

I Corinthians Lesson 14

I Cor. Chapter 14

Distributed by: KJV Bible Studies

Website: www.KjvBibleStudies.net

e-mail: mailKjvBibleStudies@gmail.com

Memory verses for this week: *1 Pet 4:8 And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.*

Introduction: Last week in Chapter 13, Paul taught how important it is as Christians to show love. Example after example was given that even if we have great knowledge, or give all of our money to the poor, it does not profit us if we do not have love.

Among other things, the Church at Corinth was guilty of abusing the gift of tongues. They had magnified this gift out of all proportion to its proper place. The modern day tongues movement is even more guilty of perverting Bible doctrine on tongues. In chapter 12, we found that tongues is listed last in the gifts of the Spirit.

This shows that it was the least important of all the gifts. In chapter 13, we learn that tongues was only a temporary gift, and that tongues would cease (13:8). They were to cease when the Scriptures were completed. The last book of the Bible was written about 96 A.D., and there has been no Scripture added in the last 1900 years. By this we know that tongues lasted no longer than 96 A.D. Tongues were diminishing in importance in Paul's day.

I. Prophecy is the Greatest of the Gifts

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

1 Cor 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.

Paul discusses three gifts in this chapter:

1. Prophecy
2. Speaking in tongues
3. Interpretation of tongues.

He lays down the rules to use when we have these gifts, and we should definitely follow these. The gift of prophecy was very special. These Corinthians were quite proud of their ability to speak in tongues. Paul goes into detail explaining that of the three gifts, speaking in tongues was the least important.

In the teaching, we find that the gift of tongues was not to be used in public, and when it was used, certain rules were to be followed. In verse one, we have a continuation from chapter 13. We are to be known by our charity, and following after that, we should desire the spiritual gifts. Verse two tells us that if a person speaks in another language besides the one that those present could understand, it would not help the church.

In verse 1, Paul advised them to desire the gift of prophesying.

Rom. 12:6 Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith.

1 Thess. 5:20, Despise not prophesyings.

Tongues were known languages, but they would be unknown to those that did not know them. German is an unknown tongue to me. God of course understands all languages.

1 Cor 14:3 But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort.

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

Prophesying provided edification, exhortation, and comfort to the hearers. Edify as used in verse 4 is found 19 times in our English Bible, but the Greek word is translated also as builder, build up, and building numerous times. True prophesying would therefore build up and edify a person. It would give them the truth of God's Word, but tongues would not.

Eph. 4:29 Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying.

Prophesying is good in that it builds up the brethren. We are edified when we teach and preach the truth. To be able to exhort and comfort our fellow brethren is truly a great gift.

Eph 4:11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;

Eph 4:12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

1 Cor 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.

A person that prophesies is considered much greater than one that could speak in a foreign language. Prophesying, giving forth the truths of God's Word, far

excels over the gift of tongues. Please note that the Corinthians needed interpreters when they spoke in tongues. None were needed at Pentecost, for each heard in his own language. It appears at this time that tongues had changed so that interpreters were needed. Apparently they were speaking in tongues with no interpretation being given.

Matthew Henry had these comments on these special spiritual gifts.

“Prophesying, that is, explaining Scripture, is compared with speaking with tongues. This drew attention, more than the plain interpretation of Scripture; it gratified pride more, but promoted the purposes of Christian charity less; it would not equally do good to the souls of men. What cannot be understood, never can edify. No advantage can be reaped from the most excellent discourses, if delivered in language such as the hearers cannot speak or understand. Every ability or possession is valuable in proportion to its usefulness. Even fervent, spiritual affection must be governed by the exercise of the understanding, else men will disgrace the truths they profess to promote.”

1 Cor 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?

1 Cor 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?

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

1 Cor 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.

1 Cor 14:10 There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world, and none of them is without signification.

1 Cor 14:11 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.

There is foolishness in uncertain sounds. Music must make a certain sound, not an uncertain sound, if it is to make any sense. The battle trumpet must not make an uncertain sound, or the soldiers will not know whether to advance or retreat. In a church service, words should be uttered that can easily be understood, or there will be confusion.

