

Tongues, Prophecy, and Church Order in 1 Corinthians 14

This is a brief, bulleted summary of the more extensive commentary that follows. Please read and consider this material in full, searching the Scriptures referenced and others that may apply to these matters before formulating questions and responses. In the interest of promoting the unity of the Body of Christ, we welcome constructive communication based on the authority and supremacy of the Word of God in these and all other matters of Christian life and practice.

INTRODUCTION

- Tongues and Prophecy are spiritual gifts given to edify the Body of Christ
- From the early days of the Church the misuse of these gifts has created confusion and controversy

1 CORINTHIANS 14

- Addresses the gifts of tongues & prophecy from the perspective of church order

VERSE 1: PURSUE LOVE, DESIRE SPIRITUAL GIFTS

- Love is primary in exercising any spiritual gifts; without love all the gifts are useless
- We are to desire spiritual gifts, so that we can be equipped for service to God and the edification of the Church
- By faith & surrender, we will receive the gifts God wills for us; not every person has the gift of tongues
- Prophecy is valuable because it directly edifies the church, and does not require interpretation

VERSE 2: THE GIFT OF TONGUES

- The primary use of tongues is to praise God. He is the audience, not a gathered body of believers
- Tongues are used to express “mysteries” to God
- Tongues are not a “proof” of salvation or of filling with the Spirit; they do not make a Christian “more valuable” in the Church than any other believer

VERSE 3: THE FUNCTION OF PROPHECY

- The function of prophecy is edification, exhortation, and comfort to men
- Prophetic words are to be judged by the congregation and by church leaders

VERSE 4-19: EDIFICATION – THE HEART OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS

- Tongues edify the believer who manifests them
- Tongues are used in the church gathering only with interpretation

VERSES 20-25: THE PURPOSE OF TONGUES & PROPHECY

- Tongues are a sign to unbelievers
- Prophecy used to encourage believers

GIFTS ARE TO BE EXERCISED IN AN ORDERLY MANNER - SPECIFICS

- The sharing of these particular gifts is NOT a “given” at every meeting
- Only 2 or 3 tongues are to be shared in a meeting, and there must be interpretation
- Only 2 or 3 prophets to speak, and prophecy is to be judged
- Small groups are an ideal context for the gifts to be made manifest in an orderly way

CONCLUSION

- We are to accept this teaching as authoritative

ADDITIONAL NOTES ON “CESSATION” DOCTRINE

- Some Christians believe that some gifts have ceased to be given, in particular tongues and prophecy
- 1 Corinthians 13:8-11 is often used to support this doctrine
- This usage ignores the structure of the thought in this passage

INTRODUCTION

Read in its entirety the Bible is a magnificent love letter to us from God, in which He offers to restore our broken relationship with Him through salvation by faith in the sacrifice He has provided: our Lord Jesus Christ. When we receive salvation, we are made righteous in God's sight and we also receive the Holy Spirit and at least one spiritual gift. Unfortunately, because of misunderstanding and even abuses of some of God's gifts, there are believers who have rejected or ignored His offer of spiritual gifts. This is sad! Jesus told His disciples that the Heavenly Father would give only good gifts to His children (Matthew 7:11) so we can be confident that everything that God has for us is both for His glory and our good!

In Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:1-11 & 28; and 1 Peter 4:9-10 are lists (with some duplication) of the spiritual gifts that God makes available to His Church. In Ephesians 4 Paul tells us that certain people are given to the church to employ a variety of gifts: "...for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ..." (v 12). This passage continues by saying that when the saints are edified they come into greater unity; into a deeper understanding of and communion with Jesus; into maturity in faith and doctrine. This is what our Lord wants for His church!

When we are dealing with spiritual matters we must understand that our natural abilities, the gifts and talents that God has given us "genetically," will not suffice. While even our "natural" talents are useful to God and are originally provided by Him, we cannot apply them to Kingdom work independent of influence and direction from the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 6:11 says "*For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.*" We must be active in God's Kingdom using the tools that He has provided. To that end, He makes His gifts available through the Holy Spirit as His people ask and receive by faith.

