

1 Corinthians 14 – Chapter Study

Emphasis: Holy Spirit

INTRODUCTION

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Before I started going to CCCM, I attended a church that had spun off from TBN Christian TV network. It was your typical, non-denominational charismatic church.

Meaning, they spent little time teaching of the Bible but a lot of time using the manifestations of the Spirit, or at least *what they called* the manifestations.

A service wasn't complete until a couple people had given a message in tongues & half a dozen had been "slain in the Spirit" – which for those of you who've never seen one of those kinds of meetings means they fell over backwards while being prayed for.

I attended that church for 2 years & can say that I didn't learn a thing from the Scriptures the entire time.

What I *did* learn, was what I've now come to realize was → a *distortion* of the gifts; a misuse, at times even abuse of the manifestations of the Spirit.

As we read chs. 12-14 of 1 Corinthians, we realize that abuse of the gifts of the Spirit is nothing new. They were doing it at the church in Corinth.

And Paul had to write to correct them.

As we pick it up at v. 1 of ch. 14, let's recap Paul's thoughts so far.

In Ch. 12, his emphasis is that while there are many different gifts & manifestations, there's only One Spirit who gives them.

Those gifts will be used in a multitude of ways, to very different ends, but the Holy Spirit is the One uniting element.

And **He** gives to each believer the gifts as **He** chooses.

Then Paul shows how, while the gifts are different, they're *meant to establish a greater unity* through their diversity – not foster conflict, as was happening at Corinth.

He uses the analogy of the body. It has different parts, but each contributes to the health & vitality of the whole.

Then he launches from this into ch. 13 where he reminds them of the primacy of love, a core truth that they as followers of Christ had lost sight of.

As he wraps up ch. 13 & his call to the pre-eminence of love, he returns to the subject of the gifts of the Spirit.

But now he wants to give them some practical instruction on *how* the gifts were to be used when they gathered.

You see, word had reached him that their services had become chaotic; a kind of charismatic circus where all 3 rings were going at once.

There was simply no order, with several people speaking out at the same time; a couple in tongues, a couple more in prophecy.

The result was meetings that were not only *not* profitable, but were working contrary to their purpose of glorifying God and bringing people closer to Him.

So Paul writes . . .

¹ Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy.

While they set love for God & one another as the focal point of their spiritual quest, & sought to be used by God in ministering to others,

When they met together as a group, there was *one gift* that ought to have been given prominence → Prophecy.

Why would Paul say they ought to place a premium on prophecy when they gathered?

Remember what prophecy is – it's speaking forth the mind & counsel of God.

While all the gifts are important & have their place, when the church gathered what they needed was to be nourished by the Word of God, which is what prophecy brought them.

Remember that they didn't have the NT as we do today.

All they had was the Tanach – the Jewish Scriptures.

And while some of the writings of the Apostles were circulated among the churches, it would be a while before they would be compiled into an accepted body of texts recognized as divinely inspired.

So in these early years, the Church relied on the gift of prophecy to nourish them

But Paul knows his emphasis on prophecy is going to elicit a reaction from those who speak in tongues, so he says . . .

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. ³ But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men. ⁴ He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church.

Okay; it's crucial we get this because this is where a lot of mistakes are made in the charismatic misuse of the gifts.

I'll ask some questions – respond out loud. Let's look at it again . . .

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.

The gift or manifestation of tongues, unknown languages – are they to men or God? **To God.**

What do we call speech from us to God? **Prayer or worship**

If a tongue were interpreted, what would we hear? **Prayer or worship.**

Would the interpretation be a message from God TO man? **No.**

What IS a message from God to man? **Prophecy.**

³ But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men.

There it is.

⁴ He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church.

Since tongues are from the speaker TO God, the one benefited is the speaker, even though their prayer might be spiritual intercession for someone half a world away.

The real effect of all genuine prayer & praise is a closer affinity to God.

But prophecy brings blessing to all who hear it because they're receiving the revelation of God.

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.

What Paul says here has to be *balanced* with what he made clear in Ch. 12 – that the Holy Spirit distributes the gifts to all as He sees fits.

