

1 Corinthians Chapter 14

14:1 "Follow after charity, and desire spiritual [gifts], but rather that ye may prophesy."

Charity is love. If you love as God loves, then you will want all mankind to be saved.

Every believer is commanded to pursue love. Because lovelessness was a root spiritual problem in the Corinthian church, the godly love just described should have been sought after by them with particular determination and diligence.

“Desire spiritual gifts”: Love does not preclude the use of these enablement’s. Since Paul has addressed not desiring showy gifts (in 12:31), and not elevating one over the other in (12:14-25), some might think it best to set them all aside for unity’s sake. Spiritual gifts on the other hand, are sovereignly bestowed by God on each believer and necessary for the building of the church (12:1-10).

Desire for them in this context, is in reference to their use collectively and faithfully in His service, not a personal yearning to have an admired gift that one did not possess. As a congregation, the Corinthians should be wanting the full expression of all the gifts to be exercised. “You” is plural, emphasizing the corporate desire of the church.

“Prophecy”: This spiritual gift was desirable in the life of the church to serve in a way that tongues cannot, namely, by edifying the entire church (verse 5).

1 Corinthians 14:2 "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."

“He that speaketh in an [unknown] tongue”: This is singular indicating that it refers to the false gibberish of the counterfeit pagan ecstatic speech. The singular is used because gibberish can’t be plural; there are not various kinds of non-language. There are however, various languages; hence when speaking of the true gift of language, Paul uses the plural to make the distinction (verses 6, 18, 22, 23, and 29).

The only exception is (in verses 13, 27, and 28), where it refers to a single person speaking a single genuine language.

“Speaketh not unto men, but unto God”: This is better translated, “to a god.” The Greek text has no definite article. Their gibberish was worship of pagan deities. The Bible records no incident of any believer ever speaking to God in any other than normal human language.

“No man understandeth [him]; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries”: The carnal Corinthians using the counterfeit ecstatic speech of paganism were not interested in being understood, but in making a dramatic display. The spirit by which they spoke was not the Holy Spirit, but their own human spirit or some demon; and the mysteries they declared were the type

associated with the pagan mystery religions, which was espoused to be the depths that only the initiated few were privileged to know and understand.

Those mysteries were totally unlike the ones mentioned in Scripture (i.e. Matt. 13:11 and Eph. 3:9), which are divine revelations of truths previously hidden.

1 Corinthians 14:3 "But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men [to] edification, and exhortation, and comfort."

"Prophesying" in this sense: to predict, to speak as a prophet, to reveal a divine message. "Edification" The condition of being informed spiritually. "Exhortation" the act of persuading (or attempting to persuade); communication intended to induce belief or action. We see then, that preaching should not just win people to the Lord, but should build them up after they are saved. It should comfort and console them as well. The gospel message is good news.

"Prophesieth": In dramatic contrast to the bedlam of counterfeit tongues was the gift of genuine prophecy or preaching of the truth. It produced the building up in truth, the encouragement to obedience, and the comfort in trouble that God desired for His church. Spiritual gifts are always for the benefit of others, never self.

1 Corinthians 14:4 "He that speaketh in an [unknown] tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church."

"Unknown": Again, as (in verse 2), Paul uses the singular to refer to the pagan counterfeit gibberish and sarcastically marks its selfishness as some kind of self-edification. This illicit building up of self comes from pride induced emotion which only produces more pride.

When a person speaks in tongues, it builds the person up who is speaking. Preaching builds up the entire congregation. It continues to say unknown, because it is saying that the tongue is unknown to all in hearing distance.

1 Corinthians 14:5 "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."

"All spake with tongues ... ye prophesied": Here the plural "tongues", appears as Paul was referring to the real gift of languages. Obviously, this was not Paul's true desire, even for the true gift, since the very idea was impossible and contrary to God's sovereign distribution of gifts.

He was simply suggesting hypothetically that, if they insisted on clamoring after gifts they did not possess, they at least should seek the one that was more enduring and more valuable for the church. The only purpose tongues renders to the church is when it is interpreted (the normal Greek word for translation).

Wherever God gave the gift of languages, He also gave the gift for translation, so that the sign would also be edifying. Never was the gift to be used without such translation (verse 28), so that the church would always be edified.

Paul is not telling them not to speak in tongues. In fact, he says, I wish you all had the evidence that the Holy Spirit had filled you with spiritual gifts. When the person speaking is moved upon by the Spirit of God and brings the message in tongues to the body of Christ, there should always be an interpreter to tell the congregation exactly what the message is from God. Then the church is built up, when it knows the message is from God to them.

1 Corinthians 14:6 "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 is saying here, that he will not speak to them in tongues, because they would not benefit from it. He will preach by revelation knowledge from God. He also speaks to them of the things he has learned. Preaching comes in several different forms; I personally believe the most effective sermons are when the speaker is overwhelmed by the Spirit of God, and God speaks through the preacher.

