

14:1: *Follow after love; yet desire earnestly spiritual (gifts), but rather that ye may prophesy.*

This chapter may be divided into two sections. In the first twenty-five verses Paul demonstrated the superiority of prophecy over tongue speaking. The second half of the chapter (verses 26-40) contains rules about spiritual gifts. Even though the miraculous gifts were for a limited time (see the preceding discussion on 13:8-13), God regulated their use. Today the gifts are no longer available, but the rules that governed them provide us with important and practical principles, especially in the area of worship.

In 12:31 Paul told the Corinthians to “desire earnestly the greater gifts,” but he also said there was the “more excellent way” (love, chapter 13). This more excellent way “bears, believes, hopes and endures all things” (1 Cor. 13:7). Here in 14:1 Paul again spoke of love and spiritual gifts, and he once more emphasized that love was the most important thing. The Corinthians had overestimated the value of spiritual gifts, especially tongue speaking, and Paul did all he could to correct this overemphasis.

One of the especially interesting words in this opening verse is “follow” (*dioko*), a present tense verb. In Classical Greek *follow* described chasing or hunting someone or something. While the New Testament normally uses this word to describe persecution (Mt. 5:10, 11, 12, 44), here the meaning seems to be *to follow* or *to pursue something as a goal*. In fact, this word could be translated “earnestly follow.” Paul told the Corinthians to continually and earnestly follow after “love” (*agape*).

In addition to pursuing love, the Corinthians were to “desire” (*zeloo*), a present tense verb, “spiritual gifts.” The ASV translates this “earnestly desire” and the KJV simply says “desire.” In some places such as here the word *desire* has a positive sense. This word, as demonstrated by Acts 7:9 and Acts 17:5, can also be used in a negative way. *Desire* may be defined as “a human emotion which leads to action” (CBL, GED, 3:25). The Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament (2:101) said in 1 Cor. 14:1 *desire* means the “desire to attain goals or to be devoted to someone.” Thayer’s definition for this word in this verse is “to desire earnestly, pursue.” The Beacon Bible Commentary (8:446) noted how *follow after* in the first part of this verse “indicates a never terminating action while ‘to desire earnestly’ stresses the intensity rather than the continuity of the action.”

As noted in the commentary on 12:4, the Holy Spirit “distributed” gifts to specific people, so the Corinthians could not control what gifts they received. Furthermore, as discussed in the commentary on 12:11, the Holy Spirit apparently determined that some Christians would receive only one gift. Christians could ask for gifts and perhaps request specific gifts, but like all prayer requests, “yes” answers were based on God’s will (1 Jn. 5:14).

Because the Corinthians did not have a completed New Testament, they were encouraged to seek spiritual gifts (see again the commentary on 1 Cor. 13:8-13). This encouragement, however, came with some guidelines (rules). MacKnight (p. 191) noted how the Corinthians seem to have “erred in their opinion of the comparative excellence of the spiritual gifts; and had been guilty of great irregularities in the exercise of these gifts. In particular, they preferred *the gift of speaking foreign languages* to all the rest, because it made them respectable in the eyes of the unbelieving Greeks, who were great admirers of eloquence. Farther, possessing that gift in the manner of an habit which they could exercise at pleasure, they were exceedingly fond of shewing it in the public assemblies, by speaking often and long in foreign languages, without regarding whether their hearers understood them or not. And fancying themselves the most honourable of all the spiritual men, because their gift was habitual, they claimed the privilege of speaking in the public assemblies preferably to others; whereby some who were better qualified to edify the church, were often obliged to be silent.”

The word “spiritual” (*pneumatikos*) is in the original text, but the word “gifts” is not (in the ASV *gifts* is italicized). Paul was discussing spiritual gifts and he was thinking of multiple gifts (in the Greek text the word *spiritual* is expressed with the plural). Paul may have been saying the Corinthians needed multiple gifts, or he may have been describing all the gifts the Holy Spirit was able to give.

Every supernatural gift had a purpose and was important, but love was the most important thing. Today Christians must still pursue love as well as seek a close acquaintance with what has replaced them (the New Testament). More information on the gift of “*prophecy*,” which is expressed here as a present tense verb, is found in the following verses as well as the commentary on 11:4a; 12:10a, 27-28; 14:31.

14:2: *For he that speaketh in a tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God; for no man understandeth; but in the spirit he speaketh mysteries.*

If a Christian could “speak in a tongue” (a foreign language he had never learned), and he spoke this language in the presence of people who did not speak this language, “no man would understand it.” “No man” means “no man in that group” instead of “no man on the earth.” If a Christian used the gift of tongues to speak in the Egyptian language and those who heard him did not understand this language, the Egyptian speaking Christian would be “*speaking mysteries*” and “no man [in the group] would understand.” The “mysteries” (*musterion*) were the truths of the gospel (Paul used this same term in 2:7; 4:1; 13:2; 15:51). As noted in the comments below as well as the commentary on 12:10b, 12:10c, and the commentary just prior to 1 Cor. 13, tongue speaking was the ability to speak in a foreign language one had never learned (compare Acts 2:6). This gift allowed Christians to communicate the gospel to people who spoke other languages. Tongues eliminated the language barriers we now face throughout the world.

Tongue speakers could have provided soul-saving information to foreigners about Christianity, but the Corinthians often used this gift to show off (they chose to speak in foreign languages when those listening to them did not understand these languages). In these cases only the tongue speaker and God would know what was said (see again the commentary on 12:10b and 12:10c). As noted in the quote from MacKnight in the commentary on 14:1, the Corinthians used this gift in their public assemblies and they were not concerned whether or not their message was understood by those who heard them. This behavior violated the principles associated with true love (chapter 13) and it misused this spiritual gift.

God’s gifts were not given to put on a performance. Spiritual gifts were given to instruct sinners in the way of salvation and to impart additional knowledge to those who had become Christians. Today people often see tongue speaking as some type of “devotional experience” or a means by which they can “get close to God.” These ideas are not taught in the Scriptures and the latter point is specifically said to be wrong (see this author’s comments regarding the “face to face” expression in 13:12a). Tongues were designed to communicate the gospel to people. If this gift were still available today, it would eliminate the need for missionaries to go to language schools or use translators when working in foreign countries.

Some believe tongue speakers also had the gifts of prophecy and knowledge and this may be correct. The gift of *tongues* would have given Christians the ability to communicate with people who spoke different languages and the gift of *knowledge* or *prophecy* would have given these same Christians the information they needed to help teach the gospel (we now have this information in the completed New Testament). God gave the first century Christians spiritual gifts to help them grow and mature as well as temporarily eliminate language barriers so the gospel could be carried into the world. The gospel was finally taken throughout the known first century world (compare Col. 1:23), so, as noted in the commentary on 1 Cor. 13:8-13, God permanently removed the gifts around the end of the first century.

The Pentecostal movement has often claimed that “*in the spirit he speaketh mysteries*” means believers can or will receive special or mystical experiences from God, especially the Holy Spirit. As noted in the preceding paragraphs, this is not what Paul meant. The word *mystery* (*musterion*) has already been defined in the commentary on 2:7. *Mystery* described the plans that God had before Jesus came into the world (Col. 1:26). Many of the details about Jesus were a *mystery* (Col. 4:3). Even the gospel was part of the *mystery* (Eph. 6:19). People such as the Old Testament prophets *searched diligently* to understand this information (1 Pet. 1:10), but “**now**” this information has been “*announced*” (1 Pet. 1:12). The latter part of this verse (*in the spirit*) means there were inspired Christians in the first century who were presenting the information we now have contained in the New Testament. Nothing in this verse, this chapter, or this book lends any support to the claims of modern Pentecostalism.

Many have wondered if the Corinthians’ ability to speak in tongues was different from or identical to the ability to speak in languages that someone had never been studied or learned. Lenski (First Corinthians, p. 504) answered this question in this way: “Since the promise regarding ‘tongues’ or regarding ‘new tongues’ (the better reading) mentioned in Mark 16:18 was fulfilled at Pentecost in Jerusalem and shortly thereafter at Caesarea, Acts 10:44, etc.; 15:8, and since this phenomenon did not

appear in Corinth for a number of years after these first occurrences, we must ask whether a difference exists between the ‘tongues’ spoken in Jerusalem and in Caesarea and those spoken in Corinth. The answer is that they are the same. As the promise is one, so the fulfillment is one.” The gift of tongue speaking allowed Greek speaking people like the Corinthians to communicate the gospel to others who spoke a different language. The Corinthians may have needed to speak to non-Christians who spoke the Persian language, the Scythian language, the Egyptian language, the Hebrew language, etc. Readers may also wish to compare Mk. 16:15, 17, 20.

In spite of the force of Lenski’s logic (see the preceding paragraph), some still insist the Holy Spirit has given them some type of “heavenly tongue.” Many of these claims are based on 1 Cor. 14:2 (this verse is used to say the sounds people now make are “tongues spoken unto God” and “only God understands these ‘heavenly sounds’”). Although those who make these claims passionately believe in their “gift,” Paul did not mention *heavenly tongues* in this verse or in this chapter. The correct explanation for verse 2 has already been given and we may further establish the rightness of this explanation, plus the error of modern Pentecostalism, by comparing modern claims with the completed New Testament Scriptures.

Modern claims	The Bible gift of tongues
People who are truly “ <i>filled with the Holy Spirit</i> ” will “speak in tongues” (i.e. a “heavenly language” that only God understands).	No “heavenly sounds” are said to have come from Jesus (Lk. 4:1), John the Baptist (Lk. 1:15), Elizabeth (Lk. 1:41), Zacharias (Lk. 1:67) or Simeon (Lk. 2:25). These Bible characters are said to have been “ <i>filled with the Holy Spirit</i> ” or the “Holy Spirit was upon them.”
Those who claim to speak in tongues want no part of drinking deadly poison, handling serpents and casting out demons.	Tongue speaking is listed in conjunction with drinking deadly poison, handling serpents and casting out demons (Mk. 16:17-18).
Today’s “gifts” are done in conjunction with false teaching (compare 1 Cor. 12:3).	Spiritual gifts confirmed the truth (Acts 8:4-18) and were performed in conjunction with the truth, not religious error.
Tongues are seen as the <i>greatest</i> gift.	Tongues were a <i>lesser gift</i> (1 Cor. 12:28).
Modern claims benefit the speaker.	Tongues were designed to benefit others (1 Cor. 14:9).
Modern claims serve as a sign for the “tongue speaker” or fellow believers.	Tongues were a sign to <i>unbelievers</i> (1 Cor. 14:22).
“Speaking in tongues” receives a great amount of emphasis. People are told to eagerly seek this gift.	In the Bible tongues receive a limited amount of emphasis (tongues are only mentioned in Mark, Acts and First Corinthians). This gift and the interpretation of tongues are listed last in 1 Cor. 12:30.
Speaking gibberish or making senseless sounds can be done by babies.	The Bible gift of tongues was understandable and it was an indisputable gift (compare Acts 2:6-12).
Modern claims can be psychologically induced (see the commentary at the end of chapter 12).	The gift of tongue speaking came from God (1 Cor. 12:4-6).
Chaotic speaking receives approval and much chaos often receives lavish praise.	If tongue speaking seemed chaotic, it was wrong (1 Cor. 14:23).

Modern tongue speakers make sounds that cannot be understood and are not actual languages.	Tongue speaking was like musical instruments in that what was heard could be understood (1 Cor. 14:7).
Modern claims specialize in incoherent sounds (compare 1 Cor. 14:11).	God tells people to use speech that is easy to understand (1 Cor. 14:9) and He says He is not the author of confusion (1 Cor. 14:33).
There is no edification because the sounds are not understood; tongues are a way to “show off” and impress others.	Because people could understand the language spoken by tongue speakers (1 Cor. 14:26), they were edified.
People do as they please when it comes to “tongue speaking.”	Tongues were spoken in turn (1 Cor. 14:27).
In many places all are encouraged to speak in tongues.	There was a maximum of three tongue speakers (1 Cor. 14:27).
This author has never heard of someone who used an interpreter (1 Cor. 14:27) and rarely do <i>tongue speakers</i> “stay silent in the church” (1 Cor. 14:28).	Tongues were to be interpreted or those who had this ability were to stay silent in the church if an interpreter was not present (1 Cor. 14:28).
People claim they “have to speak” and they “cannot control themselves.”	The gifts from the Holy Spirit could be controlled (1 Cor. 14:29-31).

