

1. We are now finishing a four-chapter section on how we Christians are to conduct ourselves when we get together. In Chapter 14, we return to the topic of "spiritual gifts" that started in Chapter 12. Chapter 14 specifically focuses on the gift of "tongues" and the gift of "prophecy". Paul describes how the gift of "tongues" and the gift of "prophecy" are to be practiced when Christians get together for the purpose of worshiping God. Therefore my title for Chapter 14 is, "Understanding spiritual gifts in context of our conduct when we get together in church!"
 - a) In a sense that's a lofty title given the debate and confusion over the issue of spiritual gifts. Few Christian denominations and churches agree about the practice of say, the gift of tongues. Many churches argue the gift of tongues was strictly for the early church and what is practiced today is simply "gibberish" or "hypnotic spells". On the other extreme are some Pentecostal churches where they believe one is not truly saved unless one has the gift to speak in tongues. Some churches teach classes on how to speak in tongues as if we Christians have the power to tell the Holy Spirit what gift we can have!
 - b) Before I begin this lesson, understand that I am not going to end all of this debate. Part of the problem is churches misinterpret scripture and part of the problem is churches that ignore biblical scripture. What I hope to clear up in this lesson is the "latter", which is to address churches and groups that practice nonbiblical concepts. As to debatable issues, those will continue unless Jesus returns.
 - c) If you wish to write me to tell me my views on the spiritual gifts are wrong, please understand that I have read or listened to a half dozen commentaries directly on this chapter, from various viewpoints. They include some who believe they have the spiritual gift of tongues and/or prophecy and from others who don't believe for example, the gift of tongues is for today. Both sides make good biblical and historical arguments.
2. Probably the most important thing on this issue is that "Christian love" should be greater in priority than our opinions on the issue of tongues and prophecy. Those Christians we disagree with on this issue are still brothers and sisters in Christ and we will live with them forever! I've seen too many Christians put down other Christians because their view on this issue is significantly different, and don't see those people as fellow Christians but incorrectly as "people who need to change".
 - a) If you want an example on this, think of Paul's treatment of the Corinth church in this letter. Despite the fact he believed the gift of tongues was misused in the church, he never doubted their salvation or their trust in God. Further, Paul just finished a chapter long presentation on the importance of showing love prior to starting up a discussion of speaking in tongues in church settings. It was written in that order for a reason!
3. With all of that out of my system, ☺ it's time for me to define just what is the gift of tongues.
 - a) First of all, remember it is a spiritual gift given by God to believers.
 - b) The purpose of all spiritual gifts is help Christians grow in their faith.
 - c) The idea of "tongues" is that one is praising God and all of a sudden, a foreign language comes out of one's mouth. I've always argued that even though that language is unknown to the person speaking the language, it is a known language.
 - d) When people started speaking in tongues in Acts Chapter 2, other people watching and hearing recognized the languages. The speakers were just speaking in languages that were unknown to the speakers themselves. Others in the area (Jerusalem) knew the language and stated so. The apostles were accused of being drunk based on the combined sound of all those languages being spoken at the same time!
 - e) Now let me define what "tongues" are not: They are never used to just "communicate" with God or other people. The purpose of "tongues" is for praising God. It is one way communication between the person speaking to God.

- f) For example, if a preacher pauses in the middle of a sermon to say, "Wait a minute God, I didn't get that. Could you repeat that again?" That is not the gift of tongues. God is not communicating in "tongues" to that preacher. Tongues are only for praising God.
 - g) Based on listening to lectures by people who claim they have this gift, the best explanation is that they are praising God and the words our English (or whatever) language is inadequate to express our love and gratitude to God for our lives.
 - i) One cannot be trained to speak that way, nor is it a matter of just moving the physical tongue in the right way. It is simply a gift given by the Holy Spirit to some people.
 - h) Paul states very clearly in Chapter 14, Verse 18 that he personally had the gift of tongues. Yet, in all of Paul's letters and in the descriptions of Paul's life in the Book of Acts, there is no reference to Paul ever practicing this gift. Paul apparently kept this gift to himself and only brought it up here, as it is a point of discussion.
 - i) That fact alone describes a key point about the gift of tongues. It is designed for a believer to praise God. It is not for Christians to "show off" in front of a large group or to disrupt a church service.
 - i) Let me talk for a second about the "modern" movement of "tongues". For all intents and purposes, "tongues" was a dead issue from about the 2nd Century until the 19th Century. There is little recorded evidence of people speaking in tongues during this time. That is why many good bible scholars argue that this gift was only for the early church.
 - i) A "revival" of tongues started in a small church meeting in downtown Los Angeles about one hundred years ago. Several Pentecostal denominations came out of that initial revival. There was then a "backlash" by denominations that don't believe this gift still applies today. That debate has now been going on for quite literally one hundred years.