Almost all Christians embrace gifts such as evangelism, pastoring, and teaching. The Church benefits greatly and the Kingdom of God has continued to increase because faithful servants employ these gifts under the direction of the Holy Spirit. Unfortunately, controversy over the gifts of prophecy and speaking in tongues has been present in the Church almost from the beginning. Within 30 years after Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts first began to be distributed to Christians, Paul had to write extensively to the church at Corinth to correct the confusion and disorder resulting from the improper use of spiritual gifts. His heart was to instruct them so that they would know how to use the gifts effectively. In 1 Corinthians 12:1, he says "*Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant...*"

Much of his correction was in the use of prophecy and tongues. In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul validates these gifts and details how they should operate within the body of Christ. He says "...the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord..." (v 37) and there should be no confusion, nor should Christians reject spiritual gifts just because the church at Corinth, (or any other church) is immature in using them. All of the spiritual gifts listed in the Bible are given to glorify God and to encourage and profit others, not ourselves, when used corporately. We are to use them in conjunction with our brothers and sisters in Christ, that we might build up others in their faith (1 Corinthians 12:7, 14:12). If we were to understand this one point, it would change our perspective on all the gifts of the Holy Spirit and how to use them. With this in mind, we'll look in more detail at the orderly use of tongues and prophecy as they are discussed in 1 Corinthians chapter 14.

VERSE 1

PURSUE LOVE

As we live out our faith together as the Church, Paul exhorts us to pursue love first and foremost. Lord, let this sink deep into our hearts! Love, which Jesus said was the mark of His disciples (John 13:35), is the overriding principle of the entire New Testament: God loved us, therefore we love Him. Because His Spirit lives in each person who is saved by faith in Jesus Christ, and because we are commanded to do so, we love

one another as well. This love is not based on feeling, it is the concrete actions and attitudes described in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8, such as a lack of self-importance and showiness, a refusal to behave rudely, and rejoicing when the truth is made known and lived out. Note also that we are to pursue love, not merely have an "attitude of love," but to expend effort and apply faith that love might be made evident in our lives. We can possess the most "impressive" collection of spiritual gifts, yet if we do not love, 1 Corinthians 13:2 says that we are nothing and our ministries will be unprofitable. Even radical martyrdom is worth nothing without love! Anything we give to God or other people must be motivated by love. If it is not, then our offer is useless, and according to 1 Corinthians 3:12-15, it will be burned by fire.

Even as Christians who believe we are mature in faith, we can easily miss this most profound doctrine in the entire Bible! God's love will produce humility and a heart to serve others. It is not a coincidence that the "Love Chapter"(1 Corinthians 13) falls between two chapters which deal with Spiritual gifts. If our Christian lives are not grounded in love for God and love for people, our spiritual gifts will not be "profitable" to us or anyone else. If the Church would understand, heed, and apply the exhortation of 1 Corinthians 13, we would all act very differently.

DESIRING SPIRITUAL GIFTS

After love has been established and has become the foundation of a person's life, the apostle Paul exhorts us to desire (many translations say "earnestly desire") spiritual gifts. This is not selfish or unspiritual, but characterizes believers who are serious about the advancement of God's Kingdom, for His glory. Such Christians are motivated by love for God and love for the Church, not the attentions of other people or their own feelings of importance. They desire spiritual gifts so that they can be effective in their service to God and to His people; their gifts are "tools" to be used in "building up" the Church. We know now only "in part" (1 Corinthians 13:12) so there is absolutely no room for pride or arrogance in any Christian's life: we need all the tools that have been made available to us to accomplish what God has called us to do.

