



1 Corinthians - Chapter Fourteen

V. 1 Corinthians 11:2-14:40 - Divisions over Corporate Worship (continues/concludes)

V.c 1 Corinthians 12:1-14:40 - Elevating one spiritual gift above others (continues/concludes)

Summary of Chapter Fourteen

Paul takes the theory of Chapter 12, seen in the light of Chapter 13, and applies it to the real problem, which is the tension between those who possess and practise different spiritual gifts. The contrast is between the person who builds up their private spirituality and the person who, in public worship, builds up the whole community.

Paul wants those in the church to exercise their gifts effectively and appropriately, giving thought to the effects on unbelievers that speaking in tongues may have if the message is not interpreted. He would rather have them prophesy than speak in tongues.

Ultimately, the purpose of having spiritual gifts is to build up the church and this can only be achieved if they are used appropriately and with discipline. It is all about making sure that public worship builds everybody up rather than simply everybody developing their own spiritual giftedness and displaying it like so many strutting peacocks.

V.c.iv 1 Corinthians 14:1-25 - Gifts of Prophecy and Tongues

Paul makes it clear that he welcomes the gift of tongues in the church, yet he values the gift of prophecy even more, for it not only builds up the church but has the power to bring unbelievers into a relationship with God as well.

Paul also makes it clear that, in the case of tongues being used to bring a message to build up the church, it has to be interpreted, otherwise it serves no purpose other than to the one who is speaking. Paul calls on such people to pray in the spirit and with their minds also, so as to ensure they are doing what is best for the church as a whole.

¹ Pursue love and strive for the spiritual gifts, and especially that you may prophesy.

1 Corinthians 14:1

Pursue love was the predominant theme in the previous chapter showing that Paul's thoughts are continuous in this letter and should not be segmented by the later additions of chapters and verses. Paul will restate this aspect of his teaching as he comes to the end of this flowing epistle: <<**Let all that you do be done in love**>> (1 Corinthians 16:14).

Strive for or earnestly desire. Even in the midst of some misuse of spiritual gifts, Paul does not want their use discontinued but calls believers to seek after them all the more, reflecting his conviction that these are given by God for the good of the church (v.12). Paul has already written: <<**But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way**>> (1 Corinthians 12:31).

That you may prophesy. As noted in 1 Corinthians 12:10, the word prophecy, Greek *prophēteia*, as used by Paul in 1 Corinthians, refers generally to speech that reports something that God spontaneously brings to mind or reveals to the speaker but which is spoken in merely human words, not words of God.

² For those who speak in a tongue do not speak to other people but to God; for nobody understands them, since they are speaking mysteries in the Spirit. ³ On the other hand, those who prophesy speak to other people for their building up and encouragement and consolation.

1 Corinthians 14:2-3

For those who speak in a tongue normally refers to those believers gifted to bring a word to the church: <<**And these signs will accompany those who believe: by using my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues**>> (Mark 16:17).

Do not speak to other people but to God indicates that Paul views tongues as a form of prayer and praise, but in a language that the speaker does not understand.

For nobody understands them implies that Paul expected tongues in Corinth in most cases to be unknown languages, unlike the evangelistic situation in Acts 2:1-13, when, on the Day of Pentecost, the apostles were enabled to speak in the languages of those listening to them.

For further comments on tongues and prophecy, refer again to the comments made on 1 Corinthians 12:10-11.

For their building up and encouragement and consolation. Paul gives similar advice to the church in Rome: <<**Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual edification**>> (Romans 14:19). This is a key component of the corporate gatherings of God's people.

⁴ Those who speak in a tongue build up themselves, but those who prophesy build up the church.

1 Corinthians 14:4

Those who speak in a tongue build up themselves because the person's spirit is praying to God even though he or she may not understand what is being said.

Those who prophesy build up the church, providing they heed Paul's other advice: <<*And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing*>> (1 Corinthians 13:2).

⁵ Now I would like all of you to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. One who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up.

