

I CORINTHIANS
Chapter 14:1-11

INTRODUCTION:

The book of **I Corinthians** was mainly written for the purpose of correcting the abuses and errors in the service and work of the church of Corinth. There was harshness and rudeness, divisions, worldliness, envy, jealousy, arrogance, and disorderly behavior. Paul summed up their condition in **3:1** - "**And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ.**" Paul states that their carnality is the root cause of all their problems. We read in **I Corinthians 3:3** - "**For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?**"

No doubt these carnal, immature Christians tried hard to imitate the miraculous gifts. And, no doubt they thought their learning and use of foreign languages in the services was like having a gift, but it was not. At Pentecost there was a miraculous gift of known languages in order that people might speak to others in the tongue in which they were born. It was directly connected with carrying out the Great Commission.

The fullness of the Holy Spirit, the endowment of power from on High as promised in **Luke 24:46-49**, was given that the Gospel should be preached in every nation. That is clear also from **Acts 1:8**, "**But ye shall receive power, after the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me...**" At Pentecost there was no conduct or language spoken for personal enjoyment or satisfaction. What they had at Pentecost was simply a gift of power to preach the Gospel to people who needed it, and in the language in which they understood.

Examine carefully how this whole chapter is filled with reproof of what they had at Corinth. This chapter will prove what the Corinthians had was not the miraculous gift, but a carnal imitation. Paul was not against the God-given gift of the Spirit, and he led up to that very carefully in **chapters 12** and **13**. He does not forbid the gift of the Spirit, if God should find occasion to give it - "**severally** (one's own) **as He will**". What was going on at Corinth concerning the tongue issue is clearly and emphatically rebuked by Paul as he wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Paul shows in **chapter 14** the contrast between the gift of tongues with the gift of prophecy. The Corinthians felt that speaking in tongues was the preferred gift, but Paul wanted them to understand that prophecy was the preferred gift.

We need to remember what Paul meant by prophesying – **chapter 12:10**. The word simply means "to speak forth, to proclaim." We often think of prophecy in the terms of prediction; the foretelling of future events. Such an idea is often derived from the fact that the prophets of the Bible often spoke of future events. Prophecy is simply the proclaiming of God's Word. When the prophets were foretelling future events, they within themselves were not just predicting the future, but simply proclaiming what God had revealed unto them. The gift of prophecy was a matter of presenting the truths of God's Word rather than foretelling future events.

In **chapter 14** - Paul was saying what is preferred beyond anything else is the proclaiming of God's Word. Prophecy was to have preeminence and priority in the church. If we give greater importance to anything and make it bigger than the proclaiming of God's Word, we have put it into a position or priority that ought not to be. Yet, that is exactly what the Corinthian Church was doing; they made speaking in tongues the "big gift" in the church. In - **chapter 14** Paul deals with this matter by declaring unto them that prophecy was the preferred gift.

VERSE 1: "Follow after charity,"

The word - **"follow"** means to pursue, to hunt, to chase after with intensity. Love is to be pursued with all diligence. It is crucial that believers do this for their spiritual happiness depends upon it. The love that God puts in the hearts of His people can and must be cultivated. How sad that so often a life of bitterness with a suspicious attitude, and a fault-finding spirit instead of charity, exists in the lives of God people. This kind of spirit in a man will never convince others he is saved - **John 13:35 "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."** In **chapter 12:31b** we find that love is the - **"more excellent way."** This **first verse** of **chapter 14** sums up **chapters 12** and **13**. The command to **"follow after love"** cannot be separated from - **chapter 13:31**.

"desire spiritual gifts" - Paul is telling the Corinthians to stop desiring those impressive gifts which made them look good and satisfy their carnal minds. Instead, they were to pursue the gifts of God's Spirit by which they could grow in grace, and be useful to others.

The phrase - **"but rather that ye may prophesy"** could be translated "especially that ye". **"Prophesy"** - simply means to be able to teach and instruct others in the things of their salvation and the truths of God's Word.

VERSE 2: "For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue,"

This verse is designed to show that the ability of speaking intelligibly and to the edification of the church is of more value than the power of speaking a foreign language.

The expression - **"unknown tongue"** is not in the Greek. The word **"unknown"** used with **"tongue"** is italicized in every instance in this chapter - **verses 2, 4, 13, 14, 19, 27**). By this the translators acknowledged there was no corresponding word in the original for - **"unknown."** The correct translation is, "for he that speaketh in a tongue."

