BUILT DIFFERENT

LESSON FIFTEEN

COMMENTARY

COMMENTARY NOTES

1 CORINTHIANS 14:1–25

Thomas Schreiner, in the *Tyndale New Testament Commentary*, explains Paul's understanding of tongues and prophecy in the church:

1. The discussion on love (12:31b–13:13) orients the readers so that they comprehend what it truly means to be spiritual. The Corinthians may be dazzled by the gifts, but what is most important is love; hence they should 'pursue' (*diokete*, CSB) love. The NIV's *follow* does not catch the ardour and strength of the verb 'pursue'. The priority of love, however, does not mean that spiritual gifts are unimportant. The verb *eagerly desire* (*zeloute*) is picked up from 12:31 where believers are exhorted to 'eagerly desire the greater gifts'. Here Paul says that the gifts of the Spirit are to be greatly desired. While they long for spiritual gifts in their midst, love should always reign supreme. If the Corinthians truly desire spiritual gifts, they should especially seek the gift of prophecy, since, as Paul will explain, prophecy edifies the congregation.

2. Paul explains why prophecy is superior to tongues. When a person speaks in a tongue, that person speaks *to God* rather than to other people. *No one understands* what is being said, for by the Spirit the tongue-speaker utters *mysteries* that cannot be comprehended. Many interpreters believe that this verse supports the idea that tongues are ecstatic utterances, since the gift seems to be different from the gift of languages described in Acts (Acts 2:4, 11; 10:46; 19:6). In Acts 2 the people understand what is being said, but here they fail to comprehend the words of the tongue-speaker. In Acts the tongues are addressed to people, but in 1 Corinthians they speak to God. The arguments are not decisive, and human languages are likely in view. First, as noted earlier, the word *glossai* refers to human languages, not ecstatic utterances. Second, the differences can be accounted for by the different contexts. In verse 2 Paul reflects on *uninterpreted* tongues. If a tongue is not interpreted, the tongue is not addressed to people but to God alone, since he is the only one who can grasp the meaning of what is being said. Paul is not necessarily saying here that tongues are restricted to prayer; his point is that the tongue is addressed to God in the sense that no-one else is able to understand what is being said. The reason why no-one understands is because the tongue is not interpreted; thus the lack of understanding does not point to ecstatic utterances. The same can be said about the reference to *mysteries*. The term *mysteries* does not denote ecstatic utterances; the words are mysterious and hidden because they are spoken in a language the congregation does not understand.

3. Prophecy takes precedence over tongues because of its comprehensibility, since the words spoken are not shrouded in mystery. Since believers can understand what is said, they are strengthened, encouraged and comforted by prophecy. *Strengthening, encouraging and comfort* are not restricted to the gift of prophecy alone. These qualities would almost certainly be true of other gifts, such as teaching or helps. The purpose in context is to say that prophecy brings such benefits since it is comprehensible.

4–5. Tongues were probably sought after by the Corinthians because the gift was exciting, but prophecy is to be preferred since tongues which are uninterpreted edify only oneself. Prophecy, by way of contrast, *edifies the church*. Love reflects on what strengthens and encourages others instead of focusing on its own needs. The contrast between tongues and prophecy seems to denigrate tongues; thus Paul attempts to remove any misunderstanding by remarking that he wishes all spoke in tongues. Paul believes that the gift of tongues is a blessing and a benefit. On the other hand, the Pauline desire for all to speak in tongues must not be taken out of context, for he does not expect that all *will* or *should* speak in tongues (12:30). The Pauline wish is rhetorical and should not be pressed, just as Paul's wish that all were single should not be pushed too far (1 Cor. 7:7).

It would be a good thing if all spoke in tongues, but prophecy is preferred. Paul could scarcely make it clearer: *the one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues*. The word *greater* does not mean that the one who prophesies is *essentially* greater. It clearly means *functionally* greater, in the sense that the one who prophesies builds up and strengthens the church more than

does the one who speaks in tongues. The last clause in the verse verifies this interpretation: *so that the church may be edified*. If the language is interpreted, however, then tongues are as edifying as prophecy, for in that case the church is strengthened because through the interpretation it understands what is being said.

6. Paul embarks on a long discussion in which he explains that comprehensible speech edifies more than uninterpreted languages. Paul imagines a scenario where he visits the Corinthians and speaks in tongues; it would be no *good* or 'benefit' (CSB) without comprehensible speech. It would be far better if he brought a *revelation* or *prophecy*. The words revelation and prophecy refer to the same entity, confirming that prophecies were received by way of revelation and disclosure instead of through study of preserved tradition. Revelation, then, is given to people through prophecy. Similarly, the words knowledge and 'teaching' (CSB) both refer to the gift of teaching, knowledge being the result or consequence of teaching. The chart below shows how Paul alternates between the two gifts.

Revelation A	Knowledge B
Prophecy A1	Teaching B1

We have further evidence here that the gift of knowledge described in 12:8 is another way of speaking of the gift of teaching. Both prophecy and teaching are more helpful than tongues because believers are able to understand what is being communicated.

7–9. Paul reaches for illustrations from elsewhere to communicate his point. Sounds exist in the world of music as well, but the same principle of intelligibility follows. If someone plays *the pipe or harp*, he or she must play the right notes—distinct notes—or the hearers will have no idea *what tune is being played*. The music will not be recognized and appreciated if there is a cacophony of sound without rhyme or reason.