1 Corinthians 14:5

I would like all of you to speak in tongues. Paul's desire to set boundaries on speaking in tongues does not mean that he thinks the Corinthians should abandon this gift. It builds up the individual who has it (v.4), and, if interpreted, builds up the church also.

Even more to prophesy. The value of the prophetic gift had been long established: <<*But Moses said to him, 'Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his spirit on them!'*>> (Numbers 11:29).

Still, prophecy is greater because, as intelligible speech that needs no interpretation, it is more directly useful to the church.

Unless someone interprets implies that, if there is an interpreter, then prophecy and tongues have equal value, since then they would both be understandable. But equal value does not imply that the gifts have the same function, for prophecy is often based on something that God suddenly brings to the mind of the speaker, although it can also include things that are carefully and prayerfully considered, and thus is communication from God to man (v.25 and v.30), as well as: <<*One of them named Agabus stood up and predicted by the Spirit that there would be a severe famine over all the world; and this took place during the reign of Claudius*>> (Acts 11:28), <<*We looked up the disciples and stayed there for seven days. Through the Spirit they told Paul not to go on to Jerusalem*>> (Acts 21:4), and: <<*While we were staying there for several days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judæa. He came to us and took Paul's belt, bound his own feet and hands with it, and said, 'Thus says the Holy Spirit, "This is the way the Jews in Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles"*>> (Acts 21:10-11), while tongues is ordinarily prayer or praise from man to God (v.2, vv.14-17 and v.28), which is confirmed in: <<*The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the*

Gentiles, for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God>> (Acts 10:45-46a).

Introduction to 1 Corinthians 14:6-19

Paul uses a variety of illustrations to teach that speaking in tongues without an interpretation does not edify others, indicating that edification comes through understanding.

⁶ Now, brothers and sisters, if I come to you speaking in tongues, how will I benefit you unless I speak to you in some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching? ⁷ It is the same way with lifeless instruments that produce sound, such as the flute or the harp. If they do not give distinct notes, how will anyone know what is being played? ⁸ And if the bugle gives an indistinct sound, who will get ready for battle? ⁹ So with yourselves; if in a tongue you utter speech that is not intelligible, how will anyone know what is being said? For you will be speaking into the air. ¹⁰ There are doubtless many different kinds of sounds in the world, and nothing is without sound. ¹¹ If then I do not know the meaning of a sound, I will be a foreigner to the speaker and the speaker a foreigner to me. ¹² So with yourselves; since you are eager for spiritual gifts, strive to excel in them for building up the church.

1 Corinthians 14:6-12

If I come to you speaking in tongues. Paul had the gift of tongues and was therefore not scorning this gift. In the same way he is not isolating a particular group in the church who have the gift also. His point is to ensure they use the gift for its intended purpose.

How will I benefit you? Paul recognised that it takes more than talk to build people up. Such people need to be gifted by God to undertake the ministry of raising up the people of God but so too the people need to have spiritual discernment to know who is authentic: **<<I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him>>** (Ephesians 1:17).

It is the same way with lifeless instruments. Musical instruments are meant to make sounds that are melodious and meaningful to the listener. If they just make disjointed sounds they make no sense to the listener and provide no pleasure. So it is with the one who speaks in an unintelligible tongue without interpretation. That is, the gift when it is used without love: **<<If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal>>** (1 Corinthians 13:1).

If the bugle gives an indistinct sound, who will get ready for battle? The rallying cry needs to be loud and clear; otherwise people will not even know they are being called into service: **<<When you go to war in your land against the adversary who oppresses you, you shall sound an alarm with the trumpets, so that you**

may be remembered before the Lord your God and be saved from your enemies>> (Numbers 10:9), and: *<<My anguish, my anguish! I writhe in pain! Oh, the walls of my heart! My heart is beating wildly; I cannot keep silent; for I hear the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war>>* (Jeremiah 4:19). The same applies to any speech within the church. It needs to be intelligible to be of benefit to anyone. Blowing the trumpet is supposed to make people get ready for their various military tasks; speaking in church is supposed to make people get ready to serve God in the world, whatever their calling may be.

