecy is Upbuilding: To read this section, one might think Paul's main subject is tongues—but it is the superiority of prophecy. In these verses the apostle illustrates and explains further the inferiority of tongues to prophecy. Some Bible students forget the main issue here and assume the emphasis is on tongues.

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Paul could have spoken to the Corinthians, by the power of the Holy Spirit, in a multitude of foreign languages (see I Cor. 14:18). Evidently, he did not have the power to translate these "tongues." Even though he could speak in more tongues than any of them, he would have benefited no one except himself, subjectively, and God, unless the tongues could have been translated into a revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching.

Imagine a Japanese Army bugle call being blown by an American soldier at an American Army camp! The call would be an *enigma* (remember, Paul used this word *enigma* in 13:12 to characterize these miraculous gifts). Musical instruments which do not give distinct, recognizable *notes* (Gr. *phthongois*) and bugles which do not give recognizable *calls* (Gr. *phonen*, phonetics) are not only useless, they are confusing. Paul uses the Greek word *diastolen*, distinct, to characterize the function of musical instruments. It is the word from which we get the English word *stole*, and means literally, "a vestment worn by someone to distinguish them from others." He uses the word *adelon* to characterize misuse of a bugle and the word means, "Indistinct, not obvious, uncertain." Musical instruments and, especially bugles, are intended to communicate messages. If they do not they are useless and confusing.

In verse 9 the suggestion is that those with the gift of "tongues" not speak in the public assembly unless they may specifically speak a *clear word* (Gr. *eusemon logon*, literally, "a word that well-signifies"). Foreign languages without interpretation are not clear signals—they are undistinguishable sounds.

In 14:10 Paul says there are multitudinous "kinds" (Gr. *gene*, geneses, families) of *phonetics* (Gr. *phonon*) in the *world* (Gr. *kosmos*) and not one without *meaning* (Gr. *aphonon*, literally, "without its own phonetics"). Yet, if one of these "phonetics" is sounded or spoken and *not* translated, and a listener does not happen to know the language being spoken miraculously, he would be a *foreigner* (Gr. *barbaros*, barbarian) and the speaker would be a *foreigner* (Gr. *barbaros*). Paul is using the term *barbaros* literally, and not figuratively. Those who do not understand one another's human language are foreigners to one another. It is clear that Paul is speaking of *actual* human languages when he says "tongues" and *not* of the modern phenomena called *glossolalia* (a word not found in that form in the New Testament at all). The modern, alleged, "speaking in tongues" has been thoroughly analyzed by linguistics and philologists

and their conclusions repudiate it as being any form of language at all (see *The Psychology of Speaking In Tongues*, by John P. Kildahl, pub. Harper and Row, 1972). Dr. Kildahl also documents cases where actual human language, spoken in an audience where the language was not understood except by the speaker, received a so-called miraculous interpretation and it was not at all what the speaker said. Modern glossolalia is pseudo-miraculous!

Paul repeats, in 14:12, the overriding, central principle of these three chapters (I Corinthians 12-13-14) again. That principle is, strive to *excel* (Gr. *perisseuete*, abound, fully) in building up the church. So the teaching thus far is that teaching by revelation ("prophecy") builds up the church, while miraculous speaking in foreign tongues which are not translated or interpreted does not build up the church.

SECTION 2

Proving by Tongues (14:13-25)

13 Therefore, he who speaks in a tongue should pray for the power to interpret. 14For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful. 15What am I to do? I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also; I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also. 16Otherwise, if you bless with the spirit, how can any one in the position of an outsider say the "Amen" to your thanksgiving when he does not know what you are saying? 17For you may give thanks well enough, but the other man is not edified. 18I thank God that I speak in tongues more than you all; 19nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind, in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue.

20 Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; be babes in evil, but in thinking be mature. 21In the law it is written, "By men of strange tongues and by the lips of foreigners will I speak to this people, and even then they will not listen to me, says the Lord." 22Thus, tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers, while prophecy is not for unbelievers but for believers. 23If, therefore, the whole church assembles and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are mad? 24But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account

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by all, ²⁵the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you.

14:13-19 Intelligibility Abdicated: Those Corinthian Christians who clamored for the gift of tongues because it was spectacular were abdicating the only means of building Christ's church—intelligible communication. The Greek word here for "tongues" is *glossa*; the Greek word for "speaking" is *lalon*. Modern charismatics have combined the two words into one, *glossolalia*, to denote modern, alleged, "tongues-speaking." But, we repeat, the word *glossolalia* is not found in the New Testament. There is a distinct difference, literally, between the Greek New Testament words *ho lalon glosse* and the modern word *glossolalia*, and there is also a difference in the connotations implied. Needless to say, then, there is a distinct difference between what was practiced in the first century and today.