Female <i>tongue speakers</i> often talk the most.	Women were to stay silent in the congregation (1 Cor. 14:34).
Tongue speakers often use the same words or syllables when they <i>speak in tongues</i> .	Jesus warned against “vain repetitions” (Mt. 6:7) and this prohibition includes the type of “tongue speaking” done today.
The modern claims of tongues and supernatural gifts promote division.	The spiritual gifts were designed to help bring unity (Eph. 4:8-15).
Claims about tongues glorify the Holy Spirit more than they glorify Jesus.	The Holy Spirit came to glorify Jesus (Jn. 16:13-14).
God’s word is still being revealed through tongue speaking.	Tongues were one of the signs God used to confirm the New Testament (Mk. 16:20; Acts 14:3; Rom. 15:18-19; 2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:3-4) and the New Testament is now confirmed and complete (Jude 3; 2 Tim. 3:16-17).
Modern claims about tongues are evaluated by personal claims and experience.	All claims and teachings are to be judged by God’s word (Jn. 12:48).
Summary: The modern claims are false and God is not the source of them.	Summary: Tongue speaking and the other spiritual gifts were demonstrations of real power that “confirmed the word” (Mk. 16:20; Heb. 2:3) and they have been permanently removed (1 Cor. 13:8-13; Eph. 4:8-15).

Many Bible versions and translations use the word “*tongue*” (*glossa*) instead of *language* because the word *tongue* is a *neutral* translation. That is, the word *tongue* allows readers to decide for themselves what type of *tongue* Paul meant. Did Paul mean a *foreign language*, *mystical sounds*, or something else? Translations that use the word *tongue* include the ASV, RSV, Phillips, and the NASB. The NIV also uses the word *tongue*, but has *another language* in a footnote. The Living Bible says, “speak in tongues, that is, to speak in languages you haven’t learned.” The KJV has “*unknown tongue*,” but *unknown* is italicized because this word is not part of the Greek text. The word *unknown* was also added by the KJV translators in verses 4, 13, 14, 19, 27 of this chapter. The NEB has “*language of ecstasy*.” The TEV says, “*strange sounds*.” These versions, however, offer an interpretation of the text instead of a translation. As shown in the preceding and following paragraphs, the interpretations offered in the NEB and TEV are incorrect

The word *tongue* (*glossa*) is used 50 times in the Greek New Testament and in several places it describes the organ of speech or a person’s actual speech (Mk. 7:33; Acts 2:26). In other places, and Acts 2:1-13 is one example, *glossa* (tongue) describes a foreign language that was spoken and understood by

human beings. In fact, in 26 of the 50 places where *glossa (tongue)* is used, this word refers to the miraculous gift of tongues.

All the verses associated with the bulleted points below contain the word for “tongue” (*glossa*). In every one of these passages it is possible to substitute the word “language” for the word “tongue” and the text makes perfect sense. Readers might also try to substitute something like “unintelligible sound” (the modern definition of tongue speaking) in these same verses.

- Mk. 16:17 (Tongues were different languages that helped people evangelize the world, Mk. 16:15).
- Acts 2:4, 11; 10:46; 19:6 (These tongues were an understandable language that helped save souls).
- 1 Cor. 12:10 (this passage uses the word twice); 12:28, 30; 13:1, 8; 14:2, 4, 5 (here the word is again used twice), 13, 14, 18, 19, 22, 23, 26, 27, 39.
- Rev. 5:9; 7:9 (Understandable languages).

In Acts 2 the word *glossa (tongue)* is used in conjunction with the word *dialektos*, a word that meant *language*. The apostles spoke with *other tongues* (Acts 2:4) and these *other tongues* were *dialektos* (languages, Acts 2:6). Luke further stressed this point in Acts 2:8 with these words: “*How hear we, every man in our own language (dialektos) wherein we were born?*” Three verses later (Acts 2:11) we read, “*We hear them speaking in our ‘tongues’ (glossa) the mighty works of God.*” If we let the Bible explain itself, *glossa (tongues)* were foreign languages (*dialektos*) spoken by human beings.

When giving the great commission Jesus promised that His people would speak in *new tongues* (foreign languages, Mk. 16:17). This gift was exercised on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:4-8). When Cornelius was baptized he and his household received this same gift (Acts 10:46). Peter said those in Cornelius’ household received the “*like gift*” (Acts 11:17). In other words, the gift of tongues that came on Cornelius’ household was the same gift received by the apostles in Acts 2. The Corinthians had this same ability and it surely helped them communicate the gospel to the unsaved.

In spite of all the preceding information, members of the Pentecostal movement still contend that tongues were and are some type of heavenly, ecstatic utterance instead of the ability to speak in a human language one had never learned. To these claims we may say the Greek New Testament has a special word for “*ecstatic*” (*ekstasis*). This term is used in Mk. 5:42; 16:8; Lk. 5:26; Acts 3:10; 10:10; 11:5; and 22:17. The Holy Spirit could have had Paul use this word to describe the tongue speaking done by the Corinthians, but this was not done. Paul was certainly familiar with this term because he used it in 2 Cor. 5:13. In way after way the Bible shows that the modern claims of Pentecostalism are false.

14:3: *But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men edification, and exhortation, and consolation.*

The gift of “*prophecy*” (*propheteuo*) was mainly a teaching gift (this ability is discussed more fully in the commentary on 11:4a; 12:10a, 27-28; 14:31). Here Paul said prophecy allowed Christians to “*edify*,” “*exhort*,” and “*console*” others. Three separate abilities are associated with the gift of prophecy, but there is some difficulty in explaining the precise nature of these three things.

The word translated “*edification*” (*oikodome*) literally meant to build a house. Just as structures are “*built up*,” so Christians are to be built up (edified). God has always wanted His people to experience spiritual growth and development. Now we receive this edification through the completed New Testament (Acts 20:32; 1 Thess. 4:18); in the first century church, Christians relied upon gifted people such as prophets. Gingrich and Danker (559) said, “*the one who prophesies speaks words that edify.*” Thayer (p. 440) defined the word *edification* as “*what contributes to edification, or augments wisdom, etc.*” The word *edification* is also found in verses 5, 12, and 26 of this chapter. *Edification* (building people up) was of great value, but the Corinthians were apparently more interested in flamboyant abilities, such as

tongues, so they could edify themselves instead of others (verse 4).

The word “*exhortation*” (*paraklesis*) indicates that Christians were to be taught how to live the Christian life. It may have also been a way to encourage Christians to be passionate about their faith (compare 15:58). Gingrich and Danker (p. 618) said *exhortation* meant “speak words of exhortation.” Thayer’s definition (p. 483) was “*exhortation, admonition, encouragement.*” God used spiritual gifts in the first century to instruct Christians in the faith of the New Testament as well as urge them to be faithful. Now He uses uninspired teachers and the completed New Testament (1 Cor. 13:8-13).

The final word (*paramuthia*) is translated “*consolation*” in the ASV and “*comfort*” in the KJV. This term occurs only here in the New Testament and it indicates that prophets sometimes *soothed the saved*. The Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament (3:32) defined this word as “prophetic speech in the congregational assembly, which ‘speaks to people to give them upbuilding, comfort/courage, and admonition.’”

Christians have needed *consolation* since the inception of Christianity. God’s people have sought comfort when facing the loss of a loved one, experiencing economic turmoil, struggling with personal hardship, or going through some other type of fearful or worrisome experience. Gromacki (p. 168) said a prophet had a “threefold goal in his preaching: Build up, stir up, and cheer up.” Bengel (2:245) said *exhortation* “takes away sluggishness” and *consolation* “takes away sadness.” Now the completed Scriptures allow us to do what the gift of prophecy formerly accomplished (compare 2 Tim. 4:2; Acts 15:30-31; 20:32). Faithful and wise teachers today still seek to *edify, exhort* and *console*.

14:4: *He that speaketh in a tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church.*

This verse contrasts the gifts of “*tongue speaking*” and “*prophecy*.” Here Paul reminded the Corinthians that tongue speaking was less important than the gift of prophecy. A tongue speaker “*edified himself*,” but those who prophesied “*edified the church*” (the whole congregation—verses 3-4). The gift of tongues was designed to teach foreigners (people who spoke other languages). This ability would have immediately enabled the Corinthians to proclaim the gospel to people such as the Persians, Scythians, Egyptians, etc. If a tongue speaker used his gift in the presence of people who spoke his native language (tongue), the gift of tongues was of little value. A tongue speaker could use this gift to “edify himself” (he could reflect on his divine gift and know what he was saying when using this ability—see the comments below and the commentary on 12:10c), but if those who heard him did not understand the language he was speaking, his gift did not instruct or build anyone up in the gospel (verse 3 and compare 12:7; 14:12, 26).

The gift of “*prophecy*” (4b) was superior to tongue speaking because it edified the entire assembly (“*church*”). Prophets offered spiritual instruction in a language that people understood. Tongues were more spectacular and more desired by the Corinthians, but if a tongue speaker used his gift in the presence of those who did not understand the foreign language he spoke, those in the assembly did not learn anything. Since the gift of tongues was not always used as God intended, prophecy was the better (superior) gift (compare 1b). This chapter reminds us that the Corinthians were more interested in self-exaltation (compare 13:4-5) than things like edification and evangelism (verse 3).

Some have concluded that *edify himself* means a tongue speaker could not interpret the language(s) he spoke. While this conclusion is possible (tongues and the interpretation of tongues are said to be separate gifts, 1 Cor. 12:10), it seems better to believe that those who possessed the gift of tongues also received the gift of interpretation (i.e. tongue speakers could also understand the language they were speaking). If a man who spoke the Hebrew language met someone who spoke Egyptian, would God let the Hebrew man “speak in Egyptian” (use his gift of tongues) to present the gospel, but not allow the Hebrew Christian to understand the Egyptian man’s reply? If people could speak in tongues but not actively participate in a conversation (i.e. the gift of tongues was “one sided”), this would have seriously hampered the basic purpose for tongue speaking—evangelism (Mk. 16:15, 17, 20).

Another indication that tongue speakers understood what they said is found in 1 Cor. 14:27-28 (if those in an assembly did not understand the language being spoken by a tongue speaker, Paul said the tongue speaker “spoke to God” and “himself”). This statement indicates that tongue speakers understood

the foreign language they spoke.

The word *edify* (*oikodomeo*) is used twice in this verse. Sometimes this term is used literally (Mk. 12:1; Lk. 6:48; 11:47). Jesus used this word in Mt. 16:18 to describe the “building” of His church. The noun form of this term (*oikodome*) is sometimes associated with the work of the apostles (2 Cor. 10:8; 12:19; 13:10).

14:5: *Now I would have you all speak with tongues, but rather that ye should prophesy: and greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying.*

“*I would have you all speak with tongues*” shows that Paul did not despise the gift of tongues. As a Christian and as someone heavily involved mission work, Paul knew the benefit of this spiritual gift. Being able to speak in foreign languages one had never learned was an important tool in communicating the gospel to all nations in the first century (notice that “*tongues*” is plural). What Paul objected to was elevating the gift of tongues to a level that God never intended or using this ability for selfish purposes. The Corinthians were guilty of both errors and these problems had to be corrected. If any gift was to be held in especially high esteem, it was “*prophesy*” (*propheteuo*). For information on this word see the commentary on 12:10a.

Due to the reasons stated in verse 4, a person who prophesied was “*greater*” than the one who spoke in tongues, “*except*” (unless) the tongues were “*interpreted*.” If tongues (languages) were interpreted, there was “*edifying*” (*oikodome*, the same word discussed in the commentary on verse 3). Tongue speakers needed two steps (speaking in a foreign language and then interpreting this language) to accomplish what others were able to immediately do with the gift of prophecy.

The information in verse 5 stands in contrast to modern Pentecostal claims. For instance, Paul said “*prophecy*” was the better gift, but modern Pentecostalism emphasizes tongue speaking over everything else. Those involved with Pentecostalism also frequently claim that tongue speakers “cannot interpret what they are saying,” but the Holy Spirit wants them to speak. Paul said uninterpreted tongues had no value in the church assembly (5b) because people were not “*edified*” (taught). Tongues were a spiritual gift designed to teach the gospel to people, not senseless sounds (compare verses 7-9). Paul did say a tongue speaker could use his gift in private if people did not understand the language(s) he could speak by using the gift of tongues (14:28b). If a tongue speaker used his gift “in the church” (14:28), someone else was to interpret this speech (14:27) or he had to “*keep silence*” (14:28a).

