

# High Peaks Bible Fellowship

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## Rules for Using Spiritual Gifts in the Church 1 Corinthians 14:1-40

### The Rule for Determining the Value of a Spiritual Gift (1 Cor 14:1-5)

- In this section, Paul turned his attention to the misuse or abuse of speaking in tongues. He proves the inferiority of tongues by comparing it with the gift of prophecy, and he gives the criteria for determining which spiritual gifts are *greater* than others (see 1 Cor 12:31).
- Pursue love (*dioko*) = to run swiftly in order to catch a person or thing; used to describe someone who swiftly runs in a race to reach the finish line. This fits well with Paul's description earlier of the life of Christian love being like a path or road that must be followed (see 1 Cor 12:31). We are to live a life filled with God's kind of love, especially when we are exercising the spiritual gifts that God has given to us for the benefit of others within the church.
- Yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts (*zeoo*) = this is the same word that Paul used in 1 Cor 12:31 when he said that the Corinthians were to "earnestly desire" the greater gifts. Here he is connecting what he said in chapter twelve with the idea of pursuing a life of Christian love from chapter thirteen.
- But especially that you may prophesy = Here Paul singles out the gift of prophecy as being of greater value in some way. We know that he had already listed several of the spiritual gifts in order of importance (1 Cor 12:28). It seems as though Paul is referring back to that list here as he deals with the misuse and abuse of the gift that the Corinthians were giving top priority. They had tongues on top instead of on the bottom, while Paul was telling them that God ranks apostleship and prophecy at the top and tongues on the bottom.



### There was something wrong with the tongues that were manifested at Corinth (1 Cor 14:2)

- The purpose of the spiritual gifts was to benefit other people within the church, to serve others in order to contribute to the common good of all (see 1 Cor 12:7). But the Corinthians had a wrong view of the spiritual gifts, and they were feeling either superior or inferior with what God had given them based on an incorrect ranking of the gifts' importance. They valued the showier speaking gifts, especially those that drew attention to themselves because of their spectacular and mysterious manifestations. As we discussed previously (1 Cor 12:2-3), there may even have been counterfeit spiritual gifts that mimicked what was going on in the pagan love feasts, where the participants would whip themselves into a frenzy and loudly shout gibberish in highly emotional outbursts.
- For one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God = The idea here is that someone who was speaking in the kind of tongues the Corinthians were practicing could only be understood by a superhuman power. It would take a god to understand them! In fact the original text of this verse has no definite article with "god," and the usual way to refer to God the Father is using the definite article -- so a better way to translate this phrase is "to a god." This would also fit well with the idea that the Corinthians were imitating the pagan temple services, with their

frenzied & ecstatic shouting of gibberish.

- For no one understands = Here is the real issue with the kind of tongues that the Corinthians were using: they were *unintelligible* -- no one could understand what was being said.
- But in his spirit he speaks mysteries = The Corinthian tongues-speakers were acting as if their words contained secret truths that others were not allowed to share. In behaving this way, their only concern was for the attention they themselves would get for speaking mysteries in the spirit. They did not care whether those so-called mysteries were understandable by anyone.
- The conclusion we reach is that something was terribly wrong with the kind of tongues that the Corinthians were manifesting in their church services. Whatever those tongues were, they manifested themselves in behavior that could be used and controlled by the individual for unworthy and improper purposes.

### The rule for determining the value of a spiritual gift (1 Cor 14:3)

- But one who prophesies speaks to men = In contrast to someone who speaks unintelligible gibberish, one who speaks in prophecy can be understood by others, and they can clearly understand and learn what God wants them to know.
- Edification (*oikadome*) = building up; the act of one who promotes another's growth in Christian wisdom, piety, happiness, holiness.
- Exhortation (*paraklesis*) = to call near for the purpose of helping; to exhort, admonish, or implore.
- Consolation (*paramuthia*) = to speak or relate a story, whether for the purpose of persuading, or of arousing and stimulating, or of calming and consoling.
- From these three terms we get a well-rounded picture of what it means to speak to others in the church for their common good. Whatever is said, it must have the effect of stimulating believers to Christian growth and godly behavior. The goal of this kind of speaking is always to benefit other people in the church.