In the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint, or LXX), the word *glossa* is used for (a) the human *organ* known as the tongue, and; (b) the language of a known people, but *never* for some ecstatic, esoteric babble. The same is true of the New Testament. In Acts 2:8, when Peter and the other apostles spoke in *other glossa*, men from all over the world heard in their own *dialect* (the Greek word *dialekto* is used in Acts 2:8).

The Greek word *gene* refers to a "family" or genre (genealogy) of *glossa*, (see 14:10). This indicates that the tongues being spoken by the Corinthians were clearly distinguishable one from another and, were not unknowable, but one family or genre of human language or another.

The Greek word *hermeneuo* (14:5, 13, 26, 27, etc.) is not used in the Bible to mean the interpretation of an unknowable language into a known language. The word *hermeneuo* always means to translate words from one knowable language into another knowable language (cf. John 1:38, 42; 9:7; see also Ezra 4:7) so that there may be an understanding; (see also Matt. 1:23; Mark 5:41; 15:22, 34; Acts 9:36; 13:8; Heb. 7:2; II Peter 1:20). When *hermeneuo* is translated, "translate," we see clearly that Paul is talking about *knowable* languages being translated into other knowable languages, and not about "unknown" and unknowable gibberish. Paul warns, "Therefore, he who speaks in a tongue should pray for the power to translate."

Reasons the modern phenomenon called *glossolalia* is *not* the miraculous speaking in “tongues” of the first century church:

- a. Scriptural reasons cited above.
- b. Today’s phenomenon is not received by the laying on of the hands of an apostle.
- c. Ecstatic, esoteric glossolalia similar to Christian glossolalia has been practiced, and is being practiced, by pagans in ancient and modern times (Hittites, Phoenicians, Egyptians, Greeks, East Africans, Islamics, American Indians, Caribbean voodoo practitioners, and many others).
- d. Ecstatic gibberish has been practiced by a multitude of different religious groups who have *fundamental doctrinal aberrations* when compared with the Bible (Roman Catholics, Mormons, Jews, cultists of all varieties). The Spirit of God would not *contradict* his apostolic word, nor would he give credence by miraculous manifestations to these *apostate* religious groups.
- e. Writings of the early church “fathers” (immediately after the first century) indicate Biblical “tongues” were not manifested in their time (Irenaeus, Origen, Chrysostom, Augustine of Hippo; see Kildahl, op. cit., pp. 14-15).
- f. In the history of modern, so-called, tongues there are no scientifically confirmed recordings of anyone speaking in a foreign language which he had never learned (Kildahl, p. 39).
- g. Dr. Kildahl, in order to investigate “interpretations” played a taped example of tongues-speech privately for several different “interpreters.” In no instance was there any similarity in the several “interpretations” (Kildahl, p. 63).
- h. Kildahl writes of a man raised in Africa, of missionary parents, who decided to test the “interpretation of tongues.” He attended a tongues-speaking meeting where he was a complete stranger. At the appropriate moment, he rose and spoke the Lord’s Prayer in the African dialect he had learned in his youth. When he sat down, an “interpreter of tongues” at once offered the meaning of what he had said. He interpreted it as a message about the imminent second coming of Christ (Kildahl, p. 63).
- i. Personal friends of mine, of the so-called charismatic persuasion, and books in my personal library from charismatic practitioners,

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offer instruction on how one may *learn*, by *human* means, the act of tongues-speaking. How does one learn that which is miraculous?

- j. Much modern, so-called, tongues-speaking is allegedly *not* under conscious control of the person who allegedly speaks and yet this very chapter (I Cor. 14) says *it must be* (I Cor. 14:26-33), so that they can determine who is to speak and when they are to speak.
- k. According to one former member of a tongues-speaking denomination, 85% of modern, so-called tongues-speaking is done in the public assemblies, by women. Yet, Paul directs (14:33-36) that women should be silent in the public assemblies.

