

# 1 Corinthians 14 - Prophecy and Tongues; Orderliness and Individuality in Worship

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## 1 Corinthians 14

- (D) The need for intelligibility (14:1-25)
  - (a) Prophecy is greater than tongues (14:1-5)

**1 Pursue love, yet earnestly desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy.**

**1 Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy.**

**1 Keep on pursuing love, and keep on desiring spiritual gifts, especially the ability to prophesy.**

**1 Follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy.**

- "Pursue" - *diōkō*, run swiftly toward, seek after eagerly; Paul uses this word 8x in his letters (Rom 9:30; 12:13; 14:19; Phil 3:12; 1 Thess 5:15; 1 Tim 6:11; 2 Tim 2:22); the verb requires intensity, determination, and persistence
- Part and parcel of pursuing love was to desire spiritual gifts, whose purpose it is to edify the body, and more so desire prophecy, because it is "other-focused" rather than tongues, which is "self-focused" (Cf. v4)
- "...love" - the Corinthians (and us) are to pursue love because it is "a more excellent way" (12:31); love is the characteristic from which the operation of all spiritual gifts should be based
- "...earnestly desire" - *zēloō*, where we get the English word "zealous" (Cf. 12:31); we (as a corporate body) are to "be zealous" for "the spirituals," especially the gift of prophecy
- Just as this verb is also used in 12:31, *zēloō* is plural, meaning the desire for "the spirituals" is not an individual desire, but rather should be the desire of the church as a whole. The church at large should earnestly desire "the spirituals" be exercised more prominently among them, especially the spiritual "gift" of prophecy.
- In 12:31, Paul told the Corinthians to *zēloō* (be zealous for) the "greater gifts" which are the specific gifts have the most positive and wide-ranging edification of the body (prophecy, teaching, pastor-teacher, apostle)
- "...spiritual gifts" - *tonpneumatikon*, literally "the spirituals" (note "gifts" is italicized in the NASB95/20 because the word is not in the original Greek, but was later added by the translators for clarity) (Cf. 12:1)
- In this case, as well as in 12:1 (see note there), "the spirituals" are more broadly defined in 12:4-6 as gifts, ministries, and effects (results) rather than just a list of spiritual "gifts"
- "...especially that you may prophesy" - Paul singles out prophecy as one of "the spirituals" that the church as a whole should "especially desire" over some other gifts that might be in operation in the corporate church environment
- Prophecy ("prophets") was listed second behind apostles in the list of gifts in 12:28. It's likely that Paul did not mention "apostle" here because the office of apostleship ended with the death of the last apostle.
- It seems that the church at Corinth had become extremely preoccupied with the gift of tongues, and had sidelined the "greater gifts." Paul valued intelligible speech (prophecy), over unintelligible speech (tongues) in the assembly. Prophecy can edify believers or lead to an unbeliever's conversion.

**2 For the one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to people, but to God; for no one understands, but in his spirit he speaks mysteries.**

2 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.

2 For the person who speaks in a foreign language is not actually speaking to people but to God. Indeed, no one understands him, because he is talking about secrets by the Spirit.  
2 For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries.

- "For" - connects v2 to v1
- "...tongue" - *glōssa*
- "...does not speak to people, but to God" - the reason we should desire prophesy over tongues while the canon was being formed was that the person who speaks in a tongue is not speaking to men but to God
  - When someone spoke in tongues (foreign language) without an interpreter present (12:10), he was speaking only to God because no one else could understand what they were saying
  - "...no one understands" - if I spoke fluent Portuguese to you, you would not understand what I was saying
  - Same goes for "tongues" (foreign languages)...if no one had learned the foreign language that you're speaking, they won't understand what you're saying
  - "...in *his* spirit he speaks mysteries" - better translated "by *his* spirit he speaks mysteries"
  - A "mystery" in the Bible is something concealed or hidden from others. What someone says to you in a foreign language is a mystery to you unless there is an interpreter present.
  - The problem with this is that no one else benefitted. Even the speaker himself did not know what he was saying (because he didn't know the language he was speaking). His speaking, which no one understands, only drew attention to himself and did not edify the church.
  - At Pentecost, some spoke in tongues and others knew the language spoken and were edified because they heard of God's mighty deeds in their native language (Acts 2:1-11)
  - Interpreters were unnecessary (Cf. Acts 10:46; 19:6), because the tongues (foreign languages) were in the hearers own language
  - In Corinth, and perhaps other churches, people spoke in tongues among people who did not understand the languages. In those cases, an interpreter was necessary for those present to understand and benefit from what was said in the foreign language (v5,13).

Some Christians have suggested another distinction. They have claimed that the tongues in Acts were foreign languages, but that the tongues in Corinthians were ecstatic utterances—not languages—but unintelligible speech. There is no basis for this distinction in the Greek text, however. The terminology used is the same, and the passages make good sense if we take tongues as languages wherever they occur.

3 **But the one who prophesies** speaks to people for **edification, exhortation, and consolation**.

3 But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation.

3 But the person who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding, encouragement, and comfort.

3 But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort.

- "But" - a contrastive, contrasting tongues with prophecy...