Another illustration is given in verse 8. One function of a bugler is to sound the trumpet to alert the citizens and army to prepare for war (Num. 10:9; cf. Jer. 4:19; Joel 2:1). But if the bugler does not *sound a clear call*—if the sound is muted—the people will not be ready for war. In verse 9 Paul applies the illustrations to speaking in tongues. If someone speaks in a language but the words are not comprehensible, the hearers will have no idea what the content of the speech is. The person might as well *be speaking into the air* since no-one understands what is being said. The person speaking in tongues might be thrilled with the gift, but the issue is whether the church is helped and encouraged; and without an interpretation the gift is quite useless.

10–12. Next the discussion turns to languages. Paul remarks on the variety of languages in the world and how each language has *meaning*. Languages are given to communicate intelligibly with others. But if one person does not understand the language another is using, conversation and understanding will be impossible between the two people; they will be foreigners to one another. Once again, in verse 12, Paul applies the illustration to tongues and to all spiritual gifts. The zeal of the Corinthians for spiritual gifts is commendable, but they could easily fall into the error of using their gifts for their own pleasure. The purpose of the gifts, however, is to 'seek' (*zeteite*) them for the 'building up [of] the church' (CSB). Love, as 1 Corinthians 13:5 says, 'does not seek [*zetei*] its own' (NKJV). The church will flourish and prosper when gifts are sought for the sake of others.

13–15. Since edification comes through understanding, those who have the gift of tongues should pray for the ability to interpret so that the church is edified. When a person prays in a tongue, that person's *spirit* is praying, which probably means that the human spirit prays by means of the Holy Spirit. We should not conclude from this verse that tongue-speaking is restricted to prayer. We have one example here of the nature of tongue-speaking, but there is no reason to think, as verse 15 shows, that it exhausts how the gift operates. In any case, if one prays in a tongue with the spirit, one should also pray for understanding since otherwise the *mind is unfruitful*. The ideal, then, is to pray with the spirit and also to pray for comprehension of the tongue. If one sings in a tongue with the

spirit—which shows that the gift of tongues can also be used in singing—one should pray that one will be enabled to understand what is sung. Paul does not denigrate the experience of prayer and singing when there is no understanding, when the tongues are uninterpreted. But when the church is gathered, the prayer in tongues or the song in tongues must be interpreted and understood. We see again the premium Paul puts on understanding, showing that edification comes through the mind, through understanding.

16–17. The phrase *praising God in the Spirit* could also be translated 'praise with the spirit' (CSB), and actually both may be correct. As noted above, the praise uttered by the human spirit may be inspired by the Holy Spirit. The believer speaking in tongues is filled with joy while praising God in tongues, but Paul continues to raise the question of how such praise benefits others. The question that must be asked is whether others are benefiting from the one praising in another language. In particular, Paul raises the issue of *an enquirer* (*idotes*). The identity of the *enquirer* is the subject of discussion. Some translations render the term here 'outsider' (ESV, NRSV, CSB). The net translates as a person 'without the gift'. The term 'outsider' could refer to an unbeliever, while the net translation seems to see the person as a believer. Probably the NIV rendering (*enquirer*) is best, and the enquirer represents a person who is interested in the Christian faith and is seeking to discern its truth. Paul is concerned about enquirers present when tongue-speaking without an interpretation takes place, because enquirers will not be able to discern what is going on. They can hardly say '*Amen*' to what the believer says since they have no idea what is being said. The person who is praising God in a tongue finds joy and satisfaction in the experience, but others are not *edified* (cf. Rom. 14:19).

18–19. The entire discussion could be wrongly interpreted as denigrating the gift of tongues, so Paul qualifies what he has said to avoid misunderstanding (cf. 14:5). He is thankful that he speaks in tongues more than any of the Corinthians. The purpose of the claim is not to boast but to assure the Corinthians that Paul values the gift of tongues. The main point of the entire section immediately follows, and it is made even more effectively having commended the gift of tongues: when the church is assembled Paul would rather speak even just *five intelligible words* than thousands of words in tongues. The purpose of speaking is to instruct others, not to display one's spiritual gift.

20. Verses 20–25 are some of the most difficult in the letter. Paul continues to argue that prophecy is superior to tongues, claiming that prophecy brings people to faith while tongues can turn unbelievers away. The details of the text, however, are quite controversial, though verse 20 itself is not difficult to grasp. Believers are summoned not to think like *children* but to think like *adults*. They are to be like *infants* in terms of their experience with *evil*, for experiencing evil does not grant wisdom but is foolish. Believers should also imitate children in that the latter are dependent and humble (Matt. 18:3; Ps. 131:2). At the same time, children are also unstable and easily deflected from the truth (Eph. 4:14); thus believers should grow in their understanding and maturity so that they are stable and reliable (cf. 1 Cor. 3:1–2). In particular, the Corinthians must grow in their understanding of spiritual gifts.

21. Paul challenges their understanding by quoting *the Law*. The *Law* in Paul usually refers to the Mosaic law, but here it refers to the Scriptures and not to the Pentateuch since Paul quotes Isaiah 28:11–12 (cf. John 10:34; 15:25). The citation from Isaiah is rather loose and not exact, though the important question for our purposes is how the words of Isaiah are applied to the Corinthians. Isaiah 28 is an oracle of judgment against Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel. The false prophets in Israel ridiculed Isaiah's words of judgment, mocking him by saying that his words were like nonsensical baby-talk. Isaiah countered by saying: when judgment comes it will be like baby-talk, for when judgment on Samaria arrives those 'with foreign lips and strange tongues … will speak to this people' (Isa. 28:11). Those with foreign lips and strange languages were the Assyrians, and Israel knew judgment had come when the Assyrians sacked Samaria and the nation was thrust into exile. Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled in 722 BC. God had promised rest and relief to his people if they would listen, but they refused to do so and experienced judgment (Isa. 28:12). Why does Paul select this text? Presumably because it recounts an instance when the people of Israel heard a foreign language that they did not understand. Hearing the language of the Assyrians was not an occasion of joy but an indication of God's judgment upon Israel.

