

# 1 Cor. 14: Tongues vs. Prophecy

- **Summary.** The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate that prophecy is superior to tongues – both in their effects on believers *and* unbelievers. Paul's clear instructions emphasise the priority of the *edification* of others in public worship and seek to regulate the exercise of both *prophecy* and *tongues* in the gatherings. The saints are "church of God" at Corinth, thus all must be done "decently and in order" (v.40) for God is a God of peace not turmoil (v.33). The chapter contains many principles to guide public participation (speaking) in the assembly.
- **Nature of tongues.** One of the challenges of this chapter is to determine whether the nature of tongues at Corinth was different from that recorded in Acts. Whilst the believers at Corinth *may* have brought remnants of ecstatic gibberish from their pagan worship, there is very little evidence to suggest that tongues was essentially different to the speaking of real foreign human languages as in Acts (2.4-11).
  - The word *glōssa* refers to actual human languages, not ecstatic utterances. The terminology used by Luke (Acts) and Paul (1 Corinthians) is the same – and they were frequent companions. Paul uses a cognate word (*heteroglōssos*) when describing the actual language of the Assyrians (v.21).
  - Tongues are for a "sign" to unbelievers (v.22). But there is no sign value in gibberish! The sign of tongues was used to gain a hearing for the gospel. *"This gift was an important, God-ordained audio symbol during the transition from the old covenant into the new covenant."* (Pettegrew)
  - Paul instructed those speaking in tongues to speak one at a time and be silent if no interpreter was present (vv.27-28). It could not, therefore, have been some kind of ecstatic, uncontrollable experience.
  - There is nothing in scripture to suggest a *private* or *devotional* use of tongues. Such a use is contrary to the purpose for spiritual gifts since it is purely for the benefit of the speaker and cannot be exercised in love.

## The Preference of Prophecy [vv.1-5] The Test of Edification

**v.1:** This verse provides a summary statement which resumes the thread from 12.31. First, the Corinthians must "follow after" charity. The 'love life' of the preceding chapter was their priority, to be followed with persistence in a strong and unrelenting pursuit. Second, they must "desire spiritual gifts" by continuing to be collectively zealous for the manifestation of the Spirit in their midst (cf. 12.1). The exercise of gift was to be *motivated* by **love**, i.e. the edification and help of others. It was not an opportunity to contribute to one's ego. *"Love is to be yoked to the Corinthians' zeal for spiritual gifts. With love as their aim, it will prevent them from being zealous only for those gifts that will enable them to steal the show and outshine others."* The manifestation of the Spirit that was to be preferred was the gift of prophecy for, as Paul will go on to show, this brings greater edification to the whole company. The over-emphasis at Corinth on tongues was ego, not love – for no-one could understand it! Consequently, prophecy was underused and undervalued. Prophecy was the communication of an authoritative, infallible divine revelation direct from God in a spontaneous utterance with a view to comforting and exhorting the saints (cf. 14.3, 29-32).

**v.2:** Paul's preference for prophecy over tongues is explained and expanded in vv.2-5. Fee gives a clear summary, *"Paul's emphasis – and concern – is unmistakable: the edification of God's people. The one activity, speaking in tongues, edifies only the speaker, not the church, because it is addressed to God and 'no one understands' what is said. The other activity, prophecy, edifies the community of faith because it is addressed to people and speaks 'edification, encouragement and comfort' to them."* The one who speaks in a "tongue" (used in the *singular* here to refer to one human language rather than many) does not speak to his fellow "men" but only "unto God" (direction of speech). This simply means that unless the person who speaks in a foreign language (or 'unknown' language as far as the understanding of the hearers is concerned) is interpreted, only God understands what is being said. This is therefore not a commendation, but a rebuke. The fact he speaks to God suggests coherent speech, not unintelligible gibberish. There is no record in the Bible of anyone speaking to God in anything other than normal human language. The proper use of tongues is evident on the Day of Pentecost. On that occasion, the tongues messages were addressed to God in various languages and understood by those who knew those same languages. They said, "We do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God" (Acts 2.11). The tongues speaker was speaking "mysteries" in the spirit (either by the influence of the *Holy Spirit* or in his *own spirit*). This could mean he was uttering something mysterious and hidden because, though known to God, it was 'not understood' by the gathered company. But the word "mystery" in the NT (and in Corinthians) always refers to divine truth once hidden now revealed. This suggests there was a revelatory aspect to the gift of tongues. **v.3:** By contrast, the one who prophesies is understood by **all** present. The message would therefore "edify" (build-up), "exhort" (stir-up) and "comfort" (bind or cheer up). *Edification, oikodomē*, is the buzzword of this chapter, occurring *four* times in noun form (vv.5, 12, 26) and *three* times in verb form (vv.4, 17). It literally means 'to build a house' and metaphorically refers to building up a person's understanding (mind). *Exhortation* touches a