— In contrast to tongues, which were not edifying except if an interpreter was present, and which otherwise only edified and drew attention to the person speaking, the person who prophesies speaks to men

— "...the one who prophesies" - in contrast to the languages uttered by those who spoke in tongues, anyone present could understand what a prophet ("one who prophesies") spoke, because it was in the language of the audience

— Paul outlines three benefits of the gift of prophecy:

- "...edification" - *oikodomē*, building up
- "...exhortation" - *paraklēsis*, encouragement, a call to action
- "...consolation" - *paramythia*, to come alongside one depressed or in grief

### Predictive Prophecy in the NT

- Agabus: Prophesied a severe famine in the entire Roman world during the reign of Emperor Claudius; also, Paul's arrest (Acts 11:28; 21:11)
- Paul: Prophesied aboard the storm at sea that the lives all 276 people would be saved, despite the shipwreck (Acts 27:23-26)
- John: His prophecies on Patmos (Rev 1:3; 22:9)
- Prophecies for preaching and teaching (1 Cor 12:28-29; 14:3; Acts 13:1; 15:32). The Holy Spirit promised to speak through them (Matt 10:19-20; Acts 4:8-12,19-20; 5:29-32; 6:5; 7:2-53).

4 The one who speaks in a **tongue** **edifies** himself; but the one who prophesies **edifies** the church.

4 One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; but one who prophesies edifies the church.

4 The person who speaks in a foreign language builds himself up, but the person who prophesies builds up the church.

4 He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church.

- A summary of Paul's point in v2-3: the person who speaks in tongues (a foreign language) in church edifies only themselves. This is why Paul says that prophecy should be desired more than tongues (v1).

- If they understood what they were saying, they could have communicated to those present in their own language, which is what a prophet did
- Paul's point is that edifying the church is more important than edifying oneself
- "...tongue" - *glōssa*, two Greek words are used for "tongues" or "language" in this passage
- "tongue" - *glōssa* - v2,4,5 [2x],6,9,13,14,18,19,22,23,26,27,39
- "languages" - *phone* - v7,8,10,11
- "...edifies" [2x] - *oikodomeō*, doesn't always refer to something that is good in Paul's writings (Cf. 8:10)
- Those who believe this verse supports a private prayer language say, See, a person who speaks in a tongue (a private prayer language) edifies himself
- However, it's clear that self-edification is not commendable here; Paul is not promoting self-edification. He is saying that gifts exist for the edification of others; if you don't follow that rubric/purpose, you're only edifying yourself, which the gifts (by definition) are not designed to do.
- Paul is not saying, Go for it if you want a private prayer language. In fact, just the opposite...he's holding it up as a negation, something you should not do, but should instead utilize the gifts that edify the body.
- What people in favor of a secret prayer language are doing with 1 Cor 14:4 is taking a negation, something to be avoided, and trying to turn it into a normal practice in Christianity

5 Now I wish that you all spoke in tongues, but rather that you would prophesy; and greater is the one who prophesies than the one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may receive edification.

5 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.

5 Now I wish that all of you could speak in foreign languages, but especially that you could prophesy. The person who prophesies is more important than the person who speaks in a foreign language, unless he interprets it so that the church may be built up.

5 I would that ye all spake with tongues but rather that ye prophesied: for greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying.

- Paul acknowledges the value of the gift of tongues, even though it required an interpreter; however, he again makes it clear that the ability to prophesy was more important, because the result (edification of the body) is the end goal

- "...unless he interprets" - the problem with the Corinthian church is that people were speaking in tongues, but there was no interpreter, so the church was not edified by what the speaker said
- Tongues were being spoken, but no one knew the meaning. What began to take place is that tongues grew more prominent, the body was not being edified, and the speakers were "showboating" and enriching themselves at the expense of time that could be used for something more beneficial, like prophesying.

### **Where do the Gift of Tongues Appear in the NT?**

- (1) At Pentecost, in Acts 2.
- (2) In Mark 16:17, where the Lord Jesus was saying farewell to His disciples, "these signs shall follow them that believe...they shall speak with new tongues."
- (3) Following Peter's address in the house of Cornelius, the Holy Spirit fell upon those assembled there and they spoke with tongues (Acts 10:45-46).
- (4) When Paul came to Ephesus he found a few believers who were unrecognizable as Christians. He asked them if they had received the Holy Spirit and they said they had never heard of it. They then received the Holy Spirit and we are told that they spoke with tongues (Acts 19:6).
- (5) 1 Cor 12-14

### **Key Tests**

How do you validate the reality of God the Holy Spirit in a Christian's life?

- (1) The Holy Spirit is concerned with character, not gifts (1 Cor 13:4-7; Gal 5:22-23)
- (2) The Holy Spirit comes to us to glorify the Lord Jesus, not Himself or ourselves (John 16:13-14)
- (3) The Holy Spirit has come to equip us for Christian ministry and testimony (Acts 1:8)
  - (b) Supporting analogies (14:6-12)
    - (i) Musical instruments (14:6-9)

**6** But now, brothers *and sisters*, if I come to you speaking in tongues, how will I benefit you unless I speak to you either by way of **revelation**, or of **knowledge**, or of **prophecy**, or of **teaching**?

**6** 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?

**6** Indeed, brothers, if I come to you speaking in foreign languages, what good will I be to you unless I speak to you in some revelation, knowledge, prophecy, or teaching?

**6** Now, brethren, if I come unto you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you, except I shall speak to you either by revelation, or by knowledge, or by prophesying, or by doctrine?

- Paul now provides two examples of why tongues without interpretation is not as desirable in the body as prophecy
  - First, tongues with no interpreter provides no content for the hearer...it's just a bunch of noise, no signal (v6)
  - If Paul came to them speaking a language they didn't understand, and there was no interpreter, then no communication or exchange of ideas can take place
  - "...revelation...knowledge...prophecy...teaching" - all intelligible utterances that would edify the body

7 Yet even lifeless *instruments*, whether 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?

7 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?

