

Week 14, 1 Corinthians 14

Hook



Main Point: Corporate worship and the use of spiritual gifts should edify the church body.

Group Activity: Break your class into small groups and ask them to discuss the most helpful rule(s) they've established at home for their families. After providing the groups with an opportunity for conversation, reconvene the class and ask the following:

What rule(s) have helped to provide your home with order? What problem was that rule designed to address?

Describe an environment (workplace, classroom, etc.) that would have benefited from rules of order. What symptoms did the lack of order cause?

What rules have the Scriptures outlined for worship? How do these rules benefit the congregation?

Transition: Today's passage will discuss the orderly use of spiritual gifts and congregational participation during corporate worship. Paul will stress that the deployment of spiritual gifts and the order of corporate worship must foster an environment that edifies the body instead of promoting chaos.

Week 14, 1 Corinthians 14

Book

Main Point: Corporate worship and the use of spiritual gifts should edify the church body.

Text Summary: Paul, after chapter 13's interjection regarding godly love, returns to the subject of spiritual gifts in chapter 14. While Paul mentions many spiritual gifts in chapter 12, he now uses this chapter to narrow in on the gifts of prophecy and tongues. As is his concern for all spiritual gifts, Paul states that both tongues and prophecy should aim to build up the church instead of glorify oneself (vv. 5, 12, 17). While he does not forbid the gift of tongues, Paul makes the case that prophecy better serves believers and even unbelievers, as it can encourage, console, exhort, and incite repentance (vv. 3, 25). He also asserts that the key to a fruitful gift of tongues is an added gift of interpretation or discernment from another believer, so that the tongue will be understandable and edifying to all (vv. 13, 27, 29; cf. 1 Corinthians 12:10). An *uninterpreted* tongue is of no corporate help to the gathered assembly, but only edifies the speaker. Finally, Paul also offers a system of order in verses 26-40 so that all in the Corinthian church are able to exercise their gifts in an organized, understandable edifying way. Though this chapter focuses on the Spirit's manifestation through tongues and prophecy, Paul's real point stays in line with both chapter 10 and 14, namely, that spiritual gifts gain their usefulness in the church from the *Christlikeness* of those exercising them.¹ In Paul's mind, the gifts of tongues and prophecy should be exercised only with the proper motivation—that being love and the desire to see others flourish.

1 Corinthians 14:1–25 [Read]

Sub-Point: Prophecy exercised in love is greater than uninterpreted tongues.

Verses 1–5 introduce Paul's main flow of thought for the entire chapter, as it is bookended with his argument that prophecy is preferable to an uninterpreted tongue.² The problem in this Corinthian church was not the gift of tongues itself (as it is earlier expressed as one of the manifestations of the Spirit for the common good; 12:7–10³), but the way the believers were *using* the gift. Yet again, these believers are exploiting something designed to join them together as a means of splitting them apart. As they have done with the Lord's Supper and head coverings in chapter 11, these Christians are using the speech gifts as a platform for pride and superiority over others instead of unity and edification. Their greatest goal has not been to

¹ Vang, Preben [2014] *Teaching the Text Commentary Series: 1 Corinthians*. Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing, p. 186.

² Taylor, Mark [2014] *New American Commentary: 1 Corinthians*. Nashville: B&H Publishing, p. 321.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 320.

“pursue love,” as Paul instructs (v. 1), but instead, to pursue personal notoriety. Since the gift of tongues has become a hindrance to their unity, Paul redirects this church toward a “greater gift” characterized by its ability to edify others, namely, prophecy.

In this section, Paul is not condemning one of God’s gifts. He is exposing the misuse of one (tongues), and arguing in favor of another that will uniquely help them with their problem of disunity (prophecy).⁴ The reader should note that prophecy and interpreted tongues were essentially designed for the same purpose: They were to be *intelligible* words from God to His people aimed to *edify* the church and incite *repentance* among nonbelievers. The misuse of tongues in the church had less to do with the legitimacy of the gift and more to do with the backward motives of the believers themselves—they were more interested in the *unintelligible* tongues so that they might look impressive to their peers. The consequences of the maltreatment of tongues resulted in the opposite of what it was designed for: *discord* and *confusion* among the believers, which in turn left non-Christian visitors unconvinced of the Gospel instead of repentant.⁵

According to scholars, “prophecy” in this chapter refers to either a spontaneous revelation in which the Spirit inspires the speaker to encourage or correct another believer within the bounds of Gospel principles (as well as convince unbelievers of the reality of God), or an expositional word spoken to interpret biblical texts for the edification of the community.⁶ That being said, Paul’s ultimate intent in this section is not to explicitly define tongues or prophecy, but rather to describe the nasty effects of misusing speech gifts in the gathered assembly.⁷

It also should be noted that while he argues strongly for prophecy starting in verse 1, Paul is not saying that prophecy is above misuse. None of the gifts are infallible, as the recipients are humans. Prophecy, while perhaps being a spontaneous prompting from God regarding another believer’s spiritual need or an unbeliever’s secret sin, is still spoken in human words and must be evaluated for authenticity (14:29; 12:10; cf. 11:14).⁸

Paul urges these believers to prefer prophecy for two reasons: First, the Corinthian use of tongues is a language used only between the speaker and God Himself. Though this is not forbidden in personal prayer, Paul is making the case that since God is the only One who can

⁴ Vang [2014] *Teaching the Text Commentary Series: 1 Corinthians*. Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing, p. 186.