Paul explains that even the bona fide speaking in tongues by miraculous gift is unfruitful as far as intelligent communication is concerned, unless there is a translator present. When a Corinthian Christian prayed in a foreign language he did not know, his spirit might receive some emotional, subjective, excitation, but there would be nothing by which his *mental*, spiritual growth (edification) could proceed. Speaking in a tongue without a translator did not bring the mind into play, and anything said would bear no edifying fruit to the congregation. The same principle is true of all singing in congregational worship. Singing is a means of instructing the congregation unto edification (see Eph. 5:19). If the singing is unintelligible, for any reason, it is foolish to say, "Amen," because no instruction or edification has taken place. *Edification cannot take place without instruction!*

Although Paul was probably writing about singing done in Corinth by Christians with the miraculous gift of tongues—and therefore, singing in a foreign language—a great amount of today's so-called religious music is neither Christian nor intelligible. In some cases, the words of today's songs, when distinguishable, are actually anti-scriptural. The twentieth century church needs to restore the New Testament teaching about music. Too many "Christian musicians" have succumbed to the "performer mentality," and, at the same time, many congregations have adopted the "audience-mentality" toward music. The New Testament concept of music in the worship assembly gives no credence to the modern mania for "the beat," "performance-mentality," and unintelligible, imprecise, vague generalizations. The desire to "show-off" as a "performer" is precisely the attitude that was destroying the Corinthian congregation. It is the issue to which

the apostle Paul addresses as much as half of this epistle! It is still relevant!

Speaking, praying or singing in a foreign language (tongue) had to be translated and made understandable if done at all in the worship services, otherwise the "outsider" could not be edified. The Greek word *idiotes* (14:16, 23, 24) (from which the English word *idiot* comes) meant someone excluded, for one reason or another, from any specific group of people, e.g. the civilian as opposed to the soldier, the uneducated man as opposed to the scholar, the private citizen as opposed to the public official. Paul is clearly using the word *idiotes* to denominate those in attendance at Christian worship services at Corinth who were unskilled in foreign languages, and had no miraculous way of translating the tongues. They could neither speak in foreign languages or translate. Thus they were the same as foreigners or "outsiders." Some commentators classify the "outsider" as one who is neither an "unbeliever" or a Christian, but a proselyte or a catechumen (learner). But the "outsider" is expected to be able to say "Amen" to any translated speech in a foreign tongue (14:16). Thus, it would appear, the "outsider" is a Christian, not ignorant, but outside the select group of Christians in the Corinthian congregation who had received special, miraculous gifts.

Any use of gifts that did not produce understanding for the whole congregation, might serve some selfish purpose for the gifted person but others are not edified. It would appear Paul disapproved of "private" use of speaking in tongues for the Corinthians. Such "private" use was selfish, childish, and, if indiscriminately used, produced the aura of insanity and foolishness. Speaking miraculously in a foreign language must communicate to the *minds* (Gr. *nous*, mind) of all present in the assembly, including the speaker, both the ungifted and the unbeliever. The tongues were to be translated into the languages of those present in the service.

The apostle had the miraculous gift of tongues in greater capacity than all the Corinthians together, but his counsel was (and his counsel would be apostolic doctrine) that five words spoken in a language all hearers could understand with their minds were worth more than ten thousand words unintelligible to the hearers, although spoken by direct miracle from God. The Greek word *katecheso* is translated "instruct" and is the word from which we get the English word *catechism*; it generally means "instruction in the fundamentals of

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a subject." God gave the infant church gifts for the sole purpose of instruction and edification (Eph. 4:11-16).

14:20-25 Immaturity Accentuated: Not only did the obsession for the spectacular gift of tongues-speaking (untranslated) show these Corinthians would abdicate intelligent communication, it also accentuated their spiritual immaturity (see I Cor. 3:1ff.). To speak in a language without translating, only for the speaker's glory, and to elevate egotism over "line upon line, precept upon precept" processes of instruction is not only immature, it is a sign of unbelief.

So Paul starts this paragraph with an admonition for the Corinthian Christians to "grow up"! They were not to have a child's "show-off" mentality. He *did* want them to be "infant-like" (Gr. *nepiazete*) in evil, but he wanted them at the same time, to be "mature" (Gr. *teleioi*, perfected, complete, matured, reach the goal) in *phresin*, mentality.

