

# ***“Spiritual Gifts: Regulation”***

**1 CORINTHIANS 14**

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If you have been with us over the past couple of weeks, then you know that we have been looking at several chapters on the spiritual gifts in the New Testament book of 1 Corinthians. We learned that the church in Corinth had some serious issues. The congregation was established by the apostle Paul in 51 AD, and shortly after Paul left, they started having trouble, and so they wrote to Paul for some inspired advice. They were divided as a congregation, one of their members was living in an intimate relationship with his own step-mother, members were taking each other to secular court over spiritual matters, they were having struggles with marriage, they had questions about eating meat that had been sacrificed to pagan idols, many of their members were in danger of falling away, they were having some serious misunderstandings concerning the Lord's Supper, and on top of all of that, some of their own members were apparently having doubts about the resurrection. Paul, therefore, wrote the book of 1 Corinthians to answer those questions. Over and over again, Paul starts a new section by saying, ***“Now concerning.”***

Well, starting in 1 Corinthians 12:1, Paul says, ***“Now concerning spiritual gifts,”*** which tells us that they were having some issues with the spiritual gifts. So, two weeks ago, we started with 1 Corinthians 12 where Paul gave an overview of the variety of gifts that were available. Two weeks ago, we learned some of the basics. We learned that spiritual gifts were miraculous powers that were passed along through the laying on of the apostles' hands. The gifts were given in order to fill the gap between the time the church was established until the time when the New Testament could be written down. We learned that the church was established in 30 AD, but the first books of the New Testament were not written until the mid-40's AD, and the New Testament was not completed until around 95 or 96 AD. So, we have a gap of between 14-65 years where the church would not have any real authoritative information. To fill that gap, God gave various spiritual gifts to communicate and confirm His word. However, we learned that some of the Christians in Corinth were feeling left out because their gifts were not as flashy as the others, and we learned that some of the Christians in Corinth were bragging because they thought their gifts were better than the others. And in response to that conflict, Paul had to write to remind them that we are all members of the body of Christ. In other words, we all work together, and one Christian is not better than another because of the gift that he or she had been given.

Last week, we learned in Chapter 13 that the gifts were always intended to be temporary. Each gift had its time and place, but we learned that love is ***“the more excellent way.”*** The gifts were temporary and would only last until the New Testament could be completed, but love was permanent. We compared the spiritual

gifts to the scaffolding that is put up as a building is under construction. It is necessary and appropriate during the construction process, but once the building is completed, the scaffolding comes down. It has served its purpose and is no longer needed. In the same way, the gifts lasted long enough so that the early church had the information it needed until the New Testament could be completed.

As we conclude our studies on this topic by looking at Chapter 14 this morning, I should point out something that I found rather interesting, and that is: The church in Corinth had more problems than any other New Testament congregation, and yet they also seem to have had more spiritual gifts than any other congregation! And so we learn that spiritual gifts do not guarantee spiritual maturity. The gift of prophecy, for example, could guarantee that someone's message would be perfect and just as God intended, but the gift of prophecy could not guarantee any kind of perfection or maturity in that person's private life. Remember: The gifts were given so that these people living in Corinth in the mid 50's AD could know God's will before it was written. Now what they did with that information was completely up to them, but the gifts did not guarantee maturity. And so for that reason, the spiritual gifts themselves actually became a problem! They had the information, but these miraculous abilities caused certain members to get rather arrogant.