Many charismatics have also sometimes claimed that “every Christian speaks in tongues,” but this idea is also proven false by verse 5. The wording that Paul used (“*I wish*,” NKJV; “*I would like*,” NIV; “*Now I wish*,” NASB) proves that not all first century Christians had the gift of tongues. *Would* (*thelo*) “is used of his wish for men and women to remain single (7:7), but he knew that marriage was inevitable for the majority. So also God wishes all men to be saved, but all men will not be converted (cf. 1 Tim. 2:4). Thus, Paul knew that all would never speak in tongues because that was contrary to the divine program (cf. 12:7, 11, 18, 30)” (Gromacki, p. 169).

In addition to telling the Corinthians that not all Christians spoke with tongues, Paul seems to have meant that those who spoke in tongues also had the gift of interpretation (this point is also discussed in the commentary on 12:10c). As the Beacon Bible Commentary (8:447) noted (this is a quotation from Grosheide), “The words **except he interpret** ‘do not refer to a particular interpretation of a message spoken in tongues, but to a permanent gift of interpretation....Paul has in view a person who has received two gifts, that of speaking in tongues and that of interpretation.’”

The word *interpret* (*diermenueo*) is used just a few times in the New Testament. This term first occurs in Lk. 24:27 (Jesus “interpreted” the Scriptures for some people). It next occurs in Acts 9:36 (“a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas”). Then this word occurs in 1 Cor. 12:30; 14:13, 27. General definitions for *interpret* are “explain, interpret, translate.” Additional information about this word may be found in the commentary on 12:29-30. For more information on the gift of interpreting tongues, see the commentary on 12:10c.

14:6: *But now, brethren, if I come unto you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you, unless I speak to you either by way of revelation, or of knowledge, or of prophesying, or of teaching?*

In spite of all the problems at this congregation Paul still considered these readers to be “*brethren*.” Here he “was about to say some things with which they would agree. First, he spoke of a hypothetical visit he might pay them. Paul declared that even a visit from him would do no **good** for the Corinthian church **unless** he came with **some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or word of instruction**” (Holman, 7:245).

In the final chapter of this book (16:3-7) Paul spoke about a future return to this congregation. “He now theorized that if he came into their midst with only uninterpreted tongues-utterances they would receive no spiritual benefit. Rather, they could receive immense spiritual edification if he ministered in at least one of four different ways” (Gromacki, p. 169). The Church’s Bible (p. 232) described the thought this way: ““What he means is this: ‘Unless I tell you something easy to understand, something that can be made clear, my speaking in tongues will demonstrate only that I have the gift. You will hear but gain no benefit.’” The word “*profit*” (*opheleo*) is the same verb used in 13:3. Here this term reminded the Corinthians about the need to properly use their spiritual gifts. This included using the gifts in a way that edified others (verse 4).

As noted in the commentary on 12:8, the gifts of the Spirit have not been seen for some 2,000 years so there is some difficulty in understanding exactly what some of them were or what some of them did. Here we do not know if the “*revelation*,” “*knowledge*,” “*prophesying*,” and “*teaching*” were all supernatural gifts or a combination of miraculous and non-miraculous abilities. We also do not know if some of these words describe basically the same type of activity. For instance, what distinction should we make between *revelation* (*apokalupsis*) and *prophecy*? We find the word *revelation* being used again in verse 26, but there Paul did not mention the word *prophecy*. Did he omit *prophecy* in verse 26 because it was so closely related to the gift of *revelation*? A general definition for the word *revelation* is “disclosure, revelation” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 1:130). For information on the word *teaching* (*didache*) see the commentary on verse 26.

About all we know for sure is that these gifts were designed to communicate New Testament truths to people. Gifts such as *prophecy* revealed the information we now have in the completed New Testament. Gifts such as *tongue speaking* allowed that information to be communicated to those who spoke other languages. Today these verses remind us about the need to provide proper religious instruction to people and do this in as many languages as possible. Verse 6 also reminds us to make this information easy to understand. We cannot simplify the truth to the point where we dilute some part of the gospel, but we can use words and illustrations that allow the majority of people to readily comprehend what we are saying.

14:7: *Even things without life, giving a voice, whether pipe or harp, if they give not a distinction in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped?*

In verses 7-9 Paul continued to discuss the need to use spiritual gifts in a way that “edified” people (compare verses 3-4). If the Corinthians used the gift of tongues (the ability to speak in foreign languages) at a time and place when no one understood the language being spoken, they would have been like musical instruments that make noise instead of music.

Paul began his musical illustration by saying instruments do not have “*life*,” but they do have a “*voice*” (i.e. they make sounds). The word translated *without life* (*apsuchos*) occurs only here in the New Testament. This term is a compound word that is based on the Greek word for “*life*” (*psuche*), and the “alpha privative” (some Greek words have an “a” added as a prefix to negate their meaning). Just as we can change “*holy*” to “*unholy*” by adding a small prefix—“un,” such is also true for this word (“*life*” becomes “*lifeless*” by adding an “a” as its prefix). In Greek writings *without life* was used to describe the statues of gods. Here, however, Paul used this word to describe musical instruments.

The word *voice* (*phone*) occurs about 140 times in the New Testament, especially in the books of Luke, Acts, and Revelation. This term is “used for the ‘sound’ of the wind (John 3:8), of instruments (1 Corinthians 4:7, 8; Revelation 1:10), and the ‘voice’ of the bridegroom (John 3:29)” (CBL, GED, 6:473). “On the Day of Pentecost the crowds reacted to the miracle of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit because they heard ‘this sound’ (Acts 2:6, NIV)” (ibid).

Paul could have used several different types of instruments to make his point but he chose two; the first is described as a “*pipe*” (*aulos*). This term occurs only here in the New Testament and it comes from a verb (*ao*) that meant “*to blow*.” This word described a wind instrument, perhaps a flute. The CBL (GED, 1:489) described it as “a reed indented with holes” (this was a common instrument in Bible times). At the end of this verse the verb form of this word (*auleo*) is found; this latter term (“*pipeda*”) meant “play the flute or wind instrument.” The verb form of this word is found in Mt. 11:17; Lk. 7:32. The second instrument is described as a “*harp*” (*kithara*). Aside from here this word is found only in Rev. 5:8; 14:2; 15:2. The verb form of this term (*kitharizo*) is used twice in the New Testament (it occurs twice in Rev. 14:2). These two instruments are likely a synecdoche (they represent all instruments). The *pipe* stands for all wind instruments and the *harp* symbolizes all stringed instruments.

In this verse the Corinthians were asked a simple question. How could a melody be understood if notes are not correctly played on an instrument? There must be order, harmony and understanding. “Genuine music is not unintelligible noise. To be played properly and to be appreciated and understood, it must envelop a series of notes in harmony. They must make musical sense” (Gromacki, p. 170). Paul said there must be “*distinction in sounds*.” *Distinction* (*diastole*) occurs only here, Rom. 3:22; 10:12. The book of Romans uses this term to describe the “lack of difference” between Jews and Gentiles. Just as a cat walking on piano keys results in chaos instead of a distinctive musical arrangement, so tongue speaking was not a useful gift unless it was interpreted. The word *sounds* (*phthongos*) is found only here and Rom. 10:18; this term described “a clear and distinct sound, whether of a musical instrument (1 Corinthians 14:7) or of the human voice” (CBL, GED, 6:425). A more specific definition for this word in this verse would be “the tones of musical instruments” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 3:423).

14:8-9: *For if the trumpet give an uncertain voice, who shall prepare himself for war? 9 So also ye, unless ye utter by the tongue speech easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye will be speaking into the air.*

The point Paul made with musical instruments in verse 7 is again illustrated in verse 8, only here Paul appealed to warfare. “*Trumpets*” (*salpinx*) have often been used by the military. They have also been used to sound commands such as *charge* and *retreat*. Many soldiers have heard them used to start as well as end the day (buglers have played *veille* and *taps*). If soldiers are to understand the sounds coming from a trumpet, the trumpet player must play the right sequence of sounds (notes). There must be “distinctions in the pitch of the sound, in the length of the blast, and in the repetition of the call, or else there would be utter confusion in the camp” (Gromacki, p. 170). “In the New Testament the trumpet is used chiefly to signal. Such a signal had to be blown clearly if it was to have meaning for its intended audience. This idea served as a standard for the use of tongues in the public assembly (1 Corinthians 14:8)” (CBL, GED, 6:19).

The word “uncertain” (*adelos*) is found only here and Lk. 11:44; this latter passage describes unknown graves. Here this word means “unrecognizable, unclear” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 1:30). The word “*war*” (*polemos*) “occurs 16 times in the New Testament. Each time it means ‘war’ or ‘battle’ in the sense of armed combat (Matthew 24:6; Luke 14:31; 1 Corinthians 14:8; Hebrews 11:34), except in James 4:1 where it is used to mean ‘strife.’ Over half of the occurrences of *polemos* are in the Revelation where it describes the hostile activity carried on by demonic forces (Revelation 9:7,9; 11:7; 12:7)” (CBL, GED, 5:247).

Paul’s illustration is still relevant for our day and time. Musical instruments are often found at funerals and festivals. At these events, some of which celebrate national holidays, different songs and tempos help set the right tone for the occasion or music helps people know what to do or expect. The type of music

may tell us if an occasion is sad, joyful, solemn, humorous, etc. We immediately know some things by understanding the music.

Just as music can only be effective if it is understood (verses 7-8), so the gift of tongue speaking was only valuable if the words were understood. As previously noted in the comments on 12:10c, if a tongue speaker chose to speak in a language that his listeners did not understand, someone else was to “interpret” what he said (compare, too, 14:27). If a tongue speaker wanted to speak in a foreign language and then interpret what he said, this was also permissible **if** someone who had the gift of interpretation was present (see again the comments on 12:10c). If no interpreter was present, the tongue speaker was to stay silent (14:28). The church was a place to edify fellow Christians (14:5), not show off supernatural gifts.

The information in the preceding paragraph is repeated in verse 9; here Paul said Christians were to use speech that was “*easy to be understood*.” This expression comes from a single word (*eusemos*) that occurs only here in the New Testament; this term meant “easily recognizable, clear, distinct, intelligible.” Paul was saying, *how shall people know what you are saying* “if you do not speak an intelligible word”? (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 2:85). “From the living world, Paul used yet another illustration and applied it directly to the situation at Corinth. ‘Likewise ye’ means ‘take a lesson here’; understand and apply it” (CBL, First Corinthians, p. 439).

If tongue speakers did not speak in a language the people understood, or there was no interpretation of the tongue speaking (this latter point is implied), the tongue speaker’s efforts would be like “*speaking into the air*” (9b). This was a proverbial expression for ineffectiveness and profitlessness. If a blaring trumpet without a distinct pattern of sounds confuses military troops, what about the tongue speakers who engaged in this same type of activity (verses 7-8)? If “*lifeless*” instruments had to be used in a way where hearers understood the music being played, what about people who have “*life*” (verse 7)? Tongue speakers could use their gift (1 Cor. 14:39), but this had to be done in a decent and orderly way (1 Cor. 14:40) and people had to understand the languages that were being spoken (verses 7-9). If these things were not done, tongue speakers had to remain silent (1 Cor. 14:28).

14:10: *There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world, and no (kind) is without signification.*

The word “*voices*” (*phone*) usually meant “*sound, tone, noise*” (this term is also used in verse 11). In this verse the word *voice* seems to mean “*language*.” As the Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament (3:446) observed, the word *voice* in verses 10-11 describes “a foreign language as opposed to one’s own” language. If Paul had said, “no tone is without significance,” he would have affirmed that every sound is significant. Because this statement is not true, it seems best to understand *voices* as human languages. Stated another way, Paul said that there are “*many languages*” and *each language has significance*. All languages (tongues) can communicate thoughts (information) to people and this communication includes instruction in the gospel.

