

I CORINTHIANS
Chapter 14:23-40

INTRODUCTION:

No church is without its problems, and some have more than others. Some rarely have problems while some churches are always having problems. Recently I read about a fellow marooned on a deserted island.

After several years of living alone on the island he was rescued. When his rescuers came ashore they noticed that there were three huts on the island. He was asked, "What is that hut?" He said, "Oh that is my house."

He was asked about the second hut. "That is where I go to church." Then he was asked about the third hut and he said, "That is where I used to go to church."

Some people can't get along with themselves much less a group of people. It is no wonder that churches often have problems. As we have seen, the church of Corinth was no exception. It had more than its share of problems.

For several weeks we have been looking at one of their problems, and one was concerning spiritual gifts. There was much confusion about spiritual gifts so Paul devotes three chapters to the subject. They were especially confused when it came to the matter of speaking in tongues. They were confused about the purpose of speaking in tongues, the practice of speaking in tongues, and as we shall see in this lesson, the procedure for speaking in tongues.

In this lesson Paul ends his discussion of spiritual gifts. He ends it by giving the Corinthians certain regulations to be observed in their churches when it came to spiritual gifts, and in particular, speaking in tongues.

VERSE 23: - "If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad?"

Instead of teaching them, it would make the ***"unlearned"*** and ***"unbelievers"*** think those speaking were crazy. If it could not be understood, it was nothing but a bunch of noise and confusion.

On the other hand, if there is understanding, there will be a convincing of the truth and conviction by the truth.

Here again is proof that the church (Ekklesia) is local; for the whole church is said to come together in one place. There is certainly nothing of a so-called universal/invisible church here.

"and all speak with tongues," - This by no stretch of the imagination means or even implies that every member of the church spoke in tongues or foreign languages. The statements of - ***Chapter 2:4-11***, show clearly that different gifts were given to different members. Therefore, the apostle is simply referring to the brethren in the church who had this gift.

"and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad?"

The ***"unlearned"*** as used here most likely refers to members of the Corinthian church who had no understanding of the foreign languages being spoken.

The - **"unbelievers"** were lost sinners who were visiting in the worship services of the church.

If the - **"unlearned"** and the **"unbeliever"** came into a church (such as the Corinthian church where all the brethren who were talking spoke in a foreign language which the hearers could not understand) they would conclude that the speakers, if not the whole church, were a group of lunatics. Note **I Corinthians 1:21; Romans 10:17**. With the use of these two verses, how can the gospel be preached to the lost if they do not understand? Christ always used a simple message to show the people the Word of God.

Nothing should ever be done or said, especially out of the energy of the flesh, in any of our church services that would wrongly reflect on the nature of God, or the nature of His work of grace wrought in believers. This accusation against those who spoke in tongues is therefore very serious.

VERSE 24:

The same principle applies to those who prophesied as those speaking in tongues written of in **verse 23**. All did not have this gift, and even those who did have it were to speak - **"one by one" verse 31**, and only **"two or three"** in any one service – **verse 29**.

It is also to be noted the change of the order from the previous verse: there the - **"unlearned"** are mentioned first; here the – **"unbeliever"** is first. There is also a change from the plural of - **verse 23**, to the singular here. The Holy Spirit is in **verse 24**, calling attention to the individual unbelief: and the individual who is **"unlearned"** and is not speaking to the church as a whole.

The individual who is in attendance is **"convinced,"** as used here in the original means "convicted." **Judged"** - here means examined; his heart is searched, and is made to see what he is or is not inwardly. In other words, as each of the prophets spoke in turn, the unbeliever's conscience was awakened; his heart was made to feel his guilt. Of course, this would be the result of the work of the Holy Spirit taking the Word spoken by each prophet, and making it personal and effective in the heart and mind of the unbeliever. The unbeliever would feel personal conviction of his sin and way of life as each of the prophets spoke, seemingly directly to him.

