

TITLE: EDIFICATION IN THE ASSEMBLY

TEXT: 1 CORINTHIANS 14

INTRO: Ch.12—the source & purpose of spiritual gifts. **Ch. 13**—the temporary nature of spiritual gifts. **Ch. 14**—the use of spiritual gifts in the church. The context is the *worship assembly*. This is important to remember as Paul places the higher priority on prophecy, and less on tongues. The purpose was to **edify** (found 7 times in this chapter).

I. EDIFICATION & UNDERSTANDING IN THE ASSEMBLY (v. 1-25):

A. TONGUES VS. PROPHECY (v. 1-5):

(v. 1) *Follow after* (pursue) *love, desire spiritual gifts, but rather* (in a greater degree) *that ye may prophesy*. This verse really is the thesis for most of the chapter. Love comes first (**ch. 13**), then desire spiritual gifts, but prophecy most. Prophecy is the message; tongues just confirm it.

(v. 2) *He that speaks in a tongue* (“unknown” is not in the original), *speaks not to men, but to God* (for no man understands (they can’t speak the language)...*he speaks mysteries*). Nobody understands (except He, God, and anyone who might know that language). So to everyone else, he speaks mysteries/secrets. This doesn’t edify the church! (Tongues were for unbelievers—**v. 22**).

(v. 3) *But* (contrast to tongues) *he that prophesies speaks edification, exhortation, comfort to men* – because they can understand!

(v. 4) *He that speaks in a tongue edifies himself; he that prophesies edifies the church*. Which is clearly better in the assembly?!

(v. 5) *I would* (wish) *that you all spoke with tongues* (i.e., this isn’t a bad thing), *but rather* (more) *that you prophesied: for greater is he that prophesies than he that speaks with tongues* (because what *he’s* doing edifies the church, but the tongue-speaker, unless he interprets, edifies only himself).

B. USELESSNESS OF TONGUES (v. 6-11):

(v. 6) If I speak w/tongues, what profit is it to you unless I do it by revelation (revealing new info from God), knowledge (understanding what’s being revealed), prophesying, doctrine? All four of these things will edify church members. But speaking in tongues won’t (unless it’s interpreted and used for one of these purposes).

(v. 7) Analogy #1: Musical instruments – *things without life giving a sound*. Unless they give a distinction in the sounds (from one musical note to another), *how shall it be known what’s being played?* If these instruments don’t provide a clear distinction in notes they emit, it won’t be music to the listener.

(v. 8) Analogy #2: If the trumpet gives an uncertain (not clear or distinct) sound, who shall prepare himself for the battle? In the OT, the trumpet was used to call assemblies, announce travel, or call to war (different blasts had different meanings). So the trumpet sound had to be distinct in order to identify what command was being made.

(v. 9) So likewise, unless your words are easy to understand, how will we know what you’re saying?

(v. 10-11) Analogy #3: There are many kinds of voices (tongues/languages) in the world, and none is without signification (w/out sound or voice; meaningless). All languages have meaning (“tongues” never meant meaningless gibberish). But this didn’t mean that everyone listening would understand the language! If I don’t understand, I’ll be like a barbarian (one who doesn’t speak Greek) to the speaker, and he to me. So it’s meaningless, even though the tongue is a legitimate language.

C. USEFULNESS OF TONGUES (v. 12-19):

(v. 12) Your goal should be to build up the congregation, not cause confusion and leave them wondering what’s going on!

(v. 13) *Let him that speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret*, otherwise the words are useless to the listeners. This doesn’t mean that *he* doesn’t understand the language he’s speaking. He clearly does (**v.4**—he edifies himself; how could this be if he himself doesn’t understand it?). But this doesn’t mean he can translate it. Those who learn other languages know that, just because you can speak some of a language, doesn’t mean you can always interpret (“explain thoroughly”).

(v. 14) *If I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding* (mind, intellect) *is unfruitful* (produces no fruit, no yield).

