

1 Corinthians 14 • Order Within the Body

Introduction

In order to understand the greater meaning and what is the most important lesson to gain from this chapter, circle the following words in the following verses:

- (v.3) “edification”
- (v.3) “exhortation”
- (v.3) “consolation”
- (v.4) “edifies” (twice)
- (v.5) “edifying”
- (v.12) “edification”
- (v.17) “edified”
- (v.19) “instruct”
- (v.26) “edification”
- (v.31) “exhorted”

Are you beginning to sense the greater, underlying pattern? There are those who think that it is only the gift of teaching which edifies, exhorts and instructs the Body of Christ, but that is actually the goal of **all** of the spiritual gifts and offices. And in order for this to take place, it cannot come about in a freestyle environment where everyone acts and does as they wish, but within a structured approach sensitive not only to allow each gift to build up the Body in truth and love, but to mutually receive the same from all the gifts. It is important to remember that one of the specific fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:21-22) is self-control, and that within that framework Church is supposed to operate so as to not just merely instruct, but edify and exhort each member lovingly.

¹Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy. ²For one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God; for no one understands, but in his spirit he speaks mysteries. ³But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation. ⁴One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; but one who prophesies edifies the church. ⁵Now I wish that you all spoke in tongues, but even more that you would prophesy; and greater is one who prophesies than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may receive edifying.

[Read v.1-5]

Q: What did we learn from 1 Corinthians 12 to be the purpose of spiritual gifts?

But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. — 1 Corinthians 12:7

Point: There is an old saying, “Gifts are for employment, not enjoyment”.

Q: Why do you suppose that of all the spiritual gifts, the two which Paul focuses on most and contrasts are speaking in tongues and prophesying?

A: [Let the group discuss to see where they are at.] First, these were not just problem areas for the Corinthian church, but historically these two “charismatic” gifts have been problems for nearly every age of the church. But secondly, whereas tongues “edifies himself”, prophesying “edifies the church”. The greater concern is always for other rather than just ourself.

Q: Are all spiritual gifts and offices equal?

A: We know they are not, not just because of what Paul says here, but by his previous teaching in 1 Co. 12:28 and Eph. 4.

And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues. — 1 Corinthians 12:28

Q: What is the difference between what a prophet does versus that of a teacher or preacher?

A: Whereas as prophecy is providing the truth of God under the immediate leading of the Holy Spirit, teaching (or preaching) is the interpretation of God’s written Word as led by the Spirit.

Q: What is the distinction Paul is specifically making about the gift of tongues?

A: The difference between what is apparently an uninterpreted personal prayer language which only God understands, and a prophetic message interpreted which for the listener accomplishes “edification and exhortation and consolation”. (v.3)

Application: The greater purpose of prophesy is for the edification, exhortation and consolation of the Church, which is the greater purpose **WE** are to seek.

⁶But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking in tongues, what will I profit you unless I speak to you either by way of revelation or of knowledge or of prophecy or of teaching? ⁷Yet even lifeless things, either flute or harp, in producing a sound, if they do not produce a distinction in the tones, how will it be known what is played on the flute or on the harp? ⁸For if the bugle produces an indistinct sound, who will prepare himself for battle? ⁹So also you, unless you utter by the tongue speech that is clear, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air. ¹⁰There are, perhaps, a great many kinds of languages in the world, and no kind is without meaning. ¹¹If then I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be to the one who speaks a barbarian, and the one who speaks will be a barbarian to me. ¹²So also you, since you are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek to abound for the edification of the church.

¹³Therefore let one who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret. ¹⁴For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. ¹⁵What is the outcome then? I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also; I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also. ¹⁶Otherwise if you bless in the spirit only, how will the one who fills the place of the ungifted say the "Amen" at your giving of thanks, since he does not know what you are saying? ¹⁷For you are giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not edified. ¹⁸I thank God, I speak in tongues more than you all; ¹⁹however, in the church I desire to speak five words with my mind so that I may instruct others also, rather than ten thousand words in a tongue.

[Read v.6-12]

Q: Based on these examples, how can we know that something will never achieve the stated goal of "edification and exhortation and consolation"?

A: Anything which cannot be clearly and plainly understood always falls short.

Q: What are the examples Paul uses which illustrate a mixed or muddled message?

1. A musical instrument producing indistinct tones. (v.7)
2. A military bugle whose instructions cannot be recognized. (v.8)
3. An unknown language or emanations of speech. (v.9-11)

Q: What is supposed to be our motivation when it comes to spiritual gifts?

