**The Church at Corinth**

**A Church Facing Inner Problems – #37**

**How to Use Spiritual Gifts**

**1 Corinthians 14**

*Note: This will be our final session with George on 1 Corinthians! Our end-of-class carry-in dinner is Wednesday, Dec. 4, 2013, 6:30 p.m. in the E91 Community Room. Food sign-up sheets will be in class Nov. 20 or contact Pam Walters, 317-727-7917,* [*nana.10554@yahoo.com*](mailto:nana.10554@yahoo.com)*. (No class Nov. 27, Thanksgiving Eve).*

**PART I - Prophecy and Tongues (verses 1-25)**

**1 Corinthians 14**

***1*** *Pursue love, and strive earnestly for spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy.* ***2*** *For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to human beings, but to God, since no one comprehends, and he utters mysteries in spirit.* ***3*** *The one who prophesies, however, speaks to human beings for their edification, encouragement, and consolation.* ***4*** *The one who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but the one who prophesies edifies the church.* ***5*** *I should like everyone of you to speak in tongues, but even more so to prophesy. One who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may be edified.*

***6****. Now, brothers, if I come to you speaking in tongues, what good will I be to you if I do not speak to you with some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or instruction?*

***7*** *Similarly, if inanimate things that make sounds, such as a flute or a harp, do not emit their tones distinctly, how will what is being played with flute or harp be recognized?*

***8***  *In fact, if a trumpet gives an unclear sound, who will get ready for battle?* ***9*** *So with you too. Unless you utter intelligible speech with your tongue, how will the utterance be comprehended? For you will be speaking into the breeze.* ***10*** *For there are perhaps many different kinds of languages in the world, and none without meaning.* ***11*** *If then I do not understand the meaning of a utterance, I shall be a foreigner to the one who speaks, and the speaker a foreigner to me.* ***12*** *So too with you. Since you strive earnestly for spirits, seek to abound in them for the edification of the church.*

***13*** *For this reason, the one who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret (what he says).* ***14*** *[For] if I pray in a tongue, my spirit is praying, but my mind is unproductive.* ***15*** *So what is to be done? I shall pray with my spirit, but I shall also pray with my mind; I shall sing with my spirit, but I shall also sing with my mind.*

***16*** *Otherwise, if you bless [with] your spirit, how shall one who holds the place of an outsider say “Amen” to your thanksgiving, when he does not know what you are saying? 17 You are giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not edified.*

***18*** *I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you!* ***19*** *But in church I prefer to speak five words with my mind, so as to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue.*

***20*** *Brothers, stop being childish in your thinking; rather be infants in regard to wickedness, but in thinking be mature.* ***21*** *It stands written in the law:*

*“By people speaking strange tongues and by lips of foreigners*

*will I speak to this people, but even so they will not listen to me,”*

*says the Lord.*

***22*** *Consequently, tongues are meant to be a sign not for believers, but for unbelievers; prophecy, however, is not for unbelievers, but for believers.* ***23*** *If then the whole church meets in one place and everyone speaks in tongues and outsiders or unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind?* ***24*** *But if everyone prophesies and some unbeliever or outsider comes in, he will be convinced by all and called to account by all:* ***24*** *the secrets of his heart will be laid bare, and so, falling down, he will worship God and declare, “God is truly in your midst.”*

**Text Study – 1 Corinthians 14, The Spiritual Gift of Prophecy**

**VERSE 1 –** *Pursue love, and strive earnestly for spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy.*

Paul counsels, first of all, the pursuit of love. Although the verb *normally* means “pursue” in the sense of chasing after or pressing on toward a goal (as in Phil 2:14), it is often used in a figurative sense of striving for, aspiring to, as in (Rom 9:30–31; 12:13; 14:19). In 1 Thessalonians 5:20, Paul says, “*Do not despise prophecy*,” because as Spirit-inspired preaching, it builds up the Christian community. It is not different, it is from some OT instances of “prophecy” (cf. Num 11:24–29; 1 Sam 10:5–6).