Do you remember in our study last week how we learned that love is not *"arrogant"*? The word literally refers to being *"puffed up."* Well, it is interesting that this particular word is found seven times in the entire New Testament. And it is very interesting that six of those times the word is used in the book of 1 Corinthians. And so it is very clear that the church in Corinth had a problem. The gifts had given them something to brag about, and of those gifts, the church had raised up the gift of tongues above all others. Remember: The gift of tongues allowed the early Christians to miraculously communicate in various languages that they had never studied, and in a large seaport city like Corinth, this gift was especially important. Honestly, it was amazing, the gift of tongues was spectacular, and with the competitive spirit there in Corinth, the gift of tongues had basically led to chaos in the assemblies of the church. Apparently, those who spoke in tongues were so proud of what they were doing that they were all getting up and speaking at the same time! Can we imagine what that must have been like? Imagine going to church and having dozens of people all get up to speak at the same time, and then imagine each person speaking in a different language. And so when we get to Chapter 14, we find that Paul has to address this issue with some REGULATION. In the first half of the chapter, we will find an emphasis of prophecy over the gift of tongues, and in the second half of the chapter we find several other principles concerning the importance of maintaining order in the worship assembly.

I. **But first of all this morning, let us please look together at 1 Corinthians 14:1-25 as we consider THE CONTRAST BETWEEN THE GIFT OF TONGUES AND THE GIFT OF PROPHECY, WITH A HUGE EMPHASIS BEING GIVEN TO THE GIFT OF PROPHECY.**

You may remember from our previous studies that prophecy is literally someone who speaks for God. Prophecy, then, is simply a reference to inspired teaching. To some, prophecy might not have been very exciting. Nobody would say "Wow!" after you exercised the gift of prophecy. So, Paul had to remind the church that the gift of tongues was really cool, but simply speaking God's word was a whole lot better. Let's look at what Paul says in verses 1-25. In Chapter 13, we learned that when compared to the gifts, love is permanent, love is the "more excellent way," which is where we pick up with Chapter 14, verse 1,

*<sup>1</sup> Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy. <sup>2</sup> For one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God; for no one understands, but in his spirit he speaks mysteries. <sup>3</sup> But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation. <sup>4</sup> One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; but one who*

*prophesies edifies the church.* <sup>5</sup> *Now I wish that you all spoke in tongues, but even more that you would prophesy; and greater is one who prophesies than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may receive edifying.*

<sup>6</sup> *But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking in tongues, what will I profit you unless I speak to you either by way of revelation or of knowledge or of prophecy or of teaching?* <sup>7</sup> *Yet even lifeless things, either flute or harp, in producing a sound, if they do not produce a distinction in the tones, how will it be known what is played on the flute or on the harp?* <sup>8</sup> *For if the bugle produces an indistinct sound, who will prepare himself for battle?* <sup>9</sup> *So also you, unless you utter by the tongue speech that is clear, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air.* <sup>10</sup> *There are, perhaps, a great many kinds of languages in the world, and no kind is without meaning.* <sup>11</sup> *If then I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be to the one who speaks a barbarian, and the one who speaks will be a barbarian to me.* <sup>12</sup> *So also you, since you are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek to abound for the edification of the church.*

<sup>13</sup> *Therefore let one who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret.* <sup>14</sup> *For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful.* <sup>15</sup> *What is the outcome then? 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.* <sup>16</sup> *Otherwise if you bless in the spirit only, how will the one who fills the place of the ungifted say the "Amen" at your giving of thanks, since he does not know what you are saying?* <sup>17</sup> *For you are giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not edified.* <sup>18</sup> *I thank God, I speak in tongues more than you all;* <sup>19</sup> *however, in the church I desire to speak five words with my mind so that I may instruct others also, rather than ten thousand words in a tongue.*

<sup>20</sup> *Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking be mature.* <sup>21</sup> *In the Law it is written, "BY MEN OF STRANGE TONGUES AND BY THE LIPS OF STRANGERS I WILL SPEAK TO THIS PEOPLE, AND EVEN SO THEY WILL NOT LISTEN TO ME," says the Lord.* <sup>22</sup> *So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophecy is for a sign, not to unbelievers but to those who believe.* <sup>23</sup> *Therefore if the whole church assembles together and all speak in tongues, and ungifted men or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are mad?* <sup>24</sup> *But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an ungifted man enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all;* <sup>25</sup> *the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so he will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you.*