I do not know the meaning of a sound. There was a time when God decided to thwart mankind's inappropriate intentions by confusing language: *<<Come, let us go down, and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another's speech>>* (Genesis 11:7). That is not and has never been his intention within his church, whose main function is to do the will of God.

¹³ Therefore, one who speaks in a tongue should pray for the power to interpret. ¹⁴ For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unproductive.

1 Corinthians 14:13-14

The comparison between my spirit and my mind shows that Paul is not speaking of the Holy Spirit but of his own human spirit. When Paul uses the term spirit of human beings, he means an inner, invisible faculty that can be especially attuned to the things of God. Refer to 1 Corinthians 2:10-15 and 5:3-5, as well as: *<<For God, whom I serve with my spirit by announcing the gospel of his Son, is my witness that without ceasing I remember you always in my prayers>>* (Romans 1:9), and: *<<it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God>>* (Romans 8:16).

Mind refers to the human faculty connected with intellectual understanding (v.19), and: *<<Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you should be in agreement and that there should be no divisions among you, but that you should be united in the same mind and the same purpose>>* (1 Corinthians 1:10). In the context of this passage, Paul is calling on believers to think about the effects of their prayers and speech in tongues on those who cannot comprehend what is being said.

In Jewish thinking, a human being is a rich, many-sided, complicated but integrated whole. Body, mind, heart, soul and spirit are not words to describe different parts that one could in principle separate out. They are words to describe the whole person seen from one angle. In particular, spirit describes the whole person at his or her deepest level of consciousness, which is in fact linked in a thousand ways to mind, heart and body. And mind describes the whole person as a thinking, reasoning being, which is again linked to everything else they are and do.

Elsewhere, Paul calls on believers to renew their minds with God's Spirit: *<<I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God*

– *what is good and acceptable and perfect*>> (Romans 12:1-2). Here, Paul applies this principle to their worship of God in the corporate gathering. They are not to get carried away with their spiritual worship by leaving their minds outside the church door!

There is a school of thought that prophecy has to be spontaneous to be authentic. However, the reality is that it can be just as real if it needs careful and prayerful consideration in order to work through a situation.

Paul is not trying to stifle the proper use of spiritual gifts. The underlying point is that Paul wants them to grow to maturity as whole human beings, using and celebrating to the full the various aspects of their created selves, made in God's image. One of the most basic laws of the spiritual life is that one becomes like what one worships; and if one is worshipping the true God, the creator of all things, the one in whose image the worshipper is made, then a believer should be developing as a wise, many-sided human being, not letting one aspect get out of proportion as though God were only interested in the 'spiritual' side, meaning by that not only the non-bodily but also the non-rational.

Of course, those who live in a world that has overemphasised the body, or the reasoning mind, may find that they need to redress the balance in other ways than the one Paul stresses here. But the point is this: especially in public worship, what matters is to bring mind, spirit and body together. When someone looks at a worshipping Christian, what they should see is a whole human being, with every aspect united in giving praise to God.

A scientific experiment carried out in the USA on speakers of tongues revealed that the part of the brain that was most active was not the area that is normally active when a person is speaking in their usual language.

¹⁵ What should I do then? I will pray with the spirit, but I will pray with the mind also; I will sing praise with the spirit, but I will sing praise with the mind also.

1 Corinthians 14:15

I will pray with the spirit, but I will pray with the mind also. The first part of this phrase most likely indicates praying in tongues led by the Holy Spirit: <<*Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words*>> (Romans 8:26). However, Paul recognises that people should also have the cognitive skills to be able to come to God with their own appropriate thoughtful requests.

I will sing praise. Song worship has always been a fundamental part of a relationship with God: <<*Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*>> (Ephesians 5:18-20).

¹⁶ Otherwise, if you say a blessing with the spirit, how can anyone in the position of an outsider say the 'Amen' to your thanksgiving, since the outsider does not know what you are saying? ¹⁷ For you may give thanks well enough, but the other person is not built up.