RECEIVING SPIRITUAL GIFTS

It is by asking and surrendering in faith that we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit at conversion (see our paper on the Holy Spirit for additional commentary) and it is by asking and surrendering in faith that we receive spiritual gifts. At conversion, every believer receives at least one spiritual gift (1 Corinthians 12:4-11) which should be used for the profit of all people in the local church and in the Church at large. As we walk with the Lord, we should continue to desire other gifts that God may want to distribute to us. It is our privilege and responsibility to desire them, yet 1 Corinthians 12 says that a variety of gifts will be given to a variety of individuals "*But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.*"(v 11). In other words, the Holy Spirit gives to each person the gift (or gifts) that He desires for that person to have.

This is very important for every Christian to understand. The Spirit gives gifts as He wills, not as we will. We cannot demand anything from Him, but simply ask in faith, and praise Him as He gives and reveals to us the gift (or gifts) that we need to fulfill the ministry that He calls us to. This is wonderful! It takes the pressure off of us to get a particular gift or have the same "spiritual experience" that someone else had. We should not put that pressure on each other, because the distribution of different gifts to different individuals makes us a diverse and complete body. Not all will have the same gifts or spiritual experiences. 1 Corinthians 12:29-30 asks "*Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?*" The obvious answer is NO, so we should be content to let God be God, in perfect control of the gifts that He gives as He wills. Take the fleshly pressure off, seek and ask Him by faith, be content with the gifts He gives you, and use them to glorify His name!

DESIRING THE GIFT OF PROPHECY

Paul encouraged the church to especially desire the gift of prophecy. The Greek words (all from the same root) used for the various forms of prophesy (propheteia [noun], prophetikos [adjective], propheteuo [verb]) are associated with the idea of “foretelling” or “telling forth” God’s word or message. The gift of prophecy operates when someone declares God’s truth or shares future events; things of which they could have no certainty apart from supernatural instruction. In Acts 11, a prophet named Agabus came from Jerusalem to Antioch, and there he prophesied by foretelling- he “*stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar.*” (v 28) The disciples were thus enabled to take action: “*Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.*” (v 29-30) Later, Agabus prophesied in Caesarea that Paul would be bound by Jews and delivered to Gentiles (Acts 21:10-11). In Acts 15:32, Judas and Silas are mentioned as prophets, and their words “exhorted and strengthened” the Christians in Antioch, which seems to indicate the “telling forth” aspect of prophecy in action.

While the “completed canon of scripture” argument (see **ADDITIONAL NOTES** at end of the paper) is not a compelling case for cessation of the prophetic gift, it is worth remembering that the early church, including the one in Corinth to which Paul is writing, did not yet have the complete written New Testament in front of them. Those having a prophetic gift would exercise it as God gave them inspiration, and all “prophetic” utterances were to be judged by church leaders to protect the body from false doctrine (1 Corinthians 14:32). Today we do have the complete New Testament, and this written word is of great assistance in the judging of prophetic words, because we know that God will not contradict Himself. Therefore, any valid word or prophecy given will not contradict God’s written word. Church leaders today must protect the church from false doctrine just as early church leaders did, and therefore they must be mature in faith (“...not a new convert...” – 1 Timothy 3:6 NASB) and knowledgeable in the scriptures (Titus 1:9).

Verse 2

THE GIFT OF TONGUES

Paul declares that a person who speaks in a tongue speaks mysteries to God. Here is an important statement about the nature of speaking in tongues- the “audience” is God. Tongues are not addressed to the world at large, nor are they addressed to an assembled group of believers- they are addressed to God. In Acts 2 when the disciples were filled with the Spirit they began to speak in tongues, and those who were standing by said “...we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God.’ So they were all amazed and perplexed.” (Acts 2:11-12) Notice that they heard the disciples declaring the wonderful works of God through languages that they had no “natural” way of knowing, because they identified the speakers as Galileans, yet “Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arab” all heard them in their native languages, but the language(s) were directed upward. They were not proclaiming the gospel, nor were they giving a message to the people; they were praising God! When tongues are shared during a church meeting, the interpretation (which verses 13 & 27-28 of this chapter require) should demonstrate this principle: praise- not prophetic, evangelistic, exhortative messages- should be the primary content of any tongue that is shared.