**VERSE 2 –** *For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to human beings, but to God.* Such speech, which Paul admits can be “interpreted” or put into articulate human speech (see verses 5, 13), is not only addressed to God, being Spirit inspired, but now is said to be intelligible only to God. Whoever speaks, speaks not to other human beings and consoles only himself or herself, having admitted this to be speech addressed only to God. The phenomenon cannot mean speaking in foreign tongues that are undoubtedly the meaning of foreign tongues (as in Acts 2:4), it denotes here rather some sort of utterance beyond the patterns of normal human speech (see Note on 12:10).

*And he utters mysteries in Spirit.*

Here the word mystery means “what transcends normal human understanding.” Mysteries mean some sort of “revealed truths.” Paul reckons this gift as a higher one because it is used for the common good. He always gives the greater honor to those gifts that will be used for the benefit of everyone (ref. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians* 35.1). Such an utterance is some kind of private revelation others, because “no one hears” the utterance and comprehended.

**VERSE 3 –** *The one who prophesies, however, speaks to human beings for their edification, encouragement, and consolation.*

Here “edification” is the building up the Christian community (as in 1 Cor 8:1; 10:23; 14:4, 5, 12, 26; 2 Cor 5:1; 10:8; 12:19; 13:10; Rom 14:19; 15:2; 1 Thess 5:11). The important contrast is that speaking in tongues is addressed to God, but prophecy to the community. It is striking that the motivation for such is edification, encouragement (as in Rom 15:4-5), and consolation.

**VERSE 4 –** *The one who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but the one who prophesies edifies the church.*

Even though one speaks with a Spirit-inspired tongue, benefits only his or her life as individual. But Paul is seeking building up the church.

**VERSE 5 –** *I should like every one of you to speak in tongues, but even more so to prophesy.*

The gifts of the Spirit are here compared only for the building up.

*One who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues* *unless he interprets, so that the church may be edified.*

Paul allows that “interpretation” is the only way that speaking in tongues might build up the Christian community. He has already listed the “interpretation of tongues” as a *spiritual gift* (12:10, 30). He is merely stressing the need of the articulation of the utterance of the tongue speaker, if there is to be any benefit from it for the church.

**VERSE 6 –** *Now, brothers, if I come to you speaking in tongues, what good will I be to you, if I do not speak to you with some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or instruction?*

This statement has to be compared with what Paul said in 2:1-2 as the way he first evangelized Corinthians.

Paul’s first analogical comparison refers to his own ministry, but the “I” is really rhetorical, as in 13:1-3, 11, and 12b. He could just as well have said, “If someone comes …” Since “no one comprehends” what is spoken in tongues (14:2), Paul realizes that even he, with all his God-given apostolic authority and guidance, would be useless to the Christians of Corinth if he were to speak in tongues.

Clear, human words used in evangelization can be one of the four forms of “revelation,” or the disclosure of some heavenly or divine truth, as in 14:26 and Galatians 2:2. It is the higher form of knowledge, Spirit guided, like prophecy (12:8). Instruction, is another mode of teaching, which is in (Rom 6:17; 16:17).

**VERSE 7 –** *Similarly, if inanimate* (lifeless) *things that make sounds, such as a flute or a harp, do not emit their tones distinctly, how will what is being played with flute or harp be recognized?*

Paul uses analogical argument drawn from lifeless musical instruments. If their sounds cannot be heard properly and distinctly, they are “kakophonous” (Eng. - cacophonous) and convey no melody that a human being can appreciate. So it is with speaking in tongues. If lifeless musical instruments must have clarity of tone and distinctness to achieve their purpose, so must human speech.

Paul mentions two different well-known musical instruments: ***aulos****,* “flute,” which occurs only here and in the NT (LXX 1 Sam 10:5); and ***kithara****,* “harp, lyre,” (Rev 5:8; 14:2, LXX Gen 31:27). Both were common.