 - ii) My personal view (wrong as it may be) is that the modern revival of tongues is "legitimate" and has fueled a modern (last century) growth in Christianity. Do I believe the gift is abused? Definitely and I'll discuss that in this lesson! Do I believe some people are under "hypnotic trances" and are not participating in the spiritual gifts of tongues as God intended it to be? Definitely. More importantly, are there churches that are clearly violating God's "rules" about the practice of tongues as laid out in the bible? Yes. I'll bring those up as well.
 - j) The other spiritual gift that is discussed in this chapter is the gift of prophecy.
 - i) Let's define "prophecy" again at this point. It is a special gift to interpret God's word and state predictions about the world around us, or predictions about the future based on what God's word says. It does include making personal predictions, but that is a subset of what "prophecy" is. The main idea is about the ability to study God's word and apply it to the world around us.
 - ii) The reason Paul emphasizes this gift is because it is beneficial to other Christians while the gift of tongues is about our personal relationship with God. The gift of tongues is not designed to communicate messages from God to others. Tongues are only used for us to praise God.
 - k) Now, let's get started. We have 40 verses to cover this week. Last week I wrote a whole lesson on 13 verses. The pace is going to have to pick up a bit! ☺
4. Chapter 14, Verse 1: Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy.
- a) Paul is going to spend a good part of this chapter comparing the gift of tongues to the gift of prophecy. Paul's point is not that these are the two best gifts or "one is the best and one is the worst". Paul's point is that prophecy may be the best of the spiritual gifts for edifying the church, while the gift of tongues is about personal communication between a Christian and God Himself!

- b) Remember the last chapter was about showing love to other Christians. Paul continues that thought by saying, "Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts".
 - i) Paul's point is we are to use these special spiritual gifts in order to show the type of love as described in the previous chapter.
 - ii) The question of the moment is about "eagerly desire spiritual gifts". Does that mean we can control what spiritual gifts we have? The bible clearly says the Holy Spirit is the one who decides which person gets what spiritual gift. At the same time, can we "desire" to have such gifts and does the Holy Spirit respond to such requests?
 - iii) The answer is we can ask for certain gifts, but it is up to God, through the Holy Spirit to decide who gets what gift. In other words, God has every right to say no to our request to have a certain gift. At the same time, it is ok to ask.
- 5. Verse 2: For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God. Indeed, no one understands him; he utters mysteries with his spirit.
 - a) Verse 2 expands upon Paul's comparison of the gift of tongues with the gift of prophecy.
 - b) Verse 2 makes the point I stated earlier: The gift of tongues is only about speaking directly to God. The idea is that when one speaks in tongues, no one understands what the speaker is saying. The idea is a foreign tongue is being spoken and the assumption is the people around the speaker in tongues can't speak that foreign language.
 - c) Some Pentecostal churches argue that the language of "tongues" is a "private" language that cannot be understood by man, based on this verse alone. However, when tongues were spoken in the Book of Acts, other people recognized the language. Further, whenever one reads of angels speaking to people, it is always in the language that the human understands. My point is I don't believe "tongues" is a private language being spoken of that no human is capable of understanding.
 - d) What Paul is communicating is that the speaker of tongues doesn't understand what he or she is saying. That's the idea behind "tongues". One is speaking to God in a language that the human speaker doesn't know.
- 6. Verse 3: But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort. ⁴ He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church.
 - a) Now we are back to comparing the gift of tongues with the gift of prophecy.
 - b) The point here is that when we prophesy, we are "strengthening, encouraging and comforting" people. The purpose of prophecy is to help other Christians around us. It is about applying God's word when we speak to other Christians. I should also add it is not just for "formal" speaking settings in church, but also applies in informal settings when just two or a few Christians are talking to each other!
 - c) With that in mind, the point of Verse 4 is that when one speaks in tongues, one edifies "him or herself" and not the church. In other words, to have the gift of tongues is designed to be a benefit to the individual believer so that they could express their love and gratitude to God in a way that is beyond our understanding. At the same time, no other Christian around them understands that benefit. Paul's point is that the gift of tongues is beneficial for the individual believer but doesn't do anything for other Christians that are near this person.
 - d) Remember that the purpose of having spiritual gifts is to show love for others. While tongues expresses one's gratitude to God, it does very little to strengthen, encourage and comfort other believers. That is why Paul is saying he would rather see people prophesy than speak in tongues!
 - e) Let me also define the word "edify" since some of you may not know its meaning. It means to "build something up". It is a construction term, like when one builds a house. The point is the use of tongues edifies oneself, but the gift of prophecy edifies the church.

- f) Why would Paul need to make that statement? I suspect it is because the Corinthian church "desired" the gifts of tongues more than other gifts and Paul wanted to teach about what gift is the most important in terms of benefit to others.