7 In the same way, lifeless instruments like the flute or harp produce sounds. But if there's no difference in the notes, how can a person tell what tune is being played?

7 And even things without life giving sound, whether pipe or harp, except they give a distinction in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped?

- Second, there's no clarity (v7-8)...

— If lifeless instruments are played in such a way that there is no distinction in the tones, how will anyone know what tune is being played?

8 For if the trumpet produces an indistinct sound, who will prepare himself for battle?

8 For if the bugle produces an indistinct sound, who will prepare himself for battle?

8 For example, if a bugle doesn't sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle?

8 For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?

- Even sounds people make using instruments need to be intelligible to benefit anyone

— This is especially true in a call to battle: if the trumpeter blows a confused tune, the army does not know to prepare for battle

9 So you too, unless you produce intelligible speech by the tongue, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will *just* be talking to the air.

9 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.

9 In the same way, unless you speak an intelligible message with your language, how will anyone know what is being said? You'll be talking into the air!

9 So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the air.

- Paul's application: if what is communicated is unclear or unintelligible, it cannot be heard and understood

(ii) Foreign language (14:10-12)

10 There are, perhaps, a great many kinds of **languages** in the world, and none is incapable of meaning.

10 There are, perhaps, a great many kinds of languages in the world, and no *kind* is without meaning.

10 There are, I suppose, many different languages in the world, yet none of them is without meaning.

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

- "...languages" - *phone*, a voice that makes speech (see note on v4)

— From the context, it's obvious Paul had languages in mind

— Paul's point is that there are many kinds of languages in the world, and none of them are noise without meaning. All languages have grammar, words, and syntax, and communicate content when understood.

— This is one of the best verses to demonstrate that "tongues" were real, known languages

11 So **if** I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be unintelligible to the one who speaks, and the one who speaks will be unintelligible to me.

11 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.

11 If I don't know the meaning of the language, I will be a foreigner to the speaker and the speaker will be a foreigner to me.

11 Therefore if I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh shall be a barbarian unto me.

- "...if" - third class condition, the condition of possibility or potentiality

— Paul says, hypothetically for the sake of argument, if I don't know the meaning of the language I am speaking then there cannot be any communication between us because I don't know what I'm communicating and the person I'm speaking to doesn't know what I'm saying either, and vice-versa...

— Paul's point was that, in communication, the tongues-speaker who did not have an interpreter was no better than an incomprehensible barbarian. Even though his speech may have had meaning, it wasn't understood by the hearers.

12 So you too, since you are eager to possess spiritual *gifts*, strive to excel for the edification of the church.

12 So also you, since you are zealous of spiritual *gifts*, seek to abound for the edification of the church.

12 In the same way, since you're so desirous of spiritual gifts, you must keep on desiring them for building up the church.

12 Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church.

- In view of what Paul said in v6-11, the Corinthians who were zealous for spiritual gifts would be better off pursuing the gifts that enable them to build up the church, rather than build up only themselves

(c) Application to believers (14:13-19)

**13 Therefore**, one who **speaks in a tongue** is to **pray that he may interpret**.

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

13 Therefore, the person who speaks in a foreign language should pray for the ability to interpret it.

13 Wherefore let him that speaketh in an unknown tongue pray that he may interpret.

- "Therefore" - Paul introduces a preliminary conclusion...

— One application of Paul's correction is for tongue-speakers to pray that someone is present who can interpret what they said

— If there is, then the gift of tongues moves from a self-edification exercise to a church-edification exercise

14 For **if** I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but **my mind is unproductive**.

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

14 For if I pray in a foreign language, my spirit prays but my mind is not productive.

14 For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful.

- "...if" - third class condition; Paul did not pray in tongues, but he's saying hypothetically if he did, it was his spirit praying, but what he was saying wouldn't connect with his mind (wouldn't be intelligible/logical)

— Unless both the spirit and mind stay engaged, the result of speaking in tongues is without benefit to the church. Paul ignores any other possible purposes.

*"That, my friend, is the answer to those who say that they speak in tongues for their private devotions. If the 'understanding is unfruitful,' you don't get a spiritual lift out of it; that is, the Holy Spirit is not ministering to you. If you get a lift, it is merely psychological. Paul says our understanding is unfruitful."* [J. Vernon McGee]

15 What is *the outcome* then? I will **pray** with the spirit, but I will **pray** with the **mind** also; I will **sing** with the spirit, but I will **sing** with the **mind** also.

15 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.

15 What does this mean? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind. I will sing psalms with my spirit, but I will also sing psalms with my mind.

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

- "...pray...sing" [2x each] - both prayer (and petitions) and praise (joyous response to blessings received) are in view

— Paul advocated praying and praising God with both the spirit (emotions) and the mind (understanding); the spirit and mind are both receptors and expressers of impressions

— Music without words can make an impression on us, but that impression is not intellectual

- "...mind" [2x] - the heart cannot rejoice over what the mind does not comprehend

— God does not circumvent the mind (like eastern mysticism), and that the first thought that comes into your mind must be from God. God doesn't work like that. God is interested in communicating to people in linguistic form (hence, God's Word), but this whole concept is violated if people are speaking in gibberish or some known language.