It takes perfection to make beautiful music, and just as musical tones must have this order to make a song, so should the language being spoken be understood by both the speaker and the hearer. To achieve personal spiritual understanding, one must be able to comprehend what is being said. If you have ever tried to communicate with someone that can't speak your language, you appreciate this. People will start repeating the same word over and over

and motioning with their hands when nothing is being communicated. When someone spoke in the early church in the foreign language, someone had to be there to interpret to the congregation. If there was no one there to interpret, verse 11 says it is effectively speaking into the air.

Sounds may be uttered, but no one is exhorted or uplifted. You have heard people say that it doesn't really make any difference what they listen to on the radio or watch on television, because they know what is right and wrong. Notice it says that there are many kinds of voices in the world, and none of them is without signification. I believe that is a warning that we may not believe what we are hearing is affecting us, but all of it added together over time will either build us up, or tear us down.

I believe it was David Jeremiah who had these thoughts about sowing and reaping. As I recall, he said: Sow a thought, reap an act. Sow an act, reap a habit. Sow a habit, and reap a lifestyle. Sow a lifestyle, and reap a lifetime.

Sort of a sobering thought of how the small things are so important. We make decisions every day. We need to choose the straight and narrow path that leads to a happy and fulfilling life. Satan is a liar and paints sin as a pretty picture. God warns us to flee from sin, and He can not lie. What He tells us, we can believe.

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

1 Cor 14:13 Wherefore let him that speaketh in an unknown tongue pray that he may interpret.

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

1 Cor 14:15 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.

1 Cor 14:16 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?

1 Cor 14:17 For thou verily givest thanks well, but the other is not edified.

Who can give thanks for the message, if it cannot be understood. As we have mentioned before, there was no such thing as an 'unknown' tongue. All were different languages being spoken, not gibberish or unknown sounds.

We are commanded to pray, sing, and give thanks in such a manner as to build up the whole church. When we do it the right way, the body of Christ is built up and we all grow in understanding.

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

1 Cor 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.

Paul was a highly educated man. He had vast teaching in his background, and was also given a spiritual revelation from God. He says that he could speak with more tongues than any of those in the church there in Corinth. But although he could speak many languages, note that he says "I HAD RATHER SPEAK FIVE WORD WITH MY UNDERSTANDING, than 10,000 words in an unknown tongue. The church is to be a place of unity, harmony, and understanding. We can not be in unity when things are being spoken that are not understood.

I want to emphasize that five understandable words are better than 10,000 words in an unknown tongue

Acts 22:3 I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day.

*Phil 3:4 Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more:
Phil 3:5 Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee;
Phil 3:6 Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.
Phil 3:7 But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.*

1 Cor 14:20 Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men.

1 Cor 14:21 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.

1 Cor 14:22 Wherefore 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.

Paul said that speaking in tongues is childish and a sign of immaturity.

1 Cor. 3:1 And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. 2 I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able.

Eph. 4:30 And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: 32 And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

Paul was a man who had great desire to teach others, not to impress them. We should be like this... constantly seeking to be men and women of understanding. And until we acknowledge God for who He is and obtain that perfect fear of God, we will never acquire wisdom. I don't think God wants us to be in fear as if He stands there ready to condemn us if we make the smallest mistake, but we should have a respectful fear of Him like a child does to their father. In verses 21 and 22, Paul quotes from 2 Old Testament books as he points out the people will speak in many tongues, but will not hear God.

Deu 28:49 The LORD shall bring a nation against thee from far, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flieth; a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand;

Isa 28:11 For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people.

Isa 28:12 To whom he said, This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing: yet they would not hear.

It is important that we understand that tongues were not given to convert men. Tongues were given as a sign to the unbeliever. Prophecy is what is used to really teach us. It's design is to serve. As we mentioned last week, today the only prophecy that is to be done is by expounding upon the teachings in the Holy Bible. The bible is complete, and no new word will come from God until Christ returns to take out the believers in the rapture.