 - g) One also has to remember that "tongues" is also common in false religious teaching. Some priests to the Greek gods went into "hypnotic trances" speaking things about those Greek gods. The demonic use of "tongues" was all around this church. How does one tell the "real" gift from the fake? Paul answered that earlier in the letter. Paul said nobody "speaking in the true spirit" can say, "Jesus is accursed" and no one speaking in the "false" spirit can say, "Jesus is Lord". (See 1st Corinthians 12:3).
 - i) In other words, it is the message that is more important than the "show". Further, that is why I argue the only purpose of tongues is to praise God and not to communicate messages from God to the church.
 - h) This reminds me to state one more point before I move on: There is always a danger in the Christian church to become "dependant" on the miraculous. There are churches and "movements" that start to emphasize having certain gifts or "being moved by the spirit" as a priority over God's word. Through the history of Christianity, there have been people who have become delusional because they started becoming dependant upon the miracles to continue or dependant upon their personal prophecies to become true as opposed to having trust in God's word coming true.
7. Verse 5: I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy. He who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may be edified.
- a) When Paul said, "I would like every one of you to speak in tongues" he is not being literal. Paul does not have the ability to distribute spiritual gifts, only the Holy Spirit does. Paul's point is that he wanted all the Christians in Corinth to have the ability to speak in tongues just so they would understand what the gift "is" and "is not".
 - b) Paul's next point is that he wished they could all "prophecy". Again, it is up to the Holy Spirit to decide which Christian gets what gift; so again, Paul is not trying to wave a magic wand so that everyone could prophesy.
 - c) Paul's point is that the gift of prophecy is better because the church benefits far more from prophesy than it does from individual's speaking in tongues.
 - d) Paul gives one exception to this rule: "Tongues" are acceptable if someone nearby can translate the tongue.
 - e) One has to remember that the "big topic" of chapters 11-14 has to do with the behavior of Christians when we "get together". Paul's point is that in Christian group settings, the gift of prophecy is better as it benefits other Christians near the person speaking the prophecy. A person speaking in tongues is only speaking to God. "Tongues" can only be beneficial to other Christians around the tongue speaker if someone could translate.
8. Verse 6: Now, brothers, if I come to you and speak in tongues, what good will I be to you, unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or word of instruction?
- a) Paul continues his point by saying what good is it to speak in tongues, as you have no idea what I am saying. It is only beneficial for me (Paul) to speak to you if I (Paul) bring some sort of "revelation, knowledge, prophecy or word of instruction". In other words, Paul is describing prophecy. If Paul is addressing a church, it is only beneficial to the church if Paul is "prophesying". If Paul speaks in tongues to the church they would have no idea what Paul is saying and it would have no benefit to them!
9. Verse 7: Even in the case of lifeless things that make sounds, such as the flute or harp, how will anyone know what tune is being played unless there is a distinction in the notes? ⁸ Again, if the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle?
- a) Paul is comparing what "tongues sounds like to the audience". He is comparing "tongues" to the sound of a flute or harp or a trumpet without any sort of melody.

- b) If a young child picks up a musical instrument, that child may make a sound on it, but it is unintelligible in terms of being part of a tune. To actually play an instrument, one has to actually learn about chords and melodies.
 - c) The same applies to a trumpet being used to rally the troops in battle. If the troops do not recognize the melody being played, the trumpet sound is wasting time to the troops.
 - d) Paul's point is that the sound of tongues is a similar type of "wasted sound" as the sound of musical instrument without the audience knowing the melody.
 - e) An interesting side point before I move on. The City of Corinth had a very large musical amphitheater that existed in that day. That may be why Paul used these examples.
10. Verse 9: So it is with you. Unless you speak intelligible words with your tongue, how will anyone know what you are saying? You will just be speaking into the air.
- a) Remember Paul is talking about Christian conduct when we get together. The gift of tongues may be productive in that God understands what one is speaking, but if the gift of tongues is used in a Christian group setting, it is just "unintelligible words" to those around the speaker of tongues. When Paul says we are "speaking into the air", he means other Christians have no idea what the speaker is saying when speaking in "tongues"!
11. Verse 10: Undoubtedly there are all sorts of languages in the world, yet none of them is without meaning. ¹¹ If then I do not grasp the meaning of what someone is saying, I am a foreigner to the speaker, and he is a foreigner to me.
- a) The world is full of different languages. Yet, if we don't speak that foreign language that is being addressed to us, we are wasting our time listening to that speaker!
 - b) The underlying point is that it is a waste of time to speak in tongues when other Christians are around, as it has no benefit to them. This goes back to the point that Paul had the gifts of tongues, yet there is no record anywhere in the Scripture of Paul ever exercising that gift when Paul talked to other Christians.