man's will and motivates him to action. *Comfort* touches the emotions, describing tender help or succour to lift the spirit and help the soul. Any public platform ministry should do *one* or *all* of these things, catering to the whole person.

**v.4:** Prophecy, then, edifies the whole gathered company because *all* can hear and understand that which is spoken. By contrast, one who speaks in a foreign language (tongues) only “edifies himself” – a wrong use of spiritual gift which is always exercised on behalf of **others** (12.7). The fact the tongues speaker edifies himself is a strong indication he understood what he was saying. Edification comes from understanding, receiving and enjoying divine truth. Others, however, are not edified because they do not understand what is being said (cf. vv.16-17). This verse is often used to justify the private use of ‘tongues’ (ecstatic gibberish) for self-edification. But, spiritual gifts, by their very nature, are designed to minister to *others*, not self. **v.5:** “I would that ye all spake with tongues” does not mean that all *did* speak with tongues or that all *could* speak with tongues (cp. 7.7; Numbers 11.29). It is *hyperbole* designed to allay any false impressions that Paul was denigrating or undervaluing what was, after all, a Spirit-given gift. Tongues was an important spiritual endowment which could be of great value if properly regulated and not abused. Nevertheless, the desire of the apostle was that prophecy should take precedence because the collective profit is greater. The prophet was not *essentially* “greater” but *functionally* greater – he was more useful because his ministry was able to edify *all* the saints. A solution to offset the limitation of tongues was “interpretation” which was probably more than merely *translation*. When Joseph and Daniel interpreted dreams, they not only described what was dreamed, but also explained what it meant. This was likely illuminating to the speaker and hearer alike. “Except he interpret” suggests the tongues-speaker was his own interpreter, which is possible, but more likely they were *different* individuals (cf. vv.27-28). In fact, a better translation here is “except one (other than the tongues speaker) interpret”.

#### Three Parallels of Illustration [vv.6-12] The Test of Clarity

**v.6:** In this section, Paul gives *three* illustrations to emphasise the importance of *clarity* and *intelligibility* when taking part in assembly gatherings, thereby implying that untranslated foreign languages were useless. **1.** His own *ministry* (v.6). **2.** *Musical* instruments giving a *distinct* (v.7) and *definite* sound (v.8). **3.** *Multitude* of languages (vv.10-11).