**VERSE 8 –** *In fact, if a trumpet gives an unclear sound, who will get ready for battle?*

A further example makes use of another musical instrument, the military trumpet or bugle and its distinctive sound as a signal for attack, halt, or retreat in a battle (see Exod 19:13; Num 10:9; 2 Sam 2:28; Zeph 1:16). This kind of question expects the answer, “No one.”

**VERSE 9 –** *So with you too. Unless you utter intelligible speech with your tongue, how will the utterance be comprehended?*

Paul applies examples of musical instruments to human speech. Unless speech passes on something intelligible, it does not achieve its purpose, and the utterance is incomprehensible.

*For you will be speaking into the breeze.*

Literally “into the air,” i.e., to the winds. Someone who is speaking in tongues would be speaking “to God,” as in prayer. The one uttering incomprehensible sounds would not be speaking “for God,” as in prophecy, but speaking only to “the air.”

**VERSE 10 –** *For there are perhaps many different kinds of languages in the world, and none without meaning.*

Literally “so many, if it might be, are the kinds of voices … and not one is voiceless.” Paul refers to the many different sounds that the human tongue was meant to make, as he refers to the diverse foreign “languages” that were spoken in his day. He calls them ***phonai*** (as in LXX 2 Macc 7:8, 21, 27; 4 Macc 12:7; 16:15), to distinguish them from ***glossai****,* which he has been using for glossolalia (speaking in tongues). None of these languages were without meaning to those who spoke them, even if they were incomprehensible to others present. There may be an allusion to Genesis 11:1, which (before the Tower of Babel) mentions ***phone mia****,* “one voice.”

John Chrysostom: “If speaking in tongues is useless, why was it given? It was given for the benefit of the person who has it. But if it is to help others also, then there must be some interpretation.” (*Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians* 35.4).

**VERSE 11** – *If then I do not understand the meaning of an utterance, I shall be a foreigner (barbarian) to the one who speaks, and the speaker a foreigner to me.*

Literally “I shall be a barbarian, and the speaker a barbarian in me,” This name “barbarian” *originally* referred to a non-Greek-speaking person. The Roman poet Ovid recorded a thought similar to that of Paul: ***Barbarus hic ego sum, quia non intelligor ulli****,* “Here I am a barbarian, because I am not understood by anyone” (*Tristia* 5.10.37). Publius Ovidius Naso (20 March 43 BC – AD 17/18), is known as Ovid in the [English](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_language)-speaking world. He was a [Roman poet](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augustan_literature_(ancient_Rome)) best known for the [*Metamorphoses*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metamorphoses), a 15-book continuous mythological narrative written in the [meter of epic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dactylic_hexameter), and for collections of love poetry in [elegiac couplets](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elegiac_couplet), especially the [*Amores*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amores_(Ovid)) ("Love Affairs") and [*Ars Amatoria*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ars_Amatoria) ("Art of Love"). His poetry was much imitated during [Late Antiquity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Late_Antiquity) and the [Middle Ages](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Middle_Ages), and greatly influenced [Western art](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_art) and [literature](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_literature). The *Metamorphoses* remains one of the most important sources of [classical mythology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classical_mythology).

**VERSE 12 –** *So too with you. Since you strive earnestly for spirits, seek to abound in them for the edification of the church.*

Paul uses a sharp description of the gifts, ***zelotai pneumaton****,* “strivers for spirits,” which NRSV, NIV render as “eager for spiritual gifts,” and RSV, ESV as “manifestations of the Spirit,” but NAB has “spirits.” Paul does not criticize the Corinthians’ pursuit of such gifts, but he recommends to them to pursue them and to and strive. To “seek to abound” It is clear that Paul is trying to reason with Corinthian Christians that they would make of the abundance of spiritual gifts received.

