

Men's Sunday Night
The Book of 1 Corinthians
"Christian Conduct"
Lesson 13 - 1 Corinthians 14
"Using Spiritual Gifts"

Surely this subject of tongues is one of the most, if not the most, controversial issues in the church today. Without a doubt it is one of the major eyebrow-raisers of modern times. Many are asking questions about it, and there is much that is written in this area. You cannot meet with any Christian group and start discussing any popular Christian leader without the question, either voiced or unvoiced, arises, "Does he, or doesn't he?"

1 Corinthians 12-14 deals with the spiritual gifts which God gives to His followers for the work of the ministry. Believers are gifted to minister and to help people in their desperate need for life, both life abundant and life eternal. However, when men focus upon their gifts and abilities, the problems of pride, arrogance, superiority, and super-spirituality always arise. There are always some people who feel that their gifts and abilities make them better and more favored and privileged than others. This is exactly what happened to the Corinthian church, and it is what has happened to multitudes of believers since that day. The gift of tongues is especially subject to pride and super-spirituality because it involves that of a heavenly utterance as opposed to ordinary human language.

The point is this: the gift of tongues (and all other gifts) is just one of many gifts. Each gift has its place in fulfilling the mission of the Lord and each must be used effectively in reaching the world for Christ and in ministering to the needs of His people. Therefore, the apostle gives us some very helpful insights on these gifts and how they contrast one with another.

Although the gifts of prophecy and speaking in tongues were valid, they were not of equal importance in the ministries of the church. Those speaking in tongues regarded their gift more highly than the other gifts, while Paul taught that prophecy is more important. He provided three reasons to support his argument: 1. Prophecy edifies the whole church. 2. Prophecy is understood by all. 3. Prophecy inspires conviction, confession, and worship.

We must keep in mind that spiritual gifts have as their purpose the building up of the church of Jesus Christ and not the personal enjoyment of the believer. Gifts are for employment, not enjoyment. In this chapter, Paul contrasts tongues and prophecy.

Read 1 Corinthians 14:1-5. Pray and answer the following questions:

What comes to mind when someone mentions prophecy? Prediction of the time and place of the next large earthquake, a stock market crash, or the final battle called Armageddon. Is that the kind of prophecy mentioned in the Bible? What mental image is conjured up when you hear about speaking in tongues? Loud, out of control speech that seems to be irrational? Misuse of these two spiritual gifts at Corinth were causing problems to which Paul now turns his attention. Given current misunderstandings, his teaching may contain a few surprises about the nature and purpose of these gifts in the church today.

Key Definitions

Prophecy: “Speaking forth, or proclaiming publicly” predictions about the future and the end-time; special messages from God, often uttered through human spokesmen, which indicate the divine will for mankind on earth and in heaven. The speaking forth of the mind and counsel of God. Speaking Gods truth by the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

Tongues: “The Spirit-given ability to speak in languages not known to the speaker or in an elated language that could not normally be understood by the speaker or the hearers.”

1. Evidently, the Corinthians placed great value on the gift of tongues. What do verses 1-5 reveal about why Paul prefers prophecy to (uninterpreted) tongues?

2. What is the purpose of prophecy?

3. What is the purpose of tongues?

Read 1 Corinthians 14:6-19. Pray and answer the following questions:

All of our spiritual gifts, talents, and abilities are given to us by God for the benefit of others. Our spiritual gifts are specifically for building up our brothers and sisters in Christ. God expects us to use them for that purpose. Because the believers in Corinth were spiritually immature, they were using their gifts to help themselves rather than others. As a result, when they gathered together for worship, they were divided rather than unified. God wants us to use our spiritual gifts to help and build his people. Instead of expecting people to give to you, or focusing your gifts on yourself, we are to use God's gifts to benefit others.

4. In verse 6 what gifts are mentioned and how does each one build up the body of Christ?

5. In verses 7-12, how do Paul's illustrations support his argument against the public use of tongues without interpretation?

6. In verses 13-19 what does Paul recommend for those who speak in tongues?

Read 1 Corinthians 14:20-40. Pray and answer the following questions:

Words are cheap today. They can be digitized and processed. With one depressed button on the computer we can eliminate words forever. However, the Bible says words have great power because they are an extension of our personality. God's Word, especially, always accomplishes His purpose because it is spoken with His personal power.

In this section Paul focuses on the exciting potential of God-inspired speech in the Christian community. Having established in chapter 13 that love should motivate and shape all the gifts, Paul now turns to a concrete example of love through inspired speech. But like every exciting gift, there are abuses to be understood and regulated, as we shall see.

7. Paul promoted orderly worship, and his instructions in this section were designed to correct the abuses the Corinthians were allowing. He centered his teaching on three basic principles: 1. All must be done for the purpose of strengthening of the church. 2. The God they worship is not a God of disorder, but of peace. 3. Everything must be done in an orderly way. Describe these principles in your own words, and note how well you believe these are applied in our churches today?

8. What were Paul's instructions regarding the role of women in the church? How are we to apply these to today's church?

9. Some worship services are so "orderly" that they put us to sleep. Others are so "free" that they seem out of control. How does this chapter promote both freedom and order in worship?

10. What are some ways you can make sure that worship in our church is "*done decently and in order*"?

Summing up this Weeks Study

According to those who study such things, the vast majority of people who own running shoes don't run. That's a lot like us. We say we believe that praying in the Spirit is meant for today. We believe in the validity of prophecy. We know the Holy Spirit wants to work wonders in and through us congregationally. We've got the running shoes. Let's step out in the Spirit and run. Like Paul, let's covet the gifts and then use them in a way that is harmonious, beautiful, and acceptable. The Holy Spirit is pictured as a dove for a reason. He's not portrayed as a hawk coming in for the kill, or a vulture circling over the congregation to pick people to death with prophecies and words of knowledge. The dove is a bird of beauty, gentleness, and peace. And when the gifts and manifestations of the Spirit it represents are operating properly, the effect will likewise be beautiful, gentle, and peaceful.