⁵ Um, Stephen T. [2015] *Preaching the Word Commentary: 1 Corinthians*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, p. 241.

⁶ Vang [2014] *Teaching the Text Commentary Series: 1 Corinthians*. Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing, p. 187.

⁷ Taylor [2014] *New American Commentary: 1 Corinthians*. Nashville: B&H Publishing, p. 323.

⁸ Vang [2014] *Teaching the Text Commentary Series: 1 Corinthians*. Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing, p. 187.

understand the utterances (v. 2), this gift is not intelligible to the gathered believers as a whole. While an uninterpreted tongue speaks only to God, prophecy in contrast “speaks to people” for their edification (v. 3).⁹ In this reason, Paul is interested in the *intelligibility* of the gifts that edify the church.

Additionally, Paul’s second interest is in the *scope* of the gifts that edify the church. The person using an unintelligible tongue only edifies himself, but one who prophesies has the ability to edify the entire church (v. 4). This is not to say that Paul does not desire all to speak in tongues, for he expresses this desire explicitly in verse 5, however, he desires even more that these believers use their speech gifts in a way that favors the *whole* instead of just themselves.

In verses 6–19, Paul explores how vital clear understanding is for edification. He uses four illustrations—himself, musical instruments, a military trumpet, and global languages—to show how crucial intelligibility is as it relates to speech gifts. He provides application in verse 13 with an admonishment to “therefore” (or “for the reason of intelligibility”¹⁰) ask God also for the clarifying gift of interpretation if one has the gift of tongues.

Paul finishes in verses 20–25 with a focus on how the misuse of tongues affects non-Christians. Paul asserts here that the “common good” spiritual gifts achieve (12:7) is not just for the betterment of believers, it encompasses unbelievers, too. The reason prophecy is more profitable for an unbeliever is because while confusing tongues repel unbelievers, understandable prophecy convicts them. Prophecy that brings repentance among believers is a small, merciful picture of the coming judgment day of the Lord when God will “expose the purposes of the heart” (4:5). While God will do this on a global scale on the last day, Paul personalizes his instruction by shifting to the singular in verse 24 that translates as “a certain unbeliever.” Paul’s point is clear: while unintelligible tongues speak to no one in particular and generate no real change in the church as a whole, prophecy toward the unbeliever is an individual, personal experience that produces worshipful surrender to God.¹¹

In sum, Paul’s preference for prophecy over uninterpreted tongues in this Corinthian church is simple: prophecy rooted in love better edifies the gathered church and unbelievers due to its intelligibility.¹²

What is the purpose of spiritual gifts? What does it mean to edify? How have you used your spiritual gifts to edify your local church body?

⁹ Taylor [2014] *New American Commentary: 1 Corinthians*. Nashville: B&H Publishing, p. 323.

¹⁰ Taylor [2014] *New American Commentary: 1 Corinthians*. Nashville: B&H Publishing, p. 330.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 345.

¹² *Ibid.*, 321, 325, 335.

What will an unbeliever declare in the Corinthian church when he witnesses prophecy and tongues exercised correctly (v. 25)? Why would this be important to the early church?

How many times does Paul use a form of the word “build” in verses 1–25? Why is this important?

1 Corinthians 14:26-40 [Read]

Sub-Point: Corporate worship should be orderly.

After arguing for the primacy of prophecy, Paul now returns to practical advice on how Christians should approach speech gifts in worship gatherings.¹³ Before jumping into his practical instructions, he reminds these believers again in verse 26 that the ultimate goal in their worship is for the building up of one another.

In verses 27–33, Paul safeguards the community’s overall worship experience by instructing that those with speech gifts should take turns in an orderly way. By setting up an orderly, interpretive approach to tongues and prophecy, the focus remains on the Savior instead of the speaker.¹⁴ To achieve this orderly worship experience, Paul asserts four things. First, Paul sets a limit to how many people should prophesy in one worship gathering, which is at most three (v. 27). Second, Paul ensures that every person speaks in turn instead of all at once (v. 27). Third, he instructs that interpretation and evaluation from others is vital, as speech gifts are legitimate, but not infallible (vv. 27, 29). And fourth, Paul stresses that a spiritual gift does not set a person into a uncontrollable state as if the speaker is wholly submitted to the will of the gift; instead, the gift submits to the will of the speaker who gives room for others to speak when God leads (v. 32). The ultimate reason for these instructions is for the Corinthian church to reflect God himself, who is “not a God of confusion, but of peace” (v. 33).

