

## LOVE IS OUR GUIDE 1 CORINTHIANS 14:1-40

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**T**his chapter completes Paul's discussion of spiritual gifts in worship (12:1-40). He had focused first on the unity and diversity that existed in the area of spiritual gifts (12:1-30). Next, he had turned to the importance of love as the greatest grace given to believers (12:31-13:13). Here, he returned to apply this principle to the issue of spiritual gifts in worship (14:1-40). In effect, Paul argued that the principles of love and edification must guide the use of gifts in worship. It is possible to employ spiritual gifts, especially tongues, for selfish purposes, but Paul urged the Corinthians to devote themselves to using their spiritual gifts for others. His discussion of these matters divides into five sections: love and spiritual gifts together (14:1-5); the limitations of tongues (14:6-12); tongues and edification within the church (14:13-19); tongues and unbelievers (14:20-25); and the practice of worship (14:26-40).

### *Excursus: Supernatural Gifts*

Paul's discussion of spiritual gifts focused once again on the extraordinary gifts of revelation (tongues, prophecy, interpretation). As mentioned in a previous chapter (see Excursus on 12:1-30), the manner in which Christians understand these verses for today depends on whether they hold to the continuation, modification, or cessation of these gifts.

### **LOVE AND GIFTS TOGETHER (14:1-5)**

In these verses Paul clearly taught the way love and spiritual gifts should work together. He urged the Corinthians to **follow the way of love** and **eagerly to desire spiritual gifts** (14:1). Paul rejoiced that the Corinthians had been blessed with spiritual gifts, but wanted them to use those gifts to edify the church. From his perspective, Christians do not have the option of treating these two concerns separately. Believers cannot choose between love and spiritual gifts. As he had demonstrated in chapter 12, every spiritual gift is important, but his discussion in chapter 13 also indicated the importance of love. As a result, believers must always keep both together.

**14:1.** In what practical ways could the Corinthian church unify love and spiritual gifts? The NIV obscures the fact that there are actually three verbs in Paul's solution: **follow**, **desire**, and "you may prophesy" (NASB). The believer who seeks both love and gifts will be **especially** desirous of **the gift of prophecy**. Having previously made the points that all gifts in the church are from the same Spirit (12:4-11), and that all members of the body are vital to the life of the church (12:12-30), Paul's

encouragement that the Corinthians **especially** pursue **prophecy** required further explanation. As he went on to explain (14:2-5), the reason lay in the nature of prophecy as opposed to that of tongues.

**14:2.** The person who **speaks in a tongue** says things that no one can understand without an interpretation (14:5,13,27-28). For this reason, tongue-speakers **do not speak to men but to God** alone. The most that can be said of them is that they utter **mysteries with their spirit[s]**. It is not clear whether Paul had in mind the spirit of the person speaking in tongues (compare 14:14,32) or the Holy Spirit (“speaking mysteries in the Spirit” NRSV). The **mysteries** that tongue-speakers utter are things incomprehensible to the human mind, or at least remain incomprehensible when delivered in this manner (1 Cor. 2:6-16; 1 Pet. 1:10-12). Put simply, no matter what tongue-speakers say, if no one interprets, the church cannot be edified.

**14:3.** To speak to God in worship is a good thing, but Paul was concerned here with the importance of using spiritual gifts to edify others. He encouraged prophecy as a way to join love and spiritual gifts because prophets speak **to men for their strengthening, encouragement, and comfort**. This assessment of God’s Word in worship is more positive than the one in 2 Timothy 3:16, but similar to the description in 1 Thessalonians 2:13. Prophecy in the early church resembled contemporary preaching in many ways. It was a message from God to his people that was delivered in the language of the people. For this reason, prophecy benefited others in countless ways. It was a gift of the Spirit easily used in the service of love.

**14:4.** To clarify this point of view, Paul drew a sharp contrast. When a person **speaks in a tongue**, he only **edifies himself**. Nothing is wrong with being edified. As Paul would suggest later in this chapter, there is a place for tongues in self-edification at home (12:14-19). It is also worth pointing out that the edification Paul talked about here appears to have been the edification of his spirit, not of his mind (14:14). But in the public worship of God, the gifts of the Spirit are for the edification of **the church**. Such corporate edification takes place only when what is said can be perceived by the minds of those listening. Service to others is much more valuable than self-serving practices in public worship.

