

Introduction

REVIEW:

1 Corinthians 12 → *Be clear! Use your mind! There's unity and diversity in the Body of Christ. Always think of ourselves as one body. Two errors to avoid: (i) I don't belong to the body (ii) I have no need of you.*

1 Corinthians 13 → *Love is supreme. Priority of love, characteristics of love and superiority of love.*

FIRST IMPRESSIONS: *After reading 1 Corinthians, it would appear that this chapter is about tongues versus prophecy. It appears that the Corinthian Christians misunderstand the purpose of tongues, leading to rather chaotic meetings.*

ELEMENTARY QUESTION: *WHAT'S THE GIFT OF TONGUES?*

- [a] **Acts 2:1-13** *This is the 1st occurrence of tongues in the New Testament. Verse 4 talks about 'speak with other tongues' while in verse 6, we read that the people 'heard them speak in their own language.'" What that language is, verses 7-11 make it clear. Hence, the tongues here are actual, known languages.*
- [b] **'Glossa' Acts 2:4,11** *used the word 'glossa'. It is the same word used in 1 Corinthians 14:2,4,5,6,9,13,14,18,19,22,23,26,27,39. Note that the word 'unknown' before the word 'tongue', if it is found in the English translation, is not in the Greek text.*
- [c] **1 Corinthians 14:13 - interpret/translate** *The meaning of 'disermeneuo' is translate. To translate means to turn from a foreign language into one's language.*
- [d] **1 Corinthians 14:10-11, 21-22** *V10-11 talk about actual languages while the other tongues/lips of v21-22 is a reference to the Assyrian language.*

Answer: *Hence, the gift of tongues is the ability to speak real, foreign languages, whereby the gospel is proclaimed in that language, and the speaker has no previous knowledge or training in that language.*

Verses 1-5

V1 ~~ (a) Pursue love *The word 'pursue' is dioko, which means to pursue/persecute; an action done with intensity and determination, like a hunter chasing after his prey. This is how we are to go after love!*

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(b) **Desire spiritual gifts** *The word 'desire' is 'zeloo'. It's basic meaning is to have warm feeling, to covet earnestly. Sometimes it is translated as 'envy' or 'jealous'. Read James 4:12 and Revelation 3:19 for two non-Pauline use of the word.*

(c) **Especially . . . prophesy** *To prophesy is to receive a message from God and then turn to convey it to the people, seeking to bring the message to bear on the hearers, for their understanding and growth.*

The overall message of this verse therefore is that we should go after love, and in doing so, in the areas of spiritual gifts, we will desire earnestly the gift of prophecy .

Why? V2-5

The key word is 'edify' – to build up. Motivated by love, we will want the best for others. Hence we will desire the gift of prophecy because prophecy will build up the church. Our yearning therefore must not be "what's best for me" but "what's best for the church", not "what will make me look good" but "what will be good for fellow believers".

Note the last phrase of verse 5 – that the church may receive edification.

Verses 6-12

Three analogies:

- (a) *Music or noise*
- (b) *Siren or noise*
- (c) *Reading Scripture in a foreign language*

When we don't understand what is spoken, we become frustrated, not edified. Failure to communicate alienates, creating fear and insecurity in the hearts of the hearers. If our aim is to edify, then we will seek to promote understanding.

Therefore, we should aim for what is said in verse 12!

Verses 13-19

¹³*Therefore let him who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret.*

¹⁴*For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful. ¹⁵What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding. ¹⁶Otherwise, if you bless with*

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the spirit, how will he who occupies the place of the uninformed say "Amen" at your giving of thanks, since he does not understand what you say?

¹⁷*For you indeed give thanks well, but the other is not edified.*

¹⁸*I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all; ¹⁹yet in the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that I may teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue.*

Overall concern: *To promote understanding on the part of the hearers. This is why Paul said in verse 19 that he would rather speak 5 words people can understand than 10,000 words in a language no one can.*

What's 'spirit' & what's 'understanding'? *It would appear that Paul is contrasting between speaking inside oneself and speaking that is fruitful, helping others understand.*

Verses 20-25

➔ **It's time to grow up! (V20)**

Children are attracted to movement, to noise, to anything exciting or unusual. But they are not given to think and ponder. Hence Paul calls them to start growing up, and not continue in a childish mentality.

➔ **Tongues a sign to unbelievers! (V21-23)**

To stretch their minds, Paul begins by quoting from Isaiah 28:11-12. There in Isaiah 28, the prophet Isaiah has been conveying God's message in a clear and simple way, but the Israelites rejected the message and even mocked the way it was conveyed. In judgment, God will send the Assyrians into their midst. For the Israelites to hear unknown, foreign languages being spoken in their midst, that is a sign of God's judgment/curse! This is the conclusion drawn by Paul in verse 22, where he says that if they have understood the flow of history, they would have known that tongues are a sign for unbelievers. When they don't understand the message, it is a judgment on them for rejecting the message given to them earlier in simple format/ Verse 23 carries this further, by applying it to the Corinthian situation. If everyone starts to speak in tongues in the church, local unbelievers coming in will not understand the Gospel. That is no blessing to them. In fact, they will be so offended by what they see and experience, thinking these Christians mad, they will turn their backs and walk off, never to return. How is this a blessing?

➔ **Prophecy for believers! (V24-25)**

Cf. v22b. Prophecy, on the other hand, conveys God's message in a language the people present can understand. This edifies the believers present, and this blessing even overflows to unbelievers who are present, where they may be convicted and be converted.

Hence, it is prophecy, not tongues, that can bring about edification to believers and conversion to unbelievers. Hence, prophecy is greater than tongues!

Verses 26-40

V26 ~ *How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.*

This could be a description of their public worship meeting then. The main point is that believers come eager to exercise their gifts, to the point that they seek to dominate the meeting where others cannot contribute. Paul's point is that the main concern ought not to be to take part, but to build up. All things done must be done with edification in view.

Flowing from that, Paul seeks to regulate the exercise of gifts by the Corinthians:

→ **Speaking in tongues? (V27-30)**

Only 2 or 3 may speak, each to take turns, and if there's no interpretation, then keep silent.

→ **Prophecy? (V31-33)**

Similarly only 2 or 3 may prophesy, each to take turns, doing it orderly, learning to give way to others, and subjecting their prophecy to be judged.

Remember: God is the God of peace.

→ **Ladies may join in? (V34-35)**

How do we understand 11:5? My understanding is that it is allowing ladies to prophesy and pray in public. What does it mean to keep silent? Cf. 14:28, 14:30. In 14:28, the tongue speaker is commanded to keep silent if there's no interpreter. This means he is not to speak in tongues, but he may still sing, pray and read the Scriptures. It is not an absolute silence, but silence concerning the subject in view. The same can be said about the prophet in 14:30. Hence, this silence for the ladies must be concerning the subject in view. What is the subject? I believe it concerns the judging of prophecy.

The law (Scripture) clearly teaches male headship in the church. As such, the office of pastor/elders may only be occupied by males. The leadership of the church has the role of judging the prophecy, if it indeed is consistent with the revealed word of God. Ladies are forbidden to do this task, because they are not allowed to be pastors/elders. To do this task is to usurp the authority of men in the church.

→ **You're so great? (V36-38)**

Paul is reminding them that they are not the only ones who know the Scripture. Hence they should be humble, and in fact, they should recognize what he says as from God.

→ **In conclusion . . . (V39-40)**

Paul underlines the importance of prophecy (because it edifies), though he does not downplay other gifts like tongues. Overall, the principle of verse 40 must be adhered.