I know there's a lot of information in these verses, but the main point, the big picture, is that prophecy is better than tongues. Remember: The gift of tongues was the miraculous ability to communicate in another language in order to spread the gospel. Up in verse 2, Paul is criticizing those who would start speaking in tongues just for the purpose of showing off. Today we might say, "If you get up and start preaching in German, but nobody here knows German, then you are only speaking to God." And that is not a compliment, it is a criticism! Some have looked at verse 2 and have said, "Oh, that's a good thing—speaking to God!" But no! And so in contrast to speaking in a language that cannot be understood by the audience, Paul says in verse 3, ***"But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation."*** In other words, if you're speaking in German when nobody at church speaks German, then only God gets it, but if you prophesy (that is, if you just speak the word of God in the language of the church), then those comments will

be good for building up the church, those comments will be useful for correcting the church, and those comments will be useful for comforting the church.

In verse 7, Paul compares this to playing an instrument. If you play an instrument without making a distinction between the tones, then the song will not be recognized. In verse 8, if the bugler in the military just starts playing indiscriminately, then the army will not know whether to charge forward or retreat. And in the same way, if the preacher preaches in a language that is not known by the audience, the sermon does no good. In verse 9, he compares it to just *“speaking into the air.”* In verse 11, if we do not understand what is being said in church, we will be like *“barbarians”* to one another, that is, there is no connection between us.

Therefore, starting in verse 13, Paul talks about how important it is to interpret what is said so that everyone can understand. In verse 15, he talks about how important it is for those without the gifts to be able to say *“Amen”* after the prayers. Remember: The word AMEN means that we agree with what was prayed. It is Biblical for the whole church to say AMEN after each prayer, but if the prayer is in a language that I cannot understand, then no, I should not be agreeing with that prayer. Paul, then, is telling those with the spiritual gifts to be careful.

In verse 19, Paul says that he would rather speak only five words in a way that could be understood than to speak 10,000 words in a foreign language, because again, without understanding there is no edification, there is no exhortation, there is no comfort in those words.

Starting in verse 20, Paul basically tells these people to grow up. He explains that if a visitor walks in and sees the chaos of dozens of people all speaking in different languages all at the same time, the visitor will think that the church has gone nuts. But on the other hand, if the visitor comes in and hears an orderly presentation of the gospel, then he will be convicted of his sins, and he will eventually worship God.

Well, as we back up and look at the first half of this chapter, it seems that we can apply at least a basic principle to our assemblies these days, and that is: The things that are said and done in worship need to be understood. We need to do the best we can to communicate clearly. My grandfather was a preacher, and he used to say, “Never use a big word when a smaller word will get the point across.” And he was making the point that you can make a sermon so complicated that you alienate half the congregation. But instead, the message should be clear. It should be understandable. People in the audience should be able to say AMEN after each Scripture, song, prayer, or sermon.

Paul, therefore, put the emphasis on prophecy. Yes, tongues are really cool, tongues will really get people’s attention, but prophecy is the word of God. Think about some of the great prophets. They were profound and yet very simple with their words. On Wednesday, we just finished studying the prophet Nathan as he approached King David and said, *“You are the man!”* It doesn’t get much simpler or much more profound than that! We think of the prophet Jonah, *“Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown.”* There was no misunderstanding those words. We think about John the Baptist as he spoke to King Agrippa, *“It is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife.”* That is a simple message! And that is what Paul is saying here: The ability to be understood, the ability to communicate clearly, is far more important than the ability to impress. First of all, therefore, Paul emphasizes the gift of prophecy over the gift of tongues.

II. As we move on and look at the last half of this chapter, we find that Paul has some inspired comments on THE IMPORTANCE OF ORDERLY WORSHIP.