A person speaking in tongues is not in a trance, they should not lose self-control (Galatians 5:23), and the language should be directed to God. The Spirit also helps us in our weaknesses when we do not know what we should pray for, or how to pray. We may find ourselves in this situation frequently in our lives, but we are to run toward God in these times, not away from Him! As we cry out, whisper, mumble, or groan to our Father, the Holy Spirit intercedes for us unto the Father with groanings of His own on our

behalf (Romans 8:23-27). The Holy Spirit communicates with the Father for the benefit of glorifying Jesus and accomplishing His will in and through us. What a God we serve! God knows our hearts and He hears even our most simplistic or unintelligible prayers. We should never be fearful to pray to the Father. He loves us so much, and He loves to hear from us!

The word that the original manuscripts of the Bible use to refer to tongues (glossa) means “speech” or “language.” To speak in tongues is to speak to God in a language that is unknown or unlearned by the person speaking. Not only does verse 2 address the audience for tongue-speaking, it also addresses the content of tongues-speaking: the one who does this speaks “mysteries.” Though the mystery of Christ dwelling within those who place their faith in Him has been revealed (Colossians 1:26), 1 Corinthians 2:10-11 says “...*For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.*” When a person speaks to God in tongues, they are privileged to let the Holy Spirit speak through them, praising Him for things that they don’t even understand. It is a mystery to the one speaking because he does not understand what he is saying in the Spirit, but God does!

Those who have the gift of tongues and those who do not are no different in value to the body of Christ. A person is not, just because he has the gift of tongues, “more Spirit-filled” than any other believer. We need to drop the “has” and “has not” label, because this kind of labeling is not from God and it hurts the body of Christ! The gift of tongues is a wonderful spiritual gift which should be desired like all the other spiritual gifts. As is true of all the gifts, some will receive this gift and some will not. Some in the church believe that the gift of tongues is an exception to this principle, but it is not! Some believe that every Christian must speak in tongues as evidence that they have the Holy Spirit, and attempt to teach two kinds of tongues, one as the evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the other as a spiritual gift. They hope to explain away 1 Corinthians 12:30, which says that “...*not all will speak in tongues...*” but the result of this teaching has been confusion and pain for many precious believers.

The opposite extreme, which says that the gift of tongues is no longer available to the Church, and thus should not be desired, has caused many in the body of Christ to miss out on a wonderful gift of God. It is very easy to understand why people might be confused about speaking in tongues when there are many Christians teaching two extreme (and opposite) positions on the subject. The Bible teaches a balance between these two extreme positions- compare “...*not all will speak in tongues...*” (1 Corinthians 12:30) with verse 39 of this chapter: “...*do not forbid to speak with tongues.*” How much clearer could Scripture be? Let God be God! To those who have or will receive the gift of tongues, commune and praise Him with it! To those who do not have or will not receive the gift of tongues, commune and praise Him with your native tongue. The bottom line is to praise Him, and be forever thankful that the Spirit is interceding continuously for us all!

Verse 3

THE FUNCTION OF PROPHECY

This verse clearly gives the function of prophecy: edification, exhortation, and comfort. If “prophecies” do not have these characteristics they are not from God, no matter how sincere and spiritual a person may seem. Whether the focus of a particular utterance is in “foretelling” the future or in “forth-telling” God’s word to the body, the exercise of a prophetic gift must fall within the boundaries set here. True prophecy will give people hope in God regardless of their present or future circumstances.

Christians, particularly those who are church leaders, are given very clear principles by which to judge a prophetic utterance. If we lack this discernment or refuse to exercise these principles in judging prophecy, we can be seriously deceived and end up following the “spirit of the Antichrist” instead of our Lord. The apostle John’s first letter to the early church demonstrates why this discernment was so important to them, and to us, and also gives further instructions on how we are to judge:

“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.” (1 John 4:1-3)

We are to discern the spiritual source of any utterance that is given, and we have been given the tools to do this!