The same would be true of the - **"unlearned."** The Holy Spirit would be speaking to him also; showing him his need of a closer walk with God and to become more separated unto the Lord in his daily lifestyle. He would become convicted of his failures in God's service, and be caused to examine himself as the purposes and motives of his service to and for God. It would show him the right ways of the Lord, and lead him to walk according to the ways of the Lord.

"He is convinced of all, he is judged of all:" - Picture this in your own heart and mind, for the Holy Spirit is speaking of what a worship service of a New Testament church ought to be. A church assembled with the desire to worship God in spirit and in truth. If prophecy is given and a gospel message preached in a language or tongue the sinner is able to understand, then he sees himself as a lost sinner in need of salvation.

VERSE 25: - "And thus the secrets of his heart are made manifest;"

We need to remember that this is the result of the prophesying – **verse 24a**. The Word of God which the prophets spoke, and which is - **"the sword of the Spirit"** - **Ephesians 6:17**, will open up, reveal, and make manifest to the hearer the secrets of his own heart. **Hebrews 4:12-13; II Corinthians 2:16; Hebrews 4:2; I Corinthians 2:14.**

As the prophets prophesied (in our day, as the Word of God is preached) the – **"unbeliever"** – **verse 24**, is given eyes to see, ears to hear, and a heart to understand; he then discovers for the first time that he is vile, depraved, and a hell-deserving sinner. He sees that in him is "no good thing", and is lost with the need of the Lord Jesus Christ as his Saviour. When prophesying or preaching is done with

understanding, conviction is wrought in the hearts of those who are able to understand and lives are changed. Note: How foolish this so-called modern day movement of speaking in “tongues” is. It totally contradicts the teachings of God’s Word and does NO good to those who are listening except to stir their emotions and their carnal flesh and pride.

“And so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth.”

To lead the hearers to God and to worship Him in Spirit and in truth is the purpose of all true testimony. This is what is shown in this verse in the case of one who has had – ***“the secrets of his heart”*** manifested to him by the amazing grace of God through His Word as proclaimed by the prophets. He is made to condemn himself, to take sides with God against himself, and then to worship God in the truths that had been revealed unto him. He submits to God and then becomes both a worshipper and a witness.

VERSE 26: - “How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying.”- Paul uses a series of words to describe several practices in their services.

The word - ***“Psalms”*** speaks of reading or singing a Psalm. No doubt the – ***“Psalms”*** were the hymnbook of the Corinthian church. Most of the Psalms were actually songs sung by the Jewish people. It is possible that the Corinthians sang the - ***“Psalms”*** in their services or read when the people gathered for worship.

The word - ***“doctrine”*** no doubt indicates that in the service some Bible doctrine or Biblical subject was discussed and declared. ***“Doctrine”*** - should always be a part of our worship. Preaching and teaching God’s Word should always be a part of our services.

The words - ***“tongues, revelation, interpretation”*** all speak of the common practice of spiritual gifts in their services. In every service people used their gifts to minister with understanding to those present.

The unusual thing about the services at Corinth is that all of this was being done by several people, and all at the same time. The phrase - ***“every one of you”*** indicates this was the case. Can you imagine going to church when everyone in the choir was singing one song, and at the same time all the special singers were singing, each their own song, all the preachers were preaching, all the teachers were teaching, along with everyone else shouting and praising the Lord? That would be interesting to say the least. Well, that is what was going on in the Corinthian church.

No wonder some that visited the church thought they were mad – ***verse 23***. To say the least it was utter chaos and confusion. It would be impossible for anyone to really get anything out of the services so Paul declares - ***“Let all things be done unto edifying.”*** It was this confusion and chaos that Paul addresses; and it largely had to do with speaking in tongues (the false practice of speaking in tongues).

VERSE 27:

It is evident from this verse as well as the entire chapter that the gift of speaking in tongues or foreign languages was not some impulsive, uncontrollable, irresistible influence or force that came upon them suddenly or unsuspecting. It was a language that was understandable in that day, but not understood by the whole assembly.