COMMENTARY NOTES

22. The meaning of verse 22 is disputed, but the first clue is the conjunction *then* (*hoste*) which joins verse 22 with verse 21. What does Paul mean by saying that tongues *are a sign … for unbelievers*? Given the close connection (*then*) between verses 21 and 22, we should look to verse 21 for the answer. We see from verse 21 that the languages of the Assyrians indicated that Israel was under judgment since Israel was going into exile. Tongues, then, constitute a sign for unbelievers in that they signify God's judgment on those who disbelieve. Judgment, of course, is not the only function of tongues since interpreted tongues edify the church (14:5). Uninterpreted tongues, however, do not lead unbelievers to repentance and faith. Instead, as we shall see in verse 23, unbelievers reject the gospel when languages are spoken.

Prophecy, on the other hand, is *not for unbelievers but for believers*. Some interpreters suggest that the word *sign* carries over, but this is doubtful. Paul intentionally leaves out the word *sign* in the second half of the verse. It is puzzling that Paul says that prophecy is a sign for believers but then, in verses 24–25, relays an account of unbelievers coming to faith through prophecy. The illustration seems to contradict what Paul says here. J. B. Phillips' translation actually changes the text here, concluding that there was probably a scribal mistake:

> That means that tongues are a sign of God's power, not for those who are unbelievers, but to those who already believe. Preaching the word of God, on the other hand, is a sign of God's power to those who do not believe rather than to believers.

The suggestion is attractive in some ways but should be rejected, since there is no textual evidence of corruption and sense can be made of the text as it stands.

The notion that tongues are a sign of judgment fits with Isaiah 28:11–12. How do we explain prophecy being for believers when verses 24–25 recount how prophecy brings unbelievers to faith? The answer is that prophecy is for the sake of believers in more than one way. First, prophecy edifies believers in the assembly because it is understandable, and this has been Paul's point throughout the chapter. Second, the illustration in verses 24–25 shows that prophecy fosters belief, in that prophetic speech may convict unbelievers of their sins and bring them to faith. Speaking in tongues causes unbelievers to reject the faith and leads to judgment, but prophecy encourages believers in their faith or even brings unbelievers to conversion.

23. Paul explains further why tongues are a sign of judgment for unbelievers. If the entire church gathers together and *everyone speaks in tongues,* and *enquirers* or *unbelievers* visit, they will say that *you are out of your mind*. The enquirers, as noted at verse 16, represent interested visitors who are investigating whether the Christian faith is true. When enquirers and unbelievers visit the church and leave thinking that members of the church are raving fanatics, tongues have become a means of judgment since they drive the enquirers and unbelievers from the church. Nor is the church to be commended for affecting unbelievers and enquirers in such a way since, as verses 24–25 show, the church should not be an agent of judgment for outsiders but an agent of salvation. The church should not be alienating enquirers and unbelievers but attempting to win them to salvation (cf. 1 Cor. 9:19–22).

24–25. Now Paul envisions another situation when the church is gathered: enquirers and unbelievers may also visit when everyone in the church is prophesying. The prophetic words are clear and understandable, and those visiting recognize that they have been in the wrong (cf. John 16:8) since the secret things they have kept hidden are brought to light (Eph. 5:13). *By all* here refers to all the words spoken—not to all the people, as if every single person assesses the unbeliever who visits. Enquirers and unbelievers also recognize that they deserve judgment because on the last day God will judge 'people's secrets through Jesus Christ' (Rom. 2:16). They fall in worship and repentance, acknowledging that '*God is really among you*!' We have an allusion here to Isaiah 45:14 and probably Zechariah 8:23 as well. The context of both texts is significant. Isaiah 45 proclaims that Yahweh is the only God (Isa. 45:5–6). He has ordained that salvation will come, namely, return from exile through the pagan king Cyrus (45:8–13). When God does this great work in the second exodus, which is ultimately fulfilled in the saving work of Jesus Christ, even Gentiles will recognize that the Lord is

among Israel (45:14). Those who make idols will be ashamed (45:16), and all nations will be invited to turn to the Lord and be saved (45:21). Paul also alludes to this text in Philippians 2:9–11 where he affirms that every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord (Isa. 45:23–24). Zechariah 8 envisions a day when the Lord will restore Jerusalem and Judah. When this occurs, the nations and peoples will seek the Lord, for they will hear that the Lord is among the Jews (Zech. 8:20–23). For Paul, these words from Isaiah and Zechariah are being fulfilled in the salvation of the Gentiles through faith in Jesus Christ. The prophetic word is for believers, then, in that it brings people to faith and repentance.[1]

1 CORINTHIANS 14:26–33

Gordon Fee, In the *NICNT*, shows how Paul believes that tongues and prophecy should be ordered in worship:

26. The combination of the formula "What then is the upshot of all this?" and the vocative "brothers and sisters" signals a shift in the argument, but in this case one that seems intended to tie together several loose ends. The verb "you come together," spoken now in the second person plural (as in 11:18, 20, 33–34), picks up the preceding argument (vv. 23–25). The first sentence, which offers a description of what should be happening646 at their gatherings, echoes his earlier concerns (chap. 12) that *each one* has opportunity to participate in the corporate ministry of the body. The second sentence, the exhortation that all of the various expressions of ministry described in the first sentence be for edification, echoes the basic concern of the preceding argument—as well as the interlude on the primacy of love (chap. 13). Thus these concluding guidelines bring both sections of the preceding argument into focus.