### The failure of Tongues to qualify as a valuable gift (1 Cor 14:4)

- One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself = The tongues-speaker might be aware that he is displaying a spectacular manifestation, but there is nothing in what he says that is having a positive impact on other people around him in the church. His spectacular display only serves the purpose of drawing attention to himself. This kind of manifestation is completely selfish and self-centered in its orientation. So the type of tongues that the Corinthians practiced had no edifying value at all for the church as a whole.
- But one who prophesies edifies the church = In contrast to what was said about tongues, the one who prophesies provides a direct edifying benefit to others around him in the church. What he says serves to build others up, encourage them, help them, and support them in their growth toward Christian maturity.

### The superiority of the gift of prophecy (1 Cor 14:5)

- Now I wish that you all spoke in tongues = Here Paul was stating something impossible for the sake of emphasis. He already wrote that not all believers could have the gift of tongues (1 Cor 12:30).
- But even more (*mallon*) that you would prophesy = *mallon* means even more in a greater degree. Even if all of them could speak in other languages, Paul desired even more that they would all prophesy.
- Greater (*me gas*) is one who prophesies than one who speaks in tongues = It is as if Paul is saying that if a tongues speaker is spiritually gifted, then the prophet is MEGA-gifted. This is a

clear example of what Paul meant by "the *greater* gifts."

- Unless he interprets, so that the church may receive edifying = The only exception to this rule is that there may be some benefit to the church if the tongues message is translated into an understandable language so that believers may get some edification from it. This is a Greek Third Class conditional clause which is proposed as a remote possibility, and the word "interpret" is a Greek compound word from *dia* (through) and *hermeneuo* (to explain). It means that the message must be explained thoroughly.

## **The Superiority of Prophecy over Tongues in Church Services (1 Cor 14:6-19)**

### **Personalizing the rule for valuing spiritual gifts (1 Cor 14:6)**

- But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking in tongues what will I profit you = Again writing in the first person, Paul used himself as an illustration of a person who was exercising a spiritual gift, and he personalized the effect of that ministry by asking what profit or benefit they themselves would have received if he had exercised a speaking gift but used a language that they could not understand.
- Unless I speak to you either by way of = The following list is placed in contrast to the kind of speaking in tongues that the Corinthians were practicing. Their tongues were unintelligible, but the things in the following list were clearly understandable ways of speaking.
- Revelation (*apokalupsis*) = the reception of truth from God.
- Knowledge (*gnosis*) = the practical understanding of God's truth.
- Prophecy (*propheteia*) = the communication of truths that were previously unknown.
- Teaching (*didache*) = the communication of doctrine or practical instructions.

### **An illustration from woodwind and stringed instruments (1 Cor 14:7)**

- Yet even lifeless things, either flute or harp, in producing a sound = People have used musical instruments for creative expression, even though they produce no words. The sounds that are made by these instruments are intended to be pleasing and enjoyable, and this can only happen when the notes are clearly distinguishable and arranged in special sequences and combinations. A random, confused set of noises cannot be called music, in any sense of the word.
- 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 = You may have heard the noises that someone makes when they are first learning to play a musical instrument. But once the person has mastered the basics of the instrument and is able to play actual pieces of music, then it is a pleasure to listen to the sounds that are made.

### **An illustration from brass instruments (1 Cor 14:8)**

- Here is a case in which the distinction of the sounds is intended to have a specific meaning. The brass instruments were used as signaling devices in battle, and there were special meanings or messages that were supposed to be communicated by the various tunes.

### **The application of these illustrations to human language (1 Cor 14:9)**

- So also you, unless you utter by the tongue speech that is clear (*eusemos*) = clear, distinct, easy to understand
- How will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air = This is a proverbial expression for "throwing away your words."

### There is no such thing as a meaningless language (1 Cor 14:10)

- There are, perhaps, a great many kinds of languages in the world = Here Paul was referring to the many actual spoken languages of the world. In fact, there are so many languages that no one man could possibly know all of them.
- No kind is without meaning = Stated positively Paul's point is that every language has meaning -- language is intended to clearly communicate ideas between human beings who have a common understanding of that language. There is no language that was ever intended NOT to communicate meaning between people. This truth rules out the idea that there are valid languages which use only meaningless gibberish. That type of language does not exist -- it would violate the very definition of a language. This verse also implies that the kind of tongues being practiced by the Corinthians was a violation of this principle -- they were pouring out meaningless gibberish, rather than speaking in a human language which would have meaning to a listener who knew that language.