Ambrosiaster: “The soul is stirred and rejoices when it learns something more about the Scriptures. The more it tends in this direction, the more it abandons vices. It is for these reasons that Paul advises that one should make efforts to communicate clearly.” *Commentary on Paul’s Epistles.*

**VERSE 13 –** *For this reason, the one who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret (what he says).*

Paul’s immediate intention is to recommend that the gift of speaking in tongues always be accompanied by the gift of making such an utterance articulate (12:10), otherwise it has no value for the good of the community.

**VERSE 14 –** [*For] if I pray in a tongue, my spirit is praying, but my mind is unproductive.*

Literally “is fruitless.” The mind (***nous***) is the God-given intellect that human beings have by which they think and judge rationally about things perceived or experienced (Rom 7:23; 12:2). The distinction that Paul makes between *“spirit”* and *“mind”* is not easily understood at first. G Fee in his commentary (*1 Cor,* 670) thinks that “my spirit” as “my S/spirit,” because Paul’s phrase would then imply that the Holy Spirit could be *[both divine and]* “mine” in some way, as even CK Barrett eventually had to admit was problematic (Commentary on 1 *Cor,* 320). Collins rightly insists (*1 Cor,* 501) that Paul “pleads that the spirit and the mind work together.” It is far from certain that for Paul “the spirit is the faculty by which one is in communion with the God. The mind is an organ of thought that allows for ordinary communication among human beings” (ibid, 502). If that were true, how could Paul say in the next verse that he will “pray” and “sing with my mind.”

Origen: “If you have brought a word in praise of God, not new and fresh from the learning of the spirit, from the teaching of God’s grace, your mouth indeed offers “a sacrifice of praise,” but your mind is accused on account of the sterility of yesterday’s flesh. (Homilies on Leviticus 5)

**VERSE 15 –** *So what is to be done? I shall pray with my spirit, but I shall also pray with my mind.*

I.e., without speaking in tongues. To “pray with my spirit” might be a way of praying in tongues, but it cannot be restricted to that kind of prayer, because the human spirit can commune with God in other ways. Paul thus admits that such praying with one’s spirit has some value, but praying with one’s mind is far better and more important, because it makes use of the most important God-given faculty that a human being possesses. The future tense is meant logically, as in a conclusion that expresses the summation of his argument.

Augustine: “For he speaks thus, when that which is said is not understood, because it cannot even be uttered, unless the images of corporeal sounds precede the oral sounds by the thought of the spirit.” *On the Trinity 14.16*

*‘I shall sing with my spirit, but I shall also sing with my mind’.* I.e., sing psalms to God, in such wise that I shall build up the community. Paul again uses the future tense*,* often found in the Greek Psalter (Ps 7:17; 9:2; 138:1). This be a reference to the use of the OT Psalms (Cf. Rom 15:9; Eph 5:19).

**VERSE 16 –** *Otherwise, if you bless [with] your spirit how shall one who holds the place of an outsider say “Amen” to your thanksgiving, when he does not know what you are saying?*

Praying or praising God in a non-rational utterance of tongues, now said to be in spirit*,* the speaker will “know” or “understand” what is being said in tongues, will not help assembly to join and share worship. Adding “Amen” to a prayer of praise or a doxology is a good Jewish custom attested in the OT (LXX Neh 5:13; 8:6; 1 Chr 16:36) and was adopted in the Christian liturgy and is attested elsewhere in Pauline writings (Gal 1:5; Rom 1:25; 9:5; 11:36; 15:33; 16:24, 27).

The noun thanksgiving is *eucharistia* does not mean Eucharist here, but simply “thanksgiving,” a form of prayer that Paul does not distinguish from “blessing” (verse 16). In Hebrew thanks and blessing mean the same. To bless the food means to thank God for the food.

**VERSE 17 –** *You are giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not edified.*  What was said was not understood because it was an irrational and unintelligible utterance.

**VERSE –** *I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you!*

Paul now uses the personal “ I” and says that he enjoys the spiritual gift of speaking in tongues more frequently or more than the whole church.