**14:5.** Next, Paul expressed his sincere wish for all of the Corinthian believers. He did not deprecate tongues, but would have liked **every one** of them **to speak in tongues**. The gift of tongues in the early church came from the Holy Spirit, and never should have been rejected or despised by followers of Christ. Yet, Paul preferred that they **prophecy**. He summed up his view by making it clear that **he who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues**. The former is greater because the employment of that gift more closely connects with the greatest of all gifts to the church, namely love for others (13:2,13). Prophecy is superior to tongues in this sense, unless the person who speaks in tongues also interprets **so that the church may be edified**. The one who prophesies is greater because he uses his gift in love, whereas the selfish demonstration of tongues without interpretation is done apart from love. Paul

had already mentioned **interpretation of tongues** as one of the gifts of the Spirit (12:10,30). When tongues are interpreted, the people of the church understand what is being said. The words are no longer mysteries understood only by God (12:2). Instead, when tongues are interpreted they instruct and edify similarly to prophecy. As can be seen in the priority given to prophecy, as well as in the qualification of tongues with interpretation, the guiding principle throughout this discussion is that the pursuit of Spiritual gifts must be joined with a pursuit of love for others.

## THE LIMITATIONS OF TONGUES (14:6-12)

To reinforce his outlooks, Paul appealed to several analogies to build a case for his application to the Corinthians. He compared their uninterpreted tongues to foreign languages, badly played instruments, and poorly sounded war bugles. Without interpretation, tongues are as ineffective as these other things.

**14:6-8.** He opened with the familial term **brothers** in order to help them lower their defenses (see also 1:10,11,26; 2:1; 3:1; 4:6; 7:24,29; 10:1; 11:33; 12:1; 14:20,26,39; 15:1,31,50,58; 16:15). He was about to say some things with which they were sure to agree. First, he spoke of a hypothetical visit he might pay them. Put simply, Paul said that even a visit from him would do no **good** for the Corinthian church **unless** he came with **some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or word of instruction**. The precise meaning of these expressions is not clear, but they are all examples of the same kind of thing. Each term refers to the communication of God's word to the church in a way that can be understood. The only benefit from a visit from Paul would be the edifying teaching he could bring.

Second, Paul mentioned how no one can discern **a tune on a flute or harp** unless there is a distinguishable series of **notes**. Third, he referred to a **trumpet** used to **call for battle**. The signal will not be understood unless the trumpet puts forth a **clear call**. The purpose of these illustrations is clear — tongues without interpretation do not reveal anything, they do not communicate knowledge, they do not prophesy, and they do not give instruction. Instead, they are like untuned instruments, making sounds that benefit no one.

**14:9.** All of these analogies point out that in order to benefit others one must communicate clearly and effectively. Paul directly applied this principle to the Corinthian situation, confronting them with the words, "**So it is with you**" (compare 14:12). When the Corinthians spoke in public worship, they had to be careful to **speak intelligible words**. Otherwise no one would **know what** they were **saying**. Speaking in ways that make no sense to anyone is the same as **speaking into thin air**.

**14:10-12a.** The apostle continued to speak about tongues in these verses, using a closely related analogy. He recognized that there were **all sorts of languages in the world**. Yet, he also emphasized that the purpose of these languages was to

communicate among people because **none** of these languages was **without meaning**. If, however, someone does not **grasp the meaning of what someone is saying**, that is, if they do not speak the same language, then the listener and the speaker consider each other **foreigner[s]**. Their attempts to communicate with one another are doomed to failure, and benefit no one. This analogy closely paralleled tongues speaking in the Corinthian church. By speaking in tongues without interpretations in their public worship, the Corinthians effectively became foreigners to one another, rather than the brothers and sisters they should have been, and their tongues failed to benefit the church. Such self-centered use of tongues was unloving and unacceptable.