In the original text there is a play on words. The idea is “no language is not a language.” Barnes (First Corinthians, p. 264) said: “The *argument* is, that as *all* the languages that are in the world, however numerous they are, are for *utility*, and as none are used for the sake of mere display, so it should be with those who had the power of speaking them in the Christian church. They should speak them only when and where they would be understood.” Gromacki (p. 170) added that all “languages, whether written or spoken by either civilized or uncivilized peoples, have vocabulary meanings, verbal syntax, and in some cases tonal distinctions. Bible translators in primitive areas have often been amazed at the sophisticated language structure of natives who could not read or write.” “To Paul, there was no difference between real dumbness and unintelligible utterances; in neither is there communication of ideas or profit” (ibid, p. 171).

The word “*kinds*” is important. As noted in the commentary on 12:10b, *kinds* “refers to a family, offspring, race, nation, kind, sort, and class in New Testament usage. It always depicts that which is related to each other. There are many ‘kinds’ of fish (Matt. 13:47), but they are all fish. There are several ‘kinds’ of demons in the world (Matt. 17:21), but they are all still demons. There are many ‘kinds’ of voices (1 Cor. 14:10), but they are all voices. From this it can be concluded that there are many ‘kinds’ of

languages, but they are all languages. They are several families of languages in the world—Semitic, Slavic, Latin, etc. These are all related in that they have a definite vocabulary and grammatical construction. Paul could not have possibly combined known, foreign languages with unknown, ecstatic utterances under the same classification. They simply are not related to each other” (Gromacki, *The Modern Tongues Movement*, p. 62).

14:11-12: *If then I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be to him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh will be a barbarian unto me. 12 So also ye, since ye are zealous of spiritual (gifts), seek that ye may abound unto the edifying of the church.*

There are many “voices” (languages) in the world (see the comments on verse 10), but if people do not speak the same language as someone else, communication is difficult or impossible (“*I shall be to him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh will be a barbarian unto me*”). Here Paul “lengthened his analogy to two civilized people who spoke and understood two different languages (14:11). To each other, they were barbarians. In that day, a barbarian was regarded as one ignorant of culture and language, living outside of the civilized Roman Empire” (Gromacki, p. 171). The CBL (*First Corinthians*, p. 439) noted how speech “is a persuasive and communicative force. But speech that is not understood is powerless, futile and useless. The listener may hear, but try as he may he cannot understand. The speaker may repeat his message, but he cannot make his listener understand.” Readers may also wish to refer back to the comments on 1 Cor. 14:2.

The word *barbarian* (*barbaros*) is used six times in the New Testament (Acts 28:2, 4; Rom. 1:14; Col. 3:11; and twice here in 1 Cor. 14:11). As Gromacki indicated (see the preceding paragraph), this word does not describe a cruel, primitive and savage-like person. Gingrich and Danker (p. 133) described Paul’s *barbarian* illustration as “*speaking a foreign language, a strange, i.e. unintelligible tongue.*”

There were *barbarians* at the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11). Until the events of Gen. 11, everyone spoke the same language (Gen. 11:1). People not only communicated without difficulty, they were willing to work together (they decided to “build a city and tower” that would have a top that “reached to heaven,” Gen. 11:4). When everyone spoke the same language, the work could have proceeded with no language barriers. When people were made to speak different tongues (languages—Gen. 11:7-9), the difficulties were so immense the construction work stopped. Imagine a person who spoke the Egyptian language asking someone who spoke Greek to get him a hammer, find some mortar, get a shovel, or take a measurement.

A similar thing was taking place in the Corinthian assemblies—people were speaking in foreign languages that were not understood by those who heard them. Unless these languages (tongues) were interpreted, it was impossible to understand what the tongue speakers were saying. Paul knew the Corinthians were very interested in spiritual gifts (verse 12), but he warned them about the need to have and use gifts in a way that led to the “*edifying of the church.*” This point was especially important with tongue speaking, a gift frequently mentioned in this chapter. If tongues were used, they had to be interpreted (verse 27) so edification would occur. If there was no interpreter, the tongue speaker was forbidden from using this gift in the church (verse 28) because the church would not be edified (12b). For more information on tongue speaking (the ability to speak and understand languages one had never studied), see the commentary on 12:10b; 12:10c, the special study on tongue speaking at the end of chapter 12, and the commentary on 14:2.

The word *edified* (*oikodome*) in verse 12 is explained in the comments on verse 3, but here we may offer this simple definition: “*the building up of the church*” (Gingrich and Danker, p. 559). The word *church* (*ekklesia*) is discussed in the commentary on 11:16, 18. *Abound* (*perisseuo*) refers to “the wealth of the Church in gifts, powers and service” (*Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, 3:77). Brown (1:731) said Paul “urged the Corinthians to use their gifts for building up the church, so that they might abound.”

The word “*zealous*” (*zelotes*) in verse 12 described “a ‘zealous or dedicated person’ generally enthusiastic on behalf of someone or something (religion and politics especially)” (CBL, GED, 3:25). The

only other passages in the New Testament that have this word are Acts 21:20; 22:3; Gal. 1:14; Tit. 2:14; 1 Pet. 3:13. The word “gifts” is italicized because it is not part of the original text. A more accurate rendering would be “spirits” (“to be zealous for spirits”) and this “has puzzled many” (Lenski, First Corinthians, p. 589). It seems best to understand this as referring to “the different manifestations of the one Holy Spirit in the individual Christians” at Corinth (Lenski, First Corinthians, p. 590). The Corinthians could be very interested in spiritual gifts, but it was imperative that they act so the church (the congregation) would be greatly blessed. Whatever gifts they had or pursued were to be used to benefit the congregation.

While the gift of tongues has ceased (this point is discussed in the commentary on 1 Cor. 13:8-13), we can still benefit from the information in verses 11-12. These passages remind us that our teaching must be done in a way that “edifies” others. We accomplish this by offering instruction that is clear, easy to follow, and true. Even though we may at times teach material that is difficult, we should always seek to communicate in a way where everyone can understand what we say. This was how Jesus and the apostles taught.

14:13: *Wherefore let him that speaketh in a tongue pray that he may interpret.*

As previously noted in the commentary on 12:10c and 14:5, those who had the ability to “speak in tongues” also had the gift of interpretation (Christians could speak in languages they had never learned as well as interpret these foreign languages). If a tongue speaker used his gift and those listening to him did not understand the language he was speaking, there were at least three potential problems: (1) The tongue speaker would appear to be ostentatious (he could have spoken in the language his listeners spoke, but he chose to “show off” by speaking in a foreign language not understood by fellow worshippers). (2) If there was no interpretation, the people listening to the tongue speaker were not edified (verses 5-12). (3) If the tongue speaker spoke and then interpreted what he said, there was no way to verify that his interpretation was correct.

God sought to prevent the problems in the preceding paragraph by giving some Christians the “gift of interpretation” (1 Cor. 12:10). The Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament defined this ability as an “interpreter, translator” (1:322). Spicq (1:317) suggested that those with this ability, if necessary, “added explanations and timely clarifications” so each person present would receive edification (1 Cor. 14:26). The word *interpret* (*diemeneuo*) occurs only in Lk. 24:27; Acts 9:36; 1 Cor. 12:30; 14:5, here; 14:27. Every time this word is used in this letter it describes the interpretation of tongues (interpreting a foreign language).

The gift of interpretation was an essential part of first century Christianity (1 Cor. 12:11-18), but the Corinthians were more interested in the more flamboyant gifts such as tongue speaking. At the beginning of this chapter Paul told these Christians to seek prophecy over tongues (14:1-2). Here Paul seems to have been telling them to not neglect or stop neglecting the gift of interpretation. Some Christians could speak with tongues (verse 27), but members of this congregation also had to serve as interpreters. Stated another way, the Corinthians emphasized the gift of tongues and downplayed the gift of interpretation and Paul said this had to stop.

Those involved with modern Pentecostalism believe people speak in a language no one understands and then these “tongue speakers” must “pray for an interpretation” of the sounds they make (this belief is often based on or allegedly supported by 1 Cor. 14:13). As noted in the commentary on 12:10b and 12:10c, tongue speakers could speak in languages they had never learned **and** interpret these languages. This information tells us that the “praying that he may interpret” here in verse 13 was not a request for the power (ability) to interpret the tongue (language) being spoken. Here the emphasis is on being willing to serve as an interpreter. Instead of showing off their ability to speak in other languages, the Corinthians needed to pray about accepting the role of a servant and interpret the tongues spoken by others. This was especially important when visitors were in a worship assembly. If a Christian was speaking in a foreign language and visitors did not understand that language, and there was no interpreter, the visitor might be turned away from the truth (verse 23 and see the *supplemental points* on 14:16-17). Just as we might pray

to overcome a personal weakness, so the Corinthians needed to pray about becoming more spiritually mature (compare verse 20) and this included being willing to interpret tongues instead of speak in them.

14:14-15: *For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful. 15 What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.*

Throughout this chapter Paul emphasized the need for the church to be edified. If Christians spoke in tongues (languages they had never learned), and these languages were not understood by others, there was no edification. This is why Paul said the Corinthians were to pray about serving as an interpreter of tongues instead of speaking in tongues (verse 13). Here in verses 14-15 Paul used *prayer* and *singing* to illustrate how important it is to understand what is said and done in the assemblies of the local congregation. He illustrated this point a third time with *giving thanks* in verse 17.

If Paul “*prayed in a tongue*,” verse 14 says his “*spirit prayed*.” This means Paul knew what he was saying when he prayed in foreign languages and he was fully involved in this activity (even when praying in a foreign language Paul was intent, fervent and concentrating. His will and emotions were involved in this activity). Such should also be true for the worship we now offer because God does not delight in half-hearted or mindless prayers and worship. Compare 1 Cor. 11:27 and the chart below. Although a tongue speaker knew exactly what he was saying when he prayed in a foreign language, Paul said his “*understanding was unfruitful*.”

As noted in the commentary on 12:10b; 12:10c and 14:5-6, tongue speakers were able to both speak in and interpret foreign languages they had never studied. Even though a tongue speaker had an *understanding* of the languages he spoke, there could be times when his understanding was *unfruitful* (i.e. it furnished “nothing to others,” Vincent, 3:269). If those listening to a tongue speaker did not understand the foreign language being spoken, the tongue speaker would understand his prayer (“*my understanding*”—he comprehended his words), but his prayer had little meaning to those listening because they did not understand the tongue (language) he was using. *Unfruitful* (*akarpos*) has the sense of *unfruitful* or *unproductive*.

This author experienced something similar to verse 14 during a mission trip to Russia. A medical doctor who spoke no English saw me and concluded I was showing signs of being undernourished. Although the Russian Christian I was with could speak no English and there was no interpreter, Russian Christians publicly prayed for me for more than an hour. These Christians *prayed*, they prayed *with their spirit* (it was intense and fervent prayer and they *understood* what they were saying), but I did not “*know the meaning of the voice*” and their speech was like that of a “*barbarian*” (verse 11) to me because I cannot understand the Russian tongue. My understanding of that long prayer was so limited that the words spoken that day were *unfruitful* to me. If the Corinthians prayed in a language that was not understood by those who heard them, there was no “*distinction in the sound*” (verse 7) and it was like hearing an “*uncertain voice*” (verse 8). It was “*unfruitful*.” Compare verse 16.

Rather than pray in a language that people did not understand, verse 15 says Christians (tongue speakers) were to “*pray with the spirit and pray with the understanding also*” (i.e. Christians were to pray in a language that people could understand. This was Paul’s conclusion). Just as they *sang* in a language that people understood, so they were to pray in a language that people understood. It does little good to attend a worship service where things are done in a language that people do not understand. If tongue speakers were going to pray, there had to be interpretation of the tongue(s) (verse 27).

Some have said the phrase “with the spirit” and “in the spirit” refer to the Holy Spirit, but this is incorrect. As shown by the chart below and the word “my” in verse 14, Paul was thinking of his own spirit instead of the Holy Spirit. Whether Paul was praying (verse 14), singing (verse 15), or blessing God (verse 16), he was mentally focused and concentrating on what he was doing (compare 11:29 and Mt. 22:37). If first century tongue speakers did not understand what they were saying when they spoke in tongues, or people today “pray in tongues and do not know what they are saying,” how would anyone know if he is giving thanks, praying, confessing sin, or doing something else? If tongue speakers prayed

in a language they did not understand, it would be impossible for them to know that they prayed, let alone know what their requests were. The modern charismatic view of tongues is that people say things they do not understand; the Bible emphasizes that true worship involves our understanding, intellect and will (compare 1 Cor. 11:29). Modern Pentecostal claims cannot be reconciled with the facts and rules God associated with spiritual gifts.

