



AN IMPERFECT LOCAL CHURCH
A Study in 1 Corinthians
CLASS – Lesson 21

GENERAL OUTLINE

1 Corinthians 12:1-14:40, Unity and spiritual gifts

OUTLINE: Lesson 21

1 Corinthians 14:1-40, Gifts in the assembly (i.e., “in church”)

14:1-5 General statement: prophecy is preferred over “tongues”

14:6-19 Extended explanation of the limited usefulness of uninterpreted “tongues”

14:20-25 Tongues, prophecy, unbelievers, and believers

14:26-40 Specific guidelines for orderly church assemblies

In the latter half of chapter 14 Paul finally lands on the exact problem of the disorderly services of the Corinthian church, especially as it related to the use of spiritual gifts in the assemblies of the church. He had laid a solid foundation by explaining the way members of a body rely and depend on each other (chap. 12). The centrality of love in those relationships reinforced the foundation in chapter 13. The first half of chapter 14 deals with the general deficiencies of speaking in languages that aren’t understood by the hearers. 1 Corinthians 14:20-40 makes specific application of these principles to the gatherings of the congregation.

More than any other passage in the New Testament, verses 26-40 give a brief, but not exhaustive, glimpse of 1st century church assemblies. This section reveals some activities of their gatherings; it also calls for some level of organization and decorum for those meetings. Simply stated, spirit-filled exuberance should not overshadow edification. Paul’s instructions, which to some extent are direct restrictions on behavior, assume a specific setting that the Corinthians would recognize as being “in church,” and sets the purpose for those gatherings.

DISCUSSION

1 Corinthians 14:20-25, Tongues, prophecy, unbelievers, and believers

The quotation from Isaiah 28:11, 12 is a statement of Isaiah highlighting the disobedience of Israel and a warning to Judah not to repeat the same mistakes. Because they refused to listen to their own prophets, God would subject them to peoples of other “tongues and lips,” referring to the Assyrians. And even then, they would not listen and repent. Paul makes a broad use of the quotation as an example of languages that people don’t understand and therefore can’t benefit from them.

- 1. At first reading this comment about the need for spiritual maturity (v. 20) might seem not to fit the context. What specifically might Paul mean by “mature” (NIV: adults) in the context of this discussion of how to use spiritual gifts?**

- 2. If uninterpreted “tongues” are forbidden “in church” (v. 28), and if unbelieving visitors would be mystified if this restriction were disregarded (v. 23), but yet tongues were intended primarily as a sign to unbelievers (v.22), what use then would there ever be for uninterpreted languages (tongues) other than for personal, private satisfaction (v. 4) (cf. Acts 2)?**

- 3. Does Paul restrict “speaking in tongues” in any setting other than “in church”?**

- 4. For whose benefit are the assemblies “when the whole church comes together”? How would a nonbeliever benefit from a prophecy that is intended primarily for believers? Compare this to our own services where the sermon is designed primarily for members, but visitors are welcome.**

1 Corinthians 14:26-40, Specific guidelines for orderly church assemblies

The Corinthian church services were exuberant and genuinely “spirit-filled,” but not edifying. The problem wasn’t with the nature of the gifts but the misuse of them. They were being used for a purpose that wasn’t the one which God intended. They were used for the selfish benefit of the users rather than for the benefit of the body as described in chapter 12.

- 5. Paul clearly identifies the setting for the following restrictions as “in church” (v. 28) or “whenever you come together” (vv. 23, 26) (cf. Lesson # 20). What is the purpose for these assemblies? He repeats that purpose several times in the chapter. What other terms does he use in the chapter to explain what the primary purpose includes?**

- 6. In this discussion of various church assembly elements in chap. 14, Paul is focused mostly on the various teaching formats (e.g., v. 26). What other assembly activity was introduced with the same “when you come together as a church” phrase in an earlier chapter?**

- 7. How many times does Paul mention “worship” as the purpose of church gatherings?**

- 8. Assuming that Ephesians 5:19-20 and Colossians 3:16 can be applied to the assembly, what are the purposes of our congregational singing? To whom do we sing?**

- 9. Paul limits the number of people who should be allowed to speak to the congregation. Was he concerned about services lasting too long, or something else? How might the thought of Philippians 2:3-4 relate to assemblies of the church?**

- 10. In the absence of an interpreter, what was the speaker of languages (tongues) to do? When a prophet had something to say and another prophet was already speaking, what was the first speaker to do? What, in this usage, did it mean to be silent? Could the “silent” person still join in congregational singing or say, “Amen,” out loud to what others said (v. 16)?**

- 11. Paul doesn’t spell out details such as how many songs and prayers to have in a service, or how long the sermon should be, but he does call for a level of orderliness that avoids confusion (vv. 33, 40). What principles run throughout this whole section (chapters 12-14) that the practices of the Corinthian church were violating (cf. 14:4-12)?**

- 12. As we noted in question 10, in the absence of an interpreter the speaker of languages was to “keep silent” (v. 28). The prophet was also to “be silent” (v. 30), yielding the floor to another. The same word for silent (Greek, *sigao*) is used in reference to the women “in the churches” (v. 34). Could the women sing or say, “Amen,” to a prayer or a speaker?**
- 13. What additional statements does Paul make other than “keep silent” to clarify and emphasize the silence of the women?**
- 14. Many churches have decided to disregard Paul’s instruction that the women are to keep silent in church. If Paul didn’t want the women to address the congregation “in church,” how could he have said it more clearly than he did?**
- 15. How does Paul respond to potential objections by someone who claimed to be speaking as moved by the Holy Spirit, and therefore thought he could override Paul’s instructions?**