**14:12b.** In conclusion, Paul repeated the theme with which he had begun the chapter. He approved of the Corinthians' **eager** pursuit of **spiritual gifts** (12:31; 14:1), including tongues (14:5). But he wanted the Corinthians to realize the true purpose of spiritual gifts, and to **try to excel in gifts that build up the church**. The edification of others is the primary goal of using spiritual gifts in public worship. As the Corinthians developed their priorities, they had to make this goal their primary guiding principle. Also, they had to stop the abuses in which they already selfishly indulged themselves. Judging from the fact that the Corinthians were zealous for spiritual gifts, and from the fact that they had to be exhorted to pursue gifts which built up the church, it seems evident that their zeal was mainly for gifts which did not build up the church. In this context, this certainly means the Corinthians were zealous for tongues without regard to interpretations.

### **TONGUES AND EDIFICATION WITHIN THE CHURCH (14:13-19)**

Because uninterpreted tongues edify only the spirit of the person speaking them, they are self-indulgent and of no use to the church. To be of public value, tongues must speak to the minds of the church, and this happens only when they are interpreted.

**14:13-14.** Having established the reasons for subordinating tongues to prophecy, Paul gave some very practical advice to those who spoke in tongues at Corinth. From the preceding description of tongues' limitations, he drew the conclusion (**for this reason**) that anyone who spoke **in a tongue should pray that he may interpret**. When one prayed **in a tongue**, his prayers involved only his **spirit**, not his **mind**. While this was still beneficial to the individual praying in tongues, it was not as beneficial as if he also prayed to interpret the tongues so that his mind might be edified.

This juxtaposition of **spirit** and **mind** is unique in the Scriptures. For this reason, it is not altogether clear what Paul meant. He at least seems to have been saying that tongues without interpretation are unintelligible to everyone, including to the speaker. The Holy Spirit uses the believer's spirit as he or she speaks in tongues, but the believer's rational ability is **unfruitful** in the process. If Paul himself did not understand what he said when he prayed in tongues, how could anyone hearing him understand and benefit from the practice? Since spiritual gifts are manifested in worship primarily

to edify others, interpretation is crucial to the proper use of tongues in worship. Without interpretation, tongues do nothing to benefit others.

**14:15.** Paul next asked what he and others were to do in light of the limitations of praying in tongues. He answered by describing his own practice of speaking in tongues. He had decided to **pray with** both his **spirit** and his **mind**. In a similar way, he determined to **sing with** his **spirit**, as well as with his **mind**. As the rest of his discussion would make clear (see 14:19), Paul believed that singing and praying unintelligibly (with the spirit) was appropriate for private worship, but that in public worship believers should sing and pray intelligibly (with the mind). Why was this so?

**14:16-17.** Paul was convinced of a principle he repeated many times in his chapters on worship (12:1-14:40). Specifically, while it is important to consider the orientation of worship toward God, one must not ignore the church's edification (12:7; 13:1-3; 14:2-5,12,17,19,26). Those who hear only uninterpreted tongues can never say in good conscience, "**Amen**," to the praise they do **not understand**. Because the church cannot understand uninterpreted tongues, it can neither profit from nor confirm what is said. It may be true that a tongues-speaker is **giving thanks** to God, but the **other man is not edified**. The need to edify others makes it necessary to pray and sing in commonly comprehensible ways.

**14:18.** Paul revealed the intensity with which he held this conviction with two final sentences in this section. He was grateful to **speak in tongues more than all of** the Corinthians. He understood and experienced the blessings of this gift in remarkable ways in his private worship. This clear report of Paul's personal life may also indicate that the preceding "hypothetical" situations (14:6,11,14-15) were directly drawn from Paul's personal experiences, including his relationship with the Corinthians (14:6). Their letter to him (7:1) had included references to this subject (see commentary 12:1), and thus may have addressed this specific issue. If so, they would have understood the hypothetical situations Paul posited to have been based in Paul's own experiences.

**14:19.** Paul had another very strong conviction that balanced his enthusiasm for tongues. **In the public worship of church, he would rather speak five intelligible words than a thousand words in a tongue.** Why did he place so much weight on **intelligible words**? It was because words that can be understood **instruct others**. Love's focus on the edification of others governed Paul's attitude toward tongues in a remarkable way. For him, public worship did not honor God if it did not edify the church — no matter how earnest, dynamic, and personally fulfilling that worship may have been.

