

# “Chaos and Confusion”

- 1 Corinthians 14, *part 2* -

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## 1 Corinthians 14:21 - 40

*21 In the law it is written: "With men of other tongues and other lips I will speak to this people;*

*And yet, for all that, they will not hear Me," says the Lord. 22 Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophesying is not for unbelievers but for those who believe. 23 Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those who are uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say that you are out of your mind? 24 But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all. 25 And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you. 26 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. 27 If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be two or at the most three, each in turn, and let one interpret. 28 But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God. 29 Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge. 30 But if anything is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent. 31 For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged. 32 And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. 33 For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints. 34 Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. 35 And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church. 36 Or did the word of God come originally from you? Or was it you only that it reached? 37 If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord. 38 But if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant. 39 Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues. 40 Let all things be done decently and in order.*

Most of us, if we are honest, do not like rules because they cramp our lifestyles. Yet, God has rules, *called commandments*, and whether these commands are positive or negative, they are always for our good. If we obey God's rules, we are blessed; if we do not, we are not blessed. God has given us some specific rules for conducting a New Testament church service. Thank God He has, for the New Testament set was vibrant, dynamic and alive with excitement.

Leon Morris, commenting on I Corinthians 14:26-40 said, *"This is the most intimate glimpse of the New Testament church at worship."* As we shall see, it was much different than most services we observe today. While it would be impossible to conduct a service exactly like the New Testament church, I Corinthians 14 can still be a guide or a general model of what the meeting of the church should be. Whatever we may say about the New Testament church service, it was a time when Christians exercised their spiritual gifts in order to benefit and build up one another and it was most certainly not dull and boring.

**14:21 In the law it is written: "With men of other tongues and other lips I will speak to this people; And yet, for all that, they will not hear Me," says the Lord.**

The word "tongues" here is a different word than what has been used to describe the gift of tongues given by the Holy Spirit. This loosely quoted passage from Isaiah refers to the imminent Assyrian invaders God would send to Israel in 732 BC. Assyria would bring and speak a new tongue. God would send punishment in order to

get the people's attention because they would not listen. Ultimately even *that* would not break them. They were indeed "children" as it says back in verse 20, and they refused to heed God's words.

Would they listen to God now through Paul with his heaven-sent directions? Many would not, just as many will not hear his teaching in this letter ...and on this subject either.

**14:22 Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophesying is not for unbelievers but for those who believe.**

Despite the past failures, and the people's refusal to heed God's direction, He had not given up. He still would make every attempt to reach them; He *still* makes every attempt to reach *us*.

In light of all other scripture, letting scripture be its own commentary, we can only see that this sign to unbelievers would generally not be a welcome one. This is a difficult verse because it seems to contradict Paul's overriding premise. But it is only difficult when you take it out of the context of the preceding verses, especially verse 21 reflecting God's dealing with Israel in the book of Isaiah. The Assyrian tongue, just like the gift of tongues as it is presented to the unbeliever *is a sign*. It is a sign of judgment and correction emanating from the hand of God. Therefore it is not a good sign to unbelievers, and not one that will likely be received, as is expressed in verse twenty-three. Just as the signs that Moses presented to Pharaoh were not welcome, so is the sign of tongues to an unbeliever.

**14:23-25 Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those who are uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say that you are out of your mind? But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all. And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you.**

To make sure we are clear on just what *kind* of sign we're talking about here, Paul presents us with a scenario. Those on the outside of the family of God with little or no understanding concerning what is going on, will come into such meetings and hearing the corporate use of tongues, will no doubt think everyone is crazy. For these unbelievers, tongues are not a *blessed* sign, but in the reckless use of them, we turn people away who would perhaps come to Christ through wise and careful teaching, God-led *prophetic* teaching. Why this occurs is simple and has been Paul's point throughout: *understanding* is crucial for the unbeliever for them to see the need within them to come to Christ. By our actions we can give them rather a sign of judgment and it will come to nothing, *or* we can give them a clear message with understanding. With clear presentation of the gospel, through the leading of the Holy Spirit, the unbeliever will not only come to Christ with a repentant heart, but will know that God is truly among you. Tongues will not accomplish this; preaching the Word of God does.

**14:26-31 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. If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be two or at the most three, each in turn, and let one interpret. But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God. Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge. But if anything is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged.**

Paul begins to address the Corinthian's actual worship practices. All the spiritual gifts were being manifested in their church services, but it sounds like things were not done with any order, and were certainly not

practiced for the edification of all the believers present, but rather for the individual exercising the gift. Paul therefore gives directions on how a service should be conducted, with the emphasis on *order*.

The Bible teaches the priesthood of the believer, and part of the Christian's responsibility is to participate in worship, not just be a spectator. Corporate worship is not where people come to be entertained by other people up front. Part of the spontaneity is people actively and wholeheartedly participating in worship.

At this time, there may have been as many as 500 Christians at Corinth, and it would have been difficult to have every believer actually participate in the service consistently. Many scholars think the church met together corporately as one body but broke up into various homes with an elder presiding. Very similar to what we do on Wednesday evenings. The latter being of the kind that would be that found in Acts 20 where Paul met with the Christians at Troas. That meeting began around nine o'clock at night and went past midnight, causing Eutychus to fall asleep and fall out the window. I guess even the Apostle Paul could put a few parishioners to sleep.

The words "each of you" or in the old King James "everyone," is significant because it indicates that as a church "body" various Christians in the church would take part in the meeting. Again, we strive to practice such with participation of ushers, worship leaders, reading of the scripture, announcements, security, children's teachers, etc.