Verses 4-19

EDIFICATION: THE HEART OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS

While no gift is “superior” to another, Paul’s instruction regarding the context of the use of tongues is based on the principle that the Church should be built up whenever a gift is exercised publicly. This is why in vv 3-4 he restricts the public use of tongues to a specific circumstance (the presence of one who can interpret), but gives a prophet more freedom to share with an assembled congregation. What is the use of tongues then? If we believe that all gifts are for the building of the “Body of Christ,” where do tongues fit in? Verse 4 gives us part of the answer- it is for the edification of the individual believer. This is one of the mysterious ways that God has chosen to bless a believer who operates in this gift- though he does not understand what he says (v 2) yet he is edified. In the spiritual, interacting beyond and above human understanding or intellect, the Holy Spirit speaks to the Father... and it builds up the person who God uses to do this.

In private prayer time, speaking to God in tongues is a great way to praise and commune with Him, and at the same time build up our own faith. When the church gathers for a meeting, the purpose of exercising any of the spiritual gifts is to edify, encourage, and build up the church. The use of spiritual gifts in corporate meetings is for the glory of God and for the benefit of others. If we miss this, we miss the whole reason why the gifts are given. Paul is making a point that tongues must be interpreted in the public meeting.

Where does the interpretation come from? Verses 5 and 13 both indicate that the interpretation comes from God, and that it will preferably come through the person speaking. The person praising God in tongues should pray that he or she might interpret what they are saying. If God grants the interpretation, they are to bless the congregation with it so that all can benefit and be encouraged. The nature of this instruction seems to indicate a knowledge on the part of the tongue-speaker before the tongues are shared aloud that an interpretation will be given. If the interpretation is not granted, then the “tongue-speaker” should continue to “give thanks” to God silently (vs. 28). The public use of tongues is allowed only when there is an interpretation so everyone can understand what is being said, and all can be edified. Notice how practical the theology of the Bible really is: it encourages us to be sensitive and courteous to others in the church... this sounds like LOVE, doesn’t it?

A quick reading of v 5 might seem to support two common errors about the gifts of tongues and prophecy: first, that all Christians will (or at least should) practice speaking in tongues, because Paul says “*I wish you all spoke with tongues...*” This does not indicate that all Christians should speak in tongues! Paul is here placing a high value on tongues. He wishes that all spoke with tongues because he is interested in God being praised, which we have already seen is what happens when tongues are employed according to his instruction... but other passages, such as “*...not all will speak in tongues...*” (1 Corinthians 12:30) which we mentioned earlier, are very direct in indicating that tongues are a specific gift which not all Christians will receive. The second “quick read” error is that there is a “hierarchy” of gifts- that one gift is more important than another. Paul says he prefers the church to prophesy rather than speak in tongues, and that “*...he who prophesies is greater than he who speaks with tongue.*” Paul is not setting one gift over another, but he prefers prophecy from the perspective of church order because the

body can be edified without anyone having to be concerned about an interpretation. His statement validates both of these gifts, and emphasizes his main point- the exercise of gifts toward the edification of the church. Verse 6 further clarifies his point about being understood- the body is directly edified through revelation, knowledge, prophesying, and teaching, and none of these need interpretation. All of these are gifts that we should desire to see exercised when the church comes together- Paul says in v 12 *"Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church."* (NIV)

Verse 14 also gives us an additional insight into the nature of tongues. When a Christian prays in tongues, the Spirit prays but the person does not understand what they are praying. The Spirit bypasses the "mind" (what we refer to as "intellect") and speaks directly to the Father. Though our mind is not formulating the things that we speak in tongues to God, yet we do have a choice as to whether to speak or to keep silent. Verses 14-16 also introduce the idea of praying or singing "in the spirit," which seem from their usage here to be the same as tongues. Paul uses himself as an example, and says that he will pray and sing to God *"with the spirit"* and in his native language or *"with the understanding"* (v 15). Christians who are granted the gift of tongues should follow Paul's example, and use this way of praising God in their private devotions, as well as with interpretation in the public meeting. Let these verses also be an exhortation to those who do pray with tongues that they should not neglect praying with understanding! Both of these expressions are of great help to us individually and to the body at large.