— An incoherent language (babbling) doesn't appeal to the mind, thus "tongues" cannot be an incoherent language

— Christianity does not play on the emotions at the expense of the mind

### **Private Prayer Languages**

There is no instance in the NT of anyone speaking in tongues in private; it is always public. Furthermore, tongues 'are for a sign' (v22), which indicates tongues were meant to be public. When Paul said that he spoke in tongues more than all of them, he was not necessarily talking about private devotions. He probably was looking back to 13:1, where he discussed the degree of the gift of tongues. This meant Paul could speak in more languages than any of the Corinthians.

Paul did not directly prohibit speaking unknown languages (not gibberish) in private. Nonetheless, the relative value and profitability of such an experience are so minimal, that its practice seems almost foolish in view of the more edifying options that are open to Christians. Perhaps the current preoccupation with *feeling good*, in contrast to having to work hard with one's mind to edify the church, is what makes this practice so attractive to many today.

16 For otherwise, if you bless God in the spirit *only*, how will the one who occupies the place of **the outsider** know to say the "Amen" at your giving of thanks, since he does not understand what you are saying?

16 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?

16 Otherwise, if you say a blessing with your spirit, how can an otherwise uneducated person say "Amen" to your thanksgiving, since he does not know what you're saying?

16 Else when thou shalt bless with the spirit, how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say Amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest?

- If you give a blessing in the spirit (foreign language) only, and there is no interpretation, how will the person you're blessing understand what you're saying so they can say "Amen!" in response?

— If the person doesn't know what you're saying, they cannot affirm the blessing

— Such a blessing is not edifying, and prayer or blessing is meant to be edifying

— "...the outsider" - a believer who is being blessed, but is untaught in spiritual gifts or tongues (Cf. v23)

17 For you are giving thanks well *enough*, but the other person is not edified.

17 For you are giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not edified.

17 It's good for you to give thanks, but it does not build up the other person.

17 For thou verily givest thanks well, but the other is not edified.

- Giving a blessing in a foreign language is great, Paul says, but the other person has no idea what you're saying, so they are not blessed by your blessing

18 I thank God, I speak in tongues more than you all;

18 I thank God, I speak in tongues more than you all;

18 I thank God that I speak in foreign languages more than all of you.

**18** I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all:

- Corinthian "tongues enthusiasts" could not reject Paul's instruction because he did not have the gift himself, and failed to appreciate it

— Paul believed in the validity of the gift, but did not value it highly. In fact, he deprecated it.

19 nevertheless, in church I prefer to speak five words with my mind so that **I may instruct** others also, rather than **ten thousand words** in a tongue.

19 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.

19 But in church I would rather speak five words with my mind to instruct others than 10,000 words in a foreign language.

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.

- Paul, who understood the proper use of tongues, would rather say five words that were understood by both him and the hearer(s) than ten thousand words in a foreign language, which he didn't understand and that, without an interpreter, the other person wouldn't understand either

- "...I may instruct" - *katecheo*, in Paul's mind, edifying instruction was 10,000 times more important than personal, private exultation

- "...ten thousand words" - further evidence that when Paul spoke of "tongues" he's talking about a foreign language. Gibberish or babbling ecstatic utterances, which many take to be "tongues" today, are not "words".

Paul affirmed the gift that the Corinthians apparently regarded as the sign of genuine spirituality, but he did so by correcting their thinking about what was really important in their meetings. Worship should never be selfish, and it should always be intelligible.

#### (d) Application to unbelievers (14:20-25)

**20** Brothers and sisters, do not be children in your **thinking**; yet **in evil be infants**, but in your thinking be mature.

**20** Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking be mature.

**20** Brothers, stop being childish in your thinking. Be like infants with respect to evil, but think like adults.

**20** Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men.

- Paul now gives these believers ("brothers and sisters") admonition on how to think and practice speaking in tongues (foreign languages)

- "...thinking" - *phrēn*, understanding

— Evidently, the Corinthians were immature in their understanding of the gift of tongues, which Paul is writing to correct. They demonstrated their immaturity by flaunting their gift of tongues and demeaning others who lacked this gift

— They thought speaking in tongues demonstrated their spirituality, but it really demonstrated their immaturity. Paul showed that it is possible to exercise a gift in an unspiritual and immature manner.

- "...in evil be infants" - there is a sense in which it is good for Christians to be childlike...in our innocence regarding evil
- They were practicing evil through their use of tongues without interpreters because it was not edifying to the church
- It's notable that Paul calls the exercise of a spiritual gift that does not edify the body as "evil"
- They needed to this more scripturally about the gift of tongues
- Today many think that speaking in tongues is evidence of spiritual maturity, but Paul is teaching that misusing tongues was evidence of immaturity

21 In **theLaw** 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.

21 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.

21 In the Law it is written, "By means of foreign languages and through the mouths of foreigners I will speak to this people, but even then they will not listen to me," declares the Lord.

**21** In the law it is written, With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that will they not hear me, saith the Lord.