## **TONGUES AND UNBELIEVERS (14:20-25)**

Throughout his discussion of worship at Corinth, Paul gave directions in light of the church's public testimony. At this point in his treatment of tongues, he turned once

more to this subject, asking, “What effect do tongues have on the unbelievers who visit the public meetings of the church?” In his answer, he provided a greatly needed caution against the practice of tongues-speaking in public worship. Not only does it not edify other believers, but it runs the risk of hindering the church’s witness and ministry to unbelievers as well.

**14:20.** Again, Paul appealed to the Corinthians as **brothers** (see also 1:10,11,26; 2:1; 3:1; 4:6; 7:24,29; 10:1; 11:33; 12:1; 14:6,26,39; 15:1,31,50,58; 16:15). This address indicates the intensity with which he appealed to them. At the same time, he was very bold, telling them to **stop thinking like children**. The allusion to the preceding chapter (13:11-12) is evident. For Paul, the Corinthians’ preoccupation with tongues constituted spiritual immaturity. They fixated on their temporary gifts, which were merely “childish ways” in the grand scheme of things. They failed to maintain a bigger, eternal perspective (compare 7:29-31).

Of course, at times the Bible commends childlike attitudes in believers. Jesus presented a child’s trust as a model of faith (Mark 10:15; Luke 18:17). Even here, Paul insisted that believers should be as naive as **infants . . . in regard to evil**, but Paul did not want believers to be foolishly naive about evil. Rather, Christians must also be wise as serpents (Matt. 10:16). The ideal is simply that believers should be inexperienced in and separated from evil, and therefore that they should not know much about it. While he found it appropriate to be innocent regarding evil, Paul insisted that believers should still be **adults . . . in their thinking**. In other words, with respect to Christian doctrine and practice, Paul wanted the Corinthians to mature in their perspectives.

**14:21-22.** Next, Paul demonstrated the Corinthians’ need to think maturely about tongues by referring to Isaiah 28:11-12. This is one of six times Paul quoted or alluded to Isaiah in this epistle. Paul quoted neither the Hebrew nor the Septuagint exactly, but paraphrased these verses without misrepresenting their meaning. In this passage Isaiah warned northern Israel that one day God would punish them by exiling them to a place where God would use **strange tongues and lips of foreigners to speak to this people**. God planned that the exiled people of Israel would be scattered into Gentile nations where the folly of their rebellion against God would become evident. Even while suffering this punishment, however, they would **not listen** to the Lord.

Paul used this passage to provide a theological context for the prominence of tongues in the early Christian church. As the church spread throughout the Gentile world, unbelieving Jews constantly heard the message of the Messiah Jesus in foreign Gentile languages. People of strange languages proclaiming God’s gospel in tongues throughout the world signified judgment against many Jews’ continuing unbelief. Paul concluded (**then**) that **tongues . . . are a sign . . . for unbelievers** because God designed them to communicate the gospel and Christian teaching across linguistic boundaries. They are **a sign** in the frequent prophetic sense of the word: as a curse against those who do not believe. Prophecy, however, is **for believers** because it edifies and builds up believers in the faith. For rhetorical effect, Paul spoke in absolute

terms about something that was actually relative. Really, tongues are only *more* for unbelievers, while prophecy is only *more* for believers, **not for unbelievers**.

**14:23.** On the basis of this distinction, Paul depicted two potential scenarios to draw attention to the way tongue-speaking in public worship might affect visiting unbelievers. On the one hand, he imagined **the whole church** in Corinth gathering for public worship, and **everyone speaking in tongues**. In fact, this scenario might have represented the reality of Corinthian worship (14:26). The result would be that visitors who did **not understand** or who were **unbelievers** would think the Christians were out of their minds. On the day of Pentecost, such visitors accused the church of drunkenness when they witnessed tongue-speaking (Acts 2:13). The unintelligibility of tongues makes some unbelievers think that the Christians have gone insane.