 - c) Paul was interested in clearly speaking the gospel message to others and not "confusing" people. Therefore, Paul kept the gifts of tongues to himself, other than here to explain how and when the gift of tongues should be used.
 - d) This reminds me of a point I heard in preparation for this lecture. It is common in many churches for people to yell out "amen" when the preacher makes a point that people like. There was one church where a choir member behind the pastor liked to yell out "keep it plain", meaning the choir member was encouraging the pastor to speak in a way the audience would understand him! (Thanks to David Guzik for that illustration!)
 - i) The point of that illustration is that when Christians get together, it is important to speak in a way that the audience around us understands what we are saying. That is far more important than the ability to speak in tongues! Keep it plain!
12. Verse 12: So it is with you. Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church.
- a) The Corinthian church was not lacking in spiritual gifts. That was stated back in the first chapter of this letter. The problem with the church is that they were not using those gifts to show love to the fellow believer. Paul's point here is that the church should focus on the gifts that best edify the church and not just the individual believer.
 - b) I suspect that means that people were "obsessed" with wanting to speak in tongues as opposed to other gifts that better benefited Christians around them!
13. Verse 13: For this reason anyone who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret what he says. ¹⁴ For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful.
- a) Verse 13 implies that one can ask for a spiritual gift. It is the Holy Spirit's job to distribute the gifts as He wills, but it is ok for us to ask for a particular spiritual gift. I say that as Verse 13 states that a person who has the gift of tongues should pray for the ability to interpret what one is saying when speaking in tongues.
 - b) The idea of tongues is one is speaking in a language one does not understand.

- c) Back in Chapter 12, when Paul was describing the spiritual gifts of tongues, he said there was a separate spiritual gift, which was the ability to translate what was being said by the tongue speaker. Paul says that if one has the gift to speak in tongues, one should pray that one also have the gift to translate so that if one wants to speak in tongues in front of other Christians, one can translate what is being said for the benefit of other Christians.
 - i) When one "prays in tongues" one's mind is "unfruitful" in that the speaker in tongues has no idea what he or she is saying. Therefore, even though one is speaking in "tongues" to God, one does not understand what one is saying unless one has the gift of interpretation.
 - d) Let me pause and share my favorite "tongue" story here. A pastor named Jon Curson was leading a men's study group at a hotel. A lot of hotels have a policy of having the "bar" open and a bartender present whenever a group is using that room. Such was the case here. After the men's study, the group formed a circle and prayed. All of sudden, one guy started speaking in tongues. The pastor stopped the action as no one could interpret. After the meeting broke up, the bartender, who was Persian, asked to give his life to Christ, because the Christian speaking in tongues was speaking perfect Persian. That act convinced the bartender that Christianity is "real" and changed his life.
 - e) Meanwhile, back to Paul and his discussion of when tongues are appropriate. ☺
14. Verse 15: So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind.
- a) The idea of "speaking in tongues" is that even the speaker in tongues has no idea what he or she is saying. Therefore, there is no personal understanding. Paul is saying it is important to have understanding when one prays and one sings to God. Therefore, while having the gift of tongues may be nice, it is probably more important that one understands what one is praying and what one is singing when speaking to God.
15. Verse 16: If you are praising God with your spirit, how can one who finds himself among those who do not understand say "Amen" to your thanksgiving, since he does not know what you are saying? ¹⁷ You may be giving thanks well enough, but the other man is not edified.
- a) These verses continue the same point of Verse 15. If one is speaking in "tongues", the people around the speaker have no idea what the speaker is saying. How can anyone say "Amen" to what someone is speaking to God if that speaker was speaking in tongues?
 - b) The point Paul is making is, it is better for those around us to understand what we are praying and singing to God. Remember the context of this whole chapter is about when Christians get together. Therefore, it may be acceptable to praise God in "tongues" when one is alone, but in Christian group settings, it is more important that people around us understand what is being said.
16. Verse 18: I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. ¹⁹ But in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue.
- a) Verse 18 is the actual verse where Paul admits he has the gift of "tongues". Again, we don't read anywhere in Paul's letters or in the Book of Acts where Paul exercised that gift. Do I believe Paul legitimately had this gift? Yes. With that said, I believe he only exercised it in his private life as when Paul was in a group setting he would much rather speak intelligible words for the benefit of those around him.
 - b) That is the essential idea of these two verses. Paul would rather speak "five intelligible words" (or however many) in a group setting than "ten thousand words in a tongue".
17. Verse 20: Brothers, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults. ²¹ In the Law it is written: "Through men of strange tongues and through the lips of foreigners I will speak to this people, but even then they will not listen to me," says the Lord.
- a) Verse 20 is saying, "In regards to evil be infants". The idea is to "roughly" know what is evil, but to avoid it.