Singing and New Testament worship:

The reference to “singing” in verse 15 as well as the information in the following chart shows that singing is a necessary part of worship. This singing is also somewhat distinctive from the worship offered under the old covenant. Under the Old Testament system of worship God commanded that instrumental music be used (2 Chron. 29:25; Ps. 150, etc.). When God gave the New Testament He could have given this same command. God could have also given a general command (“make music”) and we could make music in any way we wanted. God said those who live under the New Testament are to offer up a specific kind of music: *Singing*. This method of worship is found here in 1 Cor. 14 as well as Col. 3:16:

1 Cor. 14:15, 26	Eph. 5:18b-19	Col. 3:16
Sing with the spirit – verse 15	Be filled with the Spirit	Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly
Unto edifying – verse 26	Speaking one to another	Teaching and admonishing one another
“Hath a psalm” – verse 26	Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs	Psalms (and) hymns (and) spiritual songs
Sing with understanding – verse 15	Singing and making melody with your heart	Singing with grace in your hearts
Unto edifying – verse 26	To the Lord	Unto God

The word “sing” (*psallo*) in verse 15 is a verb and it occurs twice in 1 Cor. 14:15. This term is also found in Rom. 15:9; Eph. 5:19; and Jas. 5:13. Prior to the first century, *sing (psallo)* meant “singing in accompaniment with a harp.” By the first century (when this letter was written), this term had come to mean *singing* and **singing only**. As W. E. Vine (2:99) noted, “The word *psallo* originally meant to play a stringed instrument with the fingers, or to sing with the accompaniment of a harp. Later, however, and in the New Testament, it came to signify simply to praise without the accompaniment of an instrument. Accordingly, this is the significance here. It is rendered to sing in Romans 15:9 and James 5:13, R.V., ‘let him sing praise.’” Because New Testament worship is designed to occur without man made accompaniment, the Hebrew writer told his readers to offer “*sacrifices of praises*” from the “*lips*” (Heb. 13:15). We are to make melody in the “heart” versus a man made instrument (Eph. 5:19).

Barclay (James, p. 150) rightly noted how the “early Church was a *singing Church*; it was characteristic of the early Christians that they were always ready to burst into song. In Paul’s description of the meetings of the Church at Corinth, we find singing as an integral part (I *Corinthians* 14:15, 26).” If believers want to worship God in truth (and this is what He requires, Jn. 4:24), they will offer vocal music in worship. Using musical instruments such as organs, pianos, drums, guitars, etc. is an addition to God’s plan for worship and this “goes beyond what is written” (1 Cor. 4:6). Compare, too, 2 Jn. 9-11; Rev. 22:18-19.

As noted in the commentary on 13:8-13, the Bible is like an instruction manual for Christian living. God says His word is a “pattern” (2 Tim. 1:13) that is “complete” in every way (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Jesus warned about the need to live by “every word” from God (Mt. 4:4). Christians are obligated to do only

what God has “authorized” (Col. 3:17); this authorization (permission) comes through the Scriptures. The apostles received “all” the New Testament Scriptures (Jn. 14:26; 16:13) and then presented this information to others in both oral and written form (see 1 Cor. 11:23; 15:1-3; 1 Jn. 1:1-3). We now have the “entire counsel of God” (Acts 20:27) that provides us with all we need to know about Christianity and this includes information about worship. James described this complete package of information as the “perfect law of liberty” (Jas. 1:25). Paul warned about becoming involved with “another gospel” (Gal. 1:6-9). John said we must “*abide in the teaching of Christ*” or we “*do not have God*” (2 Jn. 9). When we look at what the New Testament says about music in worship, we find that God has instructed us to have a specific type of music: Singing (see the preceding chart). If we add an instrument to our singing, we engage in “will worship” (Col. 2:23) and God regards our worship as tainted by the “doctrines and commandments of men” (Mt. 15:8-9).

In spite of the preceding information some have claimed that *psallo* (the word for singing) meant “play an instrument.” This argument fails to consider that this word had this meaning long before the New Testament was written. Also, as John Price (a Baptist Minister) observed, “1 Cor. 14:15 becomes: ‘What is the outcome then? I shall pray with the spirit and I shall pray with the mind also; I shall play on a stringed instrument with the spirit and I shall play on a stringed instrument with the mind also.’ James 5:13 becomes ‘Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him play on a stringed instrument.’ We see what absurdities this leads us into. We cannot imagine the apostles exhorting us ‘to play on a stringed instrument with the heart’ and to ‘play on a stringed instrument with the spirit’ and ‘with the mind’” (Old Light on New Worship, p. 191). Singing is what God has specified for New Testament worship; we either truly love God and comply with this divine teaching (Jn. 14:15) or we do not (Lk. 6:46).

14:16-17: *Else if thou bless with the spirit, how shall he that filleth the place of the unlearned say the Amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he knoweth not what thou sayest? 17 For thou verily givest thanks well, but the other is not edified.*

In the previous verses Paul stressed the importance of tongue speakers being understood by those who heard them. He illustrated the point with praying and singing (verses 14-15) and the “*giving of thanks*” in verse 16. This third illustration is somewhat unique in that Paul does not apply it to himself. Instead of saying “I” will pray and “I” will sing (verse 15), verse 16 says “*if thou*” bless.

Verse 16 begins with a conjunction (*epei*) that is translated “*Else*” in the ASV and KJV. The CBL (GED, 2:507) noted how this term shows “causation” (CBL, GED, 2:507). Stated another way, this word means “*because, since*” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 2:19). If a person spoke in a foreign language (he used the gift of tongues), he could praise God, but the “*unlearned*” (those who did not speak that foreign language) would not know what was being said (this is basically the same point expressed in verses 14-15, but here Paul used a different example). Verse 17 makes the point in yet another dramatic way. A Christian could “give thanks” (present tense—on-going action), but “*the other*” would “*not be edified*” (present tense) because he would not understand the language being spoken. The word *edified* (*oikodomeo*) is also found in earlier parts of this book (8:1, 10; 10:23; 14:4). Here Thayer (p. 440) said *edified* means “*to grow in wisdom, piety, etc.*”

The word “*bless*” (*eulogeo*) usually meant “praise, commend, extol; bless; say the prayer (at the meal)” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 2:79). In Mt. 14:19 this term describes a prayer before a meal. Here it means “*give thanks and praise*” (Gingrich and Danker, p. 322). The word translated “*giving of thanks*” (*eucharistia*) meant “thankfulness, gratitude, the rendering of thanks, thanksgiving.” Here it means “personal thanksgiving in the worship service which is intelligible” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 2:88). These two words describe prayer from two different standpoints. The first perspective (*bless*) is praise. We may use prayer to praise and bless God. Prayer may also be used to express our thanksgiving and gratitude (the *giving of thanks*).

Although some believe Paul was describing prayers inspired by the Holy Spirit, the immediate context (verses 14-15) describes a tongue speaker concentrating on what he was doing (in verse 14 the ASV and

KJV say, “my spirit” and “spirit” is not capitalized). If a tongue speaker spoke a heart-felt (“spirit”) prayer in a foreign language (a “tongue”), and the people in the room did not understand this language, how could they say “amen” to it? This is the point in verse 16. Verse 17 is also easy to explain. A tongue speaker could certainly give “thanks” (*eucharisteo*) in a foreign language (the “tongue” he spoke—verse 17a), but “*the other is not edified*” (verse 17b) because the listener did not understand the language being used by the tongue speaker. If tongue speakers insisted on using their gift, what they said had to be interpreted (verses 27-28) or they had to keep silent because languages that people did not understand failed to “edify” others (17b; 14:5). The information in these two verses as well as the preceding passages further illustrates how the Corinthians were severely lacking in the area of love (1 Cor. 13). This information also provides an extraordinary amount of proof that modern Pentecostalism engages in many activities that contradict much of the New Testament information about spiritual gifts.

On the day this material was being revised I spoke with a preacher who described his brother-in-law, a man whose fluent knowledge of English and German was so good he sometimes lapsed into speaking some German words when leading a public prayer. When this happened God, as well as this brother-in-law, knew what was being said. The other Christians in these assemblies who spoke only English, however, did not understand the German parts of these prayers and they found it difficult to say “amen” to the German words in his prayers. A similar thing was taking place at Corinth, though the Corinthians had received their ability to speak in foreign languages directly from the Holy Spirit. The Corinthians could have spoken in a language that everyone understood, but they were so immature and childish they often insisted on showing off their gifts to others, especially the gift of tongues. Because the Corinthians were misusing their supernatural gifts, this chapter lays down some rules about tongue speaking and other miraculous abilities (compare verses 19-20, 26-40).

Supplemental points on 14:16-17:

Although the New Testament never describes the type of “clergy-laity” system now commonly found in the religious world, the “*place of the unlearned*” (verse 16) has sometimes been understood to describe religious “*laymen*.” The word *unlearned* (*idiotes*) is found only a few times in the New Testament (Acts 4:13; 1 Cor. 14:23, 24; and 2 Cor. 11:6 [“rude”]). In Classical Greek *unlearned* described a private citizen in contrast to a public official. It was also used to contrast a taxpayer with a tax collector (Spicq, 2:213). In general this term referred “to anyone who has no training or specialty, and therefore is contrasted with experts and professionals...the lay person as compared to the physician, the ‘common soldier’ as compared to the officer, the amateur as compared to the professional...the layman as compared to the philosopher or the poet” (ibid).

While the word *unlearned* did draw distinctions between skilled and unskilled people, the definitions in the preceding paragraph tell us this term was not associated with the type of “clergy-laity” system now commonly found in religious groups. Christians have different roles, but Jesus said they all are “brethren” (Mt. 23:8). Paul said there is “no distinction” in Christ (Gal. 3:26-28). The “clergy-laity system” found in the world affirms that all are *not* brethren and there *are* distinctions in Christ.

Here the *place of the unlearned* describes “those who were unable to interpret the speaking in tongues, and who were therefore unable to say ‘amen’ to a prayer in tongues” (CBL, GED, 3:143). This condition or state would have been true for Christians as well as non-Christians. Spicq (2:214) correctly said the *unlearned* had “no grasp of this language and cannot respond ‘yes’ (*amen* with the article), cannot join in a prayer the sense of which escapes him.” If a person came into an assembly where someone was using the gift of tongues to pray in a language that was not understood (think especially of visitors and new Christians), one might think the tongue speaker was “*crazy*” (verse 23, the Living Bible).

In verses 23-24 of this chapter the word *unlearned* is joined with the word *unbeliever*. This indicates that the *unlearned* included non-Christians who did not understand the languages being spoken by tongue speakers. It appears that some non-Christians were very interested in the gospel and were great prospects for conversion (more information on this point is found in the commentary on verses 23-25), but the Corinthians were jeopardizing these Bible study prospects by improperly using the gift of tongues. Rather

than teach and edify, tongue speakers were distracting people with their gift and even detracting from the gospel message. Thus, Paul told tongue speakers to either speak in the language of their hearers or let someone interpret what they were saying. Paul should not have had to say these things, but the Corinthians were behaving like children (verse 20). Tongue speakers were so immature and self-centered they showed off their gift, even if this meant an unsaved person would not understand the soul saving message. Tongue speakers were helping keep people out of heaven by their bad behavior and this was the epitome of selfishness and immaturity (compare 3:1, 3). Paul knew this had to stop and part of the solution is found in verse 13: The Corinthians were to pray about becoming more willing to interpret the tongues instead of speak in tongues.

These two verses also tell us that first century Christians had visitors come to their worship services. Thus, anyone who claims that worship is “just for Christians” is mistaken. These verses also suggest that when people attend a worship service they should have some opportunity to learn about and find salvation. Before people leave, they should have received enough information to know what is necessary to become a Christian and be given an opportunity to act on that information (compare Acts 2:36-40).

