

## THE CHURCH'S WORSHIP: EMPTY OR EDIFYING?

### STUDENT GUIDE

#### DAILY BIBLE READING

DAY 1	I CORINTHIANS 14: 1-5
DAY 2	I CORINTHIANS 14: 6-19
DAY 3	I CORINTHIANS 14: 20-25
DAY 4	I CORINTHIANS 14: 26-40
DAY 5	I CORINTHIANS 14: 1-19
DAY 6	I CORINTHIANS 14: 20-40
DAY 7	I CORINTHIANS 14: 1-40

*Chapter 14 concludes Paul's instructions to the Corinthians concerning spiritual gifts. For Paul, spiritual gifts are closely connected to worship. Indeed in this chapter, we gain an entirely new dimension in our understanding of the way the ancient church worshipped. We discover how our spiritual gifts may hinder or help the church's collective worship experience.*

*Unfortunately, at Corinth there existed much confusion and disorder in the services. Paul's obvious goal was to temper the services, giving them principles to implement and parameters past which they could not go. While Paul did not want to control the Corinthians, he surely wanted them under control, control of the Holy Spirit, as instructed from the clear Word of God.*

#### OUTLINE

NOTE: Chapter 14 is best studied in clusters of verses rather than our usual chronological arrangement. Therefore, we will assemble various verses from the chapter as we proceed with each point in the exposition.

### 1. The Inferiority of Tongues

Many in the Corinthians church were so emphasizing the greatness of speaking in tongues, it became a point of contention even in the public worship of believers.

A.) *Observe Paul's counsel on the appraisal of tongues.* When Paul speaks of tongues he offers *sympathy* for the presence of the gift (v. 5a). Noteworthy is the Greek word, *glóssa*, consistently translated "tongues" in the New Testament. Literally, it means "an organ of the body" (Rev. 16:10), and metaphorically, it means "language." The translators of the KJV inserted the qualifier "unknown" (cp. v. 2) in the English text for clarity. Unfortunately, their sincere intention turned out to be confusing. Why? Readers wrongly assumed the insertion of the term "unknown" meant Paul referred to "unknowable" language. However, Paul is not referring to an unknowable language but an *unknown* language; that is, a language not before spoken by the speaker or perhaps heard by the hearer. It is the same type of unknown languages the Apostles experienced on Pentecost (Acts 2: 1-4). The gift of tongues — biblically speaking — is speaking in a foreign language not yet learned.

Paul's sympathy for tongues even extends to not forbidding their use: ". . . forbid not to speak with tongues" (v. 39c). It should be noted that every time Paul sympathized with the gift of tongues, he also coupled his sympathy with a stern warning (v. 5, v. 19 and v. 39).

Furthermore, consistent with Paul's warning concerning tongues was his pattern of placing tongues always at the bottom of the list. Among the reasons for placing tongues last are the basic selfishness of tongues (v. 4), the absence of aid to spirituality (vv. 14-15), and the inevitable confusion and disorder tongues create (vv. 33, 40).

B.) *Observe Paul's counsel on the abuse of tongues.* Not only did Paul offer guidelines on how we may *appraise* the gift of tongues, he also provides us with parameters on how to avoid the *abuse* of tongues.

- 1.) *Quantitative:* No more than two or three may speak (v. 27).
- 2.) *Qualitative:* An interpreter is to offer the explanation (v. 2; v. 13).

Note carefully what Paul says. Prophecy is greater because people understand it and may be edified. Tongues is inferior to prophecy "except he interpret." *In essence, he says tongues must become prophecy so the church may be edified.* In addition, if no interpreter is found, silence is the rule (vv. 27-28). Paul specifically mentions the silence of women and tongues (v. 34). At Corinth stood many Greek temples where prostitutes were available for pagan "worship." The prostitutes were known for their frenzied babbling during the ceremonies. Undoubtedly, the Apostle had this in mind as he counseled the Corinthians to silence the women from speaking in any way which likened them to the prostitutes of Venus.

## **2. The Superiority of Prophecy**

Prophecy's superiority is clearly Paul's point in the comparison he makes between tongues and prophecy in chapter 14. In the very beginning, he makes prophecy prominent (v. 1; cp. v. 5). Paul lists the reasons prophecy exists:

A.) *Prophecy edifies saints* (v. 4). When the church meets together to worship, the gift of prophecy possesses the potential to build up the body of Christ. As the word of God is preached, God is glorified and the saints of God are edified (cp. Eph. 4:11-13).

B.) *Prophecy evangelizes sinners* (vv. 24-25). When unbelievers attend a service under the control of the Holy Spirit, and the Word of God is faithfully preached, the atmosphere is ripe for hearts to be transformed by the power of Christ.

Because prophecy is superior over tongues, the presence of prophetic preaching is indicative the Holy Spirit is in charge of a worship service. And, when the Holy Spirit is in charge, at least four things result.

A.) *Sharing will result when the Holy Spirit is in charge.* Paul calls this sharing a "coming together" (v. 26). He is not referring to various meetings of church events taking place throughout the week. Instead he is referring to the worship hour, the time when the church meets to testify of Jesus and the resurrection.

B.) *Learning will result when the Holy Spirit is in charge* (v. 20). Understanding the realities of God is ever indicative of the work of the Holy Spirit.

C.) *Growing will result when the Holy Spirit is in charge* (v. 25). Paul's concern for believers is always to "edify."

D.) *Obeying will result when the Holy Spirit is in charge.* When the Word of God is faithfully preached — true prophecy — believers inevitably discover the will of God (cp. Rom. 6:17). And, when believers obey the will of God, the Holy Spirit is the source of their power to obey.

## **Wrap Up**

*Paul's obvious intent in chapter 14 is to compare tongues and prophecy. In the comparison, he clearly attests to the superiority of prophecy over tongues. The preached Word is God's preferred method in confronting sinners with the claims of Jesus Christ upon their life. Furthermore, prophecy is God's preferred method of leading saints to understand His will for their life as they serve the Lord Jesus.*