Yet another note on the importance of a clear understanding of what is being said in a public meeting is given in v 16- that of the affirmation and agreement of other believers. When someone praises God in tongues publicly, the interpretation must be given so that the people around him can say Amen ("so be it") or "praise the Lord." These are verbal expressions of agreement, and of the unity of the church as we praise our Lord together. When interpretation is given, people will be able to understand and they will be encouraged, not confused. In the church meeting Paul would prefer to speak a few words in a language that all understand instead of speaking many words in a tongue that leaves the congregation confused. We should prefer this as well!

Verses 20-25

THE PURPOSE OF TONGUES & PROPHECY

Paul urged the church to mature in their understanding of spiritual gifts. This certainly applies to us today! When Israel would not heed to the prophet's messages that God sent to them, He allowed the Assyrians, a foreign nation with a different language, to invade them. God used the Assyrian tongue to judge the Israelite's unbelief. God uses the different languages of today as a sign to unbelievers that He is God! God confused the language of the descendants of Noah in judgement of their pride (Genesis 11:1-9), and He still uses the many different languages in the world as a sign to unbelievers that they need to repent of their pride and accept the creator of all those languages and the people who speak them. God used the gift of tongues as a sign to the unbelieving Jews that salvation by faith in Christ alone had been offered to them (Acts 2:1-39) and He also used it as a sign to prove to Jewish Christians that the Gentiles could also be saved (Acts 10:44-48). When an unbeliever hears tongues, or different languages, they will either resist it and be judged by it (as was unbelieving Israel, v 21) or will recognize that there is a God who is alive and submit themselves to Him.

Tongue speaking in a meeting without interpretation will cause the unlearned or unbelievers to think Christians are crazy. While the practice of tongues does not indicate that Christians are crazy, practicing them in this way would make them disobedient. Unfortunately, this is happening today! Strange practices are allowed and encouraged in some churches to prove "freedom in the Spirit" regardless of biblical support or order. When everyone is allowed to do whatever we feel like doing without any sensitivity to others or to scripture, we can drive unbelievers away from God. May our "freedom" in

exercising gifts never scare or confuse people to the point of driving them away! The church should be a safe, yet convicting place to bring unbelievers, but it should NOT be a scary or confusing place for them. We must follow the clear instruction of the scripture to keep the integrity of the church, and allow the Holy Spirit to convict and transform the people that He sends to our church meetings.

Prophecy is primarily used to encourage and mature believers, however if the unlearned or unbeliever hears people prophesying (speaking forth God's word or foretelling God's will), God can cut their heart with the truth of His word, save them, and cause them to prostrate themselves before Him. Verse 24 says they will be "convinced" and "convicted" by all who are present. Prophecy is powerful! God can use it to reveal the secrets of the heart in those who do not believe, so that they will find themselves beginning to worship God and testifying to His presence. May we worship Him and proclaim His word with authenticity and power! That kind of church meeting will draw unbelievers to Christ quicker than any man-made program.

Verses 26-33

ORDER: HOW THE GIFTS ARE EXERCISED

We believe that these scriptures apply to local churches that meet together with a few members or thousands of members. The practice of these principles may be different depending on the number of people in the meeting, but the biblical principal of order is the same for all. As local churches grow larger, the potential for disorder and confusion grows. In verses 26-33, Paul gives very specific instruction on how the gifts of tongues and prophecy are to be exercised. It is simply not orderly or appropriate for each person present to speak at will. This was happening in Corinth, and Paul was correcting the confusion.