When Paul says here that he wishes *all* spoke in tongues, he's **NOT** saying all can!

He's just applying what he said in v. 4 – that tongues are a great way to personal edification.

But because prophecy brings edification to *everyone* who hears it, not just the speaker, when they gather for their meetings – it ought to be more prominent than tongues.

When he says, “He who prophesies is *greater* than he who speaks with tongues,” he means only in the context of their gatherings. There, prophecy is the greater gift.

But – he makes an exception.

If tongues are *interpreted*, then tongues & prophecy reach a parity.

Why? Because when tongues are interpreted, we get to hear Spirit-directed prayer & worship that that's huge!

It's huge because we tend to learn how to pray & praise from others.

So when there's interpretation of tongues, we get to hear *perfect* prayer & praise & are edified in our own expression to God.

The disciples once went to Jesus and said, “Lord, teach us to pray..”

They'd seen the quality of His fellowship with the Father and understood prayer was crucial to it. SO they asked Him to teach them how to pray.

The result was what's known as “The Lord's Prayer” but we ought to call the Disciples' Prayer.

The Lord's Prayer is in John 17 where at the Last Supper Jesus prayed to the Father.

But the Disciples' prayer is a model, a template Jesus gave them to follow.

He never meant them to repeat it word for word as some kind of ritual.

It's an outline for prayer – one that believers have used for centuries as a guide for an effective prayer life.

If the Disciples' prayer is valuable as a model for prayer, how much so the example provided by tongues when they're interpreted?

BTW – Look at the first part of v. 5 again

I wish you all spoke with tongues

What's *implied* here is that not all the Corinthians **DID** speak in tongues.

If they *ought* to have, as Pentecostals say, then Paul would have worded this differently.

He would have said, “You all *must* / *ought to* speak in tongues.”

No – he expresses it this way because in fact not all DO speak in tongues because like all the gifts, they're distributed by the Spirit as He wills.

⁶ But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you unless I speak to you either by revelation, by knowledge, by prophesying, or by teaching? 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? ⁸ For if the trumpet makes an uncertain sound, who will prepare for battle?

His point is simple – the goal is *intelligibility*.

It's all just *noise* to the hearer unless there's *meaning* attached to the sound.

Paul uses the example of a trumpet blown in battle.

The trumpeter blew different sequences of notes to signal a charge, a retreat, to reform, which flank was to advance, etc.

If the troops didn't know which was which, it would be chaos. And that's exactly what was going on at Corinth – chaos.

People were speaking out in tongues but since no one understood them, it was useless.

The question we're moved to ask is, "**Why** were they doing this?"

I mean – it seems so obvious to us: If people can't understand you, why are you shouting as though wanting to be heard?

Because at Corinth they were all in to the *flashy* and *dramatic*.

Their lack of love for one another had made way for an environment where they just wanted to be at the center of attention.

They thought tongues, with its obvious spiritual empowering, was proof of their exalted spiritual position.

They were *grandstanding* – trying to appear "all that" to everyone else.

Every service was another episode of *Corinthian Idol* or *Charismatic Idol*.

Paul says, if no one can understand you, it's pointless to parade your gift in public!

He's *not* saying tongues is useless.

He's saying it's not profitable to be used as a main gift in their gatherings, *unless* it's interpreted.

⁹ 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.

In regard to people understanding you.

¹⁰ There are, it may be, so many kinds of languages in the world, and none of them is without significance. ¹¹ 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.

Paul's point is that while a tongue may not be intelligible to its hearers, that doesn't mean it's without meaning.

As a language, it *does* carry meaning; it's just not known to the one *speaking* it.

¹² Even so you, since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, let it be for the edification of the church that you seek to excel.

And not just because you're showing off!

In keeping with the primacy of love – edifying others ought to be their aim.

¹³ Therefore let him who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret.

Because in this way, tongues turns into edification for the reason we saw earlier.

Paul now goes back over ground he's already covered but from a different angle.

¹⁴ For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful.