Associated with the fact that non-Christians came to worship is the phrase, “*fillet the place*” (verse 16). The KJV says, “*occupieth the room.*” The word *fill* or *occupy* (*anapleroo*) has sometimes been understood to describe a special area reserved for non-Christians or a “particular seat in the assembly” (Vincent, 3:270). Others, including this author, believe Paul described those who did not understand the language(s) being used by the tongue speakers. While there is nothing wrong with accepting the first explanation, based on verse 23 and as already expressed in the preceding information, it seems Paul had the latter thought in mind.

During some of the Corinthian services people said “*amen*” (*amen*). In the Old Testament this word is frequently used to express ideas like *reliable, sure, true, and yes indeed*. When the people responded to David’s psalm (1 Chron. 16:36), they said *amen*. The word *amen* was also used when people responded to a decree from Nehemiah (Neh. 5:13). Ezra offered a public blessing and during this ceremony an *amen* was given (Neh. 8:6). God wanted the nation of Israel to *amen* (comprehend and agree to) His laws (Deut. 27:15-26). These references show that an *amen* (an expression of agreement) was often public. It was like a “seal of approval.”

Other places that have this term include 1 Kgs. 1:36; 1 Chron. 16:36; and Ps. 106:48. In the LXX (the Greek version of the Old Testament) the word translated *amen* is quite common. In the Septuagint this term expressed verbal agreement for what people said and did as well as assent and cooperation. A fascinating point about *amen* is found in the book of Isaiah (65:16). This point is best demonstrated by a good KJV reference Bible, the footnote in the ASV, or the text of the New English Bible. According to this passage God is “*the God of Amen.*” That is, God speaks the truth and He carries out His word (compare Rev. 3:14).

The church at Laodicea (Rev. 3:14) was told that Jesus is the “*Amen.*” When this statement is joined with Isa. 65:16, it demonstrates that Jesus has the same status as God the Father. Not only does the Lord have the same status, Jesus *speaks the truth and will carry out His word*, just as God the Father does. John’s description of Jesus in Rev. 3 leaves no doubt that Jesus’ statements about heaven, hell, judgment, Satan, a resurrection, sin, and everything else are all true. Whenever Jesus spoke He told the truth. What He promised will be done. There is no chance of the Lord ever failing because He is the *Amen*. Other New Testament verses that use the word *amen* include Mt. 5:18, 26 and Rom. 1:25. Jesus often used this word to emphasize His teachings. In some places the word *amen* is translated “*verily*” (see Jn. 3:5).

Passages such as Jn. 3:5 seem to use *amen* as an “authority-formula” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 1:70). In fact, when the word *amen* is used in John’s gospel, it is always repeated (*amen, amen*). English translations often translate this repetition as “*verily, verily.*” Even some of the New Testament letters start or end with *amen* to stress the integrity and authority of the book (see Rom. 16:27; Jude 25). When used in this way, the word *amen* affirms that every word in the Bible books is true.

In 1 Cor. 14 Paul used the word *amen* to describe a person who put “himself into the statement with all earnestness of faith and intensity of desire” (Baker’s Dictionary of Theology, p. 39). Those who said *amen* were worshipping in “*spirit*” (they participated in the service and agreed that what was being done

was right, verses 14-15). Also, Paul's question implies "that it was the custom in the Christian church from the beginning, for all the people, in imitation of the ancient worship, to signify their assent to the public prayers by saying *Amen* at the conclusion of them" (MacKnight, p. 194). Paul strengthened his point with the word "*say*" (*ereo*), a verb that goes beyond "the speaking of words" (CBL, GED, 2:593). This term emphasizes "the forcefulness of the speaker" in "a command, affirmation, or objection" (ibid).

Today some have taken extreme positions on saying *amen* during assemblies of the church. One extreme is a great hesitation and almost refusal to publicly acknowledge what is said and done in worship. On the other hand there are those who use this word so often it has very little meaning. Both extremes are wrong and this is not a new problem. Vincent (3:270) noted how Jewish Rabbis had several sayings about "the Amen," one of which was the "orphan Amen" (this occurred when someone said, "Amen" when it was not needed or appropriate). The Rabbis said, "Whoever says an orphan Amen, his children shall be orphans." *Amen* is a Biblical and useful word and it is a term that we should use as appropriate to express our agreement with sound Bible teaching. We should also seek to avoid *orphan amens*.

14:18-19: *I thank God, I speak with tongues more than you all: 19 howbeit in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that I might instruct others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue.*

Because tongue speaking allowed Christians to communicate the gospel to people who spoke a different language (Mk. 16:15, 17, 20), Paul was grateful that he had this ability. In fact, he was thankful that he could use this gift “*more than*” the Corinthians (“*you all*”). This statement may indicate the gift of tongues (the ability to speak in languages one had never learned) came in different degrees. Paul may have been fluent in several different languages, but the Corinthians were only able to speak a few. Or, it may mean the Holy Spirit empowered Paul to use this gift more often than the Corinthians.

Lenski (First Corinthians, p. 596) said *more than you all* “refers to a higher degree of endowment by the Spirit. The entire spiritual equipment of the apostle, which he has received for his great office, also in regard to this gift exceeds anything that appears among the Corinthian church members, all of whom are of the ordinary class.” This conclusion is consistent with Jn. 3:34, a passage that says Jesus received the Spirit “*without measure*.” If the Lord received the Spirit *without measure*, this suggests that others received the Spirit *with measure* (i.e. there were varying degrees of power). Compare, too, 1 Cor. 12:11. Lenski (First Corinthians, p. 596) also pointed out how *I speak*, though expressed with the present tense, does not mean Paul always spoke in foreign languages. The verb “resembles our English ‘I speak this or that language,’ i.e., I have this ability.”

The Church’s Bible (p. 232) noted how Paul used “this same tactic elsewhere. When he wants to deny the advantages of Judaism and to show that henceforth they amount to nothing, he first shows that he himself possessed these advantages to the fullest. Then he calls them a loss” (see Phil. 3:4-8). Here in the First Corinthian letter Paul told these saints, “Do not be arrogant, then, as if you alone had this gift. Indeed, I possess it myself, even more than you do” (ibid). We are not told how many languages Paul could speak, but it seems safe to say that whatever languages he needed to use in his missionary journeys, especially among the Gentiles, he was able to communicate in the necessary tongue(s).

Many of the verses in this chapter describe how the Corinthians were willing to use the gift of tongues in the presence of others who could not understand the language they were speaking (verses 2-9; 16-17). In some cases this was apparently done in the presence of non-Christians (verse 23). Things were so out of control Paul said he would rather speak “*five words*” (i.e. in a language the people knew) instead of “*ten thousand*” words in a tongue (a foreign language) people did not know. The word translated “*ten thousand*” (*murioi*) in verse 19 “is the largest number in the Greek language. It goes beyond ten thousand to countless myriads” (Gromacki, p. 173). Aside from here this term is found only in Mt. 18:24 and 1 Cor. 4:15. Paul knew it was imperative that people be “*instructed*” (*katecheo*), but the Corinthians were acting in ways that sometimes made this very difficult.

Instructed refers to instructing people in Christian beliefs and doctrine (this same term has this same meaning Gal. 6:6, “*taught*”). Some of the Corinthians may have thought Paul did not understand some things about tongue speaking, but Paul assured them that he was fully versed in this area. He said he was an expert at speaking in tongues (communicating in foreign languages he had never learned, verse 19). As great as Paul’s tongue speaking abilities were, he said it was better to teach (instruct) people with just a little information that could be understood instead of saying a lot in a language people did not understand. Bengel (2:247) noted how it is often the case that “those less accomplished are more proud and assuming” and this seems to have been true for the Corinthian tongue speakers. If those who spoke in tongues wanted to use their gift by themselves, that was fine. When the gift of tongues was used “*in the church*” (19a and verse 28), it had to be used as Paul described (see verse 27 and refer back to the commentary on 12:10c). For more information about the *church* (*ekklesia*), see the commentary on 11:16, 18.

Today verse 19 reminds us that we should do things in a way that is understandable to all. Some use terminology that only the most educated Christians (or visitors) can understand. Others teach in such a way whereby students find it difficult to learn. Here we find that God wants people to be taught in a way whereby all can understand what is being said. No matter how well educated, qualified or impressive a teacher is, if he cannot be understood by those he is teaching, he is not a good teacher.

14:20: *Brethren, be not children in mind: yet in malice be ye babes, but in mind be men.*

The Corinthians did not yet have the full revelation of the New Testament (1 Cor. 13:8-13), but they did have enough information to show some spiritual maturity. Here Paul told these Christians “to use some common sense in their estimate and exercise of tongues (14:18f.)” (CBL, GED, 6:455). This meant, among other things, interpreting the tongue speaking. The original text “is a command to stop an action which is in progress, ‘do not continue’” (Rienecker and Rogers, p. 436).

The word translated *men* (or in some versions “*mature*”) at the end of this verse is also found in 2:6 and 13:10 (the original word is *telios*). In 13:10 this term is translated “perfect” in the ASV and KJV. Here Thayer (p. 618) said *men* means rising “to the same level of knowledge which we ascribe to a full-grown man, until we can be likened to a full-grown man.” The word *men* is the opposite of the word *children*.

The ASV uses the word “*children*” (*paidion*) in the first part of the verse and the word “*babes*” (*nepiazō*) to help readers realize there are two different words for *children* in the Greek text (these two words make two distinct points). “Paul exhorted them to stop thinking like little children (using *paidia* in a negative sense), but with regard to plotting and performing evil they need to be as innocent as ‘infants’ (using *nepiazō* in a positive sense)” (CBL, GED, 4:252). “That is, do not be foolish in matters where you ought to be wise, but be foolish and simple only when it comes to injustice, vanity, and arrogance. One who is a babe in evil is necessarily wise” (The Church’s Bible, p. 235). The KJV translates both terms with the word “children” and thus fails to recognize this subtle distinction in the original text.

Paul may have referred to the Corinthians as *children* because youngsters often like to play with things that glitter or are showy (children are not always interested in what is useful and profitable. They frequently prefer what is amusing). These qualities were certainly true of the Corinthians; they liked gifts such as tongue speaking because gifts like tongues impressed others (if we meet someone who can speak in two, three, or more foreign languages, we are usually impressed). Paul said the Corinthians were to stop being *children in mind*.

The word translated “*mind*” (“*understanding*” in the KJV) occurs only here in the New Testament and it is used twice in this verse. Originally this term (*phren*) described the *diaphragm* in the midsection of the human body. Later it became associated with intellectual and spiritual activity. In this passage the word is associated with man’s thought process. Thayer (p. 658) said, “*the mind; the faculty of perceiving and judging.*” These Christians needed to start thinking like adults. They needed to understand that spiritual gifts were not designed to put on performance or to draw attention to oneself. Today a similar point still needs to be taught: Worship is not a performance. Those who come to worship should not think they are coming to “watch the show.” Those who help in the service, and this includes preachers, are not putting on a performance. Worship is a time to honor and glorify God. Performance oriented services may draw crowds and bring in “rave reviews,” but these things are not true worship.

At the time this information was being revised, this author was asked about helping start a worship service at a housing complex for the elderly. I was told the residents of this facility would be inclined to attend these services if “good snacks would be brought” for the residents of this complex. It seemed that the prospective attendees were mainly interested in a religious performance and the promise of a tasty treat after they had been entertained for an hour. This is one example of immature thinking, but it is by no means the only one. When some Christians do not get their way, they say, “We quit” or “We will not help anymore.” We cannot control how the unsaved think and act, but we can try to help Christians grow (2 Pet. 3:18) and grow to the point where they “grow up” (Eph. 4:15; Col. 1:10; 2 Thess. 1:3; 1 Pet. 2:2). The only “childlike qualities” God desires (Lk. 18:17) among people are things like a willingness to forgive, a thirst for knowledge, being teachable, purity, and a lack of anxiety. Today preachers still need to preach: “Brethren, be not children in mind!”

Paul also used the word “*malice*” (*kakia*), a word Gingrich and Danker (p. 397) defined as “*be a child as far as wickedness is concerned* i.e., have as little wickedness as a child.” Since this word is expressed

with the present tense, Paul meant the Corinthians were to *continually* avoid what was evil (the original text tells us this is a command instead of a suggestion). God's people were to *regularly* be babes (innocent) regarding evil while also *continually* seeking spiritual maturity. Gromacki (p. 174) said, "Paul did not want them to have any knowledge or experience of sin through active participation." When it comes to sin, sometimes the less we know about it, the better off we are (compare Rom. 7:7-13).