If you had visited one of the services of the Church of Corinth you would have heard more than one man preaching; people all over the building speaking languages which you could not understand. They would be all worked up into an emotional frenzy. It would have been like going into a mad house. Much like today, the Corinthians no doubt called this a Holy Ghost service. Actually, what they were practicing was a false and fleshly imitation of the real thing. The real gift was a language, but the false was nothing more than babbling. What they called the gift of - **"tongues"** was not a language at all.

It is plain to see that the Spiritual gift of speaking in a **"tongue,"** or speaking **"in** (or with) – **"tongues"** – **verse 18**, was the God-given ability to speak in foreign languages. This gift of the Spirit was instantaneous, immediate. In other words, those to whom the Holy Spirit gave this gift were enabled to immediately speak a foreign language which they had never spoken before without having to study, be taught, or learn the language. - **Acts 2:1-16**

That the word - **"tongue"** or **"tongues"** is commonly used in the New Testament to denote a specific language or different languages is clearly evident. It is never used as denoting a language or tongue that was not spoken or understood by any people on earth.

"speaketh not unto men," - He does not speak to the understanding, profit, and edification of men, but unto God who knows all languages, and every word in any language that is spoken by man.

"but unto God: for no man understandeth him;" – If a man spoke in a language that was not understood by the hearers it is as if he spoke only to God as no one else other than God could understand him. Paul says that message would be of no value compared with the power of speaking in a manner that would enlighten the church congregation. He did not belittle the power or ability of speaking a foreign language when those who understood were present, or when they went to preach to a foreigner. Note - **1 Corinthians 14:18, 22**.

"howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries." - This again is opposite of the true gift in **Acts 2**. In **Acts 2:8** we read - **"And how hear we every man in our own tongue?"** When the true gift was practiced, men understood what was being said. It was spoken to man and understood by man.

Paul described the practice of the false gift as – **"in the spirit he speaketh mysteries."** Notice the word - **"spirit"** is not capitalized showing he is not talking about the Holy Spirit, but the spirit of man. To put it plainly, what was being spoken remained a mystery to those in attendance.

By - **"speaking mysteries,"** the speaker would stir their emotions and their carnal flesh, while the Holy Spirit was said to be the originator of this outpouring of emotions. How sad that this kind of conduct is still being carried on today. At least in our lesson the words spoken were a known language of that day, but not understood by those in attendance. Today, the so-called speaking in tongues is nothing more than a bunch of gibberish and noise which is NOT a language at all, but a bunch of noise without interpretation. Note **14:27-28** – must have an – **"interpreter"**!

VERSE 3: "But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification and exhortation, and comfort."

Paul establishes the difference between prophecy and the false gift they were practicing. What cannot be understood can never edify.

When God's Word is proclaimed and understood, man is edified. The word **"edification"** means to instruct, strength, to build up. Thereby, men are built up by the proclaiming of God's Word.

When God's Word is proclaimed and understood, then believers are exhorted and comforted. The word - **"exhortation"** means to quicken them in the obedience and practice of the teaching of God's Word.

"and comfort" – means to relieve the hearers of their burdens, to support and uphold their troubled or wounded spirits.

The proclaiming of God's Word in a language that is understood by the hearers brings – **"comfort"**. The Corinthian practice of tongues brought neither **"edification"** nor **"comfort"**. It brought no profit to those who heard. There is no benefit from a great sermon if it spoken in language that is not understood by those listening.

VERSE 4: "He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself;"

Knowledge or understanding of the things that any man – **"speaketh"** is necessary for there to be spiritual growth in the lives of those listening. How can a hearer of God's Word be benefited if he cannot understand what is being said? **Romans 10:14** – **"How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?"**

If by speaking in a tongue a man – **"edifieth himself"** it makes it evident that he understood what he was saying. No man could possibly edify himself by speaking in a tongue he could not understand anymore than a man could edify himself by speaking truths he did not understand. This nullifies the argument of some that say they speak in tongues by the Holy Spirit when they don't even know what they are saying. Note - **verse 26** for explanation. Unknown tongue, being understood by the speaker, but does not edify or profit the church. Yet, the language is understood by the speaker **verse 27**.

"But he that prophesieth edifieth the church;" – But, he that preaches in an understandable language and style edifies all that hear the message from God, spoken by God's man to God's people to their edification.

VERSE 5: "I would that ye all spake with tongues,"

This phrase means I wish or could be content if all of the Corinthians could speak **"with tongues"** if God be pleased.