We've already looked into this just a little bit, but the real emphasis comes in verses 26-40,

***<sup>26</sup> What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. <sup>27</sup> If anyone speaks in a tongue, it should be by two or at the most three, and each in turn, and one must interpret; <sup>28</sup> but if there is no interpreter, he must keep silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God. <sup>29</sup> Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment. <sup>30</sup> But if a revelation is made to another who is seated, the first one must keep silent. <sup>31</sup> For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted; <sup>32</sup> and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets; <sup>33</sup> for God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints. <sup>34</sup> The women are to keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but are to subject themselves, just as the Law also says. <sup>35</sup> If they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church. <sup>36</sup> Was it from you that the word of God first went forth? Or has it come to you only? <sup>37</sup> If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment. <sup>38</sup> But if anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized. <sup>39</sup> Therefore, my brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak in tongues. <sup>40</sup> But all things must be done properly and in an orderly manner.***

And so in this paragraph we find several rules to govern the assemblies of the church, rules that were given to make sure that each service was conducted ***“properly and in an orderly manner.”*** First of all, we find in verse 27 that if anyone speaks in a tongue, there must be only two people (three at the most) who address the congregation. I don't know about you, but I know that from my perspective two or three sermons is plenty for one service! Not only that, but Paul very specifically says that these two or three people need to take turns. And to us, we might say, “Well, of course!” But again, in the church in Corinth, they were in the habit of having several people all get up and speak at the same time. Paul, though, tells them to speak one at a time. He also points out that there must be an interpreter. And so if someone were to get up and start speaking in a language that was not known to the congregation as a whole, then someone must interpret the message. Again, because if there were no interpreter, the presentation would be useless, and even worse than useless, because (as we discussed before) the visitors would think the church had gone mad. And if there is no interpreter, Paul says that the one who speaks in tongues must ***“keep silent in the church.”***

As we let some of these rules sink in a little bit, we come to an interesting passage in verse 32, ***“...and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets.”*** Basically, Paul is saying: You people can control this. You are acting like madmen, but in reality, you need to exercise control over this situation, because the chaos is not productive. But of course most people who claim this kind of power today would say, “Well, you know, the Spirit just came over me, and I lost control. The Spirit was moving, and I didn't really have a say in it.” But Paul would disagree. Paul would say, “You can control this; in fact, you must control this, because the chaos is not good.” In one of Wayne Jackson's articles on this subject, he made the point that “the nearest activity in the New Testament to that of the Pentecostal experience, is demon possession.” Very interesting! When people in modern times flail around, and roll on the floor, and blurt out all kinds of stuff at the top of their lungs, they have more in common with demon possessed people in the Bible than they do with those who truly had the spiritual gifts.

I don't know how many of you have been to a worship service where people claim to be speaking in tongues. Many years ago when I was a student at Freed-Hardeman University down in Tennessee, my roommate and I

got up early on a Sunday morning. We went to the early service and Bible classes at the church right next to campus, and then we traveled about half an hour up to Jackson to go visit a Pentecostal church. We just wanted to see what was up. I guess we wanted to go see what we were missing, and so we just went to observe. We arrived right after the service had started, and as we walked up to the front door, we could already hear the instruments just blaring. We went in and sat near the back. There were maybe 60 or 70 people there that Sunday morning, and I would seriously estimate that half of them were up on the stage playing all of the various instruments. I'm serious: There were probably 30 people on the stage. Well, a little bit into it, the "pastor" of the church said that they had a prayer request. Apparently, Suzie, one of their members, was suffering from a headache! With all of the instruments, I was thinking, "Lady, I can empathize with you right now!" But he invited Suzie up near the front, and the rest of those in the pews all went up front and stood around this woman. My roommate and I and just a few others were the only ones left in the pews. At that point, those who were surrounding this woman started yelling, and shouting, and jumping up and down and rolling on the floor and rolling all over the stage, and they were (in their understanding of it, at least) "speaking in tongues." Of course, I would describe it as babbling. I had no idea it was possible to babble and yell at the same time, but these people were doing it. This went on for 10-15 minutes, they had their hands on this woman's head as they danced around and as the music continued to blare, and at the end of it, the "pastor" declared that the woman had been healed, and everyone eventually sat down.