**VERSE 19 –** *But in church I prefer to speak five words with my mind, so as to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue.*

To “instruct others” as a “teacher” in the church is more important than what Paul can enjoy for himself.

**VERSE 20 –** *Brothers, stop being childish in your thinking; rather be infants in regard to wickedness, but in thinking be mature.*

This is a great saying to any church for this verse introduces an OT passage that deals with those who speak in other tongues. Notice the antithetic parallelism in:

A. “stop being childish,”

B. “in thinking”

C. “but in wickedness”

D. “be infants.”

**VERSE 21** – *It stands written in the law: By people speaking strange tongues and by lips of foreigners / will I speak to this people, / but even so they will not listen to me,” says the Lord.*

This is a quotation form of Isaiah 28:11, 12d. The words of Isaiah say “this people” is unwilling to listen to those who so speak to them. The reason for the difference is that Paul’s ironic use of the words of Isaiah continues the latter idea in the following verse, because he is writing to those who are unwilling to listen to him.

**VERSE 22** – *Consequently, tongues are meant to be a sign not for believers, but for unbelievers.*

Paul’s concluding thesis now is: “speaking in tongues” is meant to be a “sign,” just as “prophecy” is. It is Paul himself who introduces“sign,” for it is a word not used in the quotation from Isaiah, in order to relate such speaking in tongues and prophecy to believers and unbelievers. (It is likeDeut 6:8; 11:18; Josh 4:6)

*Prophecy, however, is not for unbelievers, but for believers.*

The advantage of these two spiritual gifts is the preaching of the gospel. The “sign” for unbelievers is “speaking in tongues.” Therefore tongues are a sign not resulting in believers but in unbelievers. But prophecy is a sign, not resulting in unbelievers, but resulting in believers.

**VERSE 23 –** *If then the whole church meets in one place and everyone speaks in tongues and outsiders or unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind?* Literally, “that you are crazy?” Paul uses the strong verb ***mainomai****,* “be crazy, rave,” which often denoted in antiquity that someone was possessed by a *demon* (compare John 10:20). Paul stresses that the Corinthian Christians, who are making so much of such tongue utterances, should understand that they are giving a “sign” (verse 22) to unbelievers or outsiders. Hence such people might deride them as nuts. They would never think of becoming Christians.

**VERSE 24 –** *But if everyone prophesies and some unbeliever or outsider comes in, he will be convinced by all and called to account by all.*

The “sign” given by Spirit-inspired preaching will have a three-stage effect on the unbeliever or uninstructed person: conviction, scrutiny, and exposure of the heart. This is positive rather than being known as freaks.

**VERSE 25 –** *The secrets of his heart will be laid bare, and so, falling down, he will worship God, and declare.*

Literally, “falling on his face.” This recalls 1 Corinthians 4:5, where Paul speaks of the Lord exposing the hidden “motives of our hearts.” (Cf. 2 Cor 4:2; Rom 2:16). The “heart” is understood as the inner life of a human being (Rom 10:9-10: “*If you profess with your lips that ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you will be saved”*. Falling down or “falling on one’s face” is a LXX expression for homage (see Gen 17:3; Ruth 2:10).

*God is truly in your midst.*

Paul quotes a convert’s declaration from Isaiah 45:14, which in the LXX runs the words of record about what the nations (Egypt, Ethiopia, and Seba, which would bring their tribute to Israel) would finally admit about Israel and her God (Isa 43:3).

**PART II – The Order of Worship (verses 26-33)**

**1 Corinthians 14**

***26*** *So what is to be done, brothers? When you come to a meeting, everyone has a psalm, an instruction, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. All these things should be for edification.* ***27*** *If someone speaks in a tongue, it should be two, or at most three, but each in turn, and someone should give an interpretation.* ***28*** *But if there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep silent in church and speak only to himself and to God.*

***29*** *Two or three prophets should speak, and the rest should evaluate (what is said).* ***30*** *If something is revealed to another person sitting there, the first speaker should become silent.* ***31*** *For you are all able to prophesy one by one, in order that all may learn and all be encouraged.* ***32*** *.Indeed, spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets.* ***33*** *For God is not a God of disorder, but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.*

**Text Study – The Order of Worship (verses 26-33)**

**VERSE 26** – *So what is to be done, brothers?*

Literally, “what does it mean?” or “what is the discussion?”

