

1 Corinthians 14

Introduction: Chuck Smith in his book *Charisma Versus Charismania* begins with the following story:

I spent much of my childhood and adolescent years trying to prove I was normal even though I didn't go to movies or dances. In the Pentecostal church I attended, movies and dancing were considered horrible sins.

Since I couldn't join my friends in their worldly activities, I asked them to attend church with me, for we were constantly being exhorted to witness for Christ by bringing friends to church. The problem was that almost every Sunday the pastor would warn of the evils of Hollywood, dancing, drinking, and smoking. He used to say, "If God wanted man to smoke, He would have put a chimney on top of his head." Besides this, the service was always interrupted by two or three "messages in tongues" and interpretations.

*Many times as I was seated with my unsaved friends that I had brought to church, Mrs. Newman would start breathing funny. I had learned that this was the prelude to her speaking in tongues, so I would quickly pray, "Oh, God, please don't speak in tongues today; my friends won't understand." Either God wasn't hearing me or Mrs. Newman wasn't listening to God, because she would stand up, shaking all over, and deliver God's message for the day in a loud, high-pitched voice. I would die inside as my friends giggled beside me. I hoped they weren't committing the unpardonable sin. (Chuck Smith, *Charisma versus Charismania*, download [entire book here](#).)*

The church in 1st Century Corinth bore some similarity to the church of Chuck Smith's 20th Century childhood. It seems some of things that made Chuck uneasy made the Apostle Paul uneasy too. Today's chapter deals with a church's prioritizing and use of the Holy Spirit's gifts.

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| I. | Prophecy is probably the gift most worth having. | 14:1-5 |
| II. | We should use our gifts in a way that builds up the church. | 14:6-19 |
| III. | We should use our gifts with wisdom to make them effective. | 14:20-25 |
| IV. | When we use our gifts publicly we need keep things in order. | 14:26-40 |

We should each use our spiritual gift(s) for the benefit of the church.

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| I. | Prophecy is probably the gift most worth having. | 14:1-5 |
| A. Tongues speaking in a language unknown to the person speaking. | | |
| i. In Acts 2, they were understood by the people who heard them. | | |
| ii. In Acts 10 & 19 people speak in tongues, but understanding is not mentioned. In Corinth it seems clear that no one ever knew what the tongues-speakers were saying. Thanks to these portions of Acts and 1 Corinthians, however, we see that it can plainly be a viable gift of the Holy Spirit. | | |
| B. Prophecy can be defined as "speaking for God under the inspiration of the Spirit, included foretelling the future, explaining difficult parts of Scripture, and teaching Christian belief and behavior." (New Commentary on the Whole Bible) | | |

- i. This is a ministry that goes back to the book of Genesis. Abraham is the first person to be called a prophet (Gen 20:7). It continues through the New Testament, though the role of the prophet changes over time. Moses epitomizes the OT prophet, though Samuel, David, Elijah, Elisha and others carried the title. All the OT books from Isaiah through Malachi are books of the “writing prophets”. Many more prophets appear under the Old Covenant.
- ii. In the NT, Acts mentions the following prophets: Agabus (11:27); the teachers in Antioch, including Barnabas and Saul (13:1); a false prophet named Bar-Jesus (13:6); Judas and Silas, who came from the church in Jerusalem (15:32) and the four virgin daughters of Philip the evangelist (21:9). Also pertinent, however, is that a dozen new believers in Ephesus began to prophesy when the Holy Spirit came upon them right after their baptism.

Acts 19:6 NKJV *And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied.*

- iii. So this is not a gift that can only be exercised by a select few. The present function of the prophet is summarized nicely in v.3, with the words “edification (*oikodomē*) and exhortation (*paraklēsis*) and comfort”, or as the NLT puts it:

First Corinthians 14:3 NLT *But one who prophesies strengthens others, encourages them, and comforts them.*

- iv. This can happen whenever the Scripture is taught and can also happen any time God speaks through one of us directly to the heart of another person. As Paul points out, this is a gift that he desired everyone to be able to use.
- v. I believe God can use a person to prophesy without the person actually knowing it. I say this for two reasons:
 1. Scripture: In John 11, the high priest Caiaphas seems to prophesy without even knowing what he is talking about, saying the Jesus would die on behalf of the whole nation. John, however, provides the commentary or explanation of what Caiaphas inadvertently said.
 2. Experience: It often happens to me, and to other pastors I know who do expository teaching, that God uses them to speak to people’s hearts about things that are very personal. This, to me, is one of the greatest advantages to teaching the Word. We’re just teaching the next chapter and doing the best to convey what God has said. Those who listen, however, sense that some portion of the message was directed specifically to them – either the topic as a whole, some verse, or even an almost random illustration.