First, Paul declares such a practice is out of order. He tells us in - ***verse 27*** that the most who could speak in tongues in a service were three, preferably two. Even then, it was not to be at the same time, but in - ***“course.”*** The word describes speaking in turn, one following another.

In the modern day charismatic movement it is usually the majority speaking in tongues at the same time. It is never in **"course"** as required by God's Word. It's generally all at once. In **"course"** means the first, then the second and then the third person speaks, not all at once. No more than three are permitted to speak in a service. If the biblical command Paul gave was obeyed it would drastically alter how modern day charismatic's do things. Yet, it is very clear this is the order which is demanded in this verse that was inspired by God.

Furthermore, there was to be the interpretation of what was said by those speaking in tongues. It is interesting that Paul says - **"let one interpret."** If there was not one able to interpret, then the one wishing to speak in a language not understood by the hearers was forbidden to speak.

I have heard of services where people spoke in tongues, not only were the number of speakers in violation of God's Word, but what people were saying in tongues was not interpreted as Paul said was required. Again, the lack of this procedure is a violation of the Biblical procedure of speaking in tongues.

Note: The one interpreting was not the person speaking in tongues. Yet, again, I have heard this is the process in some modern day tongues movement. How foolish for one to speak in an unknown tongue, and then turn around and interpret. That is foolish, carnal, and prideful.

VERSE 28: - "but if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God."

It is evident that those who spoke in foreign tongues had to first be sure there was an interpreter present in the assembly, and only then could he speak. A speaker in foreign tongues could not simply walk into the assembly and choose someone to interpret for him.

Should no interpreter be present, the speaker was to - **"keep silence in the church"** (assembly). He could speak to himself and to God. This again shows the speakers of foreign tongues knew what they were saying; a man could not be commanded to speak to himself if he did not know what he was saying. He was not to sit there muttering in the assembly and disturbing others. His speaking to himself in silence would not hinder God from hearing him, for He knows the very thoughts of our minds.

VERSE 29 - "Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge."

In **verse 29** - Paul deals, with a real gift and that of - **"the prophets"**, the one's who delivered God's revealed Word to them. Basically the same regulations applied. **"Two or three"**, no more, could speak in a service. The implication is that they spoke by course as described in - **verse 27**. In the case of speaking in "unknown tongues" there was an "interpreter", and when it came to the "prophets" there was a **"judge"**.

This was the divine gift of discernment that enabled one to know if the Word was really from God or not. You could not just get up and say, "God told me to tell you this." If God had told a person to say something, the one with the gift of discernment would know it. If not, he would know it. It was gift that provided a divine system of checks and balances in a day when there was no written Word of God. We no longer need prophets to give us God's Word for we have God's Word in written form. We judge what a person says by what is written in the Bible.

The same judging and guarding of the truth is the Divine responsibility of the Lord's churches today as we have warned before. **II Peter 2:1 - "But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you (i.e. the pastors who are teachers - Ephesians 4:11b), who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction."**

However, the warning must be given here of a vast difference between the churches, or members of churches, who will honestly and scripturally judge what a pastor teaches by the light of the written Word of God, and other churches or church members who are just preacher fighters. To honestly and scripturally judge whether or not what a pastor teaches is in accordance with God's Word, a man will have to know what the Word of God teaches. Far too many times a preacher's preaching or teaching will be judged only by what some other preacher has taught. This is not scriptural judging. **Acts 17:10-11**

VERSE 30: - "If any thing be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace."

In most cases, a prophet spoke to the people about what God had revealed in the past. But, if God gave new revelation to what was being said, then the person to whom the new revelation was given was to be given the floor. His word was the priority for the moment.

VERSE 31: - "For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted."

Paul gives a reason for the regulations he has just described. When everyone was singing, preaching, and talking at the same time, no one was able to learn and be helped. When there was only one speaking at a time, then people were able to hear, thus learn, and be helped by what was said.