“Now, brethren” marks a shift in Paul’s argument (cf. v.20, 26). Paul imagines a scenario where he visits the Corinthians and speaks only in tongues. Such a visit would be of no “profit” (fruitless) because they would not be able to understand him! It would be far better if he brought a “revelation” or “knowledge”<sup>1</sup> (both *inward*) and communicated it clearly in their own language by “prophecy” or “teaching” (the *outward* expression). **v.7:** Even in the sphere of music, inanimate instruments like the “pipe” (flute, *wind* instruments) or “harp” (*stringed* instruments) must make distinctions in tone, rhythm and pitch or no intelligible melody could be discerned and enjoyed – it would just be noise! **v.8:** On the battlefield, the military “trumpet” was required to alert citizens and the army to prepare for war. If it gave an “uncertain” (*indistinct* or not *clearly defined*) sound, there would be confusion in the camp. **v.9:** “So likewise” applies the principles of the illustration to the gift of tongues and its use amongst the Corinthians. Unless the content of the message used “words easy to be understood” (well-expressed, clear and intelligible) the person might as well “speak into the air” as if there was a complete absence of hearers. **v.10:** Paul’s final illustration is in the social realm. There are, perhaps (the exact number was immaterial), “many kinds of voices” (languages) in the world and not one of them is without “signification” or ‘meaning’ to those who know and speak those languages. **v.11:** But if Paul did not understand or know the “meaning” of the language, he would be as a “barbarian” (foreigner) to such a person who spoke it. “Barbarian” was a general designation for those of the first-century world who were ignorant of the Greek language. The city port of Corinth abounded with such visitors making this a most appropriate illustration. **v.12:** So then, since the Corinthians were so eager for manifestations of the Spirit, they were to channel their zeal in a way which “edified” the whole church, not merely individual members. The contributions must be *constructive*, *clear* and *comprehensible* – not as if they were foreigners to one another.

#### The Profit of Interpretation [vv.13-19] The Test of Public Worship

**v.13:** Paul now concentrates on the specific concern of tongues speaking *without interpretation* in the public gatherings. He considers its effect from the standpoint of the *speaker himself* (vv.13-15), the *assembly* (vv.16-19) and *unsaved visitors* (vv.20-25). As far as the tongues speaker is concerned, he should “pray” with the design or aim that subsequently the prayer would be interpreted, rather than left untranslated (Pettegrew). The *only* justification for taking part in a foreign tongue was that the contribution would be translated and therefore edify the saints. As noted in v.5, an interpreter would have a precise, detailed grasp of what had been said and could communicate the substance of the message effectively to those present. If no interpreter was present, the tongues speaker must remain silent (v.28).

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<sup>1</sup> One who had an intelligent apprehension and understanding of divine truth (cf. 13.2). As another revelatory gift (note its position between ‘revelation’ and ‘prophecy’), this is not knowledge acquired through study but given by divine inspiration.

**v.14:** The consequences of an untranslated prayer are considered. If Paul was to pray in a foreign language (tongue) then *his* spirit (inner being) would be praying (under the influence of the Holy Spirit), but his “understanding” (mind) would be “unfruitful” (unprofitable) for his listeners. Pettegrew notes, *“Paul is not saying that he did not understand what he said when he prayed in a foreign language. He knew what he was saying, but his understanding was not fruitful or edifying to anyone else because no one understood what he said.”* Even to the extent that they would not be able to say “Amen” to his prayer (vv.16-17).

**v.15:** What is the obvious conclusion, then? Paul would pray with his *inner spirit* and “with the understanding”, i.e. in a language that is capable of being understood by all. The same was also true of “singing” [*psallō*], a word which signifies simply to *praise* without the accompaniment of an instrument. Any singing or praise in a foreign language must be interpreted so as to be intelligible and profitable to others. **v.16:** If what is said is not intelligible, then how can others express their assent by saying “Amen”? To “bless with the spirit” is equated with “giving of thanks” and signifies simply to offer praise, probably by the *human* spirit under the influence of the *Holy* Spirit. Paul speaks of those who “occupy the room of the unlearned [*idiōtēs*]”. The word has *three* shades of meaning: **1.** A *private* individual as distinct from one holding a public office like a ruler or king. **2.** A *layman* as opposed to a professional person like a trained soldier or doctor. **3.** An *outsider* or alien as distinct from one who is a member. Whilst the word could refer to an *unbeliever* (as in v.23), the obvious meaning in this context signifies anyone unacquainted with, or ignorant of, the foreign language – probably *all* in the gathered company apart from those with gift of interpretation. **JG Toll** makes a perceptive remark, *“Paul is not referring to a special bench in the assembly reserved for unlearned people. There is a clear distinction between those who are within the assembly, and those without (cf. 5.12-13) and seating arrangements should reflect this difference, but this is not being taught here.”* To say “Amen” is the expected response of the assembled company – it is a collective assent. The word means *truly* or *verily*; and is an expression of affirmation. The use of “Amen” in gatherings was common from the days of Moses throughout the OT period until Nehemiah (8.6) and was used in Jewish synagogue worship. Malcolm Horlock notes, *“About a 100 years later [after the writing of 1 Corinthians], Justin Martyr reported that on the Lord’s Day, when thanks had been given for the bread and wine at the Lord’s supper, ‘all the people present express their assent by saying Amen’. About 200 years later again, Jerome wrote to the effect that in the church at Rome ‘the Amen’ resounded ‘loudly, like spiritual thunder’.”* We must remember that whenever a brother leads the assembly in prayer, he does so on behalf of **all**. He should be giving expression to the desires and praises of the whole company. If the saints at Corinth had no idea what was being said, how could they add their assent?