Please notice that speaking in tongues publicly was optional, not a command. Paul gives instruction about tongues and prophecy using the conditional "if," which indicates that there will not necessarily be the exercise of these particular gifts in the context of every church meeting. God forbid that we should come together without the exercise of any spiritual gift at all, but tongues are not commanded for every meeting of the church. His instruction is simple: if any one speaks in tongues there are to be no more than three in a meeting. Each is to speak in turn, and their tongue must be interpreted. If someone is giving thanks to God in tongues in a public meeting, but there is no one present to interpret, the speaker is to remain silent, yet continue speaking privately to himself and God. In other words, they should continue praising God "silently in tongues." Remember how strongly Paul speaks in v 19: he would rather speak five intelligible words that edify and build up than ten thousand words in a tongue that nobody understands. So should we!

The principle for the exercise of prophetic gifts is similar. Usually two or three prophets speak, and their words are to be judged by "*the others.*" This could indicate that others gifted in prophecy should evaluate a prophetic utterance, or that the assembled congregation and its leaders should exercise judgement, using biblical standards, regarding the prophecy. In either case, the prophetic sharing is orderly, and judgment is required. If God gives a revelation to another prophet while the first one is sharing, the initial speaker is to give way to the word that God desires to share through his brother (or sister). In other words, it is not about the speaker, but the message that God has for those who are assembled.

It is interesting to note that Paul also allowed "all" to prophesy one by one so that everyone could benefit from conviction and encouragement. (vv 24, 31) As with the evaluation above, this could mean either that everyone in the gathered congregation could prophesy, or that all those recognized as having the gift of prophecy would be permitted to prophesy. In either case, prophets are to speak one at a time, to preserve clarity and order. Paul is saying that when believers meet together, every person should have something to give to the group and something to learn (Ephesians 5:19 & Colossians 3:16). Believers are encouraged in v 26 to come to the meeting with a psalm, a song, testimony, a teaching, a tongue, etc. This is a challenge to us!

When we come together in Home Fellowships, are we each prepared with something that we have received from the Lord so that we can share it with the group? This type of body life ministry works very well in small group settings, which the early church practiced.

Following Paul's instruction in a larger meeting is challenging. In applying these verses to our larger church meetings, we know that only a few will formally minister in song and the teaching of God's word, yet everyone should participate in the meeting by giving God their praise and worship, giving God an offering, receiving God's word, and then giving others encouragement, ministry, and prayer. Can you imagine everyone prophesying publicly in a meeting with 500 or more believers present? It could take a while! This is one of the reasons that we encourage every believer at Steele Creek Church of Charlotte to participate in a Home Fellowship group, where people receive and give to each other. These groups are where we can live out the "one-anothers" of scripture, including submission, teaching, praying, encouraging, giving, and loving. When a small group meets together regularly to worship and minister, they begin to develop a heart for each other. As the group lives out the Christian life together and they begin to pray for one another, individuals are enabled to exercise the giftings that God has placed within them to minister to the group. God will give a song, a Psalm, a teaching, a prophecy, a revelation... for the building up of the people in the group, through each other. In a small-group setting it is a very natural (and yet necessary!) process to show the consideration and order that Paul commands here. By God's sovereignty and your invitation, lost people may attend your home fellowship or the corporate church meeting. Let them see and experience Christ's church so they will know that God dwells among us! This is what the church is all about... ministering! Ministering to God and each other is God's heart for His church, and God's order in His church will bring peace to His people and draw the lost to Himself.

CONCLUSION: As Paul concludes his remarks about order, he warns the Corinthian church not to rebel against this apostolic teaching that he has written to them. The word of God did not originate in Corinth, nor has it come from Charlotte, NC... it came from the heart of God. Therefore we should submit to His word, lay aside our own opinions, and resist ignorance about these matters. Paul encouraged the believers to desire that they prophesy, not to forbid people to speak with tongues in either a private or public context (with appropriate interpretation) and let everything in a church meeting be conducted decently and in order. To do things "decently and in order" (v 40) does not inhibit the Holy Spirit but rather enhances the opportunity for Him to convict and empower people's lives. God is not the author of confusion or disorder; it is His heart to bring peace to His people as they meet together to worship Him and into the lives of all who He invites to know Him.