Remember – tongues is Spirit-directed speech that bypasses the intellect.

If it was *understood* & flowed from the intellect then there'd be no point in tongues.

¹⁵ What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding.

Paul says that *personally*, when it came to *his prayer life*, he prays in *both* his native language & by the Spirit in tongues.

I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding.

In worship, he followed the same pattern as in his prayer.

Some worship was out of a sanctified mind. Some was in the Spirit.

Here's what this means: When we're worshipping, it's entirely appropriate for you to sing spontaneously, letting the Spirit direct the melody and the words.

Of course, you want to do it at moderate volume, not trying to garner attention to yourself because that would be the very thing Paul is saying not to do here.

The same goes for tongues. It's not wrong to pray quietly in tongues when we gather.

What's wrong is to grab the attention and make an utterance the focal point of attention.

You pray quietly in tongues. You sing moderately in the Spirit.

If you've ever been in a place where lots of people are singing and making melody in their hearts to the

Lord as Paul says in Ephesians – you know how incredibly beautiful it is.

¹⁶ Otherwise, 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? ¹⁷ For you indeed give thanks well, but the other is not edified.

Again – because it's a tongue & not been interpreted, he's clueless as to the meaning.

¹⁸ I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all;

Paul says this because he knew those at Corinth who wanted to parade tongues as the premier gift would say he was only saying all this because his gift was weak.

He says his gift was strong & used to far greater effect than any of them at Corinth.

¹⁹ 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.

Indeed! We've probably *all* heard someone who could say more in 5 words than another who spoke ten thousand!

But Paul's point was – when the church gathers – speak intelligibly!

²⁰ Brethren, do not be children in understanding;

Don't be immature!

however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature.

There are some things it's good to be clueless & inexperienced in – like in the desire to inflict harm on others.

But in other things, like knowledge in *how to use* spiritual gifts – it's time to grow up.

Now Paul adds some deeper theological insights into the whole tongues issue.

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.

In order to get at his meaning, we need to know the context of this quote from Isaiah 28.

God is speaking of the judgment that will come on Israel because of their rebellion against Him.

He will send enemies to defeat them in battle & carry them away to other lands where they will hear other languages they don't know.

This will be a *sign* to them of their judgment.

Paul then applies this to the gift of tongues when he says . . .

²² Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophesying is not for unbelievers but for those who believe.

By *sign* here, Paul means it in the same way Isaiah did – a *negative*; an indication of being at odds with God.

For unbelievers, tongues aren't a sign meant to warm the heart or draw them **TO** God so much as to identify their *separation* from Him.

While the Spirit-filled believer understands what tongues are, the unbeliever just hears gibberish & finds no redeeming value in them.

He or she *scoffs*, & by doing so proves only that he/she *isn't* Spirit-filled.

Prophecy, on the other hand, is a *positive* sign to believers that God is working in their midst.

A real problem comes in the next verses where Paul seems to contradict what he's just said . . .

²³ Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place,

Notice the setting is *public* worship -

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?

Precisely because tongues are *not* intelligible, if an unbeliever comes in & everyone is just babbling out loud in an unknown language – he/she’s going to think the entire group has lost it.

Why? Because tongues are a negative sign that reveal unbelievers are *clueless* about spiritual things.

Problem is – that doesn’t help the unbeliever any. So . . .

²⁴ But if all prophecy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all. ²⁵ And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on *his* face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you.

If instead of tongues, the service is marked by people speaking forth the mind & counsel of God, unbelievers will be confronted with Truth in an intelligible manner that will confront them with their need of God.

Seeing then that *both* believers & unbelievers are better served by the exercise of the gift of prophecy, wouldn’t that be the preferred gift to use when they gather for public worship?

²⁶ How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation.

It isn’t wrong that each person has something to share.

After all, the manifestations are given *to all* by the one Spirit *for* the profit *of all*.

The problem is – they were all using their gifts simultaneously, vying with one another for attention.

So -

Let all things be done for edification. ²⁷ If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be 2 or at the most 3, each in turn, and let one interpret. ²⁸ But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God.