Since the New Testament was not completed, and the gift of tongues was still in effect, Paul's wish does not contradict anything else stated in God's Word concerning the gifts of tongues. The God-given ability to speak in a foreign language would have been especially useful at Corinth as there were people from almost all nationalities and tongues in and out of Corinth doing business. But, to use that gift to speak in a church (assembly) of the Lord where the people did not understand the tongue or language was wrong. It was but a sham, a hypocritical pretense of being under the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

"but rather that ye prophesied: for greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying."

The gift of prophesy is by far a greater benefit to the church because by prophesying, the Lord's local church was edified or built up. Whereas, the gift of tongues was of no value except there be an interpretation.

"except he interpret;" - The only exception to speaking in unknown languages would be if a man spoke in a language not understood by the church, but was then interpreted. If the unknown language was interpreted, it would be the same as prophesying. He would then make known the mind and will of God through the preaching of His Word to the church. With an interpretation of the unknown tongue (language) the message would edify the hearers in the church.

VERSE 6: "Now, brethren, if I come unto you, speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you, except I shall speak to you either by revelation, or by knowledge, or by prophesying, or by doctrine?"

Paul asks a rhetorical question. He says, "If I came to you speaking in tongues how would it profit you unless – **"revelation"**, or **"knowledge"**, or **"prophesying,"** or **"doctrine"** was given in the process." Most certainly Paul had the ability to speak other tongues or languages - **verse 18**, but he did not use this gift when speaking to a church. He spoke in the native tongue of the members of that church. To speak to them in a language they could not understand would not profit them. **"Tongues"** -without an interpreter provides no **"revelation"**, **"knowledge"**, **"prophecy"** or **"doctrine"**, and thus are worthless, so far as the hearers are concerned.

"revelation" - Would be the revealing of truth; literally an uncovering. Here it means an expression of the mind and will of God for the instruction of the church. It was the uncovering of the truths of God to the hearers.

"knowledge" - The understanding of that truth and being able to teach or preach it to those in the church.

"prophecy" - Is the proclamation of that truth.

"doctrine" – It is from a Greek word that always means either "that which is taught" or "the act of teaching." As the context shows, Paul means the act of teaching. Unless he came to them teaching them God's Word as it had been divinely made known to him, he would profit them nothing.

VERSE 7: "And even things without life giving sound, whether pipe or harp, except they give a distinction in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped?"

Paul mentions two kinds of instruments that the Corinthians would have been very familiar with in order to make a very powerful illustration against the use of tongues in the church or assembly where they

could not be understood. Even a musical instrument, whether a pipe (a flute-like instrument usually made of reeds) or a harp (a stringed musical instrument much like the modern harp), must be played in such a manner as to produce music that was understood or no one would know what tune was being played. Few things, if any, can be more irritating and confusing than a bunch of noise made by blowing or plucking on an instrument that was made to provide relaxing, enjoyable, beautiful music when rightly played.

Speaking in tongues here is not just a bunch of noise and foolishness that is carried on by a lot of people today claiming to have the gift of tongues when not another person understands what they are saying. Paul says even an instrument such as a – **“pipe or harp”** when they are sounded must give a distinctive sound or else it does not have any value and the noise is not known.

Of what use is banging on a piano or blasting notes on a horn without a tune? If these things be so, how could people understand what is being said by those who are speaking an unknown language, on the same bases as the instruments, it is of no value and no good.

VERSE 8: "For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to battle?"

In this verse Paul uses an even stronger illustration against speaking in tongues not understood by the congregation. The trumpet was used in battles to sound the charge and also the retreat. If the trumpet gave an – **“uncertain** (means lacking in clearness, indistinct) **sound”** it would result in total confusion among the troops. Likewise, if the speaking in tongues were not understood by the listeners, the result would be nothing but confusion. Though the speaker spoke the truth of God’s Word, if the hearer could not understand the language, he would not know what God’s Word said.

VERSE 9: "So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the air."

“So likewise you, unless ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood”. **“So likewise”** - refers to **verses 7** and **8** to show that when a message is spoken in a language not understood by the hearers, then it profited nothing. If in musical instruments there is no distinction of notes and tunes it cannot be music and cannot be understood what is piped or harped. Unless the trumpet gives a certain sound, no one can know when to prepare himself for the battle. So, unless a message from God’s Word is spoken in a language and understood without difficulty, then it is of no profit or a benefit to the hearers and is useless and profitless.

“for ye shall speak into the air” - If words are not spoken so the hearers are strengthened in the faith and services to God, it is the same as if no one was present, and you spoke to the air.