All who had the gift of prophesying could – **"prophesy one by one;"** but still only two, or at the most three, in any one service. All spiritual gifts were given and used for the edifying of the church. This is self-evident, for they were to prophesy that, **"all** (i.e., all in the assembly) **may learn, and all may be comforted"** or be exhorted. As each of the prophets spoke he would amplify, enlarge, or shed further light on what the previous prophet had just said.

VERSE 32: - And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets."

The obvious meaning is this: the prophets were not under the influence of an uncontrollable desire or impulse to prophesy. They could and were commanded of God to exercise self-control with each one speaking in turn. This being true of the prophets being led by the Holy Spirit, it must also be true of all public speakers and preachers in the churches today. Anyone speaking in a church of the Lord Jesus Christ and claiming not to have control over what he says is either lying, is giving way entirely to the desires of the flesh, or is under the control of a false spirit or demon. He certainly is not being led of the Spirit of God.

VERSE 33: - "For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints."

The Greek word used here - **"confusion"** means a state of disorder, disturbance, confusion, tumult.

God was not behind the kind of confusion going on in their services, neither does He approve of it, nor is He the One responsible for it. Paul not only dealt with the matter concerning how tongues should be used in the church, but also as to who could actually speak in tongues.

He never leads or instructs them in such manner as to cause – **"confusion"**. God does, sometimes, leave headstrong, self-willed believers to their own feelings and notions, which always results in – **"confusion"**.

"As in all churches of the saints," shows that the Divine principle stated in these verses apply to all the Lord's churches for all time.

VERSE 34: - "Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law."

This is a very important doctrine; so much so that the Holy Spirit caused it to be explicitly stated again and again, and referred to numerous times in both the Old and New Testament. There has never been a time in the history of Christianity when there existed a greater need for a clear understanding of what the Scriptures say on the subject of the biblical role of women in the church than now.

The final authority for deciding all arguments, especially where Christians are concerned, is the inspired and infallible Word of God.

Today, some claim that Paul was prejudice against women! But to say Paul was prejudiced against women is a deliberate attempt to discredit the inspiration of the entire Bible. If Paul's prejudices caused him to misrepresent the truth of God in this matter, then we would have no choice but to conclude that he may have done so in many instances. And if a certain group of women can deny that Paul wrote the truth, other groups can deny that all the other writers of God's Word were prejudiced on any given subject where they find themselves in disagreement.

Considering the context, Paul is saying when it comes to speaking in tongues and prophesying, such gifts did not belong to women for they were gifts that did not fall into their role. Paul is not prohibiting women from speaking in church, but prohibiting them from speaking in a certain capacity that had been established by the law. From as early as **Genesis**, the role of the woman was one of submission that is implied in the statement - **"under obedience."** Paul is speaking directly to a woman usurping authority over man in spiritual things. Both the gift of speaking in tongues and prophecy involved the proclaiming of God's revelation of truth, therefore gifts limited to men. If given to women, they would involve them exercising authority over men in spiritual matters.

Paul is not saying that a woman cannot teach or be a gifted leader, but such gifts and abilities are not to be exercised over men in the services. It is not a matter of equality, but a matter of God's assigned roles.

Apparently in the church at Corinth many of those involved in prophesying or speaking in tongues were women (much like today). Paul clearly stated that when it came to prophesying or speaking in tongues, the women were not permitted to practice such gifts, thus were to be absolutely silent in these areas.

VERSE 35: - "And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church."

It would seem that in the Corinthian church there were some women who were not only abusers of these gifts, but also unashamed in questioning those who prophesied and what they were teaching. Paul says if they have a question they should ask their husbands at home. Why? It was a - **"shame"** - disgraceful for them to behave in such a matter.

Again, it was a matter of roles. We have seen what Paul said about the different roles in - **chapter 11**. God has given men certain roles and women certain roles. One is not superior and the other inferior. It is a simple matter of how God established things. When it came to certain gifts and certain behavior in the church, Paul simply and plainly states that women are omitted.