The repudiation of evil was an important lesson for this congregation because, as shown in the preceding chapters of this book, this congregation was filled with wrongdoing. Some of the Corinthians' sins involved spiritual gifts. Using spiritual gifts in improper ways (and this context specifically deals with the gift of tongues) was not only an example of evil, it was something that could turn the unsaved away from the soul-saving message of the gospel (verses 23-25). Christians had to choose between acting like spiritual babies or spiritual adults. If they would not act like spiritual grown ups, Paul said he would come with a "rod" (4:21).

A brief study on Calvinism:

By telling Christians to be like *babes in malice* (innocent when it comes to evil), Paul implied that infants are *not* guilty of "original sin," a doctrine associated with Calvinism. Calvinism is discussed in the commentary on 2:14, but some additional comments about it are offered here.

Many religious groups believe all babies are automatically affected by Adam's sin (each one is said to suffer from "original sin"). This is a common religious belief, but it is not taught in the Bible. Instead of affirming that a person is sinful from his conception or birth, the Bible says man's heart is evil from his "youth" (Gen. 8:21). Sin abounds in our world, people eventually learn about it, and all eventually choose to commit it (Rom. 3:10, 23). People are guilty of sin because they see it and commit it, not because it is passed on from one person to another (Ezek. 18:20). Rather than inheriting sin from Adam and our parents, "sin is a transgression (breaking) of the law" (1 Jn. 3:4). Sin is something we must choose and actually do before we become guilty of it. Solomon said our spirits come to us directly from God, not from our parents (Eccl. 12:7). This latter verse tells us that people do not start life with a "dirty (sinful) spirit." Woods (James, p. 152) described the point this way: "Inasmuch as 'like begets like' (Gen. 1:9-25, everything brings forth after its own kind), and since God begets our spirits, they are, at birth, as pure as the source from which they spring, and become sinful only through personal transgression."

Augustine (354-430 A.D.) is credited with formalizing the doctrine of "original sin," but this doctrine became especially popular because of John Calvin (1509-1564). Calvin was born to Catholic parents on July 10, 1509. Around 1530 Mr. Calvin had an "emotional conversion" that prompted him to break ties with the Catholic church. Calvin spent about three years writing the first edition of the "Institutes of the Christian religion" and even now most religious groups are affected by his ideas to one degree or another. Many have summed up Calvinism with the word "TULIP": Total Depravity; Unconditional Election; Limited Atonement; Irresistible Grace; Perseverance of the Saints.

As noted in the preceding information, Calvin believed children are tainted by Adam's sin (sin is "hereditary"), but the Bible says children are sinless (compare Deut. 1:39; Mt. 18:3; 19:14). Passages such as Ps. 51:5 have sometimes been used to say children are born in sin (totally depraved), but as shown in the commentary on 2:14, this is not what David meant. David used figurative language to describe himself, just as we find in other parts of the Old Testament. For instance, Ps. 58:3 says "*children speak lies as soon as they are born.*" This statement is not literally true. Another example of dramatic and figurative speech about infants is found in Job 31:18 ("*and her have I guided from my mother's womb*"). Was Job really doing this before he was born?

The second major tenant of Calvinism, and this point is more fully discussed in the commentary on 2:14, is "unconditional election." Calvinism says God *elects* certain individuals to salvation and these people will be saved no matter what they do; stated another way, people have no free-will when it comes to salvation. Like the preceding point, this teaching is also not substantiated by the Bible. God *designed a plan* to save man and *prepared a place* to save people, but each person gets to choose whether he wants to participate in this plan of redemption (Acts 2:40 says, "save yourselves"). If people choose salvation, they

are also given the right to reverse this choice in this life (compare Jn. 6:67). James said Christians can “*err from the truth*” and this choice results in “death” (eternal condemnation, Jas. 5:19-20). Judas had been “numbered” with (part of) the apostles, Acts 1:17, but Jesus said he lost his salvation (Mt. 26:24). It is also possible for a person who receives salvation to lose it and then regain it (Lk. 15:32). When it comes to salvation, God lets us choose whether or not we want to be one of His people.

The third major element in Calvinistic thought is a *limited atonement*; this idea is also untrue. Rather than die for “just a few,” Jesus died for the entire world. According to 1 Jn. 2:2, Jesus is the *propitiation for our sins*, plus the *sins of the whole world*. The Hebrew writer said Jesus “tasted of death for every man” (Heb. 2:9).

Irresistible grace is the fourth major component of Calvinism and this belief is closely connected with the Holy Spirit. It is believed that the Holy Spirit supernaturally calls people to salvation (the “unconditionally elected” who are the recipients of the “limited atonement” are eventually brought into God’s grace by a direct and special operation of the Holy Spirit). These ideas conflict with the fact that people receive faith by “hearing the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). Rather than the Holy Spirit acting directly in a person’s life, God says a person is purified by “obeying the truth” (1 Pet. 1:22 and compare Rev. 22:17). People are “begotten by the word of God” (1 Pet. 1:23) instead of a special experience from the Holy Spirit. We are saved by the “power of the gospel” (Rom. 1:16) instead of a unique experience from God.

The last major tenant of Calvinism is *perseverance of the saints*; like the other four points, this one is also untrue. This teaching says a Christian will never fall from grace (salvation cannot be lost). Paul said, “let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12). Compare, too, 2 Pet. 2:20-22; Heb. 2:1-4; 3:12-13; 4:1; Rev. 2:10.

It has been said that the “TULIP flower” of Calvinism has “changed the world” and there are only a few religious groups that have been untouched by the petals of Calvin’s teachings. These things are true, but the changes Calvin brought into the world were not for the better. Satan has used the teachings of John Calvin and others to keep many people from finding and obeying the truth.

14:21: *In the law it is written, By men of strange tongues and by the lips of strangers will I speak unto this people; and not even thus will they hear me, saith the Lord.*

One of the key terms in this verse is the word “law” (*nomos*). Paul quoted from Isaiah (Isa. 28:11) and said this prophet’s words were part of the “written” law. Although some divide the Old Testament into sections, calling the first five books of the Old Testament (Genesis-Deuteronomy) the “law” section, this passage shows that “law” was not limited to those first five books. Even Jesus affirmed that books outside of Genesis-Deuteronomy are considered law. In Jn. 10:34 the Lord appealed to an Old Testament Psalm (Ps. 82:6) and described this passage as law. Compare, too, Jn. 15:25.

Isaiah tried to teach the people of his day but they refused to listen (Isa. 28:1-7, 12). Those who were supposed to be God’s people mocked God’s ways and God’s prophets. As stated in Isa. 28:7, priests and prophets were drunkards. The people’s rebellion was so bad that J. B. Phillips rendered Isa. 28:10 in this way: “*Do we have to learn that the-law-is-the-law-is-the-law, the-rule-is-the-rule-is-the-rule, a little bit here, a little bit there?*” Since those who lived in Isaiah’s day were so rebellious, Isaiah made a prediction—a prediction that Paul also shared with the Corinthians: “*with men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that will they not hear me, saith the Lord.*”

Isaiah’s prediction was not a *prophecy about speaking in tongues*. Rather, he meant that if God’s people would not listen to God’s law and prophets in their own native speech, they could listen to someone else: Foreigners (the Assyrians). In 722 B.C. the Assyrians took the northern section of Israel into captivity and the Hebrews became familiar with the Assyrian language. The Assyrian tongue (a known but foreign language) was a sign of God’s judgment upon the Hebrews. This was a “sign.” The foreign languages spoken by at least some members of the Corinthian congregation were also a sign, but it was a different type of sign. The “Assyrian tongues” proved that Isaiah’s prophecy was true (God’s people did go into Assyrian captivity). The tongue speaking done by first century saints confirmed that

God's word was true (Mk. 16:17, 20 and see 1 Cor. 14:22a). Since New Testament tongues were a sign to verify the truthfulness of the gospel (compare Acts 2:4, 7-8), those who abused this sign were guilty of "malice" (verse 20).

Strange tongues (heteroglossos) is found only here in the New Testament; the KJV translates this term as "other tongues." The Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament (2:65) defined this word as "speaking a foreign language." Gingrich and Danker said it means "*speaking a foreign language.*" These *other tongues* were a known language (the Assyrian language), just as Paul's discussion of "tongue speaking" was a reference to known languages. For more information on the gift of tongues and how these are different from modern Pentecostalism, see the commentary on 12:10b, 10c; the commentary at the end of chapter 12; and the commentary on 14:2

The end of verse 21 is also very important. God said He would "*speak*" unto His people, but they would not "*hear*" Him. Israel would not *hear* in two senses. Since the nation was spiritually rebellious it did not want to *hear* (know and obey) God's commands. There was also the problem of *hearing* (understanding) the Assyrian tongue. The Assyrians and the Hebrews spoke different languages so there would have been some communication problems between these two nations. Today we have many tools to understand people who speak different languages so we can often overcome language barriers. Man's biggest problem is not *hearing* (i.e. failing to obey God's will). If people are going to *hear* God, they must use the "perfect" (the completed New Testament Scriptures, 1 Cor. 13:8-13).

14:22: *Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to the unbelieving: but prophesying (is for a sign), not to the unbelieving, but to them that believe.*

Here is another conclusion: *Tongues (glossa*—this word is discussed in the commentary on 12:10b and 14:2) were "*a sign, not to them that believe, but to the unbelieving.*" *Sign (semeion)* is discussed in the commentary on 1:22-25. Here Thayer defined *sign* as "a sign by which one is warned, an admonition." God allowed Christians to speak in languages they had never learned to gain the attention of non-Christians. Based on the information in Acts 2:4, 7-8, 11-12, this sign worked and it worked very well.

The word translated *amazed* in Acts 2:12 (*existemi*) literally meant "put out of its place" (i.e. the non-Christians who heard the tongue speaking were overwhelmed with amazement). The Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament (2:7) described this *amazement* as "a mental condition of being *outside oneself* or of *astonishment* because of amazement or fear" (this is the general definition for this term). There was a "miracle of languages at Pentecost" (ibid). The Holy Spirit allowed the apostles to speak in languages they had never learned, and this astounded those who witnessed it.

Luke also said those who witnessed the tongue speaking on Pentecost were "*perplexed*" (ASV, Acts 2:12). This term (*diaporeo*) meant people considered all the possible explanations for what they were witnessing but they had no explanation. Since the people were "greatly perplexed" Peter provided them with an exact explanation of what was taking place (Acts 2:16). Non-Christians understood *what* was happening because they understand the foreign languages, but they did not understand *how* it was happening. Even after considering all known explanations, they still could not explain how the apostles could communicate in languages they had never learned. The Day of Pentecost in Acts 2 is a perfect illustration of how tongues were a "sign to the unbelieving." The gift of tongues was also a sign to people at Corinth, some of whom may have been Jews. "At Corinth, the meeting place of the church was situated next door to the synagogue (Acts 18:7-8), thus unbelieving Jews would very likely attend the Christian services" (Gromacki, p. 174).

The gift of tongue speaking was one of God's ways to *confirm the word* (Mk. 16:17, 20). Since God's word has now been fully delivered and confirmed (Jude 3), all the supernatural gifts (and this includes the gift of tongue speaking) have been removed. Tongue speaking was not the most important gift (it is listed last in 1 Cor. 12:28), but it did serve an important purpose, especially when Christians engaged in evangelism. The first century Christians gradually received information about Christianity through supernatural gifts such as "prophecy" (22b) and communicated this information to foreigners with the gift of tongues. Now we have this information recorded in the New Testament (1 Cor. 13:8-13) and the power

to supernaturally speak in languages we have never learned has been removed. Several passages remind us that God's power to convert people is now based on the gospel instead of spiritual gifts (compare Jn. 20:31; Rom. 1:16; 2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Tongue speaking surely helped with first century evangelism, but evangelism was not the only work of the early church. There was also a need to offer additional instruction to those who had already become Christians. In first century times this instruction came through acts such as "*prophesying*." There were also the "words of wisdom and knowledge" (1 Cor. 12:8). Verse 22 is one more reminder that spiritual gifts were not for personal enjoyment or a tool to "put on a show." The gifts were given "*for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the body of Christ*" (Eph. 4:12). They were the "in part" (1 Cor. 13:9) that Christians used until the entire New Testament (the "perfect, 1 Cor. 13:10) was completed.