**14:24.** On the other hand, Paul suggested that if **an unbeliever or someone who did not understand** (“ungifted men or unbelievers” NASB; “outsiders or unbelievers” NRSV; “uninformed or unbelievers” NKJV) came to the worship service and **everybody** was **prophesying** in ordinary languages, then that visitor would **be convinced**. As Paul’s instruction in a few verses would show, he had in mind **everybody . . . prophesying** in sequence, one at a time, not simultaneously (14:30-31). If order were observed and ordinary language used, the visitor would discover himself or herself to be **a sinner**.

Paul also said that visitors would **be judged by all**. The meaning of these words is not entirely clear, but Paul did not contradict Jesus who warned against self-righteous judgment of others (Matt. 7:1-5). In all likelihood, Paul meant that prophecy would indirectly judge unbelievers simply by virtue of its content, not that believers would directly condemn unbelievers.

**14:25.** As a result of the intelligible proclamation of God’s word, sinful **secrets** hidden in the **heart** of the unbeliever would **be laid bare**. Even things of which the unbeliever may not have been conscious would suddenly come to his or her awareness. In response, many unbelievers would **fall down and worship God**. In other words, they would confess their sins and pledge humble loyalty to Christ. These new converts would be so astonished at the word of God proclaimed in the Christian assembly that they would proclaim, “**God is really among you**.” Just as Solomon prayed that God would hear the Gentiles’ cries at the temple in Jerusalem (1 Kgs. 8:41-43; 2 Chr. 6:32-33), Paul announced that the conversion of the lost was part of the purpose for Christian gatherings in the New Testament church, which is the new temple of God (1 Cor. 3:9,16-17; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:19-22; 1 Pet. 2:5).

## **THE PRACTICE OF WORSHIP (14:26-40)**

Having laid down a number of cautions regarding the pursuit of love and spiritual gifts in public worship, Paul turned to some very practical instructions about worship.

Simply put, Paul concluded that **everything** in worship **should be done in a fitting and orderly way** (14:40). Before he stated this conclusion, however, he wrote several instructions to serve as models for the kinds of things that constitute **a fitting and orderly way**.

**14:26.** He began with another appeal to his readers as “**brothers**” (see also 1:10,11,26; 2:1; 3:1; 4:6; 7:24,29; 10:1; 11:33; 12:1; 14:6,20,39; 15:1,31,50,58; 16:15) to continue his intense plea for their compliance. He asked, “**What then shall we say?**” In other words, “What practical conclusions should we draw from the preceding discussion?” As stated, the real answer was that **everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way** (14:40). As he began to define this more clearly, he pronounced a general policy that **everyone** should come to worship ready to use his or her spiritual gifts. Whether it be **a hymn, a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation** of tongues, each worshiper should come ready to use his or her gift(s) in worship. The distinction between **instruction** and **revelation** is not altogether clear because Paul did not employ these terms frequently enough to define them well. In all likelihood, however, by “**instruction**” he meant ordinary preaching and teaching that was not infallibly inspired by God. **Revelation** is more than likely infallibly inspired proclamation. In any case, this list constitutes a mere sampling of the spiritual exercises that might take place in a worship service. Paul’s point was that there should be no bystanders in worship. Each person should bring a gift of some kind, whether ordinary (e.g. a hymn) or extraordinary (e.g. a revelation).

At the same time, however, this general policy needs to be qualified. **All** activities in worship must be practiced **for the strengthening of the church**. Just as he had said on a number of occasions, the Spirit grants gifts to believers for the purpose of building up the whole church (12:7; 13:1-3; 14:1-5,12,19). So, whenever Christians exercise gifts in worship, they must be guided by the principle of edification. To exercise a spiritual gift in a way that does not build up other believers is to abuse the gift and to corrupt the worship of God.

Paul applied this general principle to three main issues: speaking in tongues (14:27-28); prophecy (14:29-33); and women (14:34-35). From other portions of this epistle, it appears that much controversy surrounded each of these areas.