Like all the former lists in these chapters, this final one is *ad hoc*; it is intended neither to give the "order" of service nor to be exhaustive of what "each one has" to offer by way of ministry. Given the fact that neither prayer nor prophecy and "discernment" is listed (but cf. 11:4–5), yet in the following sentences the latter two are "regulated," this list in particular seems capable of yielding to an et al. at the end. Each of these items has appeared in the previous discussion; most likely they represent various *types* of verbal manifestations of the Spirit that should occur in their assembly. Since the latter three are Spirit-inspired utterances, and are therefore spontaneous, it is probable that the first two are to be understood in that way as well, although one cannot be certain.

Regarding the "hymn," see the discussion above (v. 15); very likely this word stands for "prayer" as well, although the interpreted tongue could also fit that category. For "word of instruction" and "revelation" see above (v. 6). As suggested there, the latter could very easily be a cover word for all other forms of intelligible inspired speech, including the "prophecies" that come next (vv. 29–32), especially since in that passage (v. 30) the verb "revealed" occurs in the context of prophecy and discernment. For "tongue" and "interpretation" see the earlier discussion (12:10). On the "charismatic" nature of this worship, see above (v. 23). What is striking in this entire discussion is the absence of any mention of leadership or of anyone who would be responsible for seeing that these guidelines were generally adhered to. The community appears to be left to itself and the Holy Spirit. What is mandatory is that everything aim at edification.

27 Having commanded that "all things (i.e., the various ministries in the preceding list) be done for the edification of the church," Paul proceeds to show how this may be accomplished for speaking in tongues and prophecy, the two gifts that have been at the forefront of the preceding discussion. He begins with the problem child, "tongues." Three guidelines are given.

[1] Thomas R. Schreiner, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, ed. Eckhard J. Schnabel, vol. 7, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 2018), 285–293.

First, "two—or at the most three—should speak." One cannot be sure whether this means "at any one gathering" or "before there is an interpretation." In favor of the former is the phrase "at the most," plus the overall concern of the chapter that "tongues" not dominate the assembly; therefore in this guideline Paul is suggesting that such manifestations be limited in any given meeting. In favor of the latter is the similar recommendation for prophecies in what follows (vv. 29–32), which on the basis of what is said later (v. 31) is intended to limit the number of speakers in sequence, not the number of prophecies at any given gathering for worship. On the whole, this is not easy to decide, but probably the word "at the most," which is missing in the guidelines for prophecies, tips the balance in favor of the former.

Second, "and one at a time."656 Two observations are in order. (a) There seems to be no good reason for such a word unless it is intended to be corrective. Along with what has preceded (v. 23), the implication is that the Corinthians were doing otherwise. Not only did they have a singular passion for this gift, but apparently they had allowed it to dominate their gatherings in a way that reflected pagan ecstasy far more than the gospel of Christ. (b) This guideline at the same time clearly removes "tongues" from all forms of pagan ecstasy, as far as Paul's understanding is concerned. The admonition to come (v. 31), to take turns, as it were, is probably intended as much for this gift as for prophecy. Whatever else, Christian inspiration, including both tongues and prophecy, is not "out of control." The Spirit does not "possess" or "overpower" the speaker; rather the Spirit is subject to the prophet or tongues-speaker, in the sense that what the Spirit has to say will be said in an orderly and intelligible way. It is indeed the Spirit who speaks, but what is spoken comes through the controlled instrumentality of the believer's own mind and tongue. In this regard it is no different from the inspired utterances of the OT prophets, which were spoken at the appropriate times and settings.

Third, "and someone must interpret." This simply repeats what has already been said twice earlier (vv. 5 and 13), except that in those two passages it is assumed that the tongues-speaker will also receive the interpretation; whereas here and in what has preceded (12:10) and follows (vv. 28–30), it is assumed that the interpretation will be given to someone else. What cannot be decided is whether "someone" is to interpret after each utterance in tongues658 or whether both of the first guidelines are also intended to limit the number of expressions in tongues before there is an interpretation. Probably the latter, but there is no way for the later reader to have certainty. This guideline receives further qualification in the sentence that follows.

28 This qualification serves to underscore what has been said throughout the preceding argument for intelligibility in the assembly (vv. 1–25). First, "If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the assembly." This puts into the form of a regulation what was said in different ways earlier (vv. 5, 6–13, and 14–19). It also accounts for the conclusion (v. 13) of the presenting discussion (vv. 6–12) that urges the tongues-speaker to pray that they might also interpret. If they have not themselves experienced the gift of interpretation, and if no one is present who is known to have this gift, then they are to remain silent.

But as before, Paul does not forbid the gift itself. Repeating the ideas given at the outset (vv. 2 and 4), he admonishes that the tongues-speaker "speak to oneself and to God." Speaking "to oneself" stands in contrast to "in the assembly" in the preceding instruction (v. 27), meaning that they should pray "to God" in this way in private.

