

1st Corinthians Chapter 14

Chapter 14

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Verse 1

Follow after love, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that you may prophesy.

Follow after, seek, and labour earnestly to be in possession of that love which bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things and endures all things. Love is essential to your every life and also your eternal happiness. The Church at Corinth was intent on getting gifts that promoted their carnal minds, gifts that brought attention to themselves and put them in the eye of their public. Paul told them to rather labour for the gifts of God's Spirit, by which they may grow in grace and to be a good example to others. The example they were to one another was of the worse kind.

Verse 2

For he that speaks in an unknown tongue speaks not to man but to God; for no man understands him; howbeit in the spirit he speaks mysteries.

The wonder of speaking in an unknown tongue is that you talk to God exclusively, other people may not know what you say, even you may not know what you say, Satan may not know what you say but God knows. The question may be asked 'what is the point when this is so secret and ambiguous?

On the day of Pentecost those in the upper room spoke with an unknown tongue *as the Spirit gave them the words to say*. So the Holy Spirit spoke through the human words that only God would understand. This leads me to believe that in normal conversation between man and God our words can be heard and understood by Satan. When we speak in our heavenly language Satan cannot understand at all and our conversation is between us and God only. When a person speaks in an unknown tongue in church nobody understands what is said except that tongue is interpreted. I have spent many years in a church where there were at least three people who were trusted Christians who were recognised as interpreters of tongues and we knew what they said was from God. If a tongue was spoken the church would wait expecting one of the three interpreters to interpret. We also had one or two who thought they would not be left out and 'interpreted' a tongue and the church as a whole knew that interpretation was off the wall! When the gift of tongues is used properly it is very beneficial to the church and even heaven can trust us with such a wonderful gift. This could not be said of the church at Corinth.

Verse 3

But he that prophesies speaks unto men to edification, and exhortation and comfort.

Paul encourages the church to prophesy because the whole church can understand what is being said and therefore would benefit.

Verse 5

I would that you all spoke with tongues, but rather that you prophesied: for greater is he that prophesies than he that speaks with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive

edifying.

Paul is doing his best to set in order the gifts of God so that they would educate the church in the things of God. He is saying that it is of no use to speak in tongues unless there is an interpreter. He says in verse 13 if you speak in an unknown tongue pray that you may interpret. If tongues are used there must be an interpreter to explain what is said or you are just speaking into thin air and everyone is confused and the message from the Lord is lost. The church to which I belonged had all this laid out according to scripture; if a tongue was spoken we would wait for one of the interpreters to speak. The lead Pastor was not afraid to keep order should the meeting get out of hand or the format laid out in the Bible was not kept to. With three retired Pastors in the church he had a lot of support. On one occasion a person interpreted a tongue that was quite obvious not in keeping with the service and out of order, and the person started to walk round the church shouting ‘correction’ to the church. Two of the Pastors got up and physically escorted him from the church as the song leader lead the church in praise. This action shows the strength of the church in not wanting anything to come between us and the Lord, but you see we all had been taught the things Paul was teaching the church at Corinth, the difference was the church at Corinth were still infants in the Lord.

After the initial immediate inspiration by a new recipient of the gift of tongues it then becomes a part of his or hers make-up, so that he can if he so wishes, exercise that gift without direct inspiration, he can even do that in a backslidden state (1Corinthians 13:1-3).

On the day of Pentecost when multitudes came to see and hear what was happening in Jerusalem they found confusion because everyone was speaking in an unknown tongue. Peter, with the support of the rest of the disciples stood up and stopped the mocking crowd and told them they were not drunk but full of the Holy Spirit. He then preached to them in his own language and they still understood what he said. There is no question because some cannot control themselves, strong and wise leaders are necessary in the church to monitor behaviour.

The command is that messages in tongues should be allowed at the most by three in any one service provided they are truly interpreted. (V 27) The first message should be interpreted by the one speaking in an unknown tongue; otherwise his words may be interpreted by another gifted to do so. These principles safeguard the church from people who use the gifts to supposedly correct or criticise another. It would appear that the church at Corinth used the gift of tongues in many inappropriate ways, Paul tells them when they say a blessing in tongues how can another say Amen or even know what you are praying? The whole point of these gifts is that the church may be educated in the things of God.

Verse 18/19

I thank God I speak with tongues more than you all 19. Yet in the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue.

Paul is not dismissing speaking in tongues he is simply saying the obvious, that to speak in tongues only edifies the person speaking in tongues. The rest of the congregation is at a loss to know what is said unless there is an interpretation. Therefore it is much better to speak in an earthly tongue that people can understand or better still to prophesy.

Verse 6

Now if I come to you speaking in tongues what shall I profit you, except I shall speak to you either by revelation, or by knowledge or by prophesying or by doctrine?

The whole purposes of these gifts are to educate the church in the things of God. It would appear that some in the church at Corinth used the gifts to show off, particularly the gift of tongues. So Paul tells them it is better by far to prophesy. He says what good would it do you if I come to you

speaking in tongues all the time? It is better I come and speak revelation, the unveiling of divine truths from God in prophesies, or even simply to preach the Word of God in my natural tongue. Here are a few things that may answer some of your questions from scripture.