In verses 32-34, Paul revisits the particular case of the behavior of women and wives in the Corinthian worship experience, as we have already seen in chapter 11. Scholars maintain that due to the overall context of 1 Corinthians and Paul’s explicit reference to the legitimacy of women prophesying (11:5), Paul is not contradicting himself in these verses. Instead, he is giving a specific application of the last section regarding those who “weigh out what is said” among the prophesiers (v. 29). Since Paul approves of women prophesying, his command for women not to speak likely means that a wife is not to sit in judgment over her husband’s

¹³ Vang [2014] *Teaching the Text Commentary Series: 1 Corinthians*. Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing, p. 187.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 194.

prophecy.¹⁵ To do so would risk or undermine the submissive order God has designed for the husband-wife relationship and publically bring shame on the husband from his wife.

Additionally, according to scholars, it is likely that women in the Corinthian church are incorrectly treating New Testament prophecy like Old Testament oracles, and using the public worship time to inquire about personal issues such as whom they should marry or whether their children will be healthy.¹⁶ If this is the case, Paul maintains that these various personal questions are both distracting and time-depleting, and should be dealt with at home instead of at the public church gathering. According to these scholars, “silence” means to refrain from asking excessive and distracting questions in worship.¹⁷ This interpretation of verses 32–34 achieves Paul’s overall goal in this chapter—for these believers to experience orderly worship in a way that focuses on Christ and others instead of self.

To conclude, in verses 36–40, Paul rebukes these Corinthians for assuming that their prophetic word replaced the Word of God, in turn isolating them from the fellowship of other churches. He calls them back to refocusing on Christ as the center of their worship practices instead of their personal agendas, and then reiterates his thesis of the primacy of prophecy and the call to orderly worship in verses 39–40.

In verse 31, what reason does Paul give for having the prophesiers go “one by one”?

If there is no one present to interpret a tongue during a Corinthian worship service, what should a person with the gift of tongues do (verse 28)?

According to Paul in verses 26 and 40, “all things” in a worship service should be done in what way?

¹⁵ Taylor [2014] *New American Commentary: 1 Corinthians*. Nashville: B&H Publishing, p. 321, 359-360.

¹⁶ Vang [2014] *Teaching the Text Commentary Series: 1 Corinthians*. Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing, p. 194.

¹⁷ Taylor [2014] *New American Commentary: 1 Corinthians*. Nashville: B&H Publishing, p. 321, 359-361.

Week 14, 1 Corinthians 14

Took



Main Point: Corporate worship and the use of spiritual gifts should edify the church body.

Discussion: Break your class into groups again and encourage them to discuss the following:

- *Describe actions or habits you can develop to help promote the edification of the body during corporate worship.*
- *Describe actions or habits you resolve to cease and in doing so, will help promote edification of the body during corporate worship.*

Challenge the groups to write notes of appreciation to the preaching team, worship team, choir, media team and ushers for the work they do to prepare and execute services that bring glory to God and edify the body.

Lesson Conclusion: As a culmination of chapters 12 and 13, Paul urges these believers in chapter 14 to pursue love above all, and practically exercise the speech gifts that better edify those around them. Paul's aim in this chapter is to usher in godly order in a chaotic environment. The struggle of these Corinthian believers was not dullness, but rowdiness¹⁸; instead of putting Christ and His Gospel on display, they treated worship services as a place to show off their own personal gifting. In a word, they would rather be impressive in worship instead of transformed. Paul's instructions in this chapter correct their boisterous use of speech gifts and refocus them on intelligibility, edification and order.

Challenge

Evaluate your motives in worship. While your worship experience may not deviate from healthiness in a rowdy way, we all wrongly approach church services sometimes. What habits do you have on the Lord's Day that are not focused on the edification of others? In what ways is your worship experience focused on yourself instead of Christ and the believers around you? List these out and make alternative plans for your approach to worship this Sunday.

¹⁸ Vang [2014] *Teaching the Text Commentary Series: 1 Corinthians*. Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing, p. 195.

Ponder how you treat your spouse. If you are married, think about the ways in which you reflect God's view of family on a Sunday gathering. In this chapter, Paul desires all to use their gifts for the common good, but not in a way that undermines family values. Are you speaking harshly to your spouse or children? Are you second-guessing everything your husband or wife says? Do you give others a turn to speak? While we do not spend Sundays interpreting prophecies, we have a responsibility to respond to the words of others with kindness and love. How do you respond to the words of your family and friends on Sundays? Do order and peace characterize your conversations? If not, confess this to the Lord in prayer and ask Him to help you "pursue love" as Paul commands in verse 1.

Vocally build up others. Part of prophecy is using Scripture to build up, encourage and console others (v. 3). List out those who need a word of encouragement this week, and add verses that come to mind for them. Make a plan for when you will contact them this week to build them up with God's Word.