II. The Order of the Ministry of the Spiritual Gifts

1 Cor 14:23 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?

1 Cor 14:24 But if all prophecy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all:

1 Cor 14:25 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 Corinthians were using tongues for exhibition and not for edification. I have attended a number of meetings where they spoke in some kind of gibberish that they called tongues. I have yet to see them make any effort to conform to the teaching of this chapter. Like the Corinthians, they use it for exhibition and not edification. Tongues are definitely not an instrument of evangelism.

Unbelievers are confused by tongues. Tongues were not used to evangelize, even on the day of Pentecost. It was only when Peter preached in a normal manner that the many souls were saved. See Acts 2.

We should realize that if an unbeliever comes into our presence, and every member spoke in a language that could not be understood, they would say that

the church was mad. But if they come in, and we are busy in an organized fashion presenting the truths of God's Word, the unbeliever is convinced of all. So we should seek to prophesy much more than any other gift.

1 Cor 14:26 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.

1 Cor 14:27 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.

1 Cor 14:28 But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God.

In Corinth, utter confusion reigned in their services. Some spoke a Psalm, some spoke a doctrine, some spoke a tongue, etc. This was all going on at the same time. All things done in the church should be done to edify. We are to be busy building up one another to spiritual maturity. We should always be ready to give an account of the hope that lies within us.

Verses 27-28 point out that there were never to be more than 2 or 3 speaking in another language, and there was always to be an interpreter present. We have some today who still believe the gift of tongues is active and still available like it was in the early days of the church. But what goes on today is not another language being spoken, nor is it given with an interpreter there to tell others what is being said. Verse 28 says if there is no interpreter, then let the people keep silent in the church. And this was back during the time when tongues were common and used in the church.

In last weeks lesson, we learned that tongues would come to an end.

1 Cor 13:8 Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.

1 Cor 13:9 For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.

1 Cor 13:10 But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.

1 Cor 14:29 Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge.

1 Cor 14:30 If any thing be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace.

1 Cor 14:31 For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted.

1 Cor 14:32 And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.

1 Cor 14:33 For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.

The purpose of this was that people might learn and be comforted. God is not

the author of confusion, but of peace as is clearly stated there in verse 33. The modern charismatic movement is full of gibberish, babbling, and confusion.

Paul says that a man can control himself when he speaks in another language. Many say they have no control over what is coming out of their mouth as the spirit moves them. I believe God had Paul pen these words that we might understand the truth and not be led astray. We are to learn and be comforted by the prophesy. And even the spirits of the prophets are subject and in control to that prophet. God is not the author of confusion. We can judge what is of God or not by what goes on in the church. If it is built around feeling good for the physical man, we can be sure that it is not building up the spiritual since the two are at war one with the other.

III. The Woman's Place in the Church

1 Cor 14:34 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.

1 Cor 14:35 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.

1 Cor 14:36 What? came the word of God out from you? or came it unto you only?

Women were not permitted to speak in the church. Verse 34 commands that they were to be silent. The charismatic tongue speaking movement today, elevates women to be preachers, and they are prominent in tongues speaking. Today, some deny that God set an order within the church. Women are commanded to keep silent in the church and not to speak out. This is virtually ignored by many churches today. It says that if she does not understand, she is to ask her husband at home.

1 Tim 2:11 Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection.

1 Tim 2:12 But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.

IV. Do All Things Decently and In Order

1 Cor 14:37 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.

1 Cor 14:38 But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant.

1 Cor 14:39 Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues.

1 Cor 14:40 Let all things be done decently and in order.

The things that Paul wrote unto the church and to us are the commandments of God. We should covet to prophecy and teach. It says if any man refuses to

acknowledge that these things Paul wrote were the commandments of God, refuse that person.

No one could claim to be a prophet or spiritual, if they did not accept what Paul wrote as the Word of God. Some people are willfully ignorant, and all you can do is let them remain in their ignorance. God's Word is the final authority, whether man accepts it or not. The people were not to forbid speaking in tongues there in verse 39. If they were not that useful, why? Tongues had not ceased at that time, so they could not forbid their use. Now that tongues have ceased, we can certainly forbid the speaking in tongues. All things in every church service should be done in decency and in order.

* Comments by E.L. Bynum added in July 2013.

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Prov 4:18 But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

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Practice Random Acts of Kindness. Each act spreads, and many will be blessed.