

First Epistle to the Corinthians

25 – Essay Four: Women and Men in Church (4.5) – Spiritual Gifts in the Body

1 Corinthians 14:1b-14:25

1. Outlines

a. *ESV Study Bible*

- i. Divisions over Corporate Worship (11:2–14:40)
 - 1. Head coverings and worship (11:2–16)
 - 2. Social snobbery at the Lord’s Table (11:17–34)
 - 3. Elevating one spiritual gift above others (12:1–14:40)

b. *Reading the New Testament Series*

- i. Problems in Corporate Worship (11:2-14:40)
 - 1. Prayer and Prophecy (11:2-16) – Different Though Equal in the Lord
 - 2. The Lord’s Supper (11:17-34) – Social Significance of the Supper
 - 3. Prayer and Prophecy (12:1-14:40) – Regulation, Not Suppression of Spiritual Gifts

c. *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The First Epistle*

- i. In Response to the Corinthian Letter (7:1-16:12)
 - 1. Marriage and Related Matters (7:1-40)
 - 2. Food Sacrificed to Idols (8:1-11:1)
 - 3. Women (and Men) in Worship (11:2-16)
 - 4. Abuse of the Lord’s Supper (11:17-34)
 - 5. Spiritual Gifts and Spiritual People (12:1-14:40)

d. Bailey¹

- i. Worship: Men and Women in the Church (11:2-14:40)
 - 1. Men and Women Leading in Worship (11:2-16)
 - 2. Order in Worship: Sacrament (11:17-34)
 - 3. Gifts and the Nature of the Body (12:1-30)
 - 4. The Hymn to Love (12:31-14:1)
 - 5. Spiritual Gifts and the Upbuilding of the Body (14:1-25)
 - 6. Order in Worship: Word (14:26-33)
 - 7. Women and Men Worshipping (14:3b-40)

Table 1: Bailey, locations 4583 and 4688

1 Corinthians 14:1b-25 (ESV)		
A-1	1 ... Earnestly desire [<i>ze/oo</i>] the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy.	Seek gifts Especially prophecy
2	2 For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit.	Tongues Is to God Mysteries
3	3 On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation.	Prophecy Is to people Upbuilding

¹ Bailey, *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes: Cultural Studies in 1 Corinthians*, loc. 3428.

4	4 The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself,	Tongues Builds up self
5	but the one who prophesies builds up the church.	Prophecy Builds up church
6	5 Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up.	Seek gifts Especially prophecy
B-7	6 Now, brothers, if I come to you speaking in tongues, how will I benefit you unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching?	I - benefit The church
8	7 If even lifeless instruments, such as the flute or the harp, do not give distinct notes, how will anyone know what is played? 8 And if the bugle gives an indistinct sound, who will get ready for battle?	Parable of flute and harp the bugle
9	9 So with yourselves, if with your tongue you utter speech that is not intelligible, how will anyone know what is said? For you will be speaking into the air.	Tongues Unintelligible To the church
10	10 There are doubtless many different languages in the world, and none is without meaning, 11 but if I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be a foreigner to the speaker and the speaker a foreigner to me.	Parable of foreign language
11	12 So with yourselves, since you are eager [<i>zelotes</i>] for manifestations of the Spirit, strive [<i>zeteo</i>] to excel in building up the church.	You - build up The church
C-12	13 Therefore, one who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret. 14 For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful. 15 What am I to do?	With tongues Mind unfruitful
13	I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also; I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also.	Pray and sing With spirit and mind
14	16 Otherwise, if you <u>give thanks</u> [bless] with your spirit, how can anyone in the position of an <u>outsider</u> [<i>idiotes</i> , " <i>inquirer</i> "?] say "Amen" to your thanksgiving when he does not know what you are saying? 17 For you may be giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not being built up.	For outsiders Tongues are Incomprehensible Ineffective Do not build up
15	18 I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. 19 Nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue.	In church -- Keep it intelligible For instruction

16	20 Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature.	Think Mature
17	21 In the Law it is written, "By people of strange tongues and by the lips of foreigners will I speak to this people, and even then they will not listen to me, says the Lord."	Scripture
18	22 Thus tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers, while prophecy is a sign not for unbelievers but for believers.	Tongues - sign Prophecy - sign
19	23 If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and <u>outsiders</u> [<i>idiotes</i>] or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your minds?	In church -- If unintelligible to outsiders Tongues = madness
20	24 But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or <u>outsider</u> [<i>idiotes</i>] enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, 25 the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you.	For unbeliever or outsider Prophecy brings -- conviction self-revelation surrender worship witness

2. Rhetoric

a. Three parts

- i. Tongues vs. Prophecies: purpose of each
- ii. Tongues vs. Prophecies: illustrated
 1. Personal anecdote
 2. Parables
- iii. Tongues vs. Prophecies: respective effects in public worship
 1. Two segment intro (C-12,13)
 2. Seven-part ring composition (C-14 – C-20)
 3. C-17 – center – scripture
 4. C-18 – interpretation of C-17 and the main point
 - a. But this is also a notoriously difficult verse