### Lack of common understanding becomes a barrier that divides people (1 Cor 14:11)

- If then I do not know the meaning of the language = Notice how Paul keeps returning to the idea of communicating understandable meanings to other people around you.
- I will be to the one who speaks a barbarian, and the one who speaks will be a barbarian to me = Here is the practical effect of people's inability to understand each other. Several ancient cultures used a similar term ("barbarian") to refer to anyone who did not speak their language.

### Applying this truth about human language to the speaking gifts (1 Cor 14:12)

- So also you, since you are zealous of spiritual gifts = This connects the truth about language back to what Paul had said in 1 Cor 12:31 and 14:1 about their desire for spiritual gifts.
- Seek to abound for the edification of the church = Here Paul reminds them of the true purpose of spiritual gifts which are to be used in service for the benefit of others (see 1 Cor 12:7).

### The requirement for the intelligible interpretation of the gift of tongues (1 Cor 14:13-19)

- (1 Cor 14:13) The tongues speaker must ask God for the ability to clearly explain the truths he is communicating. It is a requirement that every message must be clearly understandable to those who hear it.
- (1 Cor 14:14) For if I pray in a tongue = Here Paul gives the reason why the tongues speaker should pray for the gift of interpretation. Once again he used himself as the subject for the purpose of illustration.  
My spirit prays, but my mind (nous) is unfruitful = This is a general term for all the activities of perceiving, understanding, judging, determining, and feeling. To be unfruitful means to be barren or unproductive. Paul is saying that the intellect neither receives nor produces any benefit, either to himself or to others.
- (1 Cor 14:15) I will pray with the spirit and I will pray (proseuchomai) with the mind also = this word is the most frequent word for prayer and is only used of prayer to God. It could include the broader idea of worship, too.  
I will sing with the spirit and I will sing (psallo) with the mind also = this word means to sing psalms or to celebrate the praises of God in music. So here we see that the activities of worship (prayer and singing) must involve an intelligent exercise of the mind. If you want to commune with God, you must make certain that your mind is engaged.
- (1 Cor 14:16) How will the one who fills the place of the ungifted say the "Amen" at your giving of thanks = Here we see that Paul clearly had the public gatherings of the church in view. He is saying that if you speak, pray, sing, or worship in a language that no one understands, how will

they be able to agree with your message of praise to God? AMEN is the traditional expression of agreement with something that was said.

He does not know what you are saying = Here is the crux of the problem -- everything that is said in the public gatherings of the church must be understandable. If other believers do not know what you are saying, then that utterance is not appropriate for the public gatherings of the church.

- (1 Cor 14:17) You are giving thanks well enough = Paul affirmed that the spiritual gift of tongues was a legitimate gift and that it could be used in appropriate ways. Giving thanks (*eucharisteo*) means to express gratitude, especially to God, and Paul is saying that it would be possible to praise and thank God in languages the person had not studied. The tongues speaker may indeed utter a message of thanks, BUT...  
But the other person is not edified = the problem is that those who are hearing this message cannot understand it and so they are not built up in their faith. Here edification is stated as the primary purpose of the gifts that are to be used in the church services. By implication, if believers are not edified, then that gift is not appropriate for use in church.
- (1 Cor 14:18) I thank God, I speak in tongues more than you all = This proves that Paul was not devaluing or despising the legitimate spiritual gift of tongues. He was grateful to God that he had been gifted in this way and could legitimately use that gift to fulfill its primary purpose. HOWEVER...
- (1 Cor 14:19) However, in the church = Here we see again that Paul was focusing on the use of these gifts in the services of the church. He was saying that the church services were not the place even for the appropriate use of the gift of languages.  
I desire to speak five words with my mind so that I may instruct others also, rather than ten thousand words in a tongue = Five understandable words are worth more than ten thousand unintelligible sounds. This gives us a clear purpose statement for the public gatherings of believers -- the true purpose that must be accomplished in church services is the instruction or edification of believers.