- 1 Tongues are spoken to God; prophesy is spoken to teach men (v2-3)
- 2 The Prophet is greater than the one who speaks in tongues unless the tongue is interpreted (v5)
- 3 Mysteries are spoken in tongues, things spoken in prophesy are clear (3-4)
- 4 Tongues are spoken to God, prophesy is spoken to man for education, exhortation and comfort (2-4)
- 5 Tongues make one a barbarian to others, prophesy does not (v 3,11)
- 6 Tongues may be a great personal blessing, but 5 words of prophesy is better than 10,000 words of tongues to a congregation (v 17-19)
- 7 Tongues are a sign to unbelievers, prophesy is for the benefit of the believer (v21-22)
- 8 Every gift must be used to educate the church in the things of God, v 26. Prophesies do this better (v 1-5; 23-25)

Three messages in tongues are allowed in any one service if they are interpreted, this many messages in prophesy are always allowed (v27-32)

Verse 15

...I will sing with in Spirit and I will sing with the understanding also.

There is something very special when someone sings with the Spirit. It is usually one of the ladies who has a good singing voice though not necessary, and when the Spirit ‘borrows’ that voice the sound is very beautiful indeed and high notes are reached that often are not reached in the natural. Much of this is missing in our churches today.

Verse 18/19

I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all; 19. Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue.

Some commentaries teach that the unknown tongue spoken of is another language including Hebrew and Arabic that was heard in the market place. The unknown tongue Paul speaks of is that which came as cloven tongues of fire that fell on each that were in the upper room where they spoke in a heavenly language as the Spirit gave them the words to say. It is that heavenly tongue that Christians are encouraged to speak, in the same way as those in the upper room, that it becomes a part of your every-day worship to God. Paul still teaches that it is better to speak in an earthly understandable tongue so all may know what is said...for the education of the church. Nowhere does Paul teach that the gift of tongues were to be used in the market place.

Verse 22

Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe but to them that believe not.

Paul explains that the main purpose of tongues is a sign to unbelievers who see the miraculous manifestation of the supernatural. (Acts 2: 1-11). In the church the Pastor can keep control of proceedings as the Pastor did in my church, but some took this gift out on the streets and it caused many problems. In Acts 2 we read that on the day of Pentecost that multitudes of people from over 16 towns and cities came to see what was going on only to find confusion. They were in doubt; amazed and mockingly said these men were drunk. It was Peter with the support of the rest of the disciples who stood up and stopped the chaos and bringing order preached the gospel to them with

great results.

This chapter also teaches that the spirit that prompts the speaking in an unknown tongue or to prophesy is subject to that person. As it is easy for one to claim he has the Spirit ‘upon’ him and speak above all others, Paul tells the church to have manners and in love prefer one another to avoid many speaking above each other and at the same time! What a mess this church was in, so Paul taught that order and correctness was necessary and that all things were to be done decently and in order (v40).

Verse 34/35

Let your women keep silent in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also says the law.35 And if they will learn anything let them ask their husbands at home, for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.

This was a Jewish law; women were not permitted to teach in the meetings, pray or even to ask questions right up to the time of the gospel and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Joel 2: says, *And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams your young men shall see visions. And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my Spirit.*

This was a Jewish thing but Jesus came not only to shed His blood that we might be saved but the ‘middle wall’ that divided Jew and Gentile would be broken down and we would all become one in Christ. It was Christ who came to fulfil the Law and bring the new commandment. At Pentecost the Holy Spirit was poured out on all flesh as we have read in fulfilment of Joel’s prophesy, from then on, in the new church age women have had the privilege to contribute in church along with men. In chapter 11 v 5 Paul clearly sets out the conditions by which a woman should contribute to church services and we now know of many women who have been used of God to bless and encourage us.

In the synagogues the Jewish men were permitted to question to find fault and oppose, Paul did not wish this behaviour in the church so he said the women were to keep silent in church particularly in the new freedom that was found in the new gospel. The women were still to be in subjection to their husbands and questions about the service were to be asked at home.

Verse 36

What? Came the word of God from you? Or came it unto you only?

Paul is quite annoyed now, the church at Corinth was so full of pride and self-conceits that Paul asks them ‘Did the word of God come from you? Was it from you that the other churches received the gospel? By their independent actions they set themselves up as the ‘mother church’ that their rules and customs should to be copied by the other churches. And Paul is asking them ‘did the gospel come from you?’ If you are so spiritual why don’t you acknowledge these teachings come from the Lord?’

Paul asks the question ‘Did the gospel come to you only?’ ‘Are you the only church of God? The gospel came to many other churches before you and they do not have the disorders, divisions and problems you have’.

Verse 37/38

If any man thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual let him acknowledge that the things that I

write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.

Paul is appealing to the church to live in the Spirit of God and recognise what the Spirit says and does. He appeals to the whole body of Christ to obey the teachings of the Word of God and he says that he that is ignorant v38, or would prefer to be ignorant to avoid any responsibility toward Christ, then you remain ignorant at your peril.

From the creation of the world God has proved Himself to be a God of order, and He expects His followers to be like Him. More so in the church how much pain, confusion and loss would be averted were this commandment followed.

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Be blessed

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