

PREFACE

It is indisputable that the inbred proclivity of human beings is to corrupt and debase most everything they touch. Given sufficient time, even things created by other human beings will be infested and defiled. Look at what it currently being tried by our presently democrat-led government: it is doing everything it can to twist and destroy the genius of this nation's founding fathers and their resulting documents. No other nation on earth has the solid foundation of an essential, *documented* constitution by which it is governed, yet today's democrats are determined to at least ignore it, and if given their way, reduce it to nothing more than the ancient, discardible opinions of a handful of white men.

If we do this to each other, how much more are we capable of corrupting things of the Divine. If we take the long and wide view of the paragraph we are in, vv26-33, it is all about how we, as a body, are to rightly commune with God. Public worship is integral to that relationship and communication, and here the apostle Paul sets forth guidelines—not exhaustive, but specific to his surrounding topic—to prevent, or at least minimize the damage human beings can inflict on this holy intercourse.

Over the centuries man has done a pretty thorough job of lowering the standards for corporate worship. I'm not referring to the contrast between "high" church and "low" church, but to the demeaning of all of the above—to, just as in Corinth, the diluting of holiness, of order, of authenticity in the church as a result of societal pressures. Many today believe the church should *reflect* the norms of society; but God's word says that the believer and the church are to be salt and light to this fallen world ([Matthew 5:13-16](#)). The church—especially in its worship—is not to conform to the world, but to draw the world to itself by conforming to the word of God.

Read 1 Corinthians 14:26-33.

v26

What 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.

Most agree that Paul's text from here to the end of Chapter Fourteen is not just instructional, but *corrective*. He is not just answering a general query—if there even was one—but issuing his commands for correcting what the Corinthians have been doing wrong. In v26 he states the "overarching principle," which he will detail in the verses that follow.

In vv20-25 Paul set forth the different effects on unbelievers as they encountered tongues and prophecy in the public assembly. (Not surprisingly, he shows a negative response to uninterpreted tongues, and a positive response to prophecy.) He follows this with the rhetorical question, “What is the outcome then, brethren?”—a common idiom (v15) that means, “What then is the upshot of what has just been said?” Then Paul answers with detailed instructions for the public assembly, which are meant to correct their misuse of the Spirit-gifts.

We are not meant to read the gifts listed in v26 as a specific, line-by-line detailing of an “order of service.” Fee suggests that the list could be appended with “et al”—that is, this is just a representational list to set up the instructions that follow. The list “represents various types of verbal manifestations of the Spirit” (Fee) that might occur in the assembly. The words “each one” or “everyone” do not mean that every person in attendance will have these Spirit-gifts. It reflects the idea that everyone in attendance is *capable* of having one or more of these gifts.

As to the gifts themselves, they are all familiar to us. Regarding the word translated “revelation” (*apokalypsin*), I believe Paul is using this as a catch-all term for prophetic utterances. Look further down where Paul combines the two.

Read 1 Corinthians 14:29-31.

The most important line in this verse is the last one: “Let all things be done for edification.” This continues the thread begun in v1—and one can make the case that it was begun in Chapter Thirteen, for pursuing the edification of others instead of edifying just oneself is a sure mark of using one’s gift with love. Paul reinforces this in v33 and v40.

Read 1 Corinthians 14:33, 40.

Regarding Tongues v27-28

If anyone speaks in a tongue, it should be by two or at the most three, and each in turn, and one must interpret;

These two verses cover ground we have trod before, except for two or three additional points:

- Paul limits the number of those speaking in tongues to at most two or three, thus correcting the implied practice of the Corinthians of making “tongues” the focus of each assembly.
- The speakers must take this “in turn,” or “one at a time,” thus supplying the necessary order and clarity of the use of this gift. No more a cacophony of incoherent babbling.

but if there is no interpreter, he must keep silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God.

Speaking in tongues is a supernatural way—a Spirit-enabled way—of communing with God. In private the believer is free to speak with God—and, far more important, let God speak to him—in any way conducive to that intercourse. In public, however, the rules are different: if the glossolalist is within earshot of others, this supernatural communion must be conducted in an orderly fashion (one at a time) and only if the speaker or someone else will interpret what has been said.

This rule from the apostle makes clear that tongues in the church is not associated with—i.e., a “Christian” form of—the mystery religions of the Greek world, which was likened to playing the flute: the “divine” spirit inbreaths the supplicant, playing him or her like a flute; the flute itself has no control over what is breathed (*pneuma*) into it. That is, the supplicant is placed into an ecstatic state, having no control over his words or actions.