- Quoted from Is 28:11-12...
- "...the Law" - can be used to refer to the *Torah*, but here refers to the entire OT
- Paul uses this OT passage to warn those who thought tongues was an evidence of spiritual maturity
- The context of the Isaiah passage was the Israelites' refusal to accept Isaiah's warning concerning the coming Assyrian invasion. God used the languages (tongues) of foreign armies of Assyria to discipline the northern kingdom (Israel) so they would repent (Cf. Deut 28:49; Is 29:10-12; 30:9-11; 33:19)
- God told them that, since they refused to listen to the prophet's words, He would "teach" them by using their foreign-speaking invading enemy (the Assyrians), and this would be a sign of judgment on Israel (northern kingdom)
- The fact that Israel (10 tribes of the northern kingdom) would be scattered by a people group whose language they didn't recognize was an indication to Israel that they were under divine judgment.
- Isaiah preached repentance to the Israelites in their own language, but they did not repent. God brought the invading Assyrians into Israel, but His people still did not repent.
- Tongues in that sense was given to an unbelieving nation, not a believing nation

— Paul applied this to the Corinthians who needed to repent of their immature thinking in the use of tongues so they could avoid divine discipline

In Is 28, the Lord is complaining that His people had made His word into a bunch of rules. Like children who repeat a rhyme without knowing its meaning, they could no longer understand what He was really trying to tell them, which was that their disobedience would lead to judgment. So in v11 He said, in effect, "You don't understand what I'm telling you when I speak in your own language. Therefore I'll send your enemies against you and they'll explain it to you in their language, but even then you will not understand."

In v22-25, Paul explained what this means. When everyone in the Church is speaking in tongues, unbelievers who come in won't be able to understand what's going on and will think everyone is crazy. Therefore tongues is a sign for unbelievers to remain unbelievers. This is why Paul cautioned us to be very careful when using tongues in worship (v26-28). But if several people tell an unbeliever something about himself they would have no way of knowing, the unbeliever will realize it came from God, conclude that God is with them, and begin worshiping Him. Therefore prophecy is a sign for an unbeliever to become a believer. In Is 28:11-12, Isaiah is being ridiculed by intoxicated priests and prophets who mock him by asking whether he is trying to explain his message to small children. "Do and do, do and do, rule on rule, rule on rule." (Is 28:10,13). In Hebrew these lines sound like baby talk: *sav lasav sav lasav, kav lakav kav lakav*. Their simplicity approaches meaninglessness. The Israelites scorned Isaiah, who came to them with God's word expressed in simple and clear Hebrew. Now God would come to them with Assyrian armed forces, whose soldiers would speak to them in a foreign language (Cf. 2 Kings 18:26, where Assyrian officials addressed the people of Jerusalem in the Hebrew tongue). Because of their unbelief, they would be exiled to Assyria, where they would hear unintelligible speech (Cf. Deut 28:49; Is 33:19; Jer 5:15). In the next three verses, Paul uses the term "unbelievers" four times.

**22 So then, tongues are for a sign**, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but **prophecy** is not for unbelievers, but for those who believe.

22 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.

22 Foreign languages, then, are meant to be a sign, not for believers, but for unbelievers, while prophecy is meant, not for unbelievers, but for believers.

**22 Wherfore tongues are for a sign**, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not: but prophesying serveth not for them that believe not, but for them which believe.

— "So then" - *oste*, a logical conclusion...God's purpose for tongues was to be a sign to unbelievers; prophecy, on the other hand, was designed for believers, not unbelievers

- "...tongues are for a sign" - particularly to Jewish unbelievers, who would understand the significance and the warning of impending judgment because of God's former discipline by way of foreign languages in the OT (Cf. Is 28:11-12)
- Gentile unbelievers would have no historical reference as to the purpose of tongues and would probably just associate them with pagan tongues (v23)
- In the same way a foreign language was a sign of imminent discipline for OT Israel (Is 28:11) by the Assyrians, it was also a sign to the unbelieving first century Jew that judgment is imminent again
- The Jews who came to belief in Christ due to the sign of tongues also believed Jesus' words to flee Jerusalem when it was surrounded (Luke 21:20)
- If this sign wasn't given to first century Jews at Pentecost, and covered again by Paul in this epistle, how would the Jews know that God had removed His hand from them and placed it onto the Church? They knew this because they received this sign from God, not for the believer but for the unbeliever.
- This is why the Church exists (Rom 11)...to provoke unbelieving Israel to jealousy
- "...prophecy" - in contrast to tongues, which was given as a sign to unbelievers (especially Jews), prophecy was given for believers
- Those with the gift of prophecy introduced new inspired revelation, which was being given to the church piecemeal until the canon was complete
- After the completion of the canon, mankind had in one book everything they needed to understand God, themselves, and how to please Him. Thus, the gift of prophecy in the realm of either forth-telling or divinely inspired revelation to the church, ceased
- The gift of prophecy today is not divine inspired new revelation, but rather the bold proclamation of God's revealed word in Scripture

23 **Therefore** if the whole church gathers together and all *the people* speak in tongues, and **outsiders** or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are insane?

23 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?

23 Now if the whole church gathers in the same place and everyone is speaking in foreign languages, when uneducated people or unbelievers come in, they will say that you are out of your mind, won't they?

23 If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad?

- "Therefore" - the logical conclusion from v22...

- "...if" - first class condition, a hypothetical situation: if the whole church gathers and everyone is speaking in foreign languages (tongues), and an "outsider" or unbeliever walks

in, they will both think the entire church is insane

- "...outsiders" - believers who are untaught in the area of spiritual gifts (Cf. v16)
- Paul paints a picture of the Corinthian church: assembled and engaged in a frenzy of unintelligible tongues-speaking
  - While this is going on, two types of individuals walk in: a believer who is untaught in the matter of spiritual gifts (an "outsider" and an unbeliever)
  - To both of these individuals, the worshippers appear to be crazy rather than soberly engaged in worship and instruction

24 But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an outsider enters, he is convicted by all, **he is called to account** by all;

24 But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an ungifted man enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all;

24 But if everyone is prophesying, when an unbeliever or an uneducated person comes in he will be convicted and examined by everything that's happening.