ADDITIONAL NOTES: A COMMON ARGUMENT REGARDING THE "CESSATION" OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS:

Paul says that the Corinthians are to desire "*especially that you may prophesy*" (v 1). There are Christians who believe that some of the spiritual gifts mentioned in the New Testament were given only to the early Church, and that these particular gifts are no longer available or necessary today. The gifts of tongues and prophecy are frequently included in their lists of "ceased" gifts, along with other of the more obviously supernatural gifts such as miracles and healing. Many also consider the gift of apostleship to have been "foundational" and necessary only to establish the Church after Jesus' ascension. A passage often used to support this doctrine of "cessation" of the gifts of tongues and prophecy is 1 Corinthians 13:8-11:

"8...But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away.

9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part.

10 But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.

11 *When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.*"

Those who argue from this passage for a doctrine of cessation take the obvious meaning of verse 8- that tongues and prophecy will, at some point, become unnecessary and "cease." They point out the "partial" nature of prophecy in verse 9, and then to the "perfect" in verse 10, taking this to mean that prophecy is inferior, and that we should prefer the "perfect" over the "partial." The key to their argument is that they take the reference to "that which is perfect" (v 10) to mean the completed written word of God- the "New Testament" as we know it today, which had yet to be completed when Paul wrote this letter to the church in Corinth. Thus they reason that the "childish" (v 11) gifts of tongues and prophecy were used to speak God's word directly to the early Church on a temporary basis, until the written scripture could be completed. Then, because "that which is perfect" –the Bible- would be available and complete, the partial and imperfect gifts of tongues and prophecy would cease to be given.

This way of looking at 1 Corinthians 13:8-11 has several flaws. First, the comparison being drawn in this chapter is between love and the spiritual gifts in general, with love being held up as far superior because it is the basis on which all spiritual gifts must be exercised. There is nothing here to suggest that Paul is comparing the gifts of prophecy and tongues to the written Scripture. Second, very few "cessationists" are ready to say that "knowledge" –of the scripture and its application, or of God Himself and His will and purposes in a particular circumstance- has "vanished away" (v 8) which would also be required if their argument about tongues and prophecy were valid. Third, this doctrine ignores the parallel "now/then" structure of the statements in verses 9-10: "For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away" and verse 12, which says "For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known."

Given this parallel, it seems clear that Paul is saying that the "perfect" in verse 10 refers to the time when we will be "face to face" with our Lord and Savior. Now we see dimly- our vision of Him is obscured by our vision of ourselves and our circumstances, and by our own sinful flesh... but someday, our flesh will be gone and the "perfect" will come. Then we will know and see Him face to face; we will see Him clearly and with a perfected understanding. He knows us fully now, but we are promised eternity to know our Savior fully. Hallelujah! Until then, we should embrace all of His gifts, including those of prophecy and tongues, so that through them the Church can praise Him and benefit from the things He is speaking to us.

God did not give certain gifts to the early church only to withhold them from us today. We need everything that the early church had, not less! We are in need of spiritual power just as badly as they were. The early church relied on the Holy Spirit in the beginning (see Acts 9:31), but some believers and churches became prideful, attempting to live their Christian lives under the power and direction of their own flesh. In Galatians 3:3 Paul asks the church at Galatia, "...*having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect in the flesh*"? Modern Christianity is falling into the same trap: reliance on programs, clever methods, money, buildings, and organizational structures to do the work of the Holy Spirit. It won't produce lasting fruit! We must stop trying to "achieve" the Christian life, advancing the gospel by fleshly action using fleshly ideas and fleshly strength. We need to be led and empowered by Holy Spirit, using all the gifts that He has made available to proclaim the gospel and build up the church. It is "...*not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit says the Lord.*" Zechariah 4:6.