Garland: By contrast, Paul does not view tongues as an uncontrollable emotional experience that overpowers an individual. The promptings of the Spirit do not contribute to confusion or unbridled outbursts. In fact, Paul lists “self-control” as one of the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:23). If tongues are of the Holy Spirit, then one should be able to hold one’s peace to maintain order in the worship [service] so that things do not get out of hand.

Fee: It is indeed the Spirit who speaks, but He speaks through the controlled instrumentality of the believer’s own mind and tongue. In this regard it is no different from the inspired utterances of the OT prophets, which were spoken at the appropriate times and settings.

Now, for those who have grown weary of all this about speaking in tongues, some good news: except for a brief mention in v39, this verse is Paul’s final word on the subject.

Regarding Prophecy

v29

Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment.

Though he ranks the gift of prophecy above that of tongues, Paul still places it under similar regulation.

Sidebar: Because Paul, in speaking of prophecy in the assembly, omits the restriction “at the most” that he used for tongues, some assume that instead of limiting the speakers to three, the idea is that two or three would prophecy *at a time*, let judgment be passed on what they had said, before the next group would speak.

Gordon Fee does an excellent job of debunking an increasingly popular view that Paul here speaks of “prophets” as a “special group of authoritative persons in the community who have been given this gift.” Paul does not mean to suggest that the church has a handful of “official” prophets, in the OT sense of a Jeremiah or Isaiah or Ezekiel—that these and these alone are so designated to “prophesy.”

That is not the picture Paul puts forth. Although it is true that Paul uses the word “prophets” (*prophetai*) here and elsewhere, I prefer to avoid its use, preferring instead, something like “those who prophesy.” For the word “prophet” invariably conjures up the image of the OT prophet speaking for God *ex cathedra* (from the chair)—that is someone so endowed as to give unerring voice to the very thoughts and commandments of God.

Churches today, as well as the NT churches, do not—and *cannot*—have anyone who speaks *ex cathedra*. The canon is closed; God’s word is closed. What we have, and what the church in Corinth had, are men who have been granted the Spirit-gift of prophecy, whose own spirits are so attuned to the Spirit of God that He uses them to *speak the right words at the right time* for the edification of the church. And as we understand the gift, it can fall upon just about anyone in the body: the gift does not so designate an “office” in the church, but comes upon various believers as needed. Paul’s desire for them to have this gift is all-inclusive.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:31; 14:1, 5, 31.

and let the others pass judgment.

Those who subscribe to there being a “special group of authoritative persons” in the church deemed “prophets,” read this to mean that others *from that group* would be responsible for judging what has been said. That is, prophets judge fellow prophets. But since there is not to be an official group of authoritative prophets in the church, it is to be those in the assembly that “weigh carefully what is said” (NIV).

Paul uses a word, translated “others” (*alloi*), that means “others different from the subject.” It is indeed possible for that word to mean “the rest” (i.e., of the same group), but if Paul had intended that idea the more correct term would have been what he used in 9:5, referring to “the rest of the apostles” (*loipoi*).

Finally, what does it mean to “pass judgment,” or “weigh what is said” in the ESV? The word is *diakrinetosan*, and means to separate one from another, to distinguish, discern, evaluate.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:8-10.

Where Paul writes “distinguishing of spirits” he uses essentially the same word he does in our passage for “pass judgment.” The difference is, however, that in Chapter 12 he speaks of being discriminating about *which* spirit(s) one listens to or attends; that is, someone with the gift of identifying foreign, or pagan spirits from the true and only Spirit of God.

Here in Chapter Fourteen he uses the word to describe fellow believers verifying that the prophecy being spoken truly conforms to the Spirit of God and conforms to God’s written word.

Let it not go unsaid that this is what every child of God in Christ is to be doing at *all* times—not just when someone is prophesying. Not with a vindictive, judgmental spirit (in the worst sense of that word), but in *love* we are to keep one another accountable to the truth of God. No matter the source—preacher, teacher, tongue-interpreter, one prophesying, books, commentaries—we are to ask ourselves, “Does this square with Scripture? Does the Holy Spirit in me affirm to my spirit what has just been said?” Gordon Fee cites A. Bittlinger’s “happy phrase: ‘The Spirit recognizes the Spirit.’”

Whether listening to someone prophesy, or listening to a sermon or Bible lesson, the indwelling Holy Spirit will tell us whether or not the words we have heard are sound, and faithful to *God’s* Holy Spirit.