Apart from the final concluding admonition (v. 39), this is the final word about tongues in this argument. Paul has been consistent throughout. It is the language of prayer and praise, directed toward God, but because it is unintelligible and therefore cannot edify, it should remain in the setting of personal prayer and devotion. Only when someone known to be gifted with interpretation is present may it be exercised in the assembly.

29 Paul now turns to give similar guidelines for the exercise of the gift of prophecy. Because of the similarities with what was said about tongues, some have suggested that there were difficulties with this gift in Corinth as well. More likely, however, he advances these guidelines because this is the Spirit gifting he has been arguing for throughout vis-à-vis tongues; since he has just "regulated" their gift,

he goes on to do the same for the one he has been plumping for in its place. Hence the similarities.

He begins with the same ordering as above (v. 27): "Two or three prophets should speak." This does not mean that in any given gathering there must be a limit of two or three prophecies. Even though that is commonly suggested, it lies quite beyond Paul's concern663 and makes little sense at all of what was said above ("when you come together and *all* prophesy" [v. 24]), nor of the later concern (v. 31) that *all* have opportunity to participate. Rather, it means that there should be no more than three at a time before "the others weigh carefully what is said." This latter item is the verb for "distinguishing between spirits" used earlier (12:10, q.v.). As noted there, this is probably to be understood as a form of "testing the S/spirits," but not so much in the sense of whether "the prophet" is speaking by a foreign spirit but whether the prophecy itself truly conforms to the Spirit of God, who is also indwelling the other believers. Other than what was said before (12:3), no criterion is here given as to what goes into the "discerning" process,666 although in a later letter (Rom. 12:6) we are told that prophecies are to be "according to the analogy of faith," which probably means "that which is compatible with their believing in Christ." Nor is there any suggestion as to how it proceeds. At best one can argue that prophecies did not have independent authority in the church, but must always be the province of the corporate body, who in the Spirit were to determine the sense or perhaps viability of what had been said.

Some have argued, on the basis of an earlier moment (12:28), that "prophets" refers to the special group of authoritative persons in the community who have been given this gift. "The others"669 in this case would mean "the other prophets," so that the whole text is intended to regulate the activities of the prophets, vis-à-vis regulating "prophecies" per se. But nearly everything else in the argument stands over against such a view. (a) The argument from the outset (v. 1) has been in the second plural, addressing the entire community. He urges all of them "eagerly [to] desire gifts of the Spirit, especially that *you* prophesy," without a hint that this gift is limited to the "prophets." (b) So with the rest of the argument; for example, later (v. 12) he exhorts, "Since you are eager for gifts of the Spirit [referring to their collective enthusiasm for tongues], try to excel in those that build up the church [meaning esp. the gift of prophecy]." (c) The evidence in the preceding paragraph (v. 24), even though hypothetical, is especially telling. As before (v. 23), Paul implies a situation that could conceivably occur, namely that "all prophesy," so that the unbeliever is convicted by *all* and judged by *all*. (d) So also in the coming final sentence (v. 31) he urges orderliness, "for you may *all* prophesy in turn so that *all* may learn and *all* be encouraged/exhorted." It is completely gratuitous to suggest that the first "all" means "all the prophets" while the next two refer to the whole community.

This does not mean, of course, that all *will* or *do* prophesy. It is simply to note that Paul's concern here is not with a group of prophets, but with the functioning of prophecy in the assembly. The noun "prophets," therefore, is to be understood as functional language, similar to the use of "interpreter" above (v. 28), and means, as at the beginning (v. 3), "the one who is prophesying." Although he uses a noun in this case, which he does not do with "the one who speaks in a tongue," the structure of the two sentences (vv. 27 and 29) calls for a similar understanding in both cases and does not imply that he is now speaking about a special group of persons.

30–31 These two sentences offer a further guideline for the prophetic gift, so that everything will be "done in a fitting and orderly way" (v. 40). The requirement seems to be aimed at those who might tend to dominate the meeting, although that is not certain. In any case, Paul presupposes that while one is speaking, "a revelation [may come] to someone who is sitting down."674 The use of the verb "reveal" in this context suggests that for Paul this was the essential character of what was spoken in a prophecy (see on vv. 6, 24–25, and 26). When this happens then "the first speaker," meaning the one already speaking, "should stop." The grounds for such a regulation will be given next (v. 32); neither the tongues-speaker *nor* the prophet is out of control.

The "for" that begins the second sentence (v. 31) may be either explanatory, offering an elucidation of what has just been said, or causal, giving its reason. In either case, Paul now offers a justification for the preceding regulation: "you can all prophesy in turn." As noted above, (1) "all" does not mean

that everyone has this gift; the implication is that it is potentially available to everyone; and (2) this language makes almost no sense at all if he is referring to what should take place over several different meetings; the concern throughout, beginning with the verb "you assemble" (v. 26), is with what takes place in any given gathering.

The appeal is both to self-control and to deference. It is difficult to imagine two people prophesying simultaneously. But since they apparently were doing so with tongues, this at least anticipates their also doing so with prophecy—as well perhaps as keeping it in the category of "controlled" speech in contrast to pagan varieties.

The reason for such orderliness is given in a final purpose clause. Paul is emphatic: "*All* may prophesy, so that *all* may be instructed and *all* may be encouraged." As earlier (chap. 12), and again in the instruction with which this paragraph began (v. 26), this reflects a concern for edification in which everyone contributes. Since the whole of the divine revelation is not given to just one or a few—or in simply one kind of manifestation—the concern is that all, including those who speak prophetically, should learn from and be encouraged or exhorted by what the Spirit has given to others. The result of such orderliness, therefore, is that the opening exhortation is fulfilled, that "everything be done for the edification of the church" (v. 26).