As I think back about that experience, I can tell you that those people violated absolutely every command that Paul has made up to this point: Two or three at the most, one at a time, and if anyone speaks in a tongue, there must be an interpreter. And I can also tell you that I was rather uncomfortable as a visitor. As one of the small handful that were left out there in the pews, I felt excluded, I felt left out, and I felt as if those people had lost their minds. That is exactly what Paul was warning about in 1 Corinthians 14. As he says in verse 33, **"...God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints."**

Well, we go on to verses 34-35, and we see another command as the women are told to be silent in the assembly. And just a brief note here: Paul is not talking about secular matters. I knew a guy many years ago who didn't think that a female police officer had the authority to pull him over. At that point, I silently prayed that God would send a woman to pull him over! I would just love to see that! "Excuse me, ma'am, but this verse says that you must be silent." No! That is not what Paul is addressing here! I knew another man who taught that a woman could not even speak up in any conversation where the Bible was being discussed among friends. And so if I were discussing the Bible with another man of this congregation in the aisle after worship as all of us are just standing around, and if a woman walked up, she would not even be able to make a comment in that situation. I pointed out that Priscilla and Aquila pulled the preacher Apollos aside privately (in Acts 18) and that **"they taught him the word of God more accurately."** This man said that Aquila must have done the teaching and that Priscilla's role was to "fluff the pillows." And yet the Bible says that **"they"** taught Apollos. I point out these objections to emphasize the context here. Please notice the situation in verse 23: Paul is talking about those times **"when the whole church assembles together,"** and again in verse 26, **"when you assemble."** He is talking, then, about the assembly. Here at Four Lakes, our assembly takes place at 10:30 every Lord's Day morning. He's not talking about Bible classes here (that's addressed in another passage, in 1 Timothy 2, a passage with a wider application, where women are told to **"quietly receive instruction with all submissiveness"**), he's not talking about getting pulled over by the police, he's not talking about three or four people discussing a Bible passage after worship on Sunday morning, but he is talking about those times when **"the whole church comes together"** (ESV), the worship assembly. During those times, Paul says that the women of the church are to **"keep silent."** By the way, let's not forget that this is third time for this word to be used in Chapter 14. The first time it's used is in verse 28: The one who speaks in tongues but does not have an interpreter is to **"keep silent."** The second time it's used is in verse 32: The one who is

speaking when someone else receives a revelation is to **“keep silent.”** The silence in these first two cases is based on conditions (if this, then this), but the third time the word is used refers to the women of the congregation as Paul gives the command that the women are to **“keep silent”** in the assembly.

In the cubbyholes, I have included an interesting article that goes into much more detail. But for now, the main idea in Chapter 14 is that **“all things must be done properly and in an orderly manner.”** The apostle Paul puts a priority on prophecy, the preaching and teaching of God’s word, and then he gives a number of rules to help bring order out of the chaotic situation in Corinth.

### **Conclusion:**

I am so thankful for the questions and comments that have led to this series of lessons. We have learned that the spiritual gifts were miraculous powers that were given to the early Christians to communicate and confirm the word of God in those years before the Bible was written. They were passed along through the laying on of the apostles’ hands. Since the Christians in Corinth were bragging over who had the greater gifts, Paul had to write to tell them to work together. He reminded them that love is more important and more permanent than any spiritual gift, and then he gave some inspired rules for using those gifts.

It is now time for us to move on, but for now all of us need to remember that Jesus died for our sins. He took our place on the cross. We respond to that sacrifice by turning away from sin and by allowing ourselves to be briefly dipped in water for the remission of our sins. We know what it means for cancer to be in remission. Baptism puts our sins in remission. If you have any questions, we would love to study the Bible with you, but if you are ready to obey the gospel right now, you can let us know as we sing this next song. Let’s stand and sing...

### **Helpful Resources:**

“1 Corinthians 14:34-35,” by Gary Workman (*Spiritual Sword*, n.d.)

“The Spiritual Gifts,” by Alan Highers (*2010 Freed-Hardeman University Bible Lectures*; David Lipe, ed.; p. 398ff)

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