1. Some use this verse to justify speaking gibberish. They claim that “my understanding is unfruitful” means “I don’t understand what I’m saying” (which, of course, they don’t understand, because they’re **not** speaking a language – cf. **v.10**).

2. This is **not** what Paul is saying. He’s saying that *he* understands the words, but his understanding is not producing any fruit. What’s going on in his mind is not producing any fruit in the other members. (v. 19 – he speaks with his understanding).

(v. 15) *So, I will pray and sing with the spirit and the understanding*. Everyone will be benefited by my words in prayer & song.

(v. 16-17) Otherwise, if I’m the only one that understands, *how shall the unlearned say “Amen” at your giving of thanks? For you truly give thanks well* (your prayer is still good – good words), *but the other is not edified* because he can’t understand!

(v. 18-19) *I speak in tongues more than all of you. But in the church* (the assembly) *I’d rather speak 5 words with my understanding than 10,000 in a tongue!* Again, this is because at least the church will be edified by those 5 words!

D. PURPOSE OF TONGUES & PROPHECY (v. 20-25):

(v. 20) *Brethren, be not children* (immature) *in understanding*.... Don’t be mature in malice. Be mature in understanding!

(v. 21-22) *In the law it is written* (**Isa 28:11-12**) – It was prophesied that God would speak to this generation (1st century) through miraculous speaking of other languages. Paul explains this in **v. 22**—*Therefore, tongues are for a sign to the unbeliever* (not the believer). The context of **ch.14** is the assembly (Christians), so we can see why tongues are less important there. *But prophesying* (messages from God) *are for believers, not unbelievers* (who don’t yet care about God’s words).

(v. 23) *If the whole church...speak w/tongues*, an unlearned or unbeliever will say they’re crazy!

(v. 24) *But if all prophesy*...he’ll understand, be able to make decisions based on what he’s taught. *He is convinced* (admonished, reproved, convicted)...*he is judged by all* – the truth has been given, so his reaction to it will be judged (as acceptance or denial).

(v. 25) All these things he has the ability to do in reaction to what is said in prophecy, but not in tongues if he can’t understand.

CONCLUSION (Part 1): This is about communication – to the believer & non-believer alike. Prophecy does this, but tongues alone do not. Therefore, those who speak in tongues should interpret, and teach the church. Though we do not have these gifts today, we need to learn the underlying truth – make sure that we edify one another, taking into consideration visitors as well (my invitation will include P.O.S.).