### **The Superiority of Prophecy over Tongues even for Unbelievers (1 Cor 14:20-25)**

- (1 Cor 14:20) Brethren, do not be children in your thinking = In 1 Cor 3:1 Paul said he could not speak to the Corinthians as spiritual men, but as men of flesh -- as mere infants in Christ. Here Paul is pointing out that they continued to have a childish attraction for things that are amusing or spectacular.  
Yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking be mature = Almost as an afterthought here, Paul thinks of one area in which it is good to be mere infants, and that is in regard to their understanding of and participation in evil. But in all other areas, they are to continue to mature in their thinking.
- (1 Cor 14:21) Here Paul gave a quote that is loosely translated from Isaiah 28:11-12 which pointed to an event in the history of his people Israel. In this quote it is as if God were saying, "Israel refused to listen to me even though I spoke to them in their own language, so now I will speak to them in a strange foreign language, namely, the language of the enemy that I will send against them in judgment -- but even then they will still not listen to Me!" One thing we can see from this Old Testament quote is that the tongues described here were actual foreign languages - they were not simply gibberish, but they were real human languages that had meaning to those who spoke them. The Corinthians had refused to listen to prophecy because they gained more personal satisfaction from listening to tongues than from hearing their faults exposed and their duties pointed out in plain words.
- (1 Cor 14:22) So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers = The purpose of the spiritual gift of tongues was to serve as a sign, specifically to unbelievers rather than to believers. It was unbelievers that might benefit from some type of miraculous sign which drew attention to the fact that God Himself was involved in this message.  
But prophecy is for a sign, not to unbelievers but to those who believe = By way of contrast, the spiritual gift of prophecy is not primarily for unbelievers but for believers, and Paul had already said it was to be used for the edification of believers in the services of the church.
- (1 Cor 14:23) This is a Third Class conditional clause which assumes that the statement is only



somewhat possible. In other words, when the church assembles together it is remotely possible that an unbeliever might enter the service. One of the truths that we should not miss in this verse is that the assembly of the church is to be focused on edifying *believers* -- it is not to be focused on attracting unbelievers into the services even for the purpose of evangelizing them and winning them to Christ. In other words, the presence of unbelievers in a church service is incidental. In the unlikely event that unbelievers were to attend a church service, here is how they would respond to the type of tongues that the Corinthians were manifesting.

Will they not say that you are mad? = This is exactly what happened on the day the very first use of the spiritual gift of tongues was manifested (see Acts 2:13). The initial response of those who did not understand the foreign languages that were being spoken was to say that the disciples were talking like drunken or insane men. But the tongues were effective in grabbing the attention of the multitude, especially of those whose language was being spoken by the disciples. And immediately after the tongues speaking event, the apostle Peter stood up and addressed the crowd by way of the gift of prophecy. The authenticating event of speaking in tongues was followed by the clear communication of the gospel through Peter's manifestation of the gift of prophecy.

- (1 Cor 14:24) But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an ungifted man enters = Paul is taking the same unlikely case of an unbeliever entering the church services, but this time instead of hearing a confused babble of different languages, suppose he were to hear someone speaking understandable and piercing words from God?  
He is convicted (elengcho) = to bring to light; to bring conviction, generally with a suggestion of shame by the person convicted. It is quite possible in this case that the unbeliever would be convicted of his sins, and would repent and turn to God for salvation.  
He is called to account (anakrino) = to examine or probe, such as during cross-examination in a courtroom.
- (1 Cor 14:25) The secrets of his heart are disclosed (phaneros) = brought to light or made apparent for all to see. He sees his own inner character brought out into the open.  
He will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you = *proskuneo* means to do homage or declare one's obedience to something. Paul is saying that even if an unbeliever were to come into the services of the church, the gift of prophecy could have this kind of positive effect on his life, even to the point of turning an unbeliever into a believer.

## Specific Instructions for Regulating the Gifts in the Church (1 Cor 14:26-40)

### A description of the current situation in the church at Corinth (1 Cor 14:26)

- What is the outcome then, brethren? = Literally, this says, "How is it, then?" We could state it this way: "What is the condition of things among you?" or "How are you conducting yourselves, then?"
- When you assemble, each one = This verse is really a description of the main problem in the Corinthian church. When they gathered together, it seemed that every individual would clamor for a speaking part in the service. Many Christians take this passage as an example of the typical life of the early church, and they often assume that this example is normative for the church today. But this passage is not *prescriptive* as much as it is *descriptive*. This really is a description by the apostle Paul of the incorrect conduct of the church meetings in Corinth, and he is about to put strict regulations in place to fix the problems he is describing in this verse. So churches today should not try to emulate the Corinthian practices described in this verse. Church meetings today should be centered around the teaching of the Word of God, the completed text of the Bible, which was not yet available to the Corinthians. We need to remember that the New Testament was still being delivered at the time Paul was writing to the Corinthians, and the special spiritual gifts were still operating which authenticated this new revelation being given at that time. Now, however, those gifts are not required, and new revelation is not required -- we now have the completed text of the Word of God available to us, and today the church must focus on explaining and teaching and applying the Scriptures to the lives of believers today.
- Psalms (*psalms*) = this was a song of praise to God, and was probably an impromptu composition