24 But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all:

- However, following the same hypothetical from v23, if someone in the church was prophesying, and the congregation was receiving instruction, both visitors (the "outsider" and the unbeliever) would have a positive impression from the conduct of the believers
  - More importantly, what the prophet said would convict the unbeliever (John 16:7-11) or provide instruction to the ungifted "outsider"
  - When the gospel is preached with understanding, it has behind it the power of the Holy Spirit to convict of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:7-11; Rom 1:16)
  - Prophecy would result in the repentance of a visiting unbeliever, whereas tongues-speaking would only leave them thinking the church is insane
  - "...he is called to account" - he carefully examines himself

25 **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.

25 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.

25 His secret, inner heart will become known, and so he will bow down to the ground and worship God, declaring, "God is truly among you!"

25 And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth.

- "...the secrets of his heart are disclosed" - when an unbeliever falls under the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit, and the power of the gospel, rightly conveyed, goes to work on

the heart, he realizes that he falls short of the glory of God

— The reflection of himself against a holy God is realized, and when that happens, he believes the gospel and worships God

- Because prophecy, as opposed to tongues, is plain speech, it is able to bring about this favorable result. Tongues, on the other hand, brings about derision from outsiders and unbelievers rather than repentance.

(E) The need for order (14:26-40)

(a) Order for gifts (14:26-33)

(i) Tongues (14:26-28)

**26** What is *the outcome* then, brothers *and sisters*? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. All things are to be done for edification.

**26** 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.

**26** What, then, does this mean, brothers? When you gather, everyone has a psalm, teaching, revelation, foreign language, or interpretation. Everything must be done for upbuilding.

**26** How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying.

- The order of worship in that day, before the completed canon, was much different than it is today

— There was congregation participation through psalms, teaching, revelation, tongues, and interpretation. Whoever had something to say was given an opportunity to share.

— Paul's instruction was for the regulation of the use of these gifts in the church. The main requirement: all things must be done for the edification (building up) of the body.

— The gift of tongues was only edifying to the church if an interpreter was present, so Paul only permitted them in those cases (v4,6,14-19,27)

27 If anyone speaks in a tongue, *it must be by two or at the most three*, and *each one* in turn, and one is to interpret;

27 If anyone speaks in a tongue, *it should be by two or at the most three*, and *each in turn*, and one must interpret;

27 If anyone speaks in a foreign language, only two or three at the most should do so, one at a time, and somebody must interpret.

27 If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course; and let one interpret.

- These verses outline a use for the gift of tongues other than a sign gift to unbelievers (Cf. 14:21-22)

— This example on the use of tongues isn't talking about something that is a sign to unbelievers, but rather to a revelatory gift for use in the early church

— This act of tongues, inside the church, occurred when a person, one at a time, would stand up and reveal a word from the Lord, in a known foreign language

— Then there was someone else with the gift of interpretation of tongues, who would stand up and interpret the message, so the rest of the church would benefit and be edified

— Through this practice, God was revealing truth to His infant church, who didn't have the benefit of a full canon at the time

- "...two or at the most three" - this implies regulation in the usage of tongues in a church setting

So there was a ministry of tongues (languages) to the unsaved in the first century, before the canon was closed, and a ministry of tongues to believers, within in church setting. But the point is that "tongues" never refers to incoherent gibberish or babbling...it always refers to a foreign, but known, language.

28 but if there is no interpreter, he is to keep silent in church; and **have him speak to himself and to God.**

28 but if there is no interpreter, he must keep silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God.

28 If an interpreter is not present, the speaker should remain silent in the church and speak to himself and God.

28 But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God.

- Paul provided five guidelines (v27-28) for the use of tongues in public worship:

(1) Numbers: two or three at the most

(2) Orderliness: each in turn

(3) Interpretation: essential for edification

(4) Silence: in absence of interpretation

(5) Devotions: speaking to God in private has nothing to do with church at worship

- "...have him speak to himself and to God" - this verse doesn't say anything about a private prayer language (although it's cited by advocates)

— It's saying that a tongues-speaker without an interpreter edifies no one, so they should remain silent in church and spend the service time in quiet meditation and prayer to God.

— Basically, they should find something better, something edifying to the body and not just themselves, or they should be silent

(ii) Prophets (14:29-33)

29 Have two or three prophets speak, and have the others **passjudgment**.

29 Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment.

29 Two or three prophets should speak, and others should weigh carefully what is said.

29 Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge.

- The same rules that applied to tongues (v27-28) also applied to the gift of prophecy in the church...

- Again describes a practice within the early (first century) church, before the closing of the canon, where people would stand up and prophesy

— These people were looked at as conduits for divine revelation, meaning their words came from God and was on par with Scripture (although not everything spoken was recorded in Scripture)

— Paul limited prophecy to two or three instances as well, in public worship

- "...pass judgment" - *diakrino*, weigh carefully, distinguish (Cf. 12:10); Paul was probably referring to people with the gift of distinguishing spirits (discernment)

— Paul is calling for every prophecy to be judged carefully, and for the worshippers to reject it if the prophecy was not in harmony with Scripture. The standard for judgment is *always* the Word of God (Deut 13:1-5; Acts 17:11; Gal 1:8-9; 1 Thess 5:21; 1 John 4:1).