If a tongue is spoken out, it needs to be interpreted.

If there’s no one with the gift of interpretation present – go ahead & use your gift of tongues, but *quietly*.

This brings us to an important point – If you have the gift of interpretation, let us know so that we can encourage those with the gift of tongues to use them when they’re moved on by God to do so.

But Paul is clear, tongues ought not take over the meeting.

It was fine to hear them & their interpretations but only 2 or 3 per meeting.

²⁹ Let 2 or 3 prophets speak, and let the others judge.

Though Paul ranks prophecy as more important in their corporate worship – even then, only 2 or 3 prophecies were to be given per service.

And after each message, the rest of the spiritual leadership of the fellowship was to give it a word of affirmation or not so that the people could know if it was something they ought to heed.

The question is – by what criteria is such prophecy to be evaluated?

First – Does it square with God’s already revealed Word.

God is never going to contradict Himself so a fresh word of prophecy will never go against Scripture.

Second – Does the Word bear witness with the spirit in the mature leadership of the church.

In 2 Cor. 13:1 Paul says this –

“By the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established.”

That’s repeated 6 times in Scripture.

When God speaks, no word will be of private interpretation;

It’ll find *confirmation* in other servants of the Lord.

What do we do when someone gives what they claim is a prophetic word but it's *not affirmed* by the leadership as from God.

The leaders should tactfully but firmly say they can't affirm the message.

But if they deem the person has the right heart & just mis-read the Spirit, they should encourage the speaker to reconsider . . .

Maybe they spoke out something that was meant just for them or another individual, but presented it as though it applied to the whole group.

They may have not said all God *wanted* them to say, or *added* to what God wanted said.

They should be *encouraged* to keep stepping out in faith and trusting God to use them.

If, on the other hand, the leadership knows the person just wants to come off as important and greatly used by God, they need to be confronted.

There are accounts in the Early Church fathers of how some people who were in the habit of receiving prophetic words handled them.¹

They approached church leaders after the service where they had them, and shared the message & visions they'd received.

If they were deemed genuine, they were spoken to the church at their next meeting.

³⁰ But if *anything* is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent. ³¹ For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged. ³² And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. ³³ For God is not *the author of confusion but of peace,*

One of the problems Paul dealt with at Corinth & is still a problem in dealing with ultra-charismatics is the belief that when the Spirit comes on you, you lose control & just have to kind of "go with it."

This is the essence of being in what is called an "ecstatic state."

Paul makes it clear that when the Holy Spirit comes on someone and the gifts are flowing, they don't lose control.

If anything, they gain a greater measure of self-control. For that is one of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:23 = Self-control !

So Paul says, if someone is speaking a prophecy, they aren't to just go on & on forever.

Speak your piece, then sit down & give someone else a chance.

Again, 2 or 3 per meeting. In this way, over time, everyone with the gift of prophecy will have a chance to share their gift for the benefit of all.

What Paul says in these verses, if it had been properly heeded would never have allowed some of the bizarre things that have happened in churches and blamed on the Holy Spirit.

There's simply no squaring the whole Holy Laughter deal with this!

Now, you may have noticed that I didn't read the last part of v. 33 because it more likely goes with v. 34 than v. 33.

Remember, there was no punctuation in Koine Greek.

It makes more sense that the phrase – "As in all the churches of the saints," goes with what follows.

As in all the churches of the saints - ³⁴ let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but *they are to be submissive, as the law [rule] also says.*

In order to understand what Paul is saying here, we need to remember the cultural context we discovered in ch. 11.

A group of women *defied* the biblical principle of authority & submission in the home & church.

Paul wrote to explain that while men & women *are equal* in standing before God as human beings -

When it comes to *roles* they *differ* according to God's design.

He made it clear in ch. 11 that women have the right to pray & prophesy publicly, so he can't be prohibiting it here.

What he's referring to here is **judging** prophecy – the very thing he'd just spoken of.

He doesn't mean that women are to be totally silent in church because that would contradict his welcoming women to public prayer & prophecy.