- b) Verse 21 is a quote of Isaiah 28:11 and 12. Let me explain why Paul picked that verse to quote: Isaiah was being hassled by the Jewish leadership based on what Isaiah preached.
 - i) The Jewish leadership of Isaiah's day was complaining that Isaiah's was wrong about his message. Nobody believed Isaiah's message of "coming doom". God was preaching through Isaiah that conquerors would come to Israel "using strange tongues". Despite Isaiah's message nobody believed what Isaiah was saying.
 - ii) Let me put it this way: Isaiah was predicting that Israel would be taken prisoners by other nations. They would have to evacuate the land of Israel to a group of people who spoke different languages. The northern kingdom of "Israel" went into captivity about 15 years prior to Isaiah's message. Isaiah was warning the southern kingdom of "Judah" would suffer the same fate one day and be taken into captivity. The Assyrians defeated the northern kingdom of "Israel". The Assyrians then relocated the Israelites all over their kingdom. The southern kingdom of Judea would be conquered by the Babylonians in another 100 years (more or less) and be scattered over the Babylonian kingdom.
 - iii) Isaiah was preaching a "negative" message about the coming destruction of the nation and that "foreign tongues" would be spoken in the land of Israel!
 - iv) The reason for that quote by Isaiah has to do with the next verse coming up.
- 18. Verse 22: Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers; prophecy, however, is for believers, not for unbelievers.
 - a) Verse 22 appears to be "out of context" of the rest of the chapter. Most of the chapter preaches the concept that "tongues" is only for believers and the main purpose of "tongues" is for people to praise God in a foreign language. The rest of the chapter also preaches that "prophecy" is for the whole church and as a sign to unbelievers.
 - i) With that said, "Verse 22" appears to be the opposite of the rest of the chapter.
 - ii) Many commentators suggest Verse 22 is a mistranslation of the original Greek.
 - b) To me, the key to understanding Verse 22 and Verses 23-25 are to read them in context of the quotation from Isaiah.
 - i) With that said, let me "break down" Verse 22: The first part of the verse says, "Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers". In Verse 21, Paul quotes Isaiah in that the prophet predicted that "foreign tongues" would lead the entire nation of Israel into captivity.
 - ii) In other words, Isaiah was describing a "different sort of tongue meaning" from earlier in the chapter! Most of the chapter has to do with "tongues" as a spiritual gift to communicate with God. Here in Verses 22 (through 25), Paul is also saying that the fact that foreign tongues being spoken in church would be a sign to unbelievers of "pending doom", just as Isaiah preached of pending doom!
 - iii) Paul is not saying that the purpose of tongues is for God to preach destruction. Paul is saying that when nonbelievers here foreign languages come out of people's mouths, it might "scare" them into believing due to the strange spectacle of it all. The same way Isaiah preached about "foreign tongues coming" was also meant a sign of "foreign tongues" coming within the world of Judaism. Here are these "foreign tongues" preaching Jesus among those who believe in the Jewish God!
 - c) Which leads to the second part of this verse: "prophecy, however, is for believers, not for unbelievers". Paul is saying, "Prophecy, in the predictive sense is for believers".
 - i) Well, wouldn't someone prophesying strange things about the future also be a "scary sign" for unbelievers? The point here is an unbeliever would become a believer if that sign came true! If one believes the biblical prophecy, one is on the road to becoming a believer in Christ! In that sense, prophecy is for believers.
 - d) Before I move on, it is important to state again, that some commentators struggle with this verse as it seems contradictory to the rest of the chapter.

19. Verse 23: So if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and some who do not understand or some unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind?
 - a) Visualize going to church next Sunday morning. Let's say during a moment of silence everyone started speaking out loud in tongues. Now let's say in that same congregation is some first-time nonbelievers. Would not those unbelievers say that everyone in this church is "out of their mind"? Those unbelievers would not be likely to come back to that church, as they have no idea what was happening! That's the point!
 - b) Paul is leading up to a point in the next few verses that if someone or a group wants to speak in tongues in church it should be done in an orderly manner.
20. Verse 24: But if an unbeliever or someone who does not understand comes in while everybody is prophesying, he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all,²⁵ and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, "God is really among you!"
 - a) Now let's suppose everyone comes to church this Sunday and all of a sudden everyone starts to prophesy in English (assuming it's an English speaking church). Everybody starts to ramble off future predictions based on the bible. An unbeliever will hear this and become convicted due to their sins.
 - b) That is how Paul's point in Verse 22 comes true: Prophesying is a sign to an unbeliever in that it convicts their hearts about their own sins and it makes them want to turn to God.
 - i) This reminds me of another point. For someone to truly turn to God, first they need to be convicted that they are sinners and need God to forgive them of their sins and need to understand that Jesus died for their sins.