in which someone was prompted by the Spirit to sing or chant words of praise to God. Teaching (*didache*) = this word identifies a teaching or instruction; a presentation of a doctrine or truth about God or about the Christian life. Revelation (*apokalupsis*) = this term means a disclosure of truth, especially a truth that had been previously unknown. Tongue (*glossa*) = this word identifies the spiritual gift of tongues that has been in view throughout this section of Paul's letter. It was a message presented in a foreign language that may not have been previously known to the speaker, and typically it accompanied and confirmed the authenticity of a truth that was being presented in a known language. Interpretation (*hermeneia*) = this word meant the interpretation or explanation of something that had already been expressed in a way that might have been unclear to most people listening.

The problem in the church at Corinth was that, whether they had a psalm, a teaching, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation, each of the members wanted to participate at the same time, including both the men and the women. It seems that in the Corinthian church there was a tendency to give men and women equal status when taking the lead in these types of manifestations.

- Let all things be done for edification (*oikodome*) = Here is the guiding principle for everything that is done in the meetings of the local church. Every activity must be done with the goal in mind of edifying the believers who are present at the service. To edify means to build up or to promote another person's growth in Christian wisdom, knowledge, contentment, and holiness. As we saw earlier in chapter fourteen, this can only be accomplished if believers' minds are engaged along with their spirits. Believers need to be able to hear and clearly understand what is being said, and they need to think about the message with the ultimate goal of applying that message to their own lives. This becomes almost impossible in an environment where every person is speaking or chattering or singing all at the same time.

### Regulating the use of Tongues (1 Cor 14:27-28)

- (1 Cor 14:27) If anyone speaks in a tongue, it should be by two or at the most three = First Paul puts limits on the number of tongues speakers that may participate in a church service. Paul was not requiring that anyone must speak in tongues at their meetings, but he was saying that if any of the members did speak in a tongue the church should allow only one or two to speak -- and the most that could be allowed to speak in a tongue would be three people.  
Each in turn = Next Paul put a limit on how the two or three tongues speakers could present their message. They were to give their message in sequence, each waiting for the previous speaker to finish before he could begin. There was never a time when two or more people were allowed to address the congregation at the same time.  
And one must interpret = Finally Paul says that before a tongues speaker could open his mouth, he must be certain that there was someone else present in the meeting who had agreed to give the proper interpretation of the tongues message. This would require quite a bit of pre-planning and coordination before the tongues speaker was even allowed to begin. The presence of the interpreter would ensure that everyone could clearly understand the message that was being presented, because without clear mental understanding there could be no edification in the life of each believer. It was only with proper interpretation that tongues could have a possibility of providing edification.
- (1 Cor 14:28) But if there is no interpreter, he must keep silent in the church = Here Paul presents the case where no interpreter could be found for the tongues messages. If that were the situation, then the tongues speaker must keep silent during the church meeting -- he was not allowed to exercise his gift, because there could be no possibility of edification. As we saw in 1 Cor 12:8-10 in Paul's list of the speaking gifts, the gift of interpretation was the controlling gift for the gift of tongues. Here Paul clearly states that if an interpreter was not present, the gift of tongues cannot be used. This verse also proves that a person with the gift of tongues was able to remain in complete control of himself at all times.  
Let him speak to himself and to God = In other words, the tongues speaker should commune silently with God in the exercise of this gift. "Speaking to oneself and to God" was a proverbial expression for meditation.