**14:27-28.** First, Paul gave directions for **anyone** who spoke **in a tongue**. For the sake of order and edification, Paul insisted that only **two — or at the most three — should** be allowed to **speak**. Even these few were not to speak simultaneously, but **one at a time**, and only if there were **interpretation**. In the absence of such order and interpretation, those speaking in tongues should **keep quiet** in the general worship, speaking only to themselves **and God**, instead of bothering the church with unintelligible speech (compare 14:9).

**14:29-33.** Second, Paul focused on **prophets**. Once again, **two or three prophets** sufficed. Others were to **weigh carefully** all prophetic speech. As Paul instructed on several occasions, prophecy must always be judged (12:1-3,10). Paul was very concerned that the prophets follow a protocol of generosity toward each other. If someone received **a revelation** while another was speaking, then **the first speaker** was to **stop**. Prophets were to wait for their **turn so that everyone** might be **instructed and encouraged**. Anticipating the objection that prophets cannot control themselves when the Spirit comes on them, Paul added that **the spirits of prophets** were under **the control of prophets**. In other words, within limits prophets can control how and when they prophesy. Paul gave the reason why (**for**) this is true: **God is not a God of disorder but of peace**. God would not inspire prophets to disrupt true worship and to bring chaos to public worship in Corinth.

**14:34-35.** The instruction to **weigh carefully what is said** (14:29) by a prophet raised a particular issue related to wives. It is likely that here (as in 11:2-16) Paul had in mind wives, not women in general. How should wives honor their husbands who prophesy, and at the same time weigh what their husbands say?

Three times Paul said that women should remain quiet: “**women should remain silent**”; “**they are not allowed to speak**”; and “**it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in church**.” Yet, he also qualified this to some degree by adding “**if they want to inquire**.” It must be remembered that Paul did not believe that women should not speak in church at all. In 11:5,13 he explicitly acknowledged their right to pray and prophesy. Rather, they should not ask questions. By suggesting that they ask their questions of **their own husbands at home**, he also implied that **their own husbands** were the ones who knew the answers. In this context, he seems specifically to have prohibited wives from questioning their own husbands in church.

It seems best to read this passage as returning to the issue of wives honoring their husbands in public worship. As noted in the comments on 11:2-16, wives must be sure to behave in worship in ways that honor their husbands. This is one way wives are to edify the church as they worship. The order for silence, therefore, was closely associated with the requirement to test prophecy. In effect, Paul told wives not to question their husbands prophecies in the public meeting. Instead, **if they want[ed] to inquire**, they were to **ask their own husbands at home**. Paul’s reason for this was the same as in 11:6: it is **disgraceful** for a wife to behave otherwise. Just as covering their heads in worship brought honor to their husbands in the Corinthian church, so it was important for wives not to embarrass their husbands by challenging their prophecies in public.

**14:36-38.** At this point, Paul closed his discussion of the use of spiritual gifts in worship. Objecting sarcastically to those at Corinth who asserted leadership in other directions, he asked if the **Word of God** came from them first? He also asked if they were the only ones whom the Word had **reached**. Of course, the answer to both of

these questions was an emphatic “No!” The Corinthians had received the Word from others, including from Paul himself, and the church throughout the world had the Word.

For this reason, Paul reminded the Corinthians of a basic Christian principle, that is, of the proper attitude to have toward the apostles of Christ. Everyone who considered himself or herself **a prophet or spiritually gifted** was to remember that Paul was an apostle, and therefore that what he wrote was **the Lord’s command**. Prophecies must be weighed and tested, but the apostolic word is the Word of Christ himself.

Neglecting apostolic authority carries serious consequences. Anyone who **ignores** Paul’s authority **will be ignored** by God. Some textual variants for this passage exist (see Deeper Discoveries), but as the NIV translates it, the idea is that those who neglect the apostolic Word will be rejected by God himself (compare Matt. 10:33; Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26; 12:9; 2 Tim. 2:12).

**14:39-40.** In conclusion (**therefore**), Paul appealed to the Corinthians once again as **brothers** to show that love and concern motivated his plea for their compliance (see also 1:10,11,26; 2:1; 3:1; 4:6; 7:24,29; 10:1; 11:33; 12:1; 14:6,20,26; 15:1,31,50,58; 16:15). In summary, he hoped the Corinthians would **be eager to prophesy** because it benefited the church so much. He was less enthusiastic about tongues, merely saying that the church should **not forbid speaking in tongues**, but not that **tongues** should be sought eagerly. In all these and other matters related to worship, all activities should take place **in a fitting and orderly way**. At minimum, this referred to the standards Paul had outlined in 14:27-35.