— This standard goes all the way back to Moses, talking to the Israelites before they entered the Promised Land...the standard in Deut 13:1-5 is if they contradict the decalogue (10 Commandments, especially the first two commandments).

30 But if a revelation is made to another who is seated, then the first one is to keep silent.

30 But if a revelation is made to another who is seated, the first one must keep silent.

30 If a revelation is made to another person who is seated, the first person should be silent.

30 If any thing be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace.

- In the case that someone else receives a revelation while a prophet is speaking, the one with the (new) revelation has priority

— This is because the new revelation seems to be a direct revelation from God to meet an immediate need, in contrast to a prophet's message which may have been received at an earlier time during the week

— In the case of this new revelation, it would appear that God was breaking into the assembly, and the first prophet who was speaking must now keep silent so God can address the immediate need

31 **For** you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted;  
31 For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted;  
31 For everyone can prophesy in turn, so that everyone can be instructed and everyone can be encouraged.

31 For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted.

- "For" - signifies an explanation of why the prophet (v30) had to keep silent
- The reason is because Paul permitted them to prophesy "one by one" for the purpose of all learning and being exhorted (encouraged)

32 and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets;

32 and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets;

32 The spirits of prophets are subject to the prophets,

32 And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.

- Those who prophesied are to control themselves when speaking publicly, even when giving new revelation
- Every person must be in full control of their senses

33 for God is not a God of confusion, but of peace. **As** in all the churches of the saints,

33 for God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.

33 for God is not a God of disorder but of peace. **As** in all the churches of the saints,

33 For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.

- The reason for this order is the nature of God...he is not a God of confusion, but of peace
- If a prophet was unable to control himself, it was evidence that their prophecy was not from God

- On the contrary, if a prophet was in control, it indicated that he was submitting to God's control, because God produces "peace" not "confusion"

- People should leave a church service with a clear picture of God's Word, not confused or questioning. Someone speaking in an unknown language without an interpreter is an example of confusion and questioning in a church service.

- Paul reminded the Corinthians that he was commanding standard policy across the church (in all the local assemblies) (Cf. 1:2; 4:17; 7:17; 11:16; 14:36).

The theological point is important: the character of one's deity is reflected in the character of one's worship. Paul urged the Corinthians to cease worship that reflects the pagan deities more than God. God is never characterized by disorder nor is He the cause of it in the assembly.

(b) Order for women (14:34-35)

34 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.

34 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.

34 the women must keep silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak out, but must place themselves in submission, as the oral law also says.

**34** Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience as also saith the law.

- Paul previously noted that women with their head covered could share a word from the Lord at church meetings (11:4-16, esp v5), however here he clarified one point about their participation in the context of prophesying

— Thus, "keep silent" must be interpreted in context, so as to not contradict what Paul said earlier (11:4-16)

- The immediate context is that a man or woman is prophesying and someone else receives a direct revelation. In that case the one prophesying must keep silent (Cf. v30).

— Paul adds that when the person who received the immediate revelation begins to speak, a woman should not interrupt them with a question or challenge.

— This was a situation where only the men were permitted to speak as a matter of authority and subjection just as the Law also says.

- "...women are to keep silent" - this demand for silence on the part of women does not conflict with 11:2-16, where under certain conditions women are permitted to pray and prophesy because the silence of v33b-36 is limited by context: women are to keep silent in connection with the evaluation of prophecies, to which the context refers, otherwise they would be assuming a role of doctrinal authority in the congregation (Cf. 1 Tim 2:11-15).

- "...are to subject themselves" - *hypotassō*, to submit, rank under (Cf. Eph 5:22). The women being referred to seem to be married women because they have husbands at home.

— Paul is saying that instead of interrupting the person with the direct revelation, they should instead remain silent, and if they are questioning that direct revelation, discuss it with their husbands at home rather than get into a debate at church.

— The reason given is that it is improper (socially or morally disgraceful, Cf. 11:6) for a woman to speak up in that context in church

— This is likely a direct instruction from Paul to the Corinthian church, as it is probable that Paul was aware of an issue of women vocalizing objections to certain prophecies or revelations, which was causing division (Cf. v36). This reflects a 1st century cultural norm similar to head coverings (11:2-16).

- "...the Law" - *nomos*, the teaching of the Mosaic Law on this subject is a reference to a woman's subordination to the authority of a man in her family (Gen 3:16). Thus, in this case, "the Law" would refer to the OT, as in v21.

-- Some argue that because the Mosaic Law does not forbid women to speak, Paul must be referring to rabbinic rules

35 If they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman **tospeak** in church.

35 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.

35 If they want to learn anything, they should ask their own husbands at home, for it is inappropriate for a woman to speak out in church.

35 And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.

- A widely misunderstood verse: Paul is asking women to observe custom and not needlessly flout the accepted ideas of the day

— The scope of the situation in which Paul is requesting a woman be silent is narrow: a woman, in a public church service/assembly, was not to question or perhaps challenge a prophecy or a direct revelation given by someone who was sharing something they believed God had given them to pass on to the church.

— The purpose of this admonition was to maintain order in the service, and Paul is also likely addressing a specific issue he was aware of at the church in Corinth (Cf. v36)

- Some argue this instruction is because 1st century women were generally uneducated

and illiterate, at least not to the extent that men generally were (which is generally true)

— However, this is a weak argument because Paul didn't differentiate between intellectual women and unlearned women. The primary reason Paul admonished women to remain silent was to not violate the principle of order in the church, while adhering to the authority structure God had set up. Paul didn't request they not speak because they were women.