## Regulating the use of Prophecy (1 Cor 14:29-33)

- (1 Cor 14:29) Let two or three prophets speak = Here Paul puts the same numerical limits on the gift of prophecy as with the gift of tongues -- only two or three prophets were allowed to speak during any meeting of the local church. So far Paul had only spoken highly of the gift of prophecy, but here he shows that just like any other gift, prophecy also must be regulated and kept under control in order to ensure that people were edified by it.  
Let the others pass judgment (diakrino) = This is the verb form of the same term that Paul used in describing the second set of speaking gifts in 1 Cor 12:8-10. There he indicated that the last gift in each set was given as a way to verify that the other gifts in each set were being used correctly, and the gift of distinguishing spirits was the controlling gift for the spiritual gift of prophecy. Not only the believers with the gift of discernment, but all believers attending the services of the church have a duty to carefully examine what is being said and to determine if it is the truth.
- (1 Cor 14:30) The first one must keep silent = Once the first speaker had concluded his message, he was to remain silent while the second person was allowed to speak. This does not mean that the first speaker was to be abruptly cut off in mid-sentence. Here as with the gift of tongues, not even the prophets were allowed to talk all at the same time. Everyone who exercised a speaking gift in the church services was to do so one at a time so that every message could be understood, evaluated, and applied.
- (1 Cor 14:31) For you can all prophesy one by one = Within the limits of two or three prophets that were allowed to speak in any one church gathering, they were all permitted to exercise their gift one by one. They would all be given an opportunity to share God's message, but not in a way which might cause disorder and chaos.  
So that all may learn and all may be exhorted = This is a purpose clause, and it gives the reason why all must speak in turn: it is so that everyone listening may learn and be exhorted or edified.
- (1 Cor 14:32) The spirits of prophets are subject to prophets = This is a very important verse regarding the gift of prophecy -- and it applied to all of the Spirit-prompted speaking gifts that Paul had listed. These gifts were not irrational or uncontrollable compulsions, like fits or convulsions that overwhelm and take control of a person. The spiritual gifts are given by the Holy Spirit, but they are under the control of the human recipient. Each gifted person is able to exercise self-control even over the supernatural gifts bestowed by the Spirit. However, this was not what was happening in the Corinthian church services. As was previously mentioned, they were probably imitating the pagan temple services more than behaving as Paul described in this verse.
- (1 Cor 14:33) For God is not a God of confusion but of peace = This actually presents the reason *why* the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. It is because those spiritual inspirations come from God, and God Himself is not the author of confusion.  
As in all the churches of the saints = This phrase does not seem to belong with what has just been said, as much as it belongs to what follows. Verse thirty-three already has an appropriate conclusion, but if we connect this phrase with the following verse then it is parallel to what Paul already expressed in 1 Cor 11:16 where the customary practices of all the churches were authoritative when it related to the behavior of the women in church services. In that previous section, the apostle Paul seemed to indicate that women might receive and exercise the spiritual gift of prophecy (1 Cor 11:5), so here in the following section Paul will put a limitation on their exercise of the speaking gifts within the public service of the church.

## Regulating the outspoken women in the church services (1 Cor 14:34-35)

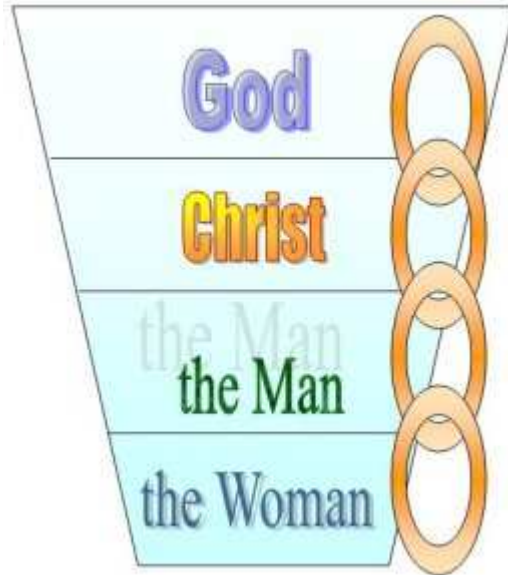
- (1 Cor 14:34) The women are to keep silent in the churches = First, notice the definite article before *women*. This identified a specific group of women. If this were not the case and Paul wanted to refer to all women in general, then the definite article would not be required.  
For they are not permitted to speak (laleo) = The verb "to speak" is a very general term in Greek, and it is used over 300 times in the New Testament. It can have a variety of implications depending upon the context in which it is used. It can mean "to make a sound, to talk, to question, to argue, to chatter, to protest." Some commentators have assumed that in this verse "to speak"



means that women are not permitted to make a sound or talk in any way. But if we look at the context in First Corinthians we see that of the 34 times this term is used, 28 times Paul used this word to indicate someone who was speaking "by the Spirit" -- specifically someone who was speaking a prophecy [2 times] or speaking in tongues [22 times]. In the immediate context, we see that this Greek word is used almost exclusively to indicate speaking in tongues. So from the context we can be certain the apostle Paul means that women are not permitted to exercise speaking gifts which take on the character of leadership in the services of the church.