**v.17:** The tongues-speaker may give thanks “well” (suitably), even *splendidly* to a high standard of excellence, but if others could not understand it, they would not be “edified”. **v.18:** Paul spoke in tongues more than any of the saints at Corinth. This was not boasting, but rather proved he was not jealous of their ability to speak in tongues. Given Paul’s warnings throughout this chapter it is not likely he used the gift in Christian gatherings. Rather, as the Apostle to the Gentiles, he frequently encountered new linguistic groups in his travels. Tongues was one of the authenticating signs of the gospel to show that God was reaching out to every tribe and tongue (Romans 15.18-19; 2 Corinthians 12.12) **v.19:** In one devastating, concluding summary Paul declares that he would rather teach (instruct) the saints with “five” words they could understand (objective genitive) than “ten thousand” words in a foreign language they could not understand. “Ten thousand” [*murios*] is the largest number in Greek and means ‘countless, innumerable, tens of thousands.’

#### The Purpose of Tongues [vv.20-25]

**v.20:** This section contains a rebuke for *childish* behaviour (v.20), a *citation* from Isaiah (v.21) and a *conclusion* (v.22) with *consequences* for unbelievers coming into the gathered company (vv.23-25). These verses also help to answer an obvious question – “What is the point of the gift of tongues if it has to be translated to be useful to the church?” The simple answer is “tongues are for a sign” to unbelievers. The Corinthians were to stop being “children [*paidion*] in understanding” by using tongues amongst believers. They had been *immature* (deficient) and *improper* in their thinking, having a childish fascination and fixation on the spectacular. Rather, they should be “men” (grown-ups!) and make intelligent (mature) use of the gift. If they wanted to act like children, they should be as *infants* [*nēpiazō*, babes] in “malice” (inherent moral evil) – unable to act, speak or think maliciously towards others. A babe has no knowledge or experience of positive sin or hostility. In summary, the Corinthians had been growing where they should not (in malice) and not growing where they should (in understanding). **v.21:** To further their understanding of the purpose of tongues, Paul quotes from Isaiah 28.11-12, or “the law”, which here refers to the whole OT, not just the Pentateuch (cf. John 10.34; 15.25). Isaiah 28.1-13 is an oracle of judgment against Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel. The unbelieving priests and prophets of the day ridiculed God’s simple and straightforward message as something fit only for infants (vv.9-10). They were offended by the simplicity of the message. Malcolm Horlock lucidly explains, *“In response to their rejection of His simple and intelligible message and warnings, God affirmed that He would soon be speaking to them through an even less acceptable and less pleasant language – in the altogether unintelligible words of the foreign invader – that of the Assyrians. It was not that Israel would understand the meaning of the Assyrians’ words*