 - ii) It reminds me of a great old joke: A pastor arrives late to a bible conference. He looks around for an empty seat and spots one across the room. The pastor then walks up and talks to the person sitting next to the empty seat. The pastor asked, "Is this seat saved?" The man sitting next to the empty seat responds, "I don't think it's even under conviction yet!" ☺ The point of the joke is someone needs to feel convicted of sin prior to getting the good news about Jesus.
 - c) Back to the verses: Does this mean that Paul wants everyone in church to speak in tongues or that he wants everyone to prophecy? No, that's not the point of the illustration. The point is that if everyone in the room did speak in tongues, it would just scare away the newcomers. If everyone in the room did prophecy, it might convict the newcomers of their sins and get them to turn to God.
 - i) With that said, what about the fact that Paul said that "tongues" are a sign for an unbeliever back in Verse 22? The reference in "Verse 22" is to the fact that tongues don't convict people of their sins the way "prophecy" does, but if everyone around them is speaking in foreign languages it means "something strange is going on" and they may inquire future.
 - d) This all leads to the issue of "what is proper behavior in church?" Should a group of Christians all be allowed to speak in tongues all at once or should a group of Christians all be allowed to prophecy all at once? No, and that's the next topic coming up.
21. Verse 26: What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church.²⁷ If anyone speaks in a tongue, two--or at the most three--should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret.²⁸ If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and God.
 - a) Verse 26 directly discusses the issue of how Christians are to behave when they get together in a church setting. Remember that "what Christians do when we get together" is the main topic of the last four chapters. Here, Paul is now directly answering the question about speaking in tongues and prophesying in church settings.

- b) Verse 26 says, "Everyone has a hymn (some translations say psalm), some have a word of instruction (i.e., something to teach others about how to live for God), some have a revelation (i.e., a prophecy) and some have the ability to speak in a tongue and others have an ability to interpret that tongue."
- i) In other words, Paul is not describing so much how a church service is to be conducted, but reminding us that each of us have different spiritual gifts and each of us come to a church service bringing along our spiritual gifts.
 - ii) For example, those who like to sing are usually up on the stage singing hymns. Those of us who are not good singers sit in the pews and sing the best we can. ☺
 - iii) Those Christians who have something to say or something to prophesy can bring that talent to church. It can be shared with others assuming it is done in an orderly manner. That will be Paul's point coming up in Verse 29.
 - iv) A reason we appoint leaders in our church is to keep the church service "in order" so that people who have a "word of instruction" or a "tongue" just don't speak when they feel like it. God wants a sense of "order" in the church and even though one may have one of these gifts, we should not exercise them if we are not called upon to do so!
- c) Verses 27-28 go on to describe how the gift of tongues should be practiced in church. The verses say, "If anyone speaks in a tongue, two--or at the most three--should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret." ²⁸ If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and God.
- i) Again, good Christians do debate about whether or not the gift of tongues is for "today" or only the early church. If you come from a background that believes the gift of tongues was only for the early church, I ask you pretend for the moment that the gift of tongues is for today, just for the purpose of this point.
 - a) Verse 27 says that if anyone speaks in a tongue, only two or three at the most should speak, one at a time and someone must interpret.
 - b) In other words, Paul is laying out the ground rules for speaking in tongues in a church setting. One rule is that there is not supposed to be the "chaos" of a number of people speaking in tongues all at once. Only one person at a time should speak out loud in tongues and no more than two or three people at church should exercise this gift. The second requirement is that someone with the gift of interpretation must be present to interpret.
 - c) Remember back in Verse 22, that Paul said "tongues" are a sign for unbelievers. Notice how Paul wants tongues to be used "in a sense of order" if they are to be used at all.
 - ii) Now let's get to the underlying point of these verses. The idea is not just that tongues should be done in order, it is that the church service should have a sense of order to it. God does not want a church service where the prophets, the singers, the leaders and the "whoever else" all speak at the same time! There must be a sense of order to the church and the congregation must respect that order!
 - iii) Paul's point in these verses is not just that tongue speakers are to speak in order with interpreters interpreting. It is the concept that when Christians gather in any size gathering, there must be a sense of order to that gathering.
- d) Before I move on, let me give one comment about how Pentecostal churches deal with this issue. For those who are unfamiliar with the term "Pentecostal churches", it usually refers to the type of church where there is prophesying spoken at the services. The term is much broader and covers lots of issues, but that's my definition point for the moment:
- i) I've been to such churches where for a "moment" in the church, they will let multiple people prophesy out loud. There are usually numerous people prophesying at once and there are not always interpreters present.

- ii) I will personally argue that this type of action goes against Paul's commands here in this letter. Such a church will give a counter argument that what Paul is talking about is different then the type of prophesying that goes on in that church. I am not an expert in Pentecostal style of churches, so I don't know what they mean by that. I just know that the few times I have been to such services, I don't have a problem with the concept of them speaking in tongues as much as I do the fact that a whole group does it simultaneously and without interpretation!