At this point, the question is always asked concerning women who have no husbands, who are they to ask? The answer is obvious. If they are unmarried, let them ask their fathers; if their fathers are not living or are not saved, let them ask their own brothers if they are saved, or let them ask other saved women to ask their husbands for them. They can always ask their pastor concerning doctrinal matters which would also involve matters of moral right and wrong.

"for it is a shame for women to speak in the church." - Because the woman is commanded of God to be in subjection, it is shameful, disgraceful, or improper for the woman to speak in the assembled church.

Question: Since - **"it is a shame for women to speak in the church,"** should women be allowed to teach a Sunday School or Bible Class? There is nothing wrong in a woman teaching a S.S. or a Bible Class, for a those classes are not the assembled church.

Question: Since a Sunday School or Bible class is not the assembled church, may women then teach a class of men, or teach a mixed class of men and women? No, a woman is forbidden to teach men or usurp authority over them - **"But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence"** - **I Timothy 2:12**. It is evident, of course, that godly women may teach classes or groups of women. She may also teach children, even mixed classes of boys and girls.

Question: What age should boys be when they are no longer to be taught in Sunday School and Bible classes by women? There is no specific answer to this question in the New Testament. However, in the light of the teaching of the New Testament on the subject of women not teaching men, it is my personal conviction that these classes of boys at the age of beginning manhood should not be taught by a woman.

Question: In as much as women are commanded to be silent in the church, should a woman sing solos, or sing in duos, trios, quartets, or in an all female choir, or chorus? There is no mention of such singing in the New Testament, and no where in the New Testament are women forbidden to sing. The early churches sang - **Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16**. There is no mention that the women did not or were not to participate in such singing. Why split hairs or raise an issue where one does not exist, and definite prohibition nor command is not given.

Considering all that we have seen in this section which deals with spiritual gifts, and if all we had was what we have in these 10 verses, **verses 26-35**, it would make me look at many of the practices we see and hear about with great skepticism. If the procedures of - **verses 26-33** were followed, most of what we see in charismatic's circles would be stopped.

Furthermore, if the instructions of - **verses 34-35** were followed, it would practically bring most charismatic groups to a halt for the majority of those who practice speaking in tongues are women.

VERSE 36: - "What? came the word of God out from you? or came it unto you only?"

Of course, both of these questions demand negative answers. It is almost if Paul recognizes some are going to object to what he has said. He says in effect, "What? I can't believe that you would rebel against what I have told you." He then asks, "Did God's Word come from you or did it come to you?" The answer is obvious. They were not the author of God's Word. God was! God's word had come to them. Therefore, it was not a word for them to argue with but to simply obey.

Therefore, they (nor any other church) had a right to establish customs, practices, or procedures contrary to the plain commands and instructions of God's Word. They (nor any other church) had the right to ignore any portion of God's Word, as they had done in these matters.

VERSE 37:

Paul tells them if they think they are a prophet or spiritual person, then they must realize and – **"acknowledge"** (take knowledge of, know clearly and surely) these things, all of them which Paul had written, were the commandments of the Lord. What Paul has declared is what God commanded. It is Settled! It is Final! There can be no argument! Simply put, "Obey it"!

The same Holy Spirit who inspired what Paul wrote would bear witness with the spirit of the believer that - **"the things"** are so. However, only the - **"spiritual"** believer would fully and constantly take knowledge of - **"the thing"** as being God's commandments.

"Spiritual" - here represents the child of God who walks so as to please the Lord. That is a far cry from what is considered a spiritual person by the vast majority of professing Christians. Their common misconception of a spiritual person is one who cries, yells, laughs, jumps up and down, and claps his or her hands in a church service.

VERSE 38: - "But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant"

Paul speaks to them that were refusing to hear and learn from what he has said. In effect he says, "If you choose to remain ignorant then remain ignorant." The implication is the church should not recognize such a person as a spiritual leader to be listened to or followed. God's Word is our final authority. It is to be obeyed.

Unwillingness to submit to the authority of God's Word prevents the possibility of being instructed in the Truth of God.

VERSE 39: - "Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues."