## DIGGING DEEPER

### A. Spiritual gifts (14:1)

For “**spiritual gifts**” here, Paul used the adjective “spiritual” (*pneumatikos*) substantively. A more literal translation would render this “spiritual things,” though the context makes it obvious that Paul did indeed refer to gifts. He referred to the gifts this same way in 12:1, but throughout the rest of chapter 12 he simply called them “gifts” (*charisma*) (12:4,9,28,30,31). In fact, in Paul’s extant letters, he only once used the adjective *pneumatikos* to qualify the noun *charisma*, producing the phrase “spiritual gifts,” and this was not in 1 Corinthians, but Romans 1:11. Still, it is right not to differentiate between “spiritual things” and “gifts” in the context of 1 Corinthians 12-14 because the “gifts” are “manifestations of the Spirit” (12:7), and because both clearly have the same referents. For example, prophecy and tongues are both “spiritual things” (14:1-5) and “gifts” (12:4,10). The difference in Paul’s word choice probably depended on the aspect of spiritual gifting that he wanted to emphasize. Thus, he probably used “spiritual things” in 12:1 because he wanted to emphasize the Holy Spirit as the source of these in 12:3. In the same way, his emphasis on the Spirit’s distribution to each

according to his own choice rather than according to the recipient's merit most likely influenced his use of "gifts" in 12:4-31.

### **B. Two — or at most three (14:27)**

In pagan worship services contemporary to Paul, tongues were very personal indulgences in ecstasy. Worshipers worked themselves into trances or frenzies. When they spoke in their tongues, they were largely uninterested in the other worshipers except insofar as those others provided the necessary environment to stimulate the ecstasy or trance. Pagan services often led to many people speaking in tongues simultaneously, each without regard to the congregation. Paul wanted to make certain that Corinth's worship services did not exhibit this chaos, so he wanted tongues speakers to conduct themselves temperately, speaking for the congregation's benefit, one at a time, and in limited numbers.

### **C. Control of prophets (14:32)**

When pagan worshipers prophesied, they behaved much as they did when they spoke in tongues (see Deeper Discoveries notes on vv. 27 above). Their prophecies constituted "madness" according to Socrates as recorded by Plato:

"In reality the greatest of blessings come to us through madness, when it is sent as a gift of the gods. For the prophetess at Delphi and the priestesses at Dodona when they have been mad have conferred many splendid benefits upon Greece . . . but few or none when they have been in their right minds" (Plato. "Phaedrus," 244a-b. Plato: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo, Phaedrus [or Plato, vol. 1], p. 465).

This was also Philo's (ca. 20 B.C. - A.D. 50) understanding. Although he was a Jew, he also drew heavily from Hellenistic thinking, such as Platonism, which fact may explain his view of prophecy:

"As long therefore as our mind still shines around and hovers around, . . . we, being masters of ourselves, are not possessed by any extraneous influence; but when it approaches its setting, then, as is natural, a trance, which proceeds from inspiration, takes violent hold of us, and madness seizes upon us, for when the divine light sets this other rises and shines, and this very frequently happens to the race of prophets; for the mind that is in us is removed from its place at the arrival of the divine Spirit, but is again restored to its previous habitation when that Spirit departs" (Philo. "Who Is the Heir of Divine Things," LIII, 264-265. The Works of Philo, p. 299. Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993).

He also wrote that the prophet is "in ignorance that his own reasoning powers are departed, and have quitted the citadel of his soul" (Philo. "The Special Laws, IV," VIII, 49. The Works of Philo, p. 620. Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993).

Thus, when Paul argued that the spirits of prophets were under the control of prophets, he meant to distinguish true prophecy from pagan prophecy. Unlike pagan prophecy that required the prophet to abandon himself to possession by some supernatural power, completely giving up control of himself to that being, Christian prophecy required that the prophet remain in control of himself and of his spirit. Christian prophets differed from pagans by being in their right minds when they prophesied, able to control whether or not they prophesied.