1 Corinthians 14:16-17

Blessing with the spirit, that is, with the human spirit only, in tongues, but not understanding with the mind, refer to the comments on v.2.

An outsider is an interested inquirer into Christianity. Uninterpreted tongues in the assembly do nothing to build this person up and therefore nothing to move him or her toward a full commitment to Christ. In fact, it could have given the impression that the church was no different to many of the other pagan cults that were in existence at that time.

How can anyone in the position of an outsider say the 'Amen' to your thanksgiving. It is fundamental that people in the corporate gathering can show their understanding and agreement with what is being said and done by those either in leadership or with other gifts to praise and thank God: <<***Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting.***>> *Then all the people said 'Amen!' and praised the Lord*>> (1 Chronicles 16:36), <<***Then Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God, and all the people answered, 'Amen, Amen', lifting up their hands. Then they bowed their heads and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground***>> (Nehemiah 8:6), <<***Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. And let all the people say, 'Amen.' Praise the Lord!***>> (Psalm 106:48), <<***And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshipped God, singing, 'Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and might be to our God for ever and ever! Amen'***>> (Revelation 7:11-12).

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 also, than ten thousand words in a tongue.

1 Corinthians 14:18-19

I would rather speak five words with my mind. As he did in v.6, Paul acknowledges that he has the gift of speaking in tongues and therefore his advice to use this gift appropriately was not given out of personal vanity or envy. He clearly wants the church to be effective in what they say, giving clear thought to the impact their words will have on others. King Solomon gave wise advice that would fit well with Paul's: <<***Never be rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be quick to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven, and you upon earth; therefore let your words be few***>> (Ecclesiastes 5:2).

²⁰ Brothers and sisters, do not be children in your thinking; rather, be infants in evil, but in thinking be adults.

1 Corinthians 14:20

Do not be children in your thinking. Although Paul had earlier written: <<*And so, brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but rather as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food. Even now you are still not ready, for you are still of the flesh. For as long as there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving according to human inclinations?*>> (1 Corinthians 3:1-3), Paul is going to tell them not to speak publically in tongues in church without interpretation, for that is acting like **children** and not caring for the needs of others. Paul clearly believes they have the capability for more if they accept his teaching. He provides similar advice on maturity in: <<*We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming*>> (Ephesians 4:14). God's people had received similar warnings in the past: <<*For my people are foolish, they do not know me; they are stupid children, they have no understanding. They are skilled in doing evil, but do not know how to do good*>> (Jeremiah 4:22). Paul does not want the Corinthians to be like their spiritual ancestors who had turned away from God through their own desires and misunderstandings.

Be infants in evil. Although Paul has been calling his readers to be adults, that is mature and rational, he also knows that nobody is diminished in their humanness by being ignorant, innocent or even naive when it comes to knowing all the things that the twisted human mind can devise. Another apostle was in full agreement: <<*Rid yourselves, therefore, of all malice, and all guile, insincerity, envy, and all slander. Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation – if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good*>> (1 Peter 2:1-3).

In thinking be adults. Those who possess spiritual gifts are to honour God and the church by using them appropriately and maturely.

²¹ In the law it is written,

‘By people of strange tongues
and by the lips of foreigners
I will speak to this people;
yet even then they will not listen to me,’
says the Lord.

1 Corinthians 14:21

Paul quotes from the Septuagint version of Isaiah 28:11-12, where God's word of judgment, a clear mark of his displeasure against rebellious Israel, is spoken in a foreign, unintelligible language by representatives of the invading Assyrian army. This had been prophesied in the time of Moses: <<*The Lord will bring a nation from far away, from the end of the earth, to swoop down on you like an eagle, a nation whose language you do not understand*>> (Deuteronomy 28:49). Both

the early warning and its enactment did not persuade Israel to turn back to God, but the very fact they were addressed in this way was a sign to them of just how far they have gone astray. This is Paul's warning to the church, then and now.

²² Tongues, then, are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers, while prophecy is not for unbelievers but for believers. ²³ If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your mind? ²⁴ But if all prophesy, an unbeliever or outsider who enters is reprovved by all and called to account by all. ²⁵ After the secrets of the unbeliever's heart are disclosed, that person will bow down before God and worship him, declaring, 'God is really among you.'