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- II. We should use our gifts in a way that builds up the church. 14:6-19
- A. 14:12 The Corinthians were eager to exercise spiritual gifts. Paul encourages them in this, but to do so for the building up of the church. Our gifts, then, are not to draw attention to self, but to bring some benefit to others.
 - B. 14:13 The gift of tongues has a “partner gift” that can render it more beneficial to others, suitable to use in a small group or other more public setting.
 - C. 14:18 Never once in the Bible do we see Paul speaking in tongues. Here however, he acknowledges that he has the gift and exercises it often.
 - i. I once heard John Stott of All Souls Church in London, teaching on spiritual gifts. All Souls is an old school Anglican church and people would sometimes ask him if he had “charismatics” in the congregation. He replied, “Yes, we do, and we have the very best kind, because I’m not sure who they are.” His point was that though he encouraged people to go ahead and use these gifts, they did so in such a way as to be entirely unobtrusive. They were not in-your-face charismatics, or as Chuck Smith, whose story we mentioned earlier, called them “Charismaniacs”.

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- III. We should use our gifts with wisdom to make them effective. 14:20-25
- A. There is a bit of technical stuff we might talk about in this section, but I think it might just bore you. The main point is that, though each of us has some kind of gift, we need to use wisdom when exercising it. Again, think of Pastor Chuck’s story.
- IV. When we use our gifts publicly we need keep things in order. 14:26-40
- A. 14:26-33 Paul presents a good example of what a first century gathering of the church might have looked like in Corinth if they could have learned to keep things orderly. Maybe they eventually did. Two important verses:
 - i. 14:32 God places the exercise of spiritual gifts at the discretion of the believer. Therefore, we need to take responsibility for when and how we use the gifts that we have.
 - ii. 14:33 “God is not the author of confusion but of peace.” This is one way to tell when God is at work.

Jms 3:17 NKJV But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.

- B. 14:34-35 The Corinthian women must have been a truly disruptive bunch as Paul says more to them that I wish I could just omit than to any other church in the New Testament. This is made all the more difficult because in chapter 11 Paul talks about women praying and prophesying (i.e. “speaking”) and it seems to be OK.
- C. Nonetheless, there is that whole *submission* thing in v.34. “Submission” – the “S” word, we might call it – probably causes more tension than the four-letter “S” word would in the average church. Here’s something from Elisabeth Elliot:

Submission for the Lord’s sake does not amount to servility. It does not lead to self-destruction, the stifling of gifts, personhood, intelligence and spirit. If obedience itself requires a suicide of the personality (as one writer claims) we would have to conclude that obedience to Christ demands this. But the promises He’s given us hardly point to self-destruction: “I will give you rest.” “My peace I give unto you.” “I am come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.” “Whosoever believeth in me shall have everlasting life.” “Whoso drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst.” “Whoever loses his life for my sake shall preserve it.” “It is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” God is not asking anybody to become a zero. (Let Me Be A Woman, ©1976, p.133)

- D. Finally, let’s simply reread the last two verses – **14:39-40**

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Conclusions:

- God has given you one or more spiritual gifts.
- God wants you to use your spiritual gifts.
- Each person’s gift(s) will be different from everyone else’s.
- The purpose of these gifts is to benefit and build up the whole church.
- When all of use our gifts, and use them wisely, several things happen:
 - Each of us is fulfilled, because we are doing what God has designed us to do.
 - The whole church will benefit, because each part is functioning for the good of the whole body.
 - Unbelievers are blessed and suitably impressed, because the wisdom of God will be apparent for even them to see. It won’t be like Chuck Smith who was embarrassed to have his friends come to church. Rather it will be as in vv.24-25:

First Corinthians 14:24-25 NKJV ²⁴ ... he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all. ²⁵ And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you.