- 22. Verse 29: Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. ³⁰ And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop.
 - a) Paul now switches from the gift of tongues back to the gift of prophecy.
 - i) In the previous set of verses, Paul says in effect that if people want to prophesy in church, it should be done in an orderly manner with no more than two or three people speaking in tongues and then, only if an interpreter is present.
 - ii) Now, here in Verse 29, Paul is making a similar point about prophecy. A key point to this whole section is that church services should have a sense of order to them and not people just randomly "shooting off" their spiritual gifts!
 - b) With that said, if there is a time in a service for people to prophecy, only two or three people should speak, and the rest of the congregation should weigh carefully what is said. In other words, the congregation is to digest the prophecy and wait and see if it comes to pass! We should not assume that every bit of prophecy stated in a church setting is meant for us and not assume that everything will come true.
 - i) There was a church movement in Southern California a generation ago in which the gift of "prophecy" was becoming more dominate than studying the bible. People were walking around carrying their "prophecy note books" about what they wanted to share, what God revealed to them and what others revealed about them". In the end, many of these people turned away from God as not all the predictions came true.
 - ii) The gift of prophecy may or may not be for today. That's a separate issue. The issue at hand is that the study of God's word should always be first and praising God for our salvation should always be first over what people prophecy about us!
 - c) Getting back to the verses, the other point is "if" a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, that sitting down person should not speak until "Speaker #1" is done.
 - i) Again, Paul's underlying point has nothing to do with which spiritual gift is most important. His point is that the church service should have a sense of order to it and we should all respect that order as to encourage one another.
 - d) Whether or not such prophesying should be part of a church service today is debated among Christians and among denominations. If one attends a large church service, it would be disruptive to have people stop for a "moment of prophecy". Remember that the early church met in people's homes in small groups. Further, Paul's point is not about the size of the group, but about having respectful conduct when we get together. In other words the Holy Spirit should never be competing against Himself to speak to a group!
- 23. Verse 31: For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged.
 - a) Paul says that if a group of Christians all have the gift of prophecy, they can all get together and prophecy one to another to instruct and encourage one another. In other words, if the gift is used properly and "in order" it can be beneficial to other Christians.
 - b) Paul is not saying that all Christians should have and exercise this gift. Paul is not saying that there should be a separate meeting for Christians who have this gift! Remember it is the Holy Spirit's job to distribute spiritual gifts as He decides, not as we decide. Paul is just saying that if one wants to have a meeting to prophesy, it can be done and should be done in an orderly manner so each Christian who does prophecy can encourage each other and support each other.

- c) As to the prophecies themselves, I remember the principal of Deuteronomy 18:20-22. It says in effect that if someone prophesies, we should watch and see if that event comes true. The two part test of seeing whether or not a prophecy is legitimate is 1) does it happen and 2) is it biblically based. If it fails on both accounts, we should ignore it.
 - i) By the way, those same verses in Deuteronomy teach that if a person is not 100% accurate in all one's prophecies, that person should be put to death. That does not mean we should kill Christians who fail to be 100% accurate. It does mean that we judge what people say in this regard and see if it happens and see if it holds light in regards to the truth of Scripture.
24. Verse 32: The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets.³³ For God is not a God of disorder but of peace.
- a) The point of these two verses is that the person speaking is in control. A "sign" that one is speaking a true prophecy is that the person is in control of the spiritual gift.
 - b) Let me put it another way. A speaker cannot say, "God forced me to say this thing and I was not stop myself from speaking out this prophecy!" A sign of "true prophecy" is that the person speaking is in control and they can calmly state their prophecy and are not forced to blurt out something as if the "spirit" is in control.
 - c) This is another reason I have problems with some "extreme Pentecostals" who say the spirit "took them over" and could not control what they are doing! Verses 32 and 33 strictly teach that God gives the prophets (i.e., Christians who prophesy) "control".
 - d) This leads to Verse 33: "For God is not a God of disorder but of peace."
 - i) I've been stating for a few pages now that God wants things done in order and Paul's underlying point about both and "all" gifts is that we should exercise our spiritual gifts with a sense of order and respect. Paul ends this argument with a reminder that "God is not a God of disorder, but of peace".
 - ii) In other words, God wants us to have "peace" in our church services as well as our lives in general. To have a church service where people are trying to speak over one another and everyone take the lead does not lead to "peace".
 - iii) This is why the "spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets". The underlying idea is that God gives us the ability and the power to organize a sense of control in our church service and people have no excuse to exercise their particular spiritual gift out of turn of everyone else.
25. Verse 33 (cont.): As in all the congregations of the saints,³⁴ women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says.³⁵ If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.