It is interesting that Paul quotes from the prophet Isaiah (14:21) and calls it "the law." He is emphasizing that prophecy in the Old Testament was just as authoritative as the law of Moses. But the significance of Isaiah's prophecy here is the context from which this prophecy came. Isaiah 28:11-12 comes from the prophet's reproach of his Hebrew contemporaries (750-700 B.C.) who *kept asking* for miraculous signs that Jehovah was going to deal with them in judgment as the prophets kept insisting he was. They were "unbelievers." The covenant people would not (except for a small remnant) accept the "line upon line, precept upon precept" teaching of the prophets. They scoffed at that kind of instruction as fit for babies. And they were angry that the prophets inferred they were babies. They considered themselves sophisticated and mature. God said, however, "You are wrong; line upon line, precept upon precept is not for babies, but for the mature. The spectacular is for babies, and I am going to show you something spectacular since that is the only way some of you will believe. I am going to deliver you into captivity and you will hear foreign languages. Your hearing foreign language will be evidence that the teachings of the prophets were for spiritual maturation." Isaiah was talking to "inside unbelievers" when he wrote to the Jews and that is precisely why Paul quotes Isaiah here. Isaiah was talking about spiritual maturity as opposed to childish "unbelief," and that is the very purpose Paul had in quoting it here to these childish, unbelieving Corinthian Christians.

There were two kinds of people in the Corinthian church. There were the believers who welcomed "line upon line" teaching. They

believed the messages of the “prophets” and did not need continual miracles to remain steadfast in the faith. Then there were the “unbelievers” who had to have miracles at every public worship or they did not think they could maintain their faith. God was displeased even with the Old Dispensation people who put him to the test beyond what they should have (see I Cor. 10:9 and Exod. 17:7). Jesus called the Jews who kept on asking for miraculous signs, “an evil and adulterous generation” (see Matt. 12:39; 16:4). So, “tongues” were a *sign* for the immature, the “unbelievers,” even the “unbelievers” within the membership of the church, as well as for unbelievers outside the membership. “Tongues” served as signs that there was a divine presence, that the one, true God was speaking to the world through the apostle’s doctrine and the messengers of Christ’s church.

But, if the whole church did nothing but speak in tongues, that would be as far as outsiders and unbelievers would get. *They would not be instructed*—only amazed. And, if the whole church did nothing but speak in tongues the outsider and unbeliever would probably say the tongues-speakers were all “out of their minds” (Gr. *mainesthe*, insane, out of control mentally). The outsiders and unbelievers would not be caused to worship God if the whole assembly spoke in tongues. Not even the miraculous really *converts* unbelievers without extensive, logical, direct, communication of the teachings of God. “Prophecy” makes believers out of unbelievers and edifies immature believers. Tongues were merely to signal the divine presence; “prophecy” (teaching) was for “outsiders” and “unbelievers” to convict them and cause them to humbly worship God and acknowledge God’s presence in the church. The Corinthian church needed a lot less of the tongues (and these were miraculous tongues), and a lot more of the prophecy.

SECTION 3

Perfecting With Decorum and Decency (14:26-40)

26 What then, brethren? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. 27 If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn; and let one interpret. 28 But if there is no one to interpret,

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let each of them keep silence in church and speak to himself and to God. ²⁹Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. ³⁰If a revelation is made to another sitting by, let the first be silent. ³¹For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged; ³²and the spirits of prophets are subjects to prophets. ³³For God is not a God of confusion but of peace.

As in all the churches of the saints, ³⁴the women should keep silence in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as even the law says. ³⁵If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church. ³⁶What! Did the word of God originate with you, or are you the only ones it has reached?

³⁷ If any one thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord. ³⁸If any one does not recognize this, he is not recognized. ³⁹So, my brethren, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues; ⁴⁰but all things should be done decently and in order.

14:26-33a Decorum: If the Corinthian church (or any church in any age) was to ever reach maturity, or perfection (reach the goal God had for it), it would have to bring order out of the confusion caused by the childish attitudes and practices with miraculous gifts. Paul sets forth specific “rules” of conduct to be followed for this problem of the Corinthian church of the first century. These are not, specifically, rules for the church today since miraculous gifts no longer exist. However, the principle teaching, that *all* things should be done decently and in order in the church, still applies. Therefore, there is much for us to learn from this section.