3. Context

- a. Corinthian church was divided and factions arguing over different things
- b. Manifestation of gifts were thought by them as signs of spiritual maturity
- c. Tongues were thought by them to be the highest gift
- d. Paul has just finished conveying to them that love is the only means through which any gifts have value
- e. Paul considers all gifts valuable and necessary – they are equal members in the upbuilding of the body of Christ – but he has consistently de-emphasized tongues because of the unique situation in Corinth
- f. Modern misunderstandings

- i. That Chapter 14 is a theology of tongues. No, chapter 14 is NOT a theology of tongues, but rather, a general discussion on the use of gifts in public worship.
 - ii. That *tongues* refers to foreign languages. No, *tongues* really does refer to ecstatic utterances (more on this later).
 - iii. That because tongues are a manifestation of emotions and Paul values “mind” over emotions, there is little or no place for emotions in the Christian life. No, Paul never says emotions are bad, evil, or have no value. Paul writes both have their place, but in public worship intelligible speech is what brings value for all present.
4. (A) Tongues vs. Prophecy: Purpose of Each
- a. Emphasis is on the better value for prophecy in the present, specific situation
 - b. Tongues:
 - i. Purpose is communication *to God* (not to others)
 - ii. Utterances are about mysteries that are not intelligible to humans
 - iii. Benefits only the utterer – Note: “build up himself” is not a pejorative

The edifying of oneself is not self-centeredness, but the personal edifying of the believer that comes through private prayer and praise.²

- c. Prophecy:
 - i. Purpose is communication *from God*
 - ii. Utterances are intelligible words of upbuilding, encouragement, and consolation for other humans
 - iii. Benefits all present at a church gathering

The reason for prophecy is that it speaks "edification, exhortation and comfort" to the rest of the people. These three words set forth the parameters of the divine intent of prophecy, and probably indicate that in Paul's view the primary focus of a prophetic utterance is not the future, but the present situations of the people of God.³

- d. Verse 5 indicates Paul's main thesis
 - i. When gathered in a community, priority must be given to spoken words for the edification of the entire assembly
 - ii. If an individual wants to speak in tongues during a public assembly, make sure there is someone else available to interpret

At the same time Paul's clear preference for prophetic utterances is often neglected throughout the church. By prophecy of course, as the full evidence of this chapter makes clear, he does not mean a prepared sermon, but the spontaneous word given to God's people for the edification of the whole. Most contemporary churches would have to be radically reconstructed in terms of their self-understanding for such to take place.⁴

5. (B) Tongues and Prophecy: Illustrations
- a. Personal anecdote (B7)

² *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The First Epistle, 14:2-4.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *NICNT, 1 Cor. 14:5*

- i. What if I came to you with unintelligible speech?
 - ii. Intelligible speech is necessary to be of benefit to others
 - iii. Revelation (new knowledge) comes through prophecy⁵
 - iv. Existing knowledge comes through teaching
- b. Your responsibility (B11)
 - i. Follow my example – strive for manifestations of the Spirit that build up the church
- c. Parable of flute, harp, and bugle (B8)
 - i. Making sounds, in and of itself, has no value

The flute and the harp are instruments that invoke tranquility and soothe the troubled soul. The harp in particular needs “distinct notes” if the listener is to be moved by the performance. Prophecy... must be able to do this...

The trumpet/bugle calls the troops to prepare for conflict and directs them in the midst of battle. Prophecy must also be prepared to offer leadership in the struggle against “principalities and powers.”⁶

- d. Parable of foreign language (B10)
 - i. This has often been used to “prove” that *tongues* mean “foreign language” and not ecstatic speech. But to do this requires taking the analogy beyond its intention.

The analogy is not that the tongues- speaker is also speaking a foreign language, as some have suggested, but that the hearer cannot understand the one speaking in tongues any more than he can the one who speaks a foreign language.⁷

The Christian with the gift of speaking in tongues is *compared to* (not identified with) a stranger who is talking in a foreign language... Paul’s point is that (unknown) foreign languages divide people; they do not unite them. The person who hears someone speaking a foreign language immediately knows that the speaker is not “one of us.”⁸

- e. Unintelligible speech offers no value to listeners (B9)

The point of everything in corporate worship is not personal experience in the Spirit, but building up the church itself... The building up of the community is the basic reason for corporate settings of worship; they should probably not be turned into a corporate gathering for a thousand individual experiences of worship.⁹

6. Tongues and Prophecies: Their Respective Effects in Public Worship (C)

- a. This passage often used by anti-tongues Christians to dismiss tongues. For example, “since the use of tongues doesn’t engage the mind, how can we know for certain that it’s from God?” But that is not the position of Paul. Paul assumes tongues is a gift of the Spirit, and that it is good and holy. Paul’s issue is with its appropriate use.

⁵ This and next item, Bailey, location 4656.

⁶ Bailey, location 4666.

⁷ *NICNT*, 1 Cor. 14:10-11.

⁸ Bailey, locations 4672-4675.

⁹ *NICNT*, 1 Cor. 14:12.