- a) I'm tempted to avoid getting in trouble and just passing over these verses! ☺
 - b) The key to understanding this section about women is to read it in context of the surrounding verses. This text is not about men only having spiritual gifts. One has to read this in the culture of Paul's day.
 - i) In the culture of Paul's day, women were not allowed to speak publicly.
 - ii) Further, men and women sat in separate sections in church. There are still churches around today where the women sit in one section and the men in another. For a woman to ask her husband a question in church, would be to yell across the room. It gets back to the principal of doing things in a sense of "order".
 - iii) Do I think it is proper for men and women to sit in separate sections? The bible avoids that question and it is a matter of tradition. One can argue that if men are sitting separately from women, the men are more likely to focus on the speaker and not focus on the beauty of our wives across the room! That has always been the traditional argument for setting up separate sections. With that said, I don't see this as being a major issue, and each church should decide for themselves.

- c) The other issue being "hinted" at is the biblical order of things. This gets back to the issue of the roll of men and women in the church as discussed back in Chapter 7. The key point is that God intended men (males) to take the lead over women. It is not that women are inferior, it is simply the idea that "somebody" has to be the leader and God picked men to lead over women. Since I'm running long, I'll just here on this issue and say to review Chapter 7 for further discussion.
26. Verse 36: Did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached? ³⁷ If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command. ³⁸ If he ignores this, he himself will be ignored.
- a) Paul is ending this discussion with a reminder that the church in Corinth was not the only church (or set of churches) that exists. Further, I believe Paul understood that somehow, what he was writing was "sacred" in that Paul was writing commands to be obeyed!
 - b) In other words, Paul may not have understood the aspect that his writings would be gathered and collected to be part of a bible, but somehow, Paul understood that what he was writing was the "Lord's command".
 - c) In other words, here is Paul commanding the church in Corinth to use spiritual gifts in an orderly manner and to not let people yell over each other. Paul is commanding that the members of this church take turns using their spiritual gifts for the benefit of other Christians. The idea is that the gifts should be exercised in a sense of order.
 - i) One gets the idea that Paul is not anti-spiritual gifts, just that Paul wants the church to exercise them with a sense of order and a sense that everyone else in the room could benefit from what others are doing with their spiritual gifts.
 - d) I sense that the problem with the church in Corinth is that everyone was interested in exercising their own spiritual gift and not caring about anyone else's gifts.
 - i) The mistake we make is we focus too much on our gifts and we are not interested in letting other Christians minister to us with their spiritual gifts.
 - ii) That is what Paul meant by, "If he ignores this, he himself will be ignored."
 - a) In other words, if a person refuses to exercise their spiritual gift with a sense of respect for others and waiting their turns, then that person should be ignored when Christians gathered for church service.
 - e) I should also acknowledge again at this point, that I understand that a lot of Christians believe that either or both of the gifts emphasized in this chapter (tongues and prophesy) are only for the early church and not for today. I'm not here to solve that debate.
 - i) The key point Paul is trying to teach us is to have a sense of order when exercising spiritual gifts and be willing to wait our turn and let others use their spiritual gifts to benefit the church. In other words, pay attention to what others are saying in church and don't focus on what we are going to say when it is our turn!
27. Verse 39: Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. ⁴⁰ But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.
- a) Speaking of the "debate" question of whether or not these gifts are for today, here is Paul ending this discussion with the point of "being eager to prophesy and do not forbid the speaking of tongues". Paul's point is that such gifts should be exercised in church.
 - i) The classical debate is whether or not this is only for the early church or whether or not it is for today.
 - ii) The simple answer is to find a church group that is "most comfortable" with one's own personality. I'm also a big believer that at some point in one's life, if one has the time and the ability, to check out different types of church services and learn of different ways people worship God!
 - b) Paul's final point is again, the key point of this lesson: "Everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way". In other words, your church or my church may encourage or discourage certain types of spiritual gifts. The key is to have "church" in an orderly way!

- c) I believe Paul's main point is that when we "have church", to do so in an orderly manner so that the rest of the congregation benefits from our spiritual gifts, just as we can benefit from the spiritual gifts of others. Paul is encouraging the practice of these two spiritual gifts, but only if it is done in a "fitting and orderly manner".
28. With that said, I can wrap up the lesson! Let's pray: Father, we thank you for the Spiritual gifts you have given us as believers. Help us, to be willing to accept the gifts of other Christians around us to strengthen our own faith. Help us not to put our own gifts first and desire to exercise our own gifts instead of accepting the spiritual gifts of others. Further, help us to accept what is the proper practice for our church and to be willing to accept other churches that still honor you, but have a different style than our own! Help us to glorify you with the gifts you have given all of us. For we ask this in Jesus name, Amen.