32 With this crucial sentence Paul offers his justification for the preceding regulations of the activities of both speaking in tongues and prophesying. Along with its theological basis given in the next sentence (v. 33), these two sentences bring this section to a fitting conclusion. With these words Paul lifts Christian "inspired speech" out of the category of "ecstasy" as such and offers it as a radically different thing from the mania of the pagan cults. There is no seizure here, no loss of control; the speaker is neither frenzied nor a babbler. If tongues is not intelligible, it is nonetheless inspired utterance and completely under the control of the speaker. So too with prophecy.

As noted earlier, the phrase "spirits of prophets" means "the prophetic Spirit" by which each of them speaks through their own spirit.682 Paul's point is that the utterances are subject to the speakers in terms of timing; the content is understood to be the product of the divine Spirit who inspires such utterances. Thus he justifies their speaking one at a time, being silent with regard to tongues when no interpreter is present, and ceasing for the sake of another when a prophetic revelation is given to someone else. All of this is possible because "the spirits of prophets are subject to the control of [the] prophets."

33 To conclude Paul adds a significant theological justification for the foregoing guidelines. Everything has to do with the character of God and what God has already established to be true of divine activity in the rest of the churches. First, "for God is not a God of disorder684 but of peace." This sentence, along with the final appeal (v. 40), seems to corroborate the suggestion made above (v. 23) that the Corinthian assembly had become unruly in its expression of tongues. Now Paul is arguing that the basis of all these instructions is ultimately theological. It has to do with the character of God, probably vis-à-vis the deities of the cults, whose worship was characterized by frenzy and disorder. The theological point is crucial: the character of one's deity is reflected in the character of one's worship. The Corinthians must therefore cease worship that reflects the pagan deities more than the God whom they have come to know through the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. 12:2–3). God is neither characterized by disorder nor the cause of it in the assembly.

The interesting opposite of "disorder," however, is not quietness or propriety, or even "order," but "peace." Minimally this refers to the sense of harmony that will obtain in a Christian assembly when everyone is truly in the Spirit and the aim of everything is the edification of the whole (v. 26). It is tempting once again, as in an earlier moment (7:15, q.v.), to see here a reflection of Paul's Jewish background, in which God's people are called to live, in this case worship, "for the sake of peace," that is, in such a way as to win the favor of others.

COMMENTARY NOTES

Second, what is true of God in terms of Christian worship is so "in all the congregations of the Lord's people." Because of some apparent awkwardness in speaking of God in this way, the original NIV followed a number of scholars and English translations, including the editors of the most commonly used Greek text (NA), who preferred to take this final phrase as introducing what follows (vv. 34–35). But there are several considerable reasons for taking it as the concluding word to these instructions on "order."

(a) As will be noted later, there is substantial evidence that these clearly intruding, and thoroughly un-Pauline, sentences (vv. 34–35) are not authentic, and therefore that Paul could not have intended it to go with what he did not write. Furthermore, the very early textual evidence in the Western church indicates that this phrase was not considered to be part of those sentences.

(b) The two rhetorical questions that follow (v. 36), both of which begin with "or," make best sense when understood as referring directly to this statement. That is, "All the churches of the saints are intended to be orderly as we have just described, *or* did the word of God originate with you?" This seems to be the proper understanding of the rhetoric to come (v. 36), even if the intruding sentences were authentic, which seems altogether unlikely. (c) To take this phrase with the intruding text creates an even clumsier sentence: "As in all the churches of the Lord's people the women should remain silent in the churches." That is a redundancy that is both nearly intolerable and altogether unlike Paul—so much so that even the NIV tries to alleviate it with a different translation for the two clauses. (d) This is now the fourth appeal of this kind in the letter (see 4:17; 7:17; 11:16); in each of the earlier instances the appeal *concludes* its sentence, and in two cases (4:17; 11:16) it functions as an addendum just as it does here. (e) Finally, and most important, this concern that they be like the other churches is more fitting at the conclusion of the major concern of this argument, as in two major earlier passages (chaps. 1–4 and 11:2–16), than with something that, even if it were authentic, would in the present argument be merely an aside at best.

Thus, this final appeal continues the theological word with which the sentence began. God is not only like this, but things have been so ordered that God's own character is to be appropriately displayed in worship in all the churches. This particular appeal, which in this letter began with the opening words of salutation (see 1:2), is an indication to the Corinthians that their view of tongues and Spirit gifting that has allowed this kind of disorderly conduct is out of keeping with what God is doing elsewhere through the gospel. They are marching to their own drum; Paul is urging them not only to conform to the character of God, but also to get in step with the rest of God's people, the church.

By and large the history of the church points to the fact that in worship we do not greatly trust the diversity of the body. Edification must always be the rule, and that carries with it orderliness so that all may learn and all be encouraged. But it is no great credit to the historical church that in opting for "order" it also opted for a silencing of the ministry of the many. That, it would seem, is at least the minimal point of the paragraph.

The most important word in this paragraph is the final one. Some Pentecostal and charismatic assemblies would do well to heed these directives; confusion and disorder is simply not in keeping with the character of God. On the other hand, what is said at the outset (v. 26) makes it clear that the "peace" and "order" at the end (v. 33) do not necessarily mean somber ritual, as though God were really something of a "stuffed shirt." If our understanding of God's character is revealed in our worship, then it must be admitted that in the contemporary church God is not often thought of in terms of allowing spontaneity or of joy.[2]

[2] Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians,* ed. Ned B. Stonehouse et al., Revised Edition, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 764–774.