– the very fact that they were forced to hear the language of the foreigner would be God’s message to them... The Assyrian invasion of Israel’s land would in effect serve both as a judgment and as a call for their repentance.” The prophecy was fulfilled when Sennacherib invaded Israel in 722BC (cf. Deuteronomy 28.49). Jeremiah spoke similarly of the Babylonians who, at a later date, came to destroy Judah (Jeremiah 5.15). **v.22:** So, tongues (foreign languages) therefore act as “a sign”, to authenticate the truth of the message to those who would not receive it. In the NT, the word “sign” [*sēmeion*] refers to a ‘fingerpost’ from God – confirming evidence in the form of the miraculous to authenticate the gospel and act as an aid to faith (Mark 16.17-20; Romans 15.19; 1 Corinthians 1.22; 2 Corinthians 12.12; Hebrews 2.4). At Pentecost, tongues were used to praise and worship God in various dialects before Peter preached in the common language of the people. The sign of tongues therefore declared that the Jews’ rejection of Christ had resulted in God moving out in blessing to the Gentiles and implicitly acted as an indication of God’s displeasure and judgment upon the nation. In contrast “prophecy” is “not for unbelievers but for believers” (NET). Though the ellipsis may suggest prophecy is also a sign, Paul does not say this. The major purpose of prophecy was to instruct and edify, and thereby to minister strength, encouragement, and comfort to the saints (v.3).

**v.23:** Paul presents two hypothetical cases of visitors to the assembly gatherings. If all the saints were to speak in foreign languages, they would think them *deranged*! But if the word of God was declared (prophecy) in a language they understood, they will think there is something *divine* – God is among you! There is no contradiction with v.22. Tongues, in a non-church setting are an authenticating sign of God’s message to *unbelievers*, whereas the improper use of tongues in a church setting, with everyone speaking in foreign languages that no-one else understood, rightly becomes an object of ridicule. “If therefore” applies the conclusion of v.22 to the Corinthians. The “whole church” coming “together” was the custom. Paul uses this phrase in the *present* tense in 11.17, 18, 20 to suggest *practice* or *habit*. Here it is *aorist* as Paul envisages one specific gathering. It was obviously the custom of the early church for *all* to attend *every* meeting – no excuses! Into the church gathering come those that are “unlearned, or unbelievers”. It is likely these two terms supplement each other and describe the same persons – unsaved individuals who are ignorant of the Christian faith and tongues. Alternatively, Paul could have two *different* groups of visitors in mind. The “unlearned” may then be believers who were unaccustomed to the gift of tongues and practices of a NT assembly. They are interested spectators, but not part of the fellowship. The *impression* these visitors are given is that everyone is speaking in foreign languages. The scene is one of such confusion that Paul expects their response to be, “ye are mad” (out of your mind) or mentally deranged (maniacs)! **v.24:** “But” if the emphasis is on speaking the word of God in a language understood by all (prophecy), then the response could be very different! “All” that is said is used by the Holy Spirit to bring:

- **Examination.** The word “convinced” means to *prove one in the wrong* and bring them to shame (guilt) – this is conviction of sin. He is “judged” or *examined* (sifted) by the word of God as one on trial before a Judge.
- **Illumination (v.25).** The “secrets of his heart are made manifest” as the searchlight of the word has exposed the hidden thoughts and motives of the inward man. His conscience is awakened to see himself as God sees him.
- **Prostration.** The Spirit of God has done His work. The individual “falls on his face” before God as a sign of self-condemnation and self-abhorrence. He bows in deepest humility to “worship God”. Jack Hunter says, “*In revealing to the man his whole self, at the same time God has revealed Himself to the man. He recognises, as never before, the presence of God so he bows in humble worship, to give homage to Him, with a sense of wonder sweeping his soul.*”
- **Exclamation.** Finally, the individual becomes a witness and “reports” (to *announce* or *declare*) that, truly, God was Himself present “in” or *among* them as a company of gathered saints. The assembly is assuredly the “temple of God” (3.16). See Isaiah 45.14, 20-22; Zechariah 8.23.