A: "...since you are zealous...seek to abound for the edification of the church". (v.12)

Point: One of the reasons so many fail in the area of spiritual gifts is because they seek them for their own good, their own power, and/or their own edification rather than seeking them for the building up of the Body of Christ. This is an extension of the previous chapter's teaching on love, because where spiritual gifts are concerned, if we seek them out of love, we will seek them not for our own good but for others'.

Application: A message, teaching or prophecy which edifies is never open to interpretation or ambiguous—it is clearly understood by both the speaker and the listener.

[Read v.13-19]

Q: How have the gifts of tongues and prophecy been contrasted to this point:

Tongues

1. Speaks to God for the speaker's own good.
2. Cannot be understood without an interpreter.
3. Edifies the speaker.
4. It is the lesser gift.

Prophecy

1. Speaks to men for their own good.
2. Can be plainly understood without an intermediary.
3. Edifies the Church.
4. It is the greater gift.

Q: What does v.16 tell us is a critical goal for any spiritual gift?

A: That it will be understood and edify even "the ungifted" so they may confirm one's "giving of thanks". It always results in mutually glorifying the Lord. (v.16)

Q: How is this confirmed in v.17?

A: "For you are giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not edified".

Q: In v.14-15, what does Paul emphasize as an accomplishment just as important as something achieved with our spirit?

A: That it edifies our mind. This describes when we are not just Spirit-controlled, but bring into mutual alignment our will as well.

Q: How might this teach us something about how it is possible for the flesh and/or Satan to imitate spiritual gifts and lead someone into deception?

A: They are seeking them first and foremost for their own personal benefit and not for anyone else's edification, they are pursued more from emotion bent on satisfying one's own will instead of coming under God's will, and the counterfeit do not convey truth for the building up of faith and understanding in God's Word and ways.

Application: *If we are carrying out our spiritual gifts biblically where the Church is concerned, the end result will be love which builds the Body of Christ.*

[Read v.20-25]

Q: What is the classic misconception when it comes to tongues and prophecy?

A: That tongues is for reaching believers and prophecy for unbelievers. However, Paul specifies that the exact opposite is true.

Point: *Have you noticed that the Old Testament prophets are sent to God's people? Even Jonah, although sent to another country, was sent to a people who not only knew the God of Israel, but immediately recognized the importance of acting on the message Jonah was carrying from God. Prophets are actually more like "evangelists" to the backslidden, calling them back to what they had originally believed in the first place.*

Q: What is an important difference in the working of tongues vs. prophecy in v.22-25?

A: In the way that the lost are reached for Christ.

Q: What are the four examples of the presence of tongues found in Acts?

1. Acts 2—Tongues is evidence to the 3,000 that the Spirit had come upon believers at Pentecost, who in turn became believers themselves.
2. Acts 8—Tongues is evidence to believing Jews that the Spirit had come upon the Samaritans.
3. Acts 10—Tongues is evidence that the Spirit came upon the Gentiles.
4. Acts 19—Tongues is evidence that twelve Ephesian men had received the Spirit.

Notice that these are all examples for believers, and where unbelieving Jews were involved at Pentecost, the tongues present were actually other languages in which each individual heard and received the Gospel—it was, in effect, interpreted, and therefore effective for all involved.

Application: *If we are carrying out our spiritual gifts biblically where the unsaved are concerned, the end result will be they become saved.*

[Read v.26-33]

Q: How might this section on order in the Church relate to order where spiritual gifts are concerned?

A: "...for God is not a God of confusion but of peace..." (v.33) There is to be order in the way we individually carry out spiritual gifts, and order in the way we come together to use them to benefit the Body of Christ as a whole.

Q: What is the overall goal for each?

A: "Let all things be done for edification". (v.26)

²⁰Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking be mature. ²¹In the Law it is written, "BY MEN OF STRANGE TONGUES AND BY THE LIPS OF STRANGERS I WILL SPEAK TO THIS PEOPLE, AND EVEN SO THEY WILL NOT LISTEN TO ME," says the Lord. ²²So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophecy is for a sign, not to unbelievers but to those who believe. ²³Therefore if the whole church assembles together and all speak in tongues, and ungifted men or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are mad? ²⁴But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an ungifted man enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all; ²⁵the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so he will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you.

²⁶What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. ²⁷If anyone speaks in a tongue, it should be by two or at the most three, and each in turn, and one must interpret; ²⁸but if there is no interpreter, he must keep silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God. ²⁹Let two or three

prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment. ³⁰But if a revelation is made to another who is seated, the first one must keep silent. ³¹For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted; ³²and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets; ³³for God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.