1 Corinthians 14:22-25

Tongues, then, are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers. The passage from Isaiah was used by Paul to make just this point. The use of such language will not make people turn to God. Therefore, speaking in tongues is not a positive sign that would lead people to faith. Jesus always used his spiritual gifts and powers to advance the Gospel: <<*Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him*>> (John 2:11), and: <<*Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name*>> (John 20:30-31). Instead, as in v.21, Paul sees that it could be perceived as a negative sign that facilitates God's judgment on the unbelieving.

Uninterpreted tongues function as a sign of judgment for the outsider and unbeliever because they may conclude from hearing them that Christians are out of their minds and so leave the church, never to return. Paul is not just concerned about the negative image this would portray of the church but with the eternal harm it would cause such individuals rejecting Jesus because of such an experience.

Prophecy is not for unbelievers but for believers. Although the purpose of prophecy is primarily for the benefit of believers, prophecy, unlike tongues, also has the secondary benefit of convicting the unbeliever, exposing or disclosing the secrets of his heart, and causing him to bow down before God and worship him. This, too, would be the fulfilment of prophecy, and Paul's conclusion God is really among you comes from: <<*Thus says the Lord: The wealth of Egypt and the merchandise of Ethiopia, and the Sabæans, tall of stature, shall come over to you and be yours, they shall follow you; they shall come over in chains and bow down to you. They will make supplication to you, saying, 'God is with you alone, and there is no other; there is no god besides him'*>> (Isaiah 45:14). Another prophet echoed this sentiment: <<*Thus says the Lord of hosts: In those days ten men from nations of every language shall take hold of a Jew, grasping his garment and saying, 'Let us go with you, for we have heard that*

God is with you'>> (Zechariah 8:23). Paul viewed these prophecies as being fulfilled during his lifetime.

Paul seems to be saying that prophecy - speaking God's word intelligibly, both under spontaneous prompting by the spirit and after mature and careful thought - is designed to further the work of bringing people to faith.

When believers see this happen, prophecy encourages them that God is at work, i.e. God is really among you, and thus it serves as a positive sign of God's blessing on the congregation. A sign in Scripture can be either positive or negative: <<*Thus I will make a distinction between my people and your people. This sign shall appear tomorrow*>> (Exodus 8:23), <<*Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Stretch out your hand over the land of Egypt, so that the locusts may come upon it and eat every plant in the land, all that the hail has left'*>> (Exodus 10:12), <<*Then he said to them, 'Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and plagues; and there will be dreadful portents and great signs from heaven*>> (Luke 21:10-11), and: <<*For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to win obedience from the Gentiles, by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and as far around as Illyricum I have fully proclaimed the good news of Christ*>> (Romans 15:18-19).

V.c.v 1 Corinthians 14:26-40 - Orderly Worship

Paul explains the need for discipline and good order in the corporate gatherings if they are to achieve the purpose of praising God, building up the church and encouraging any visitors to the congregation to engage in the worship.

²⁶ What should be done then, my friends? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up.

1 Corinthians 14:26

When you come together. This verse gives a fascinating glimpse into the kinds of activities that took place when the early church gathered as the body of Christ to worship the Lord. The worship included a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. In order to prevent discord and confusion (v.23 and v.33), Paul concludes his description of early church worship by emphasising that all of these activities must <<*be done decently and in order*>> (v.40).

The goal of building up is analogous to the building of the tabernacle: <<*And have them make me a sanctuary, so that I may dwell among them*>> (Exodus 25:8), the temple: <<*Thus says King Cyrus of Persia: The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem in Judah*>> (Ezra 1:2), and the church: <<*Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?*>> (1 Corinthians 3:16).

²⁷ If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn; and let one interpret.

1 Corinthians 14:27

Each in turn implies that speaking in tongues was not ecstatic speech, for the speakers were aware of what was happening in the meeting and could control themselves, taking turns in an ordered manner.