#### The Principles of Participation [vv.26-40]

**v.26:** The final section of the chapter lays down guidelines to regulate participation in the assembly gatherings, especially the use of tongues and prophecy. There are guidelines for those who speak in *tongues* (vv.27-28), *prophets* (vv.29-33) and *women* (vv.34-35). The last, and greatest guideline to regulate church gatherings is the word of God itself (vv.36-40). Obviously, brethren came to the gatherings in Corinth *ready* to participate! But this verse does not appear to be a commendation. The repetition of every one of you “hath” [x5] gives the impression participation had become a competitive sport even to the extent of participating at the same time! Everyone vied for attention and pre-eminence – impatient for their moment on the ‘stage’. One brother has a “psalm” (a song or prayer of praise), another a “doctrine” (teaching). One speaks in a foreign language, another to “interpret” and still another, a prophet, “has a revelation” from God. But in every case, the principle is that all be done “unto edifying” – to build up and advance the saints spiritually.

- **Tongues (vv.27-28).** **v.27:** For any participating in a foreign language, there should be *two*, or at the most *three* (to prevent them dominating proceedings), each one taking part in turn. There was to be “one” single interpreter to prevent more than one person speaking in tongues at a time. His gift was the ability to interpret any tongue. Others in the company with the gift of interpretation could judge and guarantee the legitimacy (accuracy) of the message. **v.28:** If there was no interpreter present the one speaking in tongues was to remain silent. He was to engage in

silent communion with God until such a time as he could present it publicly. If the tongues speaker was capable of remaining silent, the gift was obviously not some uncontrolled, ecstatic impulse from the Spirit.

- **Prophets** (vv.29-33a). **v.29:** Likewise, the prophets were limited to “two or three” contributions, though Paul does not add “at the most” (v.27) – he obviously accepted prophetic utterances more readily than tongues. “Let the other judge” does not suggest the prophets were fallible or lacking in divine authority, but rather that there was the possibility of false prophets who needed to be exposed. The “others” [*allos*] is ‘others of the *same kind*’, and therefore implies other prophets, but the word “judge” means to evaluate carefully, and is used of those with the gift of *discernment* (12.10). **v.30:** Prophecies were spontaneous revelations. If one prophet was speaking, and another revelation was given to a different prophet, he should bring his discourse to a close and be silent, thus allowing the other to exercise his gift. **v.31:** This would give opportunity for “all” the prophets to participate at some time or another, that the whole congregation might “learn” (instruction) and be “comforted” (exhorted *and* encouraged). MacDonald says, “*The longer the first man talks, the more apt he is to speak by his own power rather than by inspiration. In continued speech there is always the danger of shifting from God’s words to one’s own words. Revelation is superior to anything else.*” **v.32:** The Christian prophet remained in complete control of himself. His “spirit” (inner being), though under the influence of the Holy Spirit, was subject to him – whilst the content of the message came from the Holy Spirit, he himself could determine when or how long to speak. **v.33:** All was therefore consistent with the character of God, for He is not the author of “confusion” or disturbance (commotion) but “peace” – and confusion would certainly have reigned at Corinth if the exercise of spiritual gift was beyond the control of the individual concerned. Here, then, is the key to the whole chapter – worship in the presence of God should reflect His character. He is not a God of disorder and chaos, but rather order and co-ordination.
- **Women** (vv.33b-35). **v.33b:** The phrase “as in all the churches” could relate to what *precedes* (v.33a) but more likely to what *follows* (the injunction to silence on the part of women, v.34). Elsewhere in the epistle, a similar statement about the practice of the churches always belongs with an imperative statement like that of v.34 (cf. 4.17; 7.17; 11.16). The silence of sisters was therefore a universal principle in all the “churches of the saints”. Whilst there is no scriptural support for the *federation* of churches, there is a *fellowship* of churches that is based on apostolic doctrine (Acts 2.42). **v.34:** Paul has already mentioned the need for silence (at the appropriate times) on the part of tongues speakers (v.28) and prophets (v.30). Now he says that women must “keep silence” in the churches. This is an absolute rule permitting no exceptions. It is not “permitted” for her to “speak” [*laieō*] publicly (cf. v.28, 30) and therefore with authority over the man. Her silence is proper because she is “commanded to be under obedience” as stated in “the law”, a probable reference to the creation order of Genesis 2.20-24 (cf. 3.16). It is these scriptures Paul refers to in 1 Timothy 2.11-14. By creatorial order of God, *headship* belongs to the man, and willing submission to that authority belongs to the woman. Headship does not demand inequality or inferiority but concerns differing roles and responsibilities, often among equals. Thus, the public responsibility of speaking and leading in assembly gatherings is invested in the man.<sup>2</sup> **v.35:** Rabbi Eliezer, contemporary with Paul, taught that a woman should devote herself exclusively to domestic duties and must not ask questions about the Torah at all. Paul clearly disagreed! Christian women should seek to “learn” (be instructed), but not by asking questions in public church gatherings. Instead, they should ask “their husbands” (menfolk) in private at “home”. It is a “shame” (*disgraceful or improper*) for them to do so in public – that would be to assume an authority and role they have not been divinely given.