Even an apostle who spoke in tongues did not spiritually benefit a congregation unless, through interpretation, his utterance was clarified so that the revelation and knowledge could be understandably preached and taught. Any private use of this gift is excluded for several reasons:

- (1) It is a sign to unbelievers (verse 22);
- (2) It must have a translator to have any meaning, even to the speaker (verse 2); and
- (3) It must edify the church (verse 6).

In verses 7-9, Paul illustrates his previous point about the uselessness of even the true gift apart from translation for the church to understand. If even inanimate musical instruments are expected to make sensible sounds, how much more should human speech make sense, especially when it deals with the things of God?

1 Corinthians 14:7 "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?"

If an instrument of music is out of tune, it would be impossible to bless anyone with the sounds it produced.

1 Corinthians 14:8 "For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?"

The trumpet was used to call the people to battle when it was played a certain way. You would not know what to do, if a recognizable sound did not come from the instrument. This same trumpet was used to call the people to worship. The trumpet was silver (redemption), that was used for the gathering of the people. This is the same trumpet (silver), that will be blown to redeem the Christians from the earth. We will know the sound well and go to meet the Lord in the air.

1 Corinthians 14:9 "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."

To speak in tongues and no one interpret would be of no use to the winning of souls at all. Speaking in tongues in public should never be done without an interpreter.

1 Corinthians 14:10-11 "There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world, and none of them [is] without signification." "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."

Paul simply points up the obvious: the purpose of every language is to communicate, not to impress and certainly not to confuse, as the Corinthians had been doing with their counterfeits. That was clearly the point in the first instance of tongues: Each heard the apostles speak in his own language (Acts 2:6).

This section makes an undeniable case for the fact that the true gift of tongues was never some unintelligible gibberish, but was human language that was to be translated.

1 Corinthians 14:12 "Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual [gifts], seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church."

Again, Paul returned to the issue of edification, central to all gifts.

We all want to be able to minister more effectively in the church. The various gifts of the Spirit are for that very purpose. Paul is saying here, seek the gifts that will do the most good to build the church up.

1 Corinthians 14:13 "Wherefore let him that speaketh in an [unknown] tongue pray that he may interpret."

Many who speak in tongues, also have the gift of interpretation. That is one way that you would know for sure that the message in tongues would be understood by all in the church. Paul is saying pray for the gift of interpretation to go with your gift of tongues.

1 Corinthians 14:14-17 "For if I pray in an [unknown] tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful." "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." "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?" "For thou verily givest thanks well, but the other is not edified."

(In verses 14-17), Paul continues to speak sarcastically, (verse 16 and chapter 4:8-10), about counterfeit tongues, so he used the singular “tongue”, which refers to the fake gift. He was speaking hypothetically to illustrate the foolishness and pointlessness of speaking in ecstatic gibberish. The speaker could not understand, and what virtue is there in praying to God or praising God without understanding? No one can “Amen” such nonsense. Amen means so be it.

Without the interpretation, the people around you would not be able to praise God with you. How in the world could they agree, if they did not know what you were saying?

“Unlearned”: Meaning uninformed or ignorant.

1 Corinthians 14:18 "I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all:"

“I speak with tongues more than ye all”: Paul emphasized that by writing all of this, he was not condemning genuine tongues (plural); nor, as some may have thought to accuse him, was he envious of a gift he did not possess.

At that point, he stopped speaking hypothetically about counterfeit tongue speaking. He actually had more occasions to use the true gift that all of them (though we have no record of a specific instance). He knew the true gift and had used it properly. It is interesting however that the New Testament makes no mention of Paul’s actually exercising that gift. Nor does Paul in his own writings make mention of a specific use of it by any Christian.

Paul, in all of this, is not speaking against tongues. He is just explaining the proper use of tongues. Paul is not ashamed that he has the evidence of speaking in tongues and that he is filled with the Holy Spirit. He just wants to explain, not to run people who do not understand, away from the church.

1 Corinthians 14:19 "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."

“Teach others”: This is the general principle that summarizes what Paul has been saying, i.e., teaching others is the important matter and that requires understanding.

1 Corinthians 14 Questions

1. Follow after charity, and desire _____ gifts.
2. What will you want, if you love as God loves?

3. He that prophesieth speaketh unto men to what 3 things?
4. What is "prophesieth" in verse, 3 meaning?
5. The gospel message is _____.
6. He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth _____.
7. Why is it using the word unknown?
8. What is the exception in verse 5?
9. What is speaking in tongues evidence of?
10. Name the different ways that Paul ministered to the congregation.
11. Why will Paul not speak to them in tongues?
12. Did Paul speak in tongues?
13. What does the author believe to be the most effective preaching?
14. If an instrument of music is out of tune, it would be _____ to bless anyone with the sound it produced.
15. What instrument was used to call them to battle?
16. What is the trumpet of assembly made of?
17. What would be wrong in speaking in tongues with no interpreter?
18. What is verse 10 speaking of?
19. People who can not speak the same language think of each other as a _____.
20. What spiritual gift should those seek who are zealous to receive spiritual gifts?
21. Those who speak in an unknown tongue should pray for what?
22. What does Amen mean?
23. Paul said he would rather speak 5 words with his understanding than what?