COMMENTARY NOTES

1 CORINTHIANS 14:34–40

In the *Cornerstone Bible Commentary*, William Baker explains what Paul means by limiting the participation of women in the worship service, as well as Pauls' concluding thoughts:

In 14:33b–35, Paul limits the participation of women in the public assemblies. This comes as a surprise, since this had not even been hinted at as any part of his concern so far. He had not qualified any of the spiritual gifts by gender, nor had he mentioned women at all since advocating they cover their head when they pray and prophesy in the assemblies (in 11:2–16). It must be assumed that in Paul's mind, his distress over the chaotic conditions of the Corinthians' gatherings went back to that point. So he was now resurrecting a piece of unfinished business on the matter of women. The formal connection to that section was his appeal at the conclusion of 11:16 and again here at the opening of 14:33 to universal practice in the churches. This connection would suggest that his underlying reasoning continued to be based upon the concern not to undermine the created differences between men and women, as well as to look to social norms of the day as the parameters of how to maintain this observance.

Women are the third category of persons who need to learn to discipline their speech in the assembly. All three (tongue-speakers, prophets, and women) are instructed with the same word, "be silent" (*sigao* [4601, 4967]). All three must have been talking too much. Paul also reused the word "submissive" (*hupotassomai* [5293A, 5718]), first urging prophets to submit their spirits to their minds to stop speaking (14:32), then to women to submit to their husbands to stop speaking (14:34). Paul believed his goal of bringing the Corinthians' chaotic worship into order could be accomplished by limiting the formal participation of all three categories of people.

Paul's appeals to the women concurred with what was publicly acceptable behavior for married women both in Greek and Jewish culture. Cato, a Roman senator, asked a woman, "Could you not have asked your husband the same thing at home?" (Livy *History of Rome* 34:2.9). Plutarch urged a woman not to speak in public except through her husband (*Moralia* 142D). Philo wrote, "The husband seems competent to transmit knowledge of the law to his wife" (*Hypothetica* 8.7.14). Josephus wrote, "The woman, says the Law, is in all things inferior to the man. Let her accordingly be submissive" (*Against Apion* 2.201).

However much Paul's teaching coincided with these representative thoughts, Paul believed his support for women submitting to their husbands comes from the Old Testament. Though he did not say specifically what in the Old Testament verifies this position, suggestions include Genesis 3:16 (Mare 1976:276) or Numbers 12:1–15 (Liefield 1986:149–150). Even though Genesis 3:16 may be in view in 1 Timothy 2:14 (in reference to Eve's being deceived), it is less likely to be so here (Bruce 1971:136; Fee 1987:707; Garland 2003:672; Soards 1999:306; Thiselton 2000:1155) since the verse involves a prediction but not a law. It is more likely that Paul was thinking of the same creation passages of Genesis 1:26–27 and 2:21–23 that informed his discussion of head coverings in 11:2–16 (Blomberg 1994:282; Bruce 1971:136; Garland 2003:672; Oster 1995:341).

It is a mistake to read Paul's instruction for women to be silent in any fashion that expands beyond the type of situation he was concerned about in Corinth. He was not calling on all women everywhere not to talk or women to always defer to men in conversation. He defined the parameters of his concern very narrowly in 14:35 when he refers to asking questions. It would appear that while tongues-speakers were talking too much (without interpreters) and prophetic speeches were going on too long, the women were extending the questioning period too long, maybe even dominating the questioning. Paul acknowledges that asking questions is one of the best ways to learn, but he can also see that there was enough of a breach of public decorum occurring that this was another practical way to regain order.

Given that Paul presumes his own discussion regarding head coverings in 11:2–16 in the discussion of order here, it cannot be concluded that somehow Paul has countermanded his own teaching. Rather,

in his limiting women speaking in the assembly in 14:33b–36, women who are prophesying or praying or singing or exercising any other spiritual gift among the assembled believers must be expected to continue doing so. All of that activity must be bracketed out from his concern over the problems with women that had arisen during the investigative period following prophetic words. Very similar to his advice to tongue-speakers who cannot present an interpretation, he invites the women to voice all the questions they have to their husbands outside of the public forum. Though Paul did not address women who are not married, his concern would be the same: that they find ways to learn at home, outside the public evaluation of the speakers.

The explanation just provided for resolving the difficulty between Paul's advocating women praying and prophesying in 11:2–16 and then preventing their speaking in 14:33b–35 is an increasingly well-endorsed position (Bruce 1971:175; Garland 2003:664–672; Thiselton 2000:1150–1162; Witherington 1995:287). However, at least two other approaches are current. The most prominent of these, though losing its earlier luster, suggests that 14:34–35 is an interpolation, or teaching interjected in the passage by someone other than Paul (Barrett 1968:330–333; Conzelmann 1975:246; Fee 1987:699–708; Hays 1997:247; Horsley 1998:188; Lockwood 1996:36–37). The common suggestion is that this was an insertion by someone else, perhaps influenced by what Paul says in 1 Timothy 2:11–15, who wrote something in the margin at some stage that was brought over in the passage. The major basis for this view is that some Greek manuscripts place these verses after 14:40. However, as discussed in the note on 14:34–35 (see above), every known manuscript includes these verses. In addition to the manuscript situation, some observe that the passage uses some unfamiliar Pauline language (Collins 1999:516), like his use of "law" as a general proof without a specific quotation (Hollander 1998:130). However, the counterargument is that plenty of words are carried over from the context, in addition to "be silent" and "be submissive," including "learn" (Gr., *mathein* [3129, 3443], translated "have … questions" in NLT; 4:6; 14:31), "their own husbands" (7:2), "shameful" (11:6), and even "the law says" (9:8). This more than suffices to consider the verses to have been original to the context.