#### **D. Disorder (14:33)**

Paul's call for order rather than disorder was a call for Christian worship services to distinguish themselves totally from pagan services. Pagan charismatic services were characterized by disorder in that they often attempted to lead their people into frenzies and trances, and it was in this state that they all spoke in tongues and prophesied simultaneously, having as their foremost goal their own personal experience of ecstasy. (See Deeper Discoveries notes on vv. 27 and 32 above.)

#### **E. Disgraceful (14:35)**

The word *aischros* belongs to group of synonymous words containing also *aischuno*, *epaischuno*, *kataischuno*, *aischune*, and *aischrotes*. While many times these words refer to shame and disgrace that appropriately corresponds to sinfulness or error, this is not always the case. Often, they refer rather to "embarrassment" without underlying guilt. For example, Jesus himself will feel ashamed of certain people on the last day, though through no shortcoming of his own (Luke 9:26; Mark 8:38). Similarly, the rich Corinthians disgraced the poor in their church by shutting them away from the Lord's Table (1 Cor. 11:22). No sinfulness or demerit attached to poverty, nor to the poor who suffered mistreatment at the hands of others. Still, they were still "disgraced" or "shamed" by this mistreatment. Compare also the Septuagint's use of these words in Ruth 2:15, Isaiah 1:29, and Micah 3:7. In each of these cases, the idea of "embarrassment" seems best to capture the intended meaning (see also Luke 14:9; 16:3; 2 Tim. 1:16; Heb. 12:2; 1 Pet. 4:16). Thus, it may be that Paul did not mean that it was somehow sinful for women to question their husbands in church so much as it caused embarrassment to their husbands. To embarrass them in this way would have striven against the appropriate goal of honoring their husbands. Thus, whereas the church should weigh and test the spirits of prophets, wives should refrain from challenging their own husbands. The obligation to honor their husbands should have caused them to leave public weighing and testing to others when their own husbands prophesied.

#### **F. Ignores, will be ignored (14:38)**

The text of the Greek original is uncertain at this point. Two different readings enjoy fairly strong support, while a third has scant support. The NIV follows a text with strong support that literally says, "he is ignored." The other strongly evidenced reading is "let him be ignorant," which appears in very early manuscripts, and to which some of the best manuscripts supporting the first reading were subsequently altered. Neither of these readings specifies who is to do the ignoring, though they probably imply God will ignore the person. In contrast to these, the third reading explicitly says the Corinthians should ignore this one who ignores Paul's teaching. It contains the imperative "you ignore," but has only weak support. The NIV and NASB follow the first reading, but the NKJV follows the second: "If anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant."

## ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why should we eagerly desire spiritual gifts? Is this something your church teaches you to do? Why or why not?
2. What benefits do tongues provide? How do prophecy's benefits compare with these? Why is prophecy more beneficial to the church than tongues? Under what situations can tongues be as beneficial as prophecy?
3. Why do you suppose Paul thanked God that he frequently spoke in tongues? Where and when did Paul imply that he spoke in tongues? What did he prefer to do in church? Why?
4. How were the Corinthians thinking like children? How did their thinking need to mature?
5. If tongues are a sign for unbelievers, why did Paul say that prophecy was more effective in converting them?
6. What type of order should exist in a worship service? Does your church have an orderly worship service according to Paul's standards? Why do you suppose the Corinthians were to limit the number of speakers in their services? Is this standard relevant today? How?
7. Why were women to remain silent? Do women remain silent in your church? Why or why not? How does your church's practice in this area compare to Paul's teaching?
8. Paul encouraged the Corinthians to be eager to prophesy, and told them not to forbid speaking in tongues. How should we understand these commands today? If Paul were to come to your church, what do you think he would say about your worship services?
9. How did the particular situation in Corinth influence the specific instructions Paul gave in this chapter?
10. How does chapter 14 build on and complete the ideas of chapters 12 and 13? Without chapters 12 and 13, would chapter 14 seem to teach anything different from what it appears to teach now?