Point: One example here is those bringing a psalm. Have you considered that worship music has as its goal, the same as that of the pulpit, in the edification of the Body? Have you considered this is the goal for **EVERY** gift?

Q: What might be surprising about the caveats here provided for both those speaking in tongues as well as for prophets?

A: Both need to not only be understood, but both need to be kept under control. And both have situations where they are only to be employed privately (v.30) rather than publicly.

Point: Spiritual gifts have as their goal edification of the Body of Christ, but sometimes it may be one-on-one edification rather than working on the whole congregation at the same time. Sometimes Old Testament Prophets were sent to individuals alone.

Q: Considering what is stated in v.32 that “the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets”, what might be a way of absolutely knowing when something is not actually of the Holy Spirit?

A: When it is out of control. One of the fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5:21-22 is self-control.

Application: Just as a message or teaching must be understood and free of confusion as to its purpose and meaning, so should be the conduct of our gathering together in Christ.

³⁴The women are to keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but are to subject themselves, just as the Law also says. ³⁵If they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church. ³⁶Was it from you that the word of God first went forth? Or has it come to you only?

[Read v.34-36]

Q: Does Paul say that women do not have spiritual gifts?

A: No, the issue is their proper employment personally—“subject themselves” (v.34), and within the Church at large.

Q: How are these statements to be understood within the overall context of what Paul has been teaching about the order of spiritual gifts and their employment in the Church? How might this fit with his overall teaching about ministry?

A: It has to do with being in a right relationship with authority and not operating independent of it. It has to do with self-control and order.

Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you. But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ. Every man who has something on his head while praying or prophesying disgraces his head. But every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying disgraces her head, for she is one and the same as the woman whose head is shaved. For if a woman does not cover her head, let her also have her hair cut off; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, let her cover her head. For a man ought not to have his head covered, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man; for indeed man was not created for the woman’s sake, but woman for the man’s sake. Therefore the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. However, in the Lord, neither is woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as the woman originates from the man, so also the man has his birth through the woman; and all things originate from God. — 1 Corinthians 11:2–12

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Q: What is the greater principle which applies to male leadership?

A: They have a responsibility to teach and practice spiritual truth.

Application: This order and conduct of spiritual gifts extends to even our most personal relationships.

³⁷If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment. ³⁸But if anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized.

[Read v.37-38]

Q: To whom is this caveat addressed, and why might that be particularly important?

A: It is not limited to just someone who "thinks he is a prophet", but includes everyone who "thinks he is...spiritual" as well. (v.37) The problems illustrated in the examples of tongues and prophecy extends to everyone.

Q: What is the ultimate standard to which all things must adhere?

A: God's Word.

Application: Every gift and office of the Body of Christ must be in control, orderly, and working toward the common goal of edification, not just the historically "problematic" ones.

³⁹Therefore, my brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak in tongues. ⁴⁰But all things must be done properly and in an orderly manner.

[Read v.39-40]

Q: How might this be an expressions of extremes meant to get us to see the bigger picture?

A: We are not to eliminate a gift just because it may be temporarily out of control, nor are we to elevate one to effectively eliminate or overshadow the others as in the use here of prophecy and tongues.

Q: So if someone "desires" to prophesy, what might that look like biblically?

A: Rather than being someone who can supernaturally make predictions or effect a sign as many suppose proves that one is a prophet, which shows them to actually be desirous of building themselves up, it is the burden to edify, exhort and console the Body of Christ so as to build it up both internally in its love for each other, and as a visible witness to those external looking in so as to make the Gospel message appealing to them.

Application: The cure for "bad" gifts is not "no" gifts, but "right" gifts "done properly and in an orderly manner".

Overall Application

The way a church service or gathering is conducted can take place in a wide variety of ways within many different cultural paradigms, but here is the basic parameters provided in Paul's teachings which apply to every age, generation or culture:

- *It is the teaching of the Word which takes precedence over everything else and the standards by which all things are measured.*
- *The fruit of the Spirit is listed in Galatians 5:21-22, but its overall goal is to build up—"edify", the whole Church.*
- *There must always be self-control, and everything "must be done properly and in an orderly manner".*
- *There must not be anything which can hurt our testimony before non-believers.*
- *There is a proper chain of authority which exists for all in the Body of Christ, even men and women.*
- *As the old saying goes, "There must be understanding before there is blessing".*

While a planned service does not automatically guarantee a spiritual service, the Holy Spirit can lead our planning beforehand just as well as guiding the service itself. In either case, the overall goal is still "edification and exhortation and consolation".