- "...to speak" - *laleo*, talk, question, argue, chatter; used 300x in NT

— It has nothing to do with praying, prophesying, or singing. It is not public speaking. At that time, women and men sat on opposite sides of a center aisle. Questions of their husbands would create a distraction during the service, which is why Paul told them to do it at home.

*These days, it is often the men that do not understand and they ask the women at home!*  
[Ironside]

(c) Concluding exhortation (14:36-40)

(i) Individualism (14:36)

36 Or was it from you that the word of God *first* went out? Or has it come to you **only**?

36 Was it from you that the word of God *first* went forth? Or has it come to you only?

36 Did God's word originate with you? Are you the only ones it has reached?

**36** What? came the word of God out from you? or came it unto you only?

- Paul reminded the Corinthian church that they are not the ones who set the standard for how church meetings should proceed. God's Word did not originate at the church in Corinth, and God's Word did not come to only the church in Corinth.

— Paul likely needed to issue this warning because they were arrogant about their spirituality and knowledge and thought they could do whatever they wanted

— Paul wanted the Corinthian church to fall in line with the worship style and substance of all the other churches and not be an outlier

— "...only" - *monos*, masculine adjective, but this doesn't mean that Paul was only speaking to the men, asking them if they think they are the only ones the word of God has reached—they alone and not the women.

— Rather, it refers to both the men and the women who constitute the church: the Greek regularly uses plural masculine forms when people (without distinction as to sex) are being referred to or addressed. This means that Paul by his rhetorical question is rebuking the entire church for its laxness on the issue at hand; he is rebuking the highhandedness its members display on all kinds of issues, a highhandedness that prompts them to break with the practice of other churches and even question Paul's authority.

— This interpretation of *monos* is confirmed by three things:

1. First, it makes sense of 14:33b, "As in all the churches of the saints": that is, Paul is refuting a practice that sets the Corinthian church off from other churches.
2. Second, this interpretation also suits v37-38: apparently the Corinthian believers were so arrogant, so puffed up with an awareness of the spiritual gifts distributed among them, that they were in danger of ignoring apostolic authority. Are they the only ones who think they have prophetic gifts? Real spiritual giftedness will recognize that what Paul writes is the Lord's command. The contrast in v36, carried on in v37-38, is thus not between Corinthian men believers and Corinthian women believers, but between Corinthian believers, men and women, who set themselves over against other churches (v33b) and even against apostolic authority (v37-38). The Corinthians must learn that they are not the only people (*monos*) the word of God has reached.
3. Third, this interpretation is confirmed by other passages in this epistle where the same sort of argument is constructed (Cf. 7:40b; 11:16).

#### (ii) Spirituality (14:37)

**37** If anyone thinks that he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment.

37 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.

37 If anyone thinks he is a prophet or a spiritual person, he must acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command.

37 If any man think 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 gave the Corinthians a way to test if whether someone was a prophet, or was "spiritual": check to see if they acknowledged that what Paul had written was authoritative, because he was an apostle of the Lord.

— The test was submission to apostolic authority, not speaking in tongues. Submission to the apostles and their teaching was an expression of submission to the Lord.

(iii) Disagreement with apostolic authority (14:38)

38 But if anyone does not recognize *this*, he is not recognized.

38 But if anyone does not recognize *this*, he is not recognized.

38 But if anyone ignores this, he should be ignored.

38 But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant.

- The Corinthians should ignore anyone who did not pass the test of v37

— Failure to recognize the Lord as the source of Paul's teaching would lead to that person's failure to be recognized by the Lord (Cf. 8:2-3)

(iv) Summation of the argument (14:39-40)

**39 Therefore**, my brothers and sisters, **earnestly desire** to prophesy, and **do not forbid speaking in tongues**.

**39** Therefore, my brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak in tongues.

**39** Therefore, my brothers, desire the ability to prophesy, and do not prevent others from speaking in foreign languages.

**39** Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues.

- "Therefore" - signals a summary of the entire argument on spiritual gifts

- "...earnestly desire" - *zēloō*, where we get the English word "zealous" (Cf. 12:31); we (as a corporate body) are to "be zealous" to prophesy

— Just as in 12:31 and 14:1, *zēloō* here is plural, meaning the desire for to prophesy is not an individual desire, but rather should be the desire of the church as a whole

— The church at large should earnestly desire that prophecy be exercised more prominently among them, in their church, because as Paul has explained numerous times, it edifies the body.

- "...do not forbid speaking in tongues" - while prophecy was a "greater gift" they should not take Paul's instruction in this epistle to swing back to the other extreme and forbid the speaking in tongues in the church
- Paul explained the purpose of this gift, which was a sign for unbelieving Jews to repent before the coming judgment of 70 AD

40 But all things must be done properly and in an **orderly way**.

40 But all things must be done properly and in an orderly manner.

40 But everything must be done in a proper and orderly way.

40 Let all things be done decently and in order.

- "...orderly way" - orderliness respects the nature of God

— Any disorder or chaos is not of the Holy Spirit and is not suitable for worship no matter how sincere or emotional one may be

- Foundational principles of church meetings:

- Christians should do everything "properly"
- Everything should be done "decently and in order"
- Everything should be edifying (v26)
- A spirit of peace should prevail (v33)