*When you come to a meeting,*

Literally “when you come together,” i.e., in a liturgical that public worship or gathering. Paul makes use of the same verb that he has in (11:17, 18, 20, 33, 34), when dealing with abuses related to the Lord’s Supper.

*Everyone has a psalm, an instruction, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation.*

Paul describes prayer gathering and what individual Corinthian Christians might bring to it: one comes to sing a hymn of praise (as in the OT Psalter), another to teach some Christian truth, another to pass on some further understanding of God’s self-communication (recall verse 6), another to speak in tongues, and still another with the gift to recast such an utterance in articulate sounds.

**VERSE 26 (cont.) –** *All these things should be for edification.*

That is, for the building up and harmony of the community; “edification,” is the primary motivation. Paul formulates a community rule as he recommends again the same idea as in (14:3–5, 12, 17 (cf. 10:23) and the basic rule is, “All things should be done properly and in due order.”

**VERSE 27 –** *If someone speaks in a tongue, it should be two, or at most three, but each in turn.*

Having mentioned five different spiritual gifts, Paul begins with a regulation about the one that has been causing most of the trouble. He does not forbid it outright, but his all-important regulation is introduced: orderliness. The utterance may go on, but only under certain conditions: one at a time, and each one waits for his or her turn. Two equally important regulations are stated in the next verse, “*and someone should give an interpretation.”* Someone other than the speaker is to “interpret” the utterance.

**VERSE 28** – *But if there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep silent in church and speak only to himself and to God.*

Because no one in the congregation will understand the utterance being made silence and the privet talk “ to God”.

**VERSE 29 –** *Two or three prophets should speak.*

The same limited number should be applied even to those whom the Spirit moves to preach especially for the sake of good order and the building up of the Christian community.

*And the rest should evaluate (what is said).*

Literally, “let the others pass judgment on” what is being said by Christian prophets must be examined. Even those who exercise the ministry of *prophecy are* subject to the scrutiny of others in the Christian community (cf. 14:16). The “rest,” theoretically could mean other prophets in the community or just members of the community who have the gift of “the discernment of spirits” (1 Cor 12:10); hence “others” with this gift would be among those who can evaluate carefully prophetic preaching (see 1 Thess 5:20-21).

**VERSE 30** – *If something is revealed to another person sitting there.*

The verb meaning here is “revealed by God” (as in Rom 1:17; cf. Phil 3:15). Such a gift of God’s Spirit would be clearly more important even than the inspired preaching of the Christian prophet or speaker in tongues who may already be at the podium.

*… the first speaker should become silent”.*

To keep the order.

**VERSE 31** – *For you are all able to prophesy one by one, in order that all may learn and all be encouraged.*

Paul is encouraging all Corinthians to prophesy because prophecy is one of the endowments of the Spirit; “all” people may be possible recipients of such a gift, but it does not depend on their individual endeavors.

**VERSE 32** – *Indeed, spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets.*

In this proverb-like statement. Paul gives the basic remarks in vv. 29-31 and recognizes the difference between Christian prophets whose spirits enable them to speak in the name of God, and pagan sibyls or pythonesses, whose oracles were beyond all their control and whose utterances went on and on.

**VERSE 33** – *For God is not a God of disorder, but of peace.*

So Paul expresses the fundamental reason for the order that he has been advocating in verse 27. They cannot be dominated by ***akatastasia****,* “disorder” a term used of civil strife, but now applied to “the specific manifestation of Corinthian partisanship and divisiveness in the worship of the community

*“As in all the churches of the saints.”*

That is, the congregational meeting of Christians for worship.