The idiomatic phrase, “What then, brethren?” is much like the modern phrase in English, “How about it, then, folks?” Paul is saying, “This, then, is the way it is to be when you meet in your Christian assemblies.” He recognized that there would be a multitude of people with gifts all at the same gathering. He also realized that a person with a miraculous gift could hardly be asked *never* to use it. After all, God would not give any gift, miraculous or non-miraculous, and forbid its use. God would certainly want it to be used. But the controlling principle for use of all gifts was, “Let *all* things be done for edification.” These are the apostolic rules:

1. If any are to speak miraculously, in a foreign language, there must be only two, or at most three, *and each in turn* (Gr. *kai ana meros*, the word *meros*, means, to divide up, to allot, to distribute). One at a time!
2. Those with the gift of “tongues” were permitted to speak *only* if they knew there was a *translator* (Gr. *hermeneuto*) present. If there was no translator present, they were to keep silent! Any so-called “private” exercise would be misuse.
3. If any prophesied, only two or three were to prophesy. And, they were told, prophesying would be each in turn—*one at a time*, (14:30-31).
4. Those with the gift of “prophecy” were to exercise their gift only when there were “others” present to *discern* (Gr. *diakrinetosan*, the word from which the English words, critique, criticize, critic, meaning, “to judge, to discriminate, to decide”). The “discerners” had the miraculous power to *decide* (not interpret) whether a prophet spoke from God or not.
5. Evidently, no one prophet had all the truth to proclaim. One by one they were to teach at each corporate assembly of the church. And *all*, even those who taught, were to do some learning at one time or another (14:31).
6. All gifts were to be kept under these controls, for the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets (and so were the spirits of the language-speakers). Every apostolic command here by Paul presupposes that these gifts could be, and were to be, exercised under their *control*. Paul would not have insisted on the gifts being exercised by only two or three, and one at a time, had they not been controllable. No tongues-speaker, or prophet, was to jump up and begin to exercise a gift when another was doing so. No one was to claim he could not help himself—that it was the Holy Spirit forcing him to exercise his gift. *These gifts were not exercised spontaneously!*

God would never produce disorder and confusion! God brings order out of chaos. God does not produce fragmentation—he creates wholeness. The Greek word *akatastasia*, translated, *confusion*, means, “instability, anarchy, revolution,” and from it we get the English words, *catastasis*, *catastrope*, and *catatonia*.

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The church today, though not possessing miraculous gifts, will do well to learn a lesson from the fundamental principle Paul teaches here. The principle is decorum, orderliness. Worship does not, in fact should not, have to be *spontaneous*, to be worship! Of course, worship must come from the heart. And, simply following a regimen of worship ceremonies does not insure that worship is being done. But neither does spontaneity! Paul is saying to these Corinthians (and to all Christians) that God is not pleased with any worship service that is disorderly and confusing. The worship of God must be intelligent, instructive, maturing, and orderly (according to a design, with regularity). If spontaneity must suffer, then let it suffer. This is true of “youth sessions” as much, or more, than “adult sessions.” How can Christians learn to “order” their lives if they are taught that the worship of God is some exercise in spontaneity, impulsiveness, and confusion?

14:33b-40 Decency: Is it indecent for a woman to speak in church? The instruction concerning women in the public assembly, in this context, must have involved the misuse of miraculous gifts. We really do not know what the problem was, specifically, but it was probably one of the following situations:

- a. either some women had miraculous gifts and were using them publicly which, in that culture especially, was an indecent usurpation of male leadership in the public assemblies; the dignity of man and woman is preserved only if the place God has ordained for each is maintained (see our comments in I Cor. 11:1ff.).
- b. or, some women, who did not have miraculous gifts, were prodding and agitating their husbands or others who did have gifts to use them contrary to the apostolic guidelines; this also was indecent behavior for women.
- c. or, some women who did not have miraculous gifts were insisting they were going to teach in the public assemblies without gifts.

The *point* is, even had there been women in the Corinthian church with miraculous gifts, they were not to exercise them in the public assemblies. This certainly is *not* the case with most of the so-called “charismatic” assemblies in modern times.

The apostle reiterates a teaching he has made in other places in the New Testament. He says, “. . . women should be subordinate, as even the law says.” The Greek same word *hupotassethosan* (be subject, subordinate) is used in Ephesians 5:21ff. and in Colossians 3:18.

The woman was created by God *subordinate* to her husband. Male chauvinism has nothing to do with it—it is divinely ordained.

Paul anticipated there would be those who would not agree with his teaching about women in the public assembly, but he reminded them that the word of God did not originate with them, nor did it come to them alone. Actually, Paul says, “Did the word of God *go forth from you . . .* or are you the only people who have and know the word of God?” The Greek word is *exelthen*, “go forth.” In other words, the word of God is not subject to the whims of the Corinthians—the Corinthians are to be subject to the word of God.

Furthermore, Paul speaks the word of God. Any member of the Corinthian church who would disobey the apostle’s instructions about the use and misuse of miraculous gifts in this letter is not possessed of God’s truth, nor is he spiritually-minded. This warning is as relevant for the church today as it was for the first century church.