However, with all that being said, to avoid bedlam and disorder, Paul gives directions. Please note that nowhere here do we find permission for services with the exercise of multiple tongues, especially without interpretation. In fact, we actually find the clear and direct *prohibition* of such practice.

In light of what Paul has already said on this matter, many churches...*those who truly seek to stand righteous in this practice*, attempt to allow the use of tongues only in gatherings of born again believers. These are often called "believer's meetings."

If anyone speaks in a tongue, two—or at the most three—should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. While Paul was not against the use of tongues in the local church, he did not encourage it either. Paul clearly states that if people speak in tongues only two or three are to participate and they are never to speak all at once but in succession. Tongues did not have to happen in every worship service. There must be no duplication or multiplicity of tongues speakers. Only one could speak at any given time. There was to be an interpreter whenever a person spoke in tongues. If there was no interpretation, then it was not a work of God. The interpretation was for the whole congregation so they would know what was being said.

**14:32-33 And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.**

Paul reminds us that in the exercise of *all* gifts, we are never out of control, though many claim to be while under the *Spirit's power*. Our "spirit" is still subject to us in the earthly realm. So any excuse to violate scriptural directives with the reasoning that the "spirit overtook me" is rendered void.

The purpose again is for *order* and *understanding*. For as we read herein, our God is *not the author of confusion*, but of peace. So I, as the pastor, am given not only the right, but the *direction* to see that under all circumstances, peace and order is maintained in any service that is conducted here. Further, such is to be the case in *all* churches.

**14:34-35 Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church.**

Paul goes on here to give further instruction, not a different issue *per se*, when we note that the issue on the table before us is not so much a detailed instruction on speaking in tongues as much as an overall mandate for order and unity. Whatever else we may say about verses 34 and 35, we must put them in the context of all of I Corinthians 14. These verses in context are speaking about tongues and prophesying in the public meeting of the church. Therefore, when it says, "Women should remain silent in the churches" it is no doubt somehow related to tongues and prophesy.

This passage is certainly one many females do not care for. In this passage, it seems Paul wants women to be quiet, but in fact it does no such thing. It does in fact however prohibit woman from having an *ongoing speaking role* in the church. (Note: prolonged verb use in the original "speak") I know much dispute has arisen over this issue, and the existence of female pastors/preachers in our age are many. However, this is what the passage says. Will we accept the scripture as it is presented, or will we plant our feet and remain unmovable? Paul reiterates this point in Timothy 2:12: "*And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence.*"

Paul's point is not to demean women nor to disallow them to exercise their gifts, or even to participate in the operation of the Sunday service. This verse does not say a woman cannot ever teach or speak or verbally participate in the public meeting of the church. Nor does this verse teach a woman can never teach adult men the Bible, for surely Priscilla taught Apollos. But what it implies is that women are not to be the final judges on the truth or error of the service prophetic teaching, nor be the pastoral authority in a body of believers. Again **order** is the priority, and the *church service* is the setting (Note: "*in church*") There have been many attempts to both magnify as well as *explain away* this passage. I, however, am unwilling to stretch or torture the text, or extrapolate too far on this issue. It says what it says. Please remember that Paul praised a lot of women in his writings for their service and faithfulness; he is not shelving females.

This is about order *in the church*, leadership *in the church*, and a submissive attitude *in the church*.

**14:36-37 Or did the word of God come originally from you? Or was it you only that it reached? If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord.**

Paul saw it coming. He knew...*as I know and have experientially discovered*, that what he was penning would cause a lot of animosity. The Corinthian church had seemingly lifted themselves up as the official authority on the matters of faith practice. He reminds them, albeit through overt cynicism, that they were a part of something bigger than just them. There was the *greater* church to consider, not to mention what Christ laid down as a foundation. Paul was taking a stand and forcing the believers in Corinth to choose a side. Like all of them, we must decide who is speaking for God and who is not.

**14:38 But if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant.**

Truly spiritual people will always recognize the authority of Scripture. Today there are many Christians who are having experiences which are quite spectacular. Yet, when you point out from the Bible that what they are experiencing is not found in the Bible or even contrary to the Bible, they insist on their feelings or experiences rather than conformity to the inspired, infallible Bible. We know that the Spirit of God never operates contrary

to the Word of God. Those who are truly spiritual will recognize the authority of Scripture and will bring all experiences to the touchstone of Scripture. If one ignores this, he himself will be ignored.

If there were those who would refuse Paul's direction, he was not going to waste his time trying to further convince them. There were always those who rejected his teaching, just as there will always be. As I have already mentioned, there are plenty who today will seek to twist or reject these directives. Many will simply do what they want, and will not heed what is taught by Paul, the other apostles, or any spirit-filled preacher today. They will hear what Paul has clearly taught in this letter and simply say "no". The thinking goes something like, "*I will continue to do as I please. I know better than Paul and certainly better than this pastor.*" So, as Paul has done, I will let those who choose to be ignorant stay that way.

**14:39 Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues.**

Paul gives the bottom line. Seek firstly to prophesy. To clearly, and in our case, *in English*, teach the scriptures for the edification of the whole body of believers, *including those who are not yet believers who have come into the church seeking redemption.*

Yet, through all of this, we are not to forbid the speaking in tongues. Again, it needs to be done properly, with interpretation, and with order. But we are not to prohibit it.

**14:40 Let all things be done decently and in order.**

As his final point, Paul reiterates: "*order ...*" This seems like a simple premise, but it is wholly ignored in many churches and denominations today. Order, **decently and in order**. Everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way. Whatever is done in any church meeting is to be done orderly so as to bring the most glory to the Lord and to edify the whole church. Any worship service which is out of order and out of control is not of God. It does not glorify God but exalts man.