But are to subject themselves, just as the Law also says = The main contrast in this sentence is

between the exercise of a speaking gift vs. being under proper authority within the church service. What Paul is communicating here has to do with specific gifted women who were speaking out authoritatively in the meetings of the local church -- they were casting themselves in the role of spiritual authorities based on the perceived importance of their speaking gifts. What Paul is saying here corresponds with what he had said previously in chapter eleven about the God-ordained hierarchy of authority that is built into God's created order. As we noted in chapter eleven, Paul specifically stated, "The man is the head of a woman" -- and we saw that a man is in authority over a woman in two specific situations within the context of church meetings. First, if the man is one of the church officers who has authority and responsibility for the spiritual well-being of all the men and women who are present (1 Thess 5:12-13; Heb 13:17; 1 Pet 5:2-3); and Second, if the man is the husband of the woman and has authority and responsibility for her well-being in every area (Eph 5:22-28; 1 Pet 3:7). We need to understand that Paul is not denying women the appropriate use of their legitimate spiritual gifts. He is simply regulating the way that the services of the local church are to be directed. That type of leadership role for women was contrary to God's plan for the direction of the local church (see 1 Tim 2:11-12).



- (1 Cor 14:35) If they desire to learn anything = The desire to learn is *not* what is being regulated in this verse. A woman's desire to learn should be encouraged and fostered, just as should a man's desire to learn. But women are free to learn without having to exercise speaking gifts in the public worship service of the church.

Let them ask their own husbands at home = The home is a setting where every family member is able to interact freely and discuss any issues that arise in the public service of the church. This implies that one of the duties of every husband is to help in answering questions and to be willing to discuss biblical issues as they relate to the lives of the family members. The husband is not required to know everything or be an expert on everything, but he must be willing to ask and learn and discuss.

For it is improper for a woman to speak in church = Here Paul is simply restating what he had previously said, that in the public services of the church the leadership roles for the edification of the congregation were to be held by the mature Christian men of the church.

### Ensuring that the Corinthians have the right attitude about his instruction (1 Cor 14:36-38)

- (1 Cor 14:36) Was it from you that the word of God first went forth? Or has it come to you only? = This seems to connect back to 1 Cor 14:33 -- "As in all the churches of the saints" -- or even farther back to 1 Cor 11:13 -- "But if one is inclined to be contentious, we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God." The Corinthians were acting as if they were the first or the only church that mattered, but Paul is pointing out that there are other more mature churches from which Corinth should take its pattern.
- (1 Cor 14:37) If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual = If a person regards himself as a

prophet who is being led by God's Spirit and who understands God's truth, then he should have no trouble recognizing a true message when he sees one!

Let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment = A truly spiritual person will be able to see that what Paul is writing is directly from the Lord. Here Paul is asserting the authority of God behind his words -- he is claiming divine inspiration for the commands he has given.

- (1 Cor 14:38) But if anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized = If someone claims to be a spiritual person but cannot recognize the truth of what Paul is saying, then he really is not a spiritual person at all, and he should not be recognized by others as a spiritual person.

### **Summary statement concerning the use of Prophecy and Tongues (1 Cor 14:39-40)**

- (1 Cor 14:39) Desire earnestly to prophesy = As Paul brings this section to a close he restated what he had said in 1 Cor 14:1. In essence he is saying, "It is good that a man would desire to speak under the influence of the Holy Spirit, but it should always be in such a way as to edify the church."  
Do not forbid to speak in tongues = This implies that Paul's instruction so far might lead them to forbid speaking in tongues altogether. But Paul was saying that the legitimate gift of speaking in tongues had a proper function. However, that gift was intended to convince unbelievers of the authenticity of the gospel, and it was not to be used in the services of the local church unless an interpretation could be given which would edify those who were listening.
- (1 Cor 14:40) But all things must be done properly and in an orderly manner = This is the primary guideline for the conduct of the services of the local church. Everything that is done should be done in a way that promotes decency and propriety, and it should be done in an orderly, controlled, and structured manner.

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