When all is said and done, it comes down to this: “Earnestly desire to prophesy,” because that is what converts and edifies. “But do not forbid anyone who has the miraculous gift of speaking in a foreign language to do so” for God had a purpose for the exercise of all the miraculous gifts. “But let *all* things be done decently and in order.” The word *decently* is a translation of the Greek word *euschemonos*, and means literally, “well-schematized,” or, “with good schematics.” Any worship of God that does not follow God’s schematic (plan, blueprint, order, arrangement) is *not decent!* The words *in order* are translated from the Greek words, *kata taxin*; the word *taxin* is related to the Greek word *tagma*, and both are used to signify “to arrange something in order, especially in a military order.” It would not, therefore, be altogether unscriptural to say that the worship of God in the church’s corporate assemblies, should be *regimented!*

We believe the apostolic doctrine concerning miraculous gifts is clearly set forth in these three chapters (I Cor. 12-13-14). We believe all Christians, using accepted hermeneutical rules, should understand this teaching alike. But we also acknowledge that as long as some accept what they believe they have experienced in the place of understanding what Paul teaches here, there will continue to be division among Christians, just as there was nearly two thousand years ago, when Paul wrote to the brethren at Corinth.

A quotation from Seth Wilson, Dean Emeritus of Ozark Bible College, is in order here. Dean Wilson has spent nearly fifty years researching this subject and counseling individuals and congregations who are “plagued by this problem.”

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The tongues-speaker (modern-day) who says, "You cannot understand or give any true judgment about a gift from God which you have not experienced and do not believe in," is saying, in effect, that it is not subject to critical examination in the light of Scripture. An error which grows out of this is the belief that one cannot understand the Bible unless he has been "baptized in the Holy Spirit." To say that only the believer in the tongues experience is qualified to comment on it begs the question, supposes that it is always from God, and puts the subjective (inward and personal feeling) above the Scripture as a source of truth. This takes the attitude that tongues speaking is something that is beyond the realm of reasonable evidence or factual investigation.

—*from an unpublished essay on the Holy Spirit by Seth Wilson*

APPLICATIONS:

1. The attitude of the Corinthians toward miraculous gifts shows conclusively that possession of miraculous powers, *per se*, does not produce holiness or Christian maturity.
2. It is possible to have a miraculous gift and be carnally-minded.
3. Teaching the word of God (in Corinth, by "prophecy" since there was as yet no completed New Testament scripture) in understandable human language is to be preferred above every other exercise in the church.
4. Edification, maturation, is the goal of everything God does through members of the body of Christ.
5. God wants Christians to be mature in their thinking and reasoning.
6. Self-glorification is childish and forbidden in Christians.
7. God demands order and planning in the corporate assembly of the Church—and in private worship, too, we might add.
8. No personal experience, miraculous or non-miraculous, can be a substitute for obedience to the apostolic word.
9. A thorough study of this chapter (using proper hermeneutical principles) shows conclusively that modern, pseudo-miraculous gifts, do not fit the apostolic revelation concerning miraculous gifts.

APPREHENSIONS:

1. Is the word "gifts" in 14:1? What does its absence probably indicate?
2. Why did Paul emphasize seeking the gift of prophecy?
3. Does it not seem in 14:4 Paul is rebuking (mildly) some of the Corinthians for seeking to "edify" only themselves by using the gift of tongues without interpretation? Why would we reach that conclusion?
4. Why would using a miraculous gift only for oneself be wrong?
5. How do we know Paul is talking about human languages, knowable languages, when he says "tongues"? (14:10)
6. Why were the gifts given to the Corinthians? (12:7; 14:5; 14:12; 14:19; 14:26)
7. Did the possession of a miraculous gift mean the possessor's own abilities to think and reason were suspended in the exercise of the gift? (14:13-19)
8. Are Christians supposed to think? Like mature adults? (14:20)
9. Why does Paul quote from Isaiah 28:11-12 in this discussion of "tongues"?
10. Who is the "outsider"? Who is the "unbeliever" in Corinth?
11. Which was better for the outsider and unbeliever to experience in the congregation at Corinth—"tongues" or "prophecy"? Why?
12. Did Paul give "rules" for the use of miraculous gifts? Name the rules!
13. Why did Paul address the subject of women speaking in the church here? What does he say about it in chapter 11?
14. What is the Greek word which is translated "decency"?
15. Is Paul's emphatic statement about the church's need to follow planned, regimented worship relevant for the church today? How? or why?