**PART III – Women Speaking in the Church Assemblies (vv 34-36)**

**1 Corinthians 14**

***34*** *Women should remain silent in the churches. For they are not allowed to speak, but should be subordinate, even as the law says.* ***35*** *If they want to learn something, they should ask their own husbands at home. For it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in church.*

***36*** *What, did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only ones it has reached?*

**Was There a Problem with Women?**

1. After putting the life of the church back into order, Paul said that “all these things should be done for edification” (14:26). There seems to be a problem, otherwise why mention of “silence” in verses 28, 30, and to “learning” in verse 31?
2. The question of women speaking in church’s assembly seems to be not about women speaking but about “disorder” (verse 33). Obviously, it has nothing to do with“speaking in tongues.” These three verses seem to be a self-contained unit, but because they deal with women speaking in church gatherings, they have only a general connection with what precedes and follows.
3. These verses are, however, the subject of much controversy because of several difficulties that one encounters in this passage:

a. The verses interrupt the discussion about speaking in tongues and prophesying, to which Paul returns (verses 37-40).

b. If these verses mean the prohibition of women speaking in church, this seems to counter what Paul has already admitted in 11:5, where he spoke of a “woman who prays or prophesies” (in a common worship service), even though he criticized one who did so “with uncovered head.”

c. The allusion to “the law” in verse 34 is a most unusual way of arguing for Paul because the Law does not say anything about speaking in church’s assembly, so the Law reference must be about women trying to overcome or rule their husbands by the kind of gift they have received.

4. The same problem seems to have been also a struggle over the use of a gift. We can read that in 1 Timothy 2:11-12, “*Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness. I allow no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent*”). That is the same as above.

Two acceptable ways in which this passage has been interpreted:

1. Verses 34-36 are how the Paul reacts to the practice of some Corinthian Christian women who have been speaking and pressing for more leadership in the assemblies. Paul is trying to save the women from disgracing themselves. In this attitude, he would be assuming a position quite different from what he has written (Gal 3:28 where women and men are equal), because his concern now is to insure the inner stability and order of this church.

2. Verses 34-35 are considered to be a quotation of what some Corinthian Christian men have been maintaining against women who have been speaking out in Church assemblies. It has come to Paul’s attention, just as did the slogans quoted earlier in the letter (6:12, 13; 8:1, 4, 5; 10:23).

**‘Contentious People’**

Paul was not intending to set limits to a basic movement for emancipation, but rather to take the position that currently *certain* women, on the basis of their newfound freedom, have gone too far and have disrupted the church’s order. Paul was not anticipating a universal protest by women, but, as with 11:16, from “some contentious people” (men and women). Here, however, they should first subordinate themselves to the community assembly.

Much has be made of these controversial Pauline verses. It is well to repeat the comment of Calvin (cited by C K Barrett, Study of *1 Cor, page* 333):

“The discerning reader should come to the decision, that the things which Paul is dealing with here, are indifferent, neither good nor bad; and that they are forbidden because they work against seemliness and edification.”

**Text Study – Women Speaking in the Church Assemblies (verses 34-36)**

**VERSE 34 –** *Women should remain silent in the churches,*

Paul quotes the saying of some Corinthian men who undoubtedly might allow the women to join audibly in “Amen” to a prayer, as in the thanksgiving of (14:16)

*… for they are not allowed to speak.*

A form of the same verb“permit, allow,” is found in a parallel passage (1 Tim 2:12).

**VERSE 35 –** *If they want to learn something, they should ask their own husbands at home.*

Or “they should ask their own men in (the) house,” because “the phrase is appropriate not only for wives, since daughters, widows, and women slaves are just as subordinate to the man of the house” (A C Wire, *Corinthian Women Prophets, 2003,* 156). They might want to learn something about what has been revealed or taught or announced in prophecy (14:26).