And let one interpret could include either the person speaking in tongues (v.13), or someone else. Others who perhaps have a further tongue or prophecy should wait for a period of time to allow for the interpretation of a previous message to be given to the church.

²⁸ But if there is no one to interpret, let them be silent in church and speak to themselves and to God.

1 Corinthians 14:28

If there is no one to interpret, let them be silent in church indicates that the spiritual gift should also enable the person to realise whether there would be an interpretation or not. If not, they should realise the message they have is not for the whole church to hear, at that moment at least.

And speak to themselves and to God means the speaker would use the gift of tongues privately in prayer, but not in public, since there was no interpreter.

²⁹ Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said.

1 Corinthians 14:29

Let two or three prophets speak. Paul is not trying to stifle the use of gifts. This restriction is intended for good order and assumes that such prophecies can wait until a future opportunity to be shared publically. Again, those gifted should be able to discern when it is appropriate. They should also seek the guidance of their local church leaders.

Let the others weigh what is said. The others means the whole church, not just those with gifts of prophecy or discernment, for there is no reason to think that those with the gift of prophecy would have better judgment than all the other Christians: <<***Do not despise the words of prophets, but test everything; hold fast to what is good***>> (1 Thessalonians 5:20-21), and: <<***Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. And this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming; and now it is already in the world***>> (1 John 4:1-3), where the whole church is similarly told to evaluate prophecies. Those who claimed to speak under the

Spirit's prompting could be mistaken, so it was important for the assembly to discern whether the prophecies were really from the Lord. Some understand this to imply that Paul did not think the prophecies at Corinth could include absolutely authoritative 'words of the Lord' in the manner of OT prophets, although there are others who disagree with this interpretation.

³⁰ If a revelation is made to someone else sitting nearby, let the first person be silent. ³¹ For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged.

1 Corinthians 14:30-31

You can all prophesy does not contradict Paul's statement that two or three should prophesy during a particular session. It does not mean that all who have a prophecy have to give it immediately.

One by one. These verses support Paul's overall theme that calls for good order during public worship and for spiritual discernment to rule over any personal desire to speak out loud.

³² And the spirits of prophets are subject to the prophets, ^{33a} for God is a God not of disorder but of peace.

1 Corinthians 14:32-33a

The spirits of prophets seems to refer to the various workings of the Holy Spirit within the prophets, whether that was someone like King David: <<***The spirit of the Lord speaks through me, his word is upon my tongue***>> (2 Samuel 23:2), someone in Corinth or someone with such a gift in the church today. The Holy Spirit will not force people to prophesy against their will.

God is a God not of disorder but of peace. Elsewhere Paul writes: <<***The God of peace be with all of you. Amen***>> (Romans 15:33). Here, he indicates how God expects his people to behave in their corporate gatherings, especially with regard to actions that could disrupt the meeting or prevent a genuine prophecy being delivered to the church by someone with their own agenda to speak.

^{33b} (As in all the churches of the saints, ³⁴ women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says. ³⁵ If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church. ³⁶ Or did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only ones it has reached?)

1 Corinthians 14:33b-36

Paul had once been feared by the saints, those who believe in God: <<***But Ananias answered, 'Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem'***>> (Acts 9:13).

As in all the churches of the saints is the beginning of the sentence in v.34, i.e. on how the Corinthians should act, rather than the end of the sentence in v.33, that is, on the character of God. Paul elsewhere tells the Corinthians to follow the patterns of behaviour that all the churches follow, refer to 1 Corinthians 4:17, 7:17, 11:16, and 16:1; the mention of churches means that Paul's statement is not limited to one local church situation. Remember, there were no verse numbers in Paul's letters; they were first added by an editor of a Greek NT in 1551.