VERSE 10: "there are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world, and none of them is without signification."

“it may be” - is simply a phrase used to show the uncertainty of the exact number. The exact number makes no difference. At one time - **“the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech”** – **Genesis 11:1**. God confounded or confused their language so they could not understand one another. Being scattered abroad they had different languages. From these, other languages and dialects have come into use, yet each group understood their words or language. Therefore, not one voice or language is without its significance; not one is unintelligible to those who speak it.

The word - **“voices”** simply means "languages." There are many languages spoken in the world and all of them have a purpose. They are not - **“without signification.”**

The words - **“without signification”** literally mean "meaningless." They all have meaning and were designed to be understood; each language should, therefore, be used with those only who understand it.

VERSE 11: "Therefore if I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh shall be a barbarian unto me."

Paul sums it up by simply saying if we don't understand what is being said it has no value to anyone. In fact, if we are just babbling it makes us no different than the barbarians. Barbarians were a people who were rude and unrefined that lived in deserts and wild places, which can neither understand the language of others, nor were understood by others. It also could mean any type of people that did not understand one another's language.

Certainly the ignorance of one another's language would be a barrier to communication. Therefore, it would be a barrier to fellowship. How could there be fellowship in a church where - "***tongues***" or foreign languages were spoken for sheer display and without an interpreter. Nothing that is a real obstacle to true spiritual fellowship should be allowed to exist in a church!

I CORINTHIANS 14:1-11

Study Guide

1. What purpose was the book of I Corinthians written?
2. What miraculous gift was given on the day of Pentecost? Give Bible verse and explain your answer.
3. The day of Pentecost was a simple gift of _____ to _____ the _____ to _____ who needed it, and in the _____ in which they _____.
4. The Corinthians had _____ instead of a God given gift.
5. **Chapter 14** shows the contrast between the gift of _____ and the gift of _____.
6. Define the meaning of prophesying _____.
7. Give the definition of **"follow"**.
8. The love that God puts in the hearts of His people can and must be _____. Give ways that your answer can be accomplished.
9. Spiritual gifts should be desired of God for what reasons?
10. What does prophesy mean?
11. What does the word "unknown" mean when it is used with the word "tongue"?
12. Speaking in a **"tongue,"** or speaking **"in** (or with) – **"tongues"** – **verse 18**, was the God-given ability to speak in a _____. In other words, those to whom the Holy Spirit gave this gift were enabled to immediately speak a _____ which they had never _____ before without having to _____, be _____, or learn the _____. - **Acts 2:1-16**
13. That the word - **"tongue"** or **"tongues"** is commonly used in the New Testament to denote a _____.
14. A sermon preached in a language not understood by the hearers would be of what value? Explain!
15. In verse two the word **"spirit"** is not capitalized. Why?
16. Paul establishes the difference between prophecy and the false gift they were practicing. What cannot be _____ can never _____.
17. Define - **"exhortation"**, **"comfort"**.
18. Why was the gift of prophesy of greater benefit to the church than tongues?
19. When would speaking in an unknown language be of benefit to the church? Explain
20. In **verse 18** we see where Paul spoke in many languages, what language did he use when speaking to the Corinthians? (Note: a tricky question) Discuss answer.
21. **"revelation"** - Would be the revealing of _____.
22. **knowledge"** - The _____ of that truth and being able to teach or _____ it to those in the church.

23. **“prophecy”** - Is the _____ of that _____.
24. **“doctrine”** – It is from a Greek word that always means what?
25. What two instruments did Paul use to make a point of how foolish it was to speak in a language the hearers did not understand?
26. Explain the comparison Paul uses between noisy and out of tune music and **“unknown tongues”**
27. What does Paul mean when he says even an instrument such as a – **“pipe or harp”** when they are sounded must give a distinctive sound or else it does not have any value and the noise is not known. How does that apply to speaking in **“unknown tongues”**
28. In **verse 8** Paul uses an even stronger illustration by comparing **“unknown tongues”** to the use of a trumpet in battle. Explain his illustration.
29. Explain the statement of **verse 9 - “So likewise ye”** . .
30. If words are not spoken so the hearers are _____ in the faith and services to God, it is the same as if _____ was _____, and you _____ to the _____.
31. In history when did ONE language become many? Give chapter and verse and explain what the one language was changed to many.
32. The word - **“voices”** simply means _____. There are many _____ spoken in the world and _____ of them have a _____.
33. Paul sums it up by simply saying if we _____ what is being _____ it has no _____ to _____.