*For it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in church.*

Or “to talk in the assembly.” Paul himself has already made a similar judgment of the woman who would pray or prophesy in a public worship service with an uncovered head, regarded there as the equivalent of a shaved head (1 Cor 11:6, Cf. Eph 5:12; Titus 1:11).

The disgrace would be seen not only from the viewpoint of Jewish custom or tradition, but from what ancient society in which the woman lived would normally think about her behavior. That judgment would be conditioned by contemporary customs and culture, well illustrated by the negative criticism of the public activity of women in Plutarch, *Coniugalia praecepta* 31 §142d; or Aristophanes’ comedy, *Ecclesiazusae,* in which the women of Athens take over the city’s *Ekklesia,* “(civil) assembly,” from the vacillating male members and adopt a form of socialism with common ownership of property and abolition of marriage (see further C K Barrett, *1 Cor, page* 331).

**VERSE 36** – *What, did the word of God originate with you?*

Or, “has the word of God come forth from you?” This verse, with its double question, formulates Paul’s reaction to the attitude of Corinthian Christian men quoted in the two preceding verses. Paul’s phrasemay be derived from LXX Jeremiah 1:2, but he is using it in the sense of the “gospel,” the Christian message (as in 1 Thess 2:13; 2 Cor 2:17; 4:2; Rom 9:6). Paul wants the Corinthian Christian men to realize that neither the gospel nor its implications for life have had a starting point among them, and so they are in no way a law unto themselves.

*Or are you the only ones it has reached?*

Or, “has it reached you alone.” Christian men of Roman Corinth were not the only ones evangelized.

**PART IV – Order in All Things (vv 37-40)**

**1 Corinthians 14**

**37** If anyone considers himself a prophet or a spiritual person, he should know well that what I am writing to you is a commandment of the Lord. **38** If anyone disregards it, he is disregarded.

**39** Consequently, [my] brothers, strive earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. **40** But all things should be done properly and in due order.

**Text Study – Order in All Things (verses 37-40)**

**VERSE 37 –** *If anyone considers himself a prophet or a spiritual person, he should know well that what I am writing to you is a commandment of the Lord.*

Or, “If anyone thinks,” and expresses an authoritative conclusion (cf. 3:18; 8:2; Gal 6:3; Phil 3:4) he must be in harmony with the “commandment of the Lord” in order to consider himself or herself a spokesperson for Godor a mature Christian spiritual ***pneumatikos***(as in 1 Cor 2:15), “subject to no one’s scrutiny”.

The verse stresses indirectly Paul’s apostleship: he cannot pass on a commandment of the Lord while being ignored.

**VERSE 38 –** *If anyone disregards it, he is disregarded.*

Paul’s similar statement in (1 Cor 3:17, “If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him.” The implication is that a person who disregards such a commandment is not really part of the community.

**VERSE 39 –** *Consequently, [my] brothers, strive earnestly to prophecy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues.*

So Paul concludes with “consequently,” and again addressing the Corinthian Christians as “brothers” (recall verses 6, 20, 26). The purpose of Paul is to discourage the practice of speaking with tongues and prophecies among Christians. He does not suggest that either are evil, he certainly directs his readers to seek other manifestations, and especially to seek gifts that will be helpful to build the church.

**VERSE 40 –** *But all things should be done properly and in due order.*

Harmony and order should reign in any assembly of God’s people, “so that you may command the respect of outsiders” (1 Thess 4:12).

***Pope’s Notes***

**Class Contacts**

George & May Bebawi Bob & Pam Walters

403 Shoemaker Dr. 7831 A Somerset Bay

Carmel, IN 46032 Indianapolis, IN 46240

317-818-1487 317-694-4141 / 317-727-7917

www.GeorgeBebawi.com [rlwcom@aol.com](mailto:rlwcom@aol.com) / [nana.10554@yahoo.com](mailto:nana.10554@yahoo.com)