- b. Paul's position is that tongues are perfectly appropriate for private worship. Its use in public worship must be mediated by an interpreter (and the one interpreting is not the same as the one speaking in tongues).
- c. "My mind is unfruitful" (v.14)
 - i. It can be interpreted as a negative, but immediately in the next verse Paul writes he will continue to pray and praise "with my spirit" (i.e., using tongues). Thus Paul does not see the use and effect of tongues as necessarily negative.
 - ii. He is not making a judgment; rather, an observation.
 - iii. On spirit vs. mind:

In modern terms, these components of human nature are perhaps similar to the affective and cognitive components, or the subconscious and conscious mind. At any rate, neither the pure rationality of some modern churches nor the pure emotionalism of some churches in other traditions would have suited Paul; his view of worship engaged the whole person.¹⁰

- d. Paul's concern in this section is the *idiotes* and the unbeliever who happens to be present during Christian worship
 - i. First, we learn that Christian assemblies were open to the public
 - ii. Second, we learn that unbelievers were welcome and expected
 - iii. Third, we come to the problem of *idiotes*
 - 1. Our modern English word *idiot* is derived from *idiotes*
 - 2. It does mean *unlearned or ignorant*
 - 3. Translations in this passage for *idiotes* include *inquirer, outsider, or a believer who hadn't yet received spiritual gifts*¹¹
 - 4. Another possibility is *those who don't understand what is being spoken of in tongues*¹²
- e. The overall thrust is Paul saying that worship should be participatory, it should be inclusive, it should not exclude someone because they don't understand what is going on, and it should be a revelation of God and his power working through the church.
 - i. For us: how do our "church services" include and exclude "outsiders" through our words, actions, assumptions, etc.?
 - ii. There should be no "spectators" during a worship service (believers, unbelievers, and those in-between all have a part to play in the drama of worship)
- f. The main point of the passage is not the bookends, but the center
 - i. Verse 21 – scripture adapted from Isaiah 28:11-12
 - ii. Verse 22 – interpretation of verse 21 – this is the main point
 - iii. Verses 23-25 – illustration of verse 22
- g. First, an alternate way of reading 14:21-25¹³
 - i. Verses 21-22 are Corinthian assertions and verses 23-25 are Paul's response

¹⁰ *The IVP Bible Background Commentary – New Testament*, 1 Cor. 14:13-14

¹¹ Bailey, location 4724.

¹² *NICNT*, 1 Cor. 14:16.

¹³ *Reading the New Testament Series: Reading Corinthians*, 1 Cor. 14:20-36.

- ii. The Corinthians quote scripture and use it to assert that tongues are a sign for unbelievers and prophecy is a sign for believers. That's why they speak in tongues during worship.
- iii. Paul responds by writing that you've got it backwards. When you speak in tongues and unbelievers see you, they will associate your worship with pagan worship. But if your worship makes sense, the unbeliever will be convicted by your words and praise God.
- h. The more typical interpretation¹⁴
 - i. "Sign" is a manifestation of God that can mean either blessing or judgment
 - ii. Tongues are certainly from God, but when unbelievers and outsiders hear it, they won't understand and instead of drawing them toward God, they will see this as madness and something to stay away from. Thus tongues, instead of having a good effect, has the negative effect of forcing people away from God and into judgment.
 - iii. Prophecy is also from God, but the utterances are understandable by all. It has the effect of bringing conviction to outsiders and unbelievers (who choose to come to a church assembly – this isn't about general evangelism outside of a church setting) so that they are moved away from judgment into the community of grace; i.e., building up the church. The "sign" of God's favor is the building up of the church through the conviction of unbelievers and outsiders, not manifestations of the Spirit.

This final confession of the unbeliever is thus the "sign" that prophecy is for "believers"; it is sure evidence of God's favor resting on his people.¹⁵

- iv. Therefore, keep your worship intelligible in every way possible for the benefit of all
 - i. "But if all prophesy..." – no restrictions; assumption that *all* can prophesy (preach, teach)
7. Summary
- a. It's about what takes place during public worship
 - b. It's not about tongues or prophecy
 - c. It's about intelligibility and understanding in the use of any spiritual gift
 - d. It's about inclusion, not exclusion, in worship
 - e. All may and should participate in whatever way God chooses to manifest his gift
 - f. The sign of God's favor is not wonders but convictions that lead to upbuilding of the church

Along with the great need for local communities to be edified, the reason set forth in this paragraph ought to be sufficient to lead the church to pray for the renewal of the prophetic gift in its ongoing life. It is not simply the presence of prophecy itself that signifies God's presence among his gathered people, but the powerful revealing work of the Spirit that convicts of sin and leads to repentance. Perhaps in our domestication of the Spirit we have also settled for a "safer" expression of worship, one in which very few are ever led to exclaim that "Surely God is among you." Seeing that actually take place leads to prayer that v. 1 might be the church's ongoing portion: love, spiritual gifts, especially prophecy.¹⁶

¹⁴ NICNT, 1 Cor. 14:20-25; Bailey, locations 4777-4791; *Understanding the Bible Commentary: 1 Corinthians*, 1 Cor. 14:20-25.

¹⁵ NICNT, 1 Cor. 14:25.

¹⁶ NICNT, 1 Cor. 14:25.