**v.36:** As Paul draws a long chiasm (from 11.2, instructions governing order in the local church) to a close, he reminds the Corinthians of his authority as an apostle, and the ultimate authority of the word of God. With a bite of sarcasm, and perhaps anticipating the outrage and contention of the Corinthians, Paul suggests it would be the height of arrogance for the Corinthians to claim exclusive rights over the word of God. Were they the *source* (originators) of divine revelation or its *only* recipients that they could be a law unto themselves. No! The word of God does not come *from* the church, but *to* the church. They are subject to its authority. **v.37:** And, as an apostle, the “things” Paul had written in the whole epistle were the “commandments of the Lord”. He was not merely giving his own opinion but wrote with the authority of the risen Lord of the churches (cf. 2.16; 2 Corinthians 13.3). Those in Corinth who claimed to be “prophets” or “spiritual” (probably the self-coined description of the ‘tongues-speaking elite’ used here in sarcasm) should prove those claims by bowing to the authority of apostolic teaching. Nobody – no matter how gifted they might be, or think they are – is above the authority of scripture. The real test of spirituality (and love for Christ) has always been a person’s obedience to the word of God. **v.38:** There may have been some who were unwilling to recognise Paul’s authority, “if any man be ignorant”. This is not *innocent* ignorance, but *wilful* ignorance – rebellion against divinely constituted authority. The NET translation has, “If someone does not recognize this, he is not recognized.” This suggests that the individual who disregards divine authority should himself be disregarded as a legitimate servant of God. He would bear

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<sup>2</sup> For the apparent contradiction between this verse and 11.4, please see BC notes on 1 Corinthians 11.

the mark of a false prophet. But there may be a more serious implication. The *passive* voice suggests that such a person is not *acknowledged* (or *known*) by **God** (cf. 8.3). Rebellion against the word of God is the evidence of unbelief.

**v.39:** This verse gives a summary of the whole chapter. The Corinthians should be zealous for the exercise of **prophecy** (cp. 12.31; 14.1) for it edifies the *whole* church. But speaking in **tongues** was not to be “forbidden” either – it was a gift of the Holy Spirit after all. “*Paul’s answer to misuse and abuse is not disuse but right and proper use*” (Horlock). **v.40:** This verse summarises the whole chiastic section from 11.2. *All* the activities and public gatherings of the local church at Corinth were to be characterised by “decency” and “order”. “Decently” is a term of *beauty*. It means *well-formed* and implies comeliness, decorum, and harmony. “Order” is the opposite of confusion (v.33) and conveys the rank and file of military discipline. A well-disciplined military force puts every man in his proper place with a knowledge of his particular responsibility. He knows how to perform his task at the proper time and in the proper way.

The practical lessons of such a chapter are well summarised by David Gilliland. If I am going to contribute to the assembly gatherings, I should speak: *constructively* unto edifying (vv.1-5); *clearly* in the sense of audible and succinct (vv.6-11); *comprehensively*, so people can understand (comprehend) it (vv.13-19); *convincingly* with a sense of Divine power (vv.20-25); *consecutively*, one at a time; *consistently* with divine revelation, for others will judge; and *considerately*, for others may want to speak (vv.26-40).