After dealing with a false practice and false gifts, Paul simply concludes by saying, "Stop the false, practice the real." There was a true gift of speaking in tongues and Paul is not condemning nor forbidding the use of that as we also have seen in this chapter. The real gift should be recognized and allowed.

As a church, we should never be tolerating of anything that is not of God. If it is God's way for the church it should not be ignored or absent from the church. If it is not of God, then there is no place for it in the church under any conditions. If we are going to do it, this is the way it should be done. God's way and God's way only.

VERSE 40: - "Let all things be done decently and in order."

"Let all things be done" - in an appropriate and becoming manner; **"decently"**, as becomes the worship of God. **"Let all things be done in order"**, regularly, without confusion, discord, or commotion.

Here it is used in contrast to the disorder of the services in the preaching ministry, the confusion and disorder of speaking in tongues or foreign languages, and some of the prophets speaking out of turn.

Remember **verse 33 - "God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints"**.

I CORINTHIANS 14:23-40**Work Sheet**

1. How many chapters did the Apostle Paul devote to the subject of spiritual gifts?
2. If a church congregation were all speaking in an unknown language during a worship service what would the lost people and unlearned people think? Why?
3. Think carefully! Paul would rather speak ____ with understanding than _____ words without understanding?
4. The "**unlearned**" as used here most likely refers to members of the Corinthian church who had no _____ of the foreign _____ being spoken.
5. The - "**unbelievers**" were _____ who were visiting in the worship services of the church.
6. What good would it be to the - "**unlearned**" and the "**unbeliever**" if they could not understand the message being presented? Explain your answer.
7. What does "**convinced,**" mean?
8. "**Judged**" means?
9. It is possible that the Corinthians sang the _____ in their services or read when the people gathered for worship.
10. The words - "**tongues, revelation, interpretation**" all speak of the common practice of _____ in their services. In every service people used their gifts to _____ with _____ to those present.
11. But, the _____ thing about the services at Corinth is that _____ of this was being done by _____ people, and all at the _____.
12. In this entire chapter Paul shows that the gift of speaking in tongues or a foreign language was not some _____, _____, _____ influence or force that came upon them suddenly or unsuspecting. It was a _____ that was _____ in that day, but not understood by the _____ assembly. EXPLAIN how this is different from the so called modern day "gift of tongues" in churches.
13. What was the most that could speak in tongues in a service?
14. What does speaking in "**course.**" mean? How do the modern day tongues contradict the meaning of this word?
15. A person could not speak in an unknown language unless there was an _____ present. Why?
16. What was the purpose of a - "**judge**". What were they to judge? Today what and how are people to judge the pastor as to what he teaches and preaches?
17. What does - "**verse 31**" mean and how is it discarded by the tongues speakers of today?
18. What is the meaning of the word - "**confusion**"? So if in a church service at Corinth or in today's services there is confusion, who is the author of it?

19. The _____ for deciding all arguments, especially where Christians are concerned, is the _____ and _____ Word of God.
20. In **verse 34** - Paul is _____ saying that a woman cannot teach or be a gifted leader, but such gifts and abilities are _____ to be exercised over _____ in the services. It is not a matter of _____, but a matter of _____ assigned _____.
21. Paul says if a woman has a question she should ask her _____ at home. Why? It was a – "**_____**" – disgraceful for them to behave in such a matter.
22. Who is a woman to ask if she has a question but does not have a husband?
23. Can a woman teach a Sunday School class? Who can she teach and who can she not teach?
24. Can women sing in the church? Explain your answer.
25. If the procedures of - **verses 26-33** were followed, _____ of what we see in charismatic's circles _____ be _____.
26. Explain - **verse 36**?
27. Simple put, what was Paul saying in **verse 38**?
28. Unwillingness to submit to the authority of God's Word prevents the possibility of being _____ in the _____ of God.
29. "**Let all things be done in order**" means: _____, without _____, _____, or _____.
30. Remember **verse 33** - "**God is not the _____ of _____, but of _____, as in _____ churches of the saints**".