II. EDIFICATION & ORDER IN THE ASSEMBLY (v. 26-35): Regulation/Management of spiritual gifts in the assembly

- A. THE GOVERNING PRINCIPLE (v. 26)** – *When you come together, every one has a psalm, doctrine, tongue, revelation, interpretation.* With all these people and gifts, things could get very confusing. *Let all things be done unto edifying* (he'll explain how in v. 27-35).
- B. IN SPEAKING IN TONGUES (v. 27-28)**
(v. 27) *If any speak in a tongue, let it be by two or three, and that by course* (in turns)... **1)** Take turns and **2)** someone interpret!
(v. 28) *If there's no interpreter, keep silent in the church...speak to himself and to God.*
1. If there's no interpreter, there will be no benefit to the church. So speak to yourself, and keep silence (hold one's peace; in the context, he is not to make any audible noise).
 2. This rule applied only in the assembly – outside the church, a brother could speak in tongues to non-believers, and didn't need to interpret, since the tongue-speaking was to confirm that he was from God.
- C. IN PROPHECYING (v. 29-33)**
(v. 29) *Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the others judge* [discern]. As w/tongues, this is about order in the assembly.
(v. 30) If one member is prophesying, and another receives a revelation (another prophecy), *let the first hold his peace* (same word as in v. 28 (keep completely silent). God has obviously communicated to another person, and it's now *his* turn to speak.
(v. 31-32) The prophecies are to be given one by one, so all can learn and be comforted (otherwise it's too much information, and too confusing). *And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.* Just because God was speaking to them didn't mean they had no control over themselves (so don't use this as an excuse not to sit down and let the other member speak – per v. 30).
*Some today have gotten the label “holy rollers” because they **1)** don't realize these gifts have ceased, and **2)** have no order in their gatherings, claiming that the Holy Spirit is in control, and so they are not! But v. 32-33 refute this.
(v. 33) Failure to follow these instructions leads to confusion and disorder. And God is not a God confusion, but of peace.
- D. IN WOMEN'S ROLE (v. 34-35)**
Let your women keep silence (same word as in v. 28 & 30) *in the churches* (assemblies)....
1. This is complete silence (not just a quiet demeanor). Like the one w/a tongue but no interpreter was to keep complete silence (someone else was doing the speaking), so the woman is to keep silence.
 2. This is in the **worship assembly** – women are to remain silent, *for it is not permitted unto them to speak...but they are to be under obedience* (subordinate – 11:3). *It is a shame* (disgrace) *for women to speak* (“utter words”) *in the church* (assembly). - This didn't mean that women had no spiritual gifts (11:5—a woman wasn't to prophesy with her head uncovered; Acts 21:9 - Philip's daughters prophesied). The restriction is upon their doing it in the worship assembly.
 3. This is not the same word as in 1 Tim 2:11-12—“*Let the woman learn in silence, with all subjection. And I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority of the man, but to be in silence.*” This is **not** complete silence, but “quietness, stillness.” In the church in general (*not* limited to the worship assembly), the man has the authority, the woman isn't to teach or usurp that authority (but she's not restricted from speaking). This would apply to anything *other than* the worship assembly (e.g., Bible studies – a woman can speak, but can't teach men or in any other way usurp his authority).
 4. Paul's instructions here are **not** culturally limited (as many claim). Where does this passage limit itself in such a way? 11:3 says that the head of every woman is the man. And in 1 Tim 2:13, he appeals to Adam & Eve – God's original order.

III. FINAL COMMENTS (v. 36-40):

- A. PAUL'S AUTHORITY (v. 36-38)**
(v. 36) *What? Came the word of God out from you? Or came it to you only?* Paul is anticipating objections to his instructions in this chapter, so he states his authority! “You're not the sole source of revelation! **I'm** an apostle!”
(v. 37) *If any of you think you're a prophet, or spiritual, acknowledge that the things I write to you are the commandments of the Lord!*” One of the spiritual gifts was the discerning of the spirits (v. 12:10; 1 John 4:6 – discerning the spirit of truth and the spirit of error). So discern this! Verify publicly that what I've said is from God! And then obey it!
(v. 38) *But if any be ignorant, let him be ignorant.* If you refuse to acknowledge me and my words, so be it. But this doesn't change the truth of what I've just said.
- B. PAUL'S RECAP (v. 39-40)**
1. (v. 39) Recap of v. 1-25.
Wherefore brethren, covet to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues. So many pull this verse completely out of its context and try to show that these things are to be done today! Ch. 13 has already made it clear that spiritual gifts have ceased. And in the context, he's reminding them that **1)** prophecy was the higher priority in the assembly, but **2)** just because this is true doesn't mean you have to *forbid* speaking in tongues (it's okay, as long as there's an interpreter).
 2. (v. 40) Recap of v. 26-35.
Let all things be done decently (properly, becomingly – becoming Christians who want to edify one another) *and in order* (an arrangement, succession; orderly). We plan our Sunday morning worship ahead of time, with an “order of worship.” We don't just show up and claim that the HS is going to move us at any given time to do something! The HS has already told us the things we are to do (the 5 acts of worship in the NT), and these we prepare to do in advance, so that everything is orderly, and done decently (properly – attempting to edify all members as well as any visitors that might come in).

CONCLUSION: Ch. 13 teaches that all these spiritual gifts have ceased. But that doesn't mean we should discount this ch.14 as meaningless. Rather, it helps us to see how the church was to work together to **edify** one another. We too must make sure that what we're always striving to grow, and that our teaching uplifts, edifies, rebukes, admonishes, encourages, comforts, etc., depending on the needs of the congregation.