Women should be silent in the churches. Since Paul seems to permit wives to pray and prophesy, as in 1 Corinthians 11:5 and 11:13, as long as they do not dishonour their husbands by the way they dress, also recorded in 11:5, it is difficult to see this as an absolute prohibition: <<*In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams*>> (Acts 2:17), and: <<*The next day we left and came to Caesarea; and we went into the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the seven, and stayed with him. He had four unmarried daughters who had the gift of prophecy*>> (Acts 21:8-9). Paul is likely forbidding women to speak up and discern prophecies, for this is the activity in the immediate context (v.29), since such an activity could subvert male headship.

The law also says. Paul is probably thinking of the woman's creation 'from' and 'for' the man, refer to 1 Corinthians 11:8-9 that is based Genesis 2:20-24, as well as a general pattern of male leadership among the people of Israel in the OT.

These words, if they are indeed the words of Paul and not a later addition made by a scribe, have been the subject of much debate within the church. The reasons why some people do not attribute these words to Paul are because they do not fit with what appears earlier in the chapter that indicates women should be as much a part of leading in worship, interpretation of tongues and discernment of prophecy. Additionally, in some ancient and reliable manuscripts the words appear at what is now the end of Chapter 14 in the form of an appendix. That is why they appear in parenthesis in this translation.

Let them ask their husbands at home. These words, if written by Paul, come from a time when worship services were segregated. This had been the case in synagogues and indeed some of the pagan worship from the region of Corinth. Some understand that in Corinth and in many other regions, the men would have used Greek in their services but the women would have held their services in a regional dialect, since many were not as well educated as the men. Now that there were joint services held in Greek, some of the women may not have understood what was being said and may have been calling across the dividing space to ask their husbands what was being said. Another view is that women may have been responding to something their own husband had spoken about in the meeting and this was leading to domestic disharmony spilling over into the public meeting. However, these views are only speculation. What is apparent is that Paul's understanding of the Gospel message was to include and not marginalise women in the church as some have interpreted this passage. Paul's overriding concern was for order, peace and mutual edification when the congregation comes together for worship; rather than for chaos, interruption and dissension.

³⁷ Anyone who claims to be a prophet, or to have spiritual powers, must acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord. ³⁸ Anyone who does not recognise this is not to be recognised.

1 Corinthians 14:37-38

A command of the Lord is a very strong affirmation of the absolute divine authority of Paul's writings. Paul seems to have been aware that when he wrote to the churches with his apostolic authority, his words had authority equal to the OT Scriptures: <<*for the scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain', and, 'The labourer deserves to be paid'*>> (1 Timothy 5:18), a view shared by Peter: <<*So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given to him, speaking of this as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures*>> (2 Peter 3:15-16).

Anyone who does not recognise this is not to be recognised. Those who belong to Jesus should discern the spirit of other believers and know they can hold to what they say as true. Paul was one who should certainly have been held in high regard since he was an apostle of Jesus: <<*Look at what is before your eyes. If you are confident that you belong to Christ, remind yourself of this, that just as you belong to Christ, so also do we*>> (2 Corinthians 10:7), acknowledged by John: <<*We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us, and whoever is not from God does not listen to us. From this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error*>> (1 John 4:6). Those who deny such authority should not be listened to in the church.

³⁹ So, my friends, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues; ⁴⁰ but all things should be done decently and in order.

1 Corinthians 14:39-40

All things should be done decently and in order. As he commonly does in this letter, Paul sums up a complex discussion by clearly stating his main point: <<*A wife is bound as long as her husband lives. But if the husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, only in the Lord. But in my judgement she is more blessed if she remains as she is. And I think that I too have the Spirit of God*>> (1 Corinthians 7:39-40), <<*So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God. Give no offence to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, so that they may be saved. Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ*>> (1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1), and: <<*So then, my brothers and sisters, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. If you are hungry, eat at home, so that when you come together, it will not be for your condemnation. About the other things I will give instructions when I come*>> (1 Corinthians 11:33-34).

Be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. Paul is calling, not for silence in the church but full participation. However, he wants services to be

ordered for it is not meant to be an opportunity for individuals to demonstrate their own gifts and monopolise the meeting. Those with spiritual gifts must use them to recognise when it is appropriate to speak aloud and when to remain silent. This is part of God's gift to them!