What they weren't to engage in was **judging** prophecy.

Why? Well, whose charged with judging it? The leadership of the church.

And it's clear from the rule that was in place in all the churches of the saints, that only men could serve as elders.

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

Speak = laleo; to chatter, argue, banter. It's that mindless kind of verbal diarrhea that's nothing if not annoying.

Paul elaborates now a bit on this idea of order in the church, and specifically as it applies to women.

His goal is to halt the chaos that marked their meetings in Corinth.

One of the ways to do that was by asking the women to avoid calling out to their husbands who sat in a different section.

History tells us nearly all early churches were based on the model of the Jewish synagogue.

Even primarily Gentile churches ended up structuring themselves on the model of the synagogue,

Where men sat in one section and the women in another.

Now, it was forbidden for women to speak at all in the synagogue.

Gentiles had no background in this & since most Greek & Roman women had little to no education, when something was said they didn't understand, they'd just shout out, "Hey, honey – what did Pastor Timotheous say? Huh? Oh – what does he mean; Can you explain it for me?"

You can imagine how unruly it got.

So Paul says, listen, if you need something explained, wait till you get him, then ask.

When he says, it shameful for women to speak in the church, he means it's **embarrassing** when they're constantly interrupting.

36 Or did the word of God come originally from you? Or was it you only that it reached?

Paul knew at the heart of the problem at Corinth was **pride**.

Realizing that, he knew there might be some there would think they could argue with him.

So he kind of plays his trump card here & says – "Did the Scriptures **originate with** you or **come to** you?"

They came to them. And who brought them? Paul!

Having come to them did they think they were **the only ones** who had it right & everyone else was wrong?

The fact is, the errors in place at Corinth were pretty unique to them.

The other churches were for the most part using the gifts in the right way.

Were the Corinthians really so arrogant as to think they alone had figured it out? Not likely!

37 If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord. 38 But if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant.

Or v. 38 better – "If anyone **remains** ignorant – so be it."

He's finished convincing them. If they're haven't gotten it by now they aren't going to.

Here's the test – if they're in tune with the Spirit they'll agree with him.

If they don't agree it only proves they're wrong.

Paul's *not* being arrogant himself here.

There comes a time when it's pointless to keep arguing your point & you need to just state the facts & move on.

I don't know how many times I've talked to a Jehovah's Witness about the deity of Christ and they keep denying it, saying Jesus was just an incarnation of the angel Michael.

It gets to the point where every time you pile up yet another proof, they reply with more blasphemy. So it's best to just end it.

Paul's made it clear that the chaos & spiritual elitist that marked the Corinthians church was a sign of gross spiritual immaturity.

He's made clear how the gifts ought to be used.

Either the Corinthians will comply, or not.

There was nothing more to be said.

³⁹ Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues.

Because both are gifts of the Spirit, both ought to be used – but in a way that brings honor to the Lord. So he ends this section with -

⁴⁰ Let all things be done decently and in order.

That's the principle that guides our use of the gifts in the corporate setting.

CONCLUSION

I want to encourage you to use the gifts the Lord has given you.

Especially if you've been given the gift of prophesy or tongues.

You go right ahead and speak out or sing in tongues quietly as we worship.

If you have the gift of interpretation so we can let others know and when moved on by the Spirit, we can hear some Spirit-directed prayer & praise.

If you sense God has something He wants said to the congregation at large, then you come to pastor Charley or I or one of the elders and share it with them.

Of come up afterward and share it & we'll suggest the best way to bring that to the body.

The gifts are here, and they're for the profit of all.

Let's be faithful to use them.

Now – I'm going to be up front here after study if you have any questions.

ⁱ Tertullian – Ante-Nicene Father, Volume 111, A Treatise on the Soul, Ch. 9. NOTE: Tertullian was a Montanist and as such part of an aberrant (heretical) group that was what we would call hyper-charismatic. O looking to his description here may be problematic. However, it does give us an insight into how one early church at least attempted to follow Paul's instructions in 1 Cor. 14.