An approach growing in prominence suggests that 14:33b–35 is not intended to be taken as Paul's own beliefs, but rather the views of some in Corinth with whom he disagrees. This type of person would be a theological conservative with the mind-set of the person who wrote 1 Timothy, presumed not to be Paul (Allison 1988:43–52; Arichea 1995:107–111; Collins 1999:514–517; Odell-Scott 1983:90–93; 1987:100–103; Vander Stichele 1995:246–248; Talbert 1987:92–93). When Paul blurts out, "Or do you think God's word originated with you?" (14:36), this is taken as a rebuttal of their view that endorses women to speak. The key to this argument is the particle (ē [2228, 2445]; NLT, "Or") indicating an exclamation, but this certainly is not a required understanding of this word, which normally means "or." Paul employs this technique of rebuttal elsewhere in 1 Corinthians, such as in 6:12; 7:1; 8:1, 4, 8; 11:2; 15:12.

That Paul occasionally employed this form of diatribe is not disputed. However, there are problems with claiming that this is another example of such use—namely, the so-called quote from those Paul opposed is (1) overly long, (2) not introduced in any formal way that would help readers recognize it as such, and (3) is not patterned like others found in 1 Corinthians (Garland 2003:667). In the end, without the apparent conflict with 11:2–16, nothing in this passage compels viewing it as an opponent's interjection (Jervis 1995:59). It seems far better to understand 14:33b–35 within the scope of 11:2–16.

Paul's limit on women speaking in the public assemblies of believers, then, must be said to be under the umbrella of advancing order in public worship. Being grounded on the wife's submission to her husband makes it no more a universal dictate for all churches for all time than a woman covering her head to pray and prophesy, as some contend (Maier 1991:91). Like 11:2–16, the concern is about honoring God's created distinction between genders by demonstrating a wife's respect for her husband publicly in conventional fashion (Isaak 1995:59–61). To do this in Paul's day, when participating in worship with other believers, she covered her head. Women in contemporary Western culture could show this respect in other ways.

COMMENTARY NOTES

Regarding women asking questions, the concern remains for wives to honor their husbands and God's created distinction. However, in Western culture, it would no longer dishonor her husband for a woman to ask a discerning question in a public setting or learn in a mixed classroom with her male and female peers. It certainly would not effect any concern about maintaining order. As with covering the head, though, Western culture should not be assumed to be the norm everywhere. Christians need to be sensitive to varying cultures around the globe regarding how women go about participating in public assemblies of Christians.

Paul's final approach to secure order in the Corinthian worship gatherings appeals to his own apostolic position (14:36–38). That he does this so rarely in his letters, including 1 Corinthians, evidences his deep concern about these matters. The hint of sarcasm in his two opening questions in 14:36 was his attempt to counter the arrogance displayed by some of the Corinthians who believed their gift of tongues set them higher than others.

Paul wanted to remind them who was speaking to them through this letter. It should not be forgotten that an apostle sits on top of the list of those with gifts to edify the body of Christ, most notably a rung above prophets (12:28–29). Fully confident that the Spirit would not be contradictory or add confusion, Paul invited those with special spiritual insight, even prophets in their midst, to consider his teaching and weigh its validity (14:37). He had no doubt that his instructions about the need for order, alongside the proper use of gifts, would align with what Christ himself desires. His challenge in 14:38 suggests that any prophet whose teaching contradicts his own on this matter must be a false prophet, who will be judged by Christ when he returns.

Though it may appear so, Paul was not being arrogant or simply authoritarian. He had, in fact, already done a large amount of teaching in the last four chapters to persuade the Corinthians about changes needed in their worship and exercise of gifts. This capstone appeal is based on his confidence about who he was in the exercise of his own call. True, Spirit-guided teaching simply would not undermine his own. Paul's position on this point also undergirds the deferential respect Paul's letters should be given in the church today.

Finally, in 14:39–40 Paul offers something of a postscript to everything he has said in chapters 12–14. He boiled down his corrections to two priorities: (1) prophecy over tongues speaking without devaluing tongues and (2) order and discretion in public gatherings without compromising spiritual vitality. Oddly, he did not mention the issue of women voicing their questions in this mix, which no doubt is why some manuscripts place 14:34–35 here after this summary. However, he probably considered this covered in the encouragement to do things "properly."[3]

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Mark A. Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, New American Commentary
Gordon Fee, *1 Corinthians*, New International Commentary of the New Testament (NICNT)
Anthony Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (NIGTC)
Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentary
Alan F. Johnson, *1 Corinthians*, IVP New Testament Commentary
David Prior, *The Message of 1 Corinthians*, The Bible Speaks Today
William Baker, *1 Corinthians*, Cornerstone Bible Commentary
Paul Ellingwroth and Howard A. Hatton, *A Handbook on 1 Corinthians*, UBSH

[3] William Baker, "1 Corinthians," in *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary: 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians*, vol. 15 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2009), 206–209.