Tongue speaking was useful for only one group: Unbelievers. *Prophecy (propheteia)*, however, was useful to both Christians (verse 3) and non-Christians (verse 24). As the Church's Bible (p. 235) said, "You ask me: 'How can you claim that Paul says prophecy is useful for both groups when he says that **prophecy is not for unbelievers but for believers**?' If you examine the text carefully, you will understand Paul's meaning. He does not say that prophecy is useless for unbelievers, but that it is not a **sign**, as tongues are, because it is obviously wasted on them." *Prophecy* was not a sign for unbelievers, but it did help them learn the truth and become Christians (verses 23-25). For additional information on the gift of prophecy—"the endowment and speech of the Christian teachers" (Thayer, p. 552)—see the commentary on 12:10a and 14:31.

14:23: *If therefore the whole church be assembled together and all speak with tongues, and there come in men unlearned or unbelieving, will they not say that ye are mad?*

Here Paul envisioned a time when the "*the whole church*" was "*assembled together*." *Assembled together (sunerchomai)* is a verb that is also found in 1 Cor. 7:5; 11:17, 18, 20, 33-34; 14:26. The CBL (GED, 6:195) said this word has a "technical sense in 1 Corinthians 11 and 14." Paul "used this term to describe the corporate church service/meeting" (ibid). This coming together is also described with a special trio of words in the original text (*epi, to, auto*); this unique combination of words is also found in 11:20 and discussed in the commentary on 11:20b. Here *epi, to, auto* indicates "all assembled in the same place." Paul did not mean every single member of the congregation had come together (some may have been sick, out of town, etc.). He told the Corinthians to imagine a time when the congregation came together (presumably for worship) and "*all*" would "*speak with tongues*." The word *all* is a hyperbole (an exaggeration for emphasis). The word "*if*" also emphasizes that this is a hypothetical situation. Paul offered a second and similar hypothetical example with *prophecy* in verse 24.

Some of the Corinthian tongue speakers should have been willing to serve as interpreters (verse 13), but their childish mindset (verse 20) caused them to insist on speaking in tongues, even if those present could not understand the language(s) being spoken (compare verses 6-13). This behavior was not only rude, it had a negative impact on visitors (verse 23). If visitors attended a service and they did not understand the language(s) being spoken, they (the "*unlearned*" or the "*unbelieving*") would say the tongue speakers were "*mad*." Bengel (2:248) said, "For they will not be able to distinguish that earnestness from madness; hence they will speak shamefully." Instead of tongues being a sign to people (verse 22), they would have been a source of derision.

As noted in the supplemental information on 14:16-17, the *unlearned (idiotes)* described "those who were unable to interpret the speaking in tongues, and who were therefore unable to say 'amen' to a prayer in tongues" (CBL, GED, 3:143). Paul also spoke of the *unbelieving* (non-Christians, who in this case, did not understand the foreign languages being spoken. The word *unbelieving* is also used twice in verse 22). It seems several Christians wanted to use the gift of tongues and presumably "teach" others, but no teaching occurred because those in attendance did not understand the language(s) being spoken. Some Christians could have served as interpreters so teaching could occur (verse 27), but no one wanted to fulfill this role because it was less glamorous than tongue speaking.

We do not know if visitors ever saw what Paul described in this verse, but the chance that they would see this type of thing was very high if the Corinthians did not change their ways. Just as visitors in our day and time can have a very negative experience at worship, so such could have occurred and likely did happen in the first century church. Brown (2:741) said, “An utterance in another tongue can only serve to harden the unbeliever, because it communicates nothing to him, and does not show him how to be reconciled to God.” The Corinthians’ actions could have frightened non-Christian visitors to the point where they left and told others Christians were part of a kooky cult or were “mad” (crazy).

The Bible teaches that God gives some attention to the “court of public opinion” (1 Tim. 3:7; Col. 4:5; 1 Thess. 4:12; Lk. 2:52; Acts 2:47) and His people should do the same. We cannot tailor our worship to what others want, but we can have worship services that are as appealing to visitors as possible and still comply with the instructions found in the New Testament. Verse 23 reminds us that our actions in worship can interfere with people who want to investigate the Christian faith. Verse 25 says the opposite is also true (our actions in worship can also help people to obey the gospel).

The word translated *mad* (*mainomai*) is a present tense verb; it was used by ancient Greeks to describe a state of ecstasy that resulted from worship. Homer used it to describe the rage involved in some marital disputes. It was even used to describe the “madness” of an uncontrolled fire. By using this term Paul implied that non-Christians saw or would see Christians as part of a wild and frenzied group—a bunch of crazed fanatics. Gingrich and Danker (p. 486) said *mad* in this verse describes “the impression made by speakers ‘in tongues’ on strangers.” Christians can leave a great impression on others and sometimes the one they leave is very bad.

MacArthur (God’s High Calling For Women, pp. 36-37) offered some interesting background material that may further explain why the unsaved at Corinth would have been so taken aback by the Corinthians’ actions. “The city of Delphi, located across the Gulf of Corinth, was the seat of a religion headed by a woman known as the Pythia, or the oracle of Delphi. To qualify for the office of priestess in this religion, a woman had to be a young virgin. Later, married women over fifty were preferred, but they were required to dress like maidens. Each priestess was a medium in contact with demon spirits.

“A man desiring to consult the oracle (no women were allowed to consult) sacrificed an animal while a few attendant priestesses evaluated the omens. If they were favorable, the man was permitted to enter the inner shrine. After entering he wrote his request on a tablet (archaeologists have excavated the shrine area and found some of those tablets still intact), which would probably then be read to the Pythia. The Pythia sat on a tripod, allegedly over a chasm from which a mystic vapor from the ground arose. Before taking her seat, she drank water from the prophetic stream called Kassotis and ate sacred laurel leaves. In response to the question on the tablet, she uttered incoherent sounds that were interpreted (often in perfect hexameter verse) by a male prophet who stood nearby. The interpretation, which was often obscure and variable, usually left the inquirer more mystified than when he came.

“That pagan practice had a negative impact on the church at Corinth. Some people came into the Corinthian assembly and uttered similar ecstatic speech, supposedly in the power of the Holy Spirit. That led to chaos in the Corinthian church. The true gifts of speaking in tongues and prophesying became confused with satanic counterfeits.”

Tongues were a *sign* for unbelievers *if they were used correctly* (verse 22). The correct use of tongues meant speaking in a foreign language when in the presence of others who spoke that foreign tongue. If the tongues were abused—and speaking a foreign language in the presence of people who did not understand that tongue was an abuse (verse 23)—Christians could harm the cause of Christ. In some respects tongues were like modern medicine. A properly prescribed prescription can be very helpful; if medicine is abused, it can lead to addiction, sickness, and sometimes death. The Corinthians had to realize that tongues were only effective if they were used in the right way.

14:24: *But if all prophesy, and there come in one unbelieving or unlearned, he is reproved by all, he is judged by all;*

Instead of speaking in foreign languages that people did not know (verse 23), Paul said it was better to

use the gift of “*prophecy*” (verse 24). *Prophecy (propheteuo)* has already been discussed in the commentary on 11:4a; 12:10a, 27-28; 14:31. Prophets communicated the gospel to people. Those who had this ability were similar to preachers in that they edified the church (14:4). Prophets were unlike modern preachers in that they needed no advance preparation before speaking. As noted in the comments on verse 23, Paul did not mean “*all*” (every single Christian) would have or use the gift of prophecy. Just as Paul said “*if*” in verse 23, so he used this same hypothetical example here. Also, it seems Paul had in mind “**prophesying** in sequence, one at a time, not simultaneously” (Holman, 7:248).

If Christians used the gift of prophecy to present information about Christianity, others in the assembly (verse 23) could be “*reproved*” (the KJV has “*convinced*”) “*by all*.” Gingrich and Danker (p. 249) defined *reproved (elencho)*, a present tense verb, as “*convict or convince someone of something.*” *Reproved* brings to mind a situation where someone hears information and is convinced of its truthfulness (Jesus used this same word in Jn. 16:8). Allen (p. 176) suggested (and this author agrees), the *reproving* (conviction) probably involved sin, righteousness, and judgment (the things mentioned in Jn. 16:8-11). People heard teaching (perhaps a “sermon”) and that information convinced them about the truthfulness of the gospel.

First century assemblies were one of the ways Christians evangelized the world (1 Cor. 1:21). Unlike many today who tell funny stories and use anecdotes to entertain, first century Christians taught the word of God. Some teaching involved the wrongness of idolatry. In 1 Thess 1:9 Paul said, “*For they themselves report concerning us what manner of entering in we had unto you; and how ye turned unto God from idols, to serve a living and true God.*” People were taught and convinced about sin and the “wages” of sin (Rom. 6:23). Non-Christians were taught and convinced about a better way of life (compare 1 Cor. 6:9-11). Prophets and others tried to *prick the hearts* of the unsaved (Acts 2:37).

In addition to being *reproved* (convinced about the truthfulness of the gospel), Paul said the unsaved would be “*judged by all*.” In other words, those who had the gift of prophecy would *judge* (present tense) non-Christians by what they said. Prophets offered teaching that affirmed people were lost (unsaved) and would therefore perish (Lk. 13:3) unless they obeyed God’s will. Holman (7:249) noted how the “conversion of the lost is part of the purpose for Christian gatherings.”

The CBL (GED, 1:228) offered this helpful comment on the word *judged (anakrino)*: “The idea here is not that a non-Christian is standing trial or is being judged by all the saints; rather, Paul was simply suggesting that everyone will ‘recognize’ (i.e., ‘discern’) that the sinner has been confronted by the power of the Living God. The assembly will recognize this change because the nonbeliever will turn (repent) and will ‘worship God’ (verse 25) saying, ‘God is truly among you!’”

Verse 24 tells us that first century Christians taught the unsaved about subjects such as sin, repentance, baptism, Jesus’ second coming, heaven, hell, etc. The first century saints encouraged non-Christians to become “*children of obedience*” (1 Pet. 1:14). Today people still need to be taught about sin and repentance (Acts 2:38; 17:30; Rom. 3:10, 23) as well as the things related to salvation. People need to be challenged to examine their lives. Miraculous gifts have been replaced by the *perfect* (a completed Bible, 1 Cor. 13:8-13), but the things associated with Christianity (see the commentary on 1 Cor. 12:13a and 13b and “An Overview of New Testament Christianity” at the end of this book) are unchanged and still need to be communicated to a lost and dying world.

14:25: *the secrets of his heart are made manifest; and so he will fall down on his face and worship God, declaring that God is among you indeed.*

The discussion in verse 24 about evangelizing the unsaved is also the subject in this verse. Here Paul described non-Christians who realized they were unsaved and they wanted to right their relationship with God. Paul knew that not all are “reproved” (convicted of sin, verse 24), but some are. When a person reaches this point he is sorry for his sins, he wants forgiveness, he is ready to acknowledge the Lordship of Jesus, and he is ready to be buried with Christ in baptism (Rom. 6:1-4) for the forgiveness of his sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16). Stated another way, verse 25 pictures an individual who is willing to honestly evaluate his life, acknowledge his sins, and do what is necessary to become a Christian.

The beginning of verse 25 (“*the secrets of his heart are made manifest*”) describes the stirring of a non-Christian’s conscience. After instruction in the gospel (verse 24) a person begins to see himself as he really is. *Secrets (kruptos)* describes a man’s “hidden sins” (CBL, GED, 3:413). Thayer’s definition (p. 362) for this word is “his secret thoughts, feelings, desires.” The gospel causes people to reflect on their lives and see that they are guilty of breaking God’s laws and this fact justifies their spiritual death (Rom. 6:23). Today those who preach often hear someone say, “The information you presented today really applied to my life.” Or, “That sermon really describes me.” Even though some think they have safely hidden their sin from others and maybe even themselves, God’s word pierces the deepest parts of a person’s life (Heb. 4:12). The word of God is the sword that reaches into man’s innermost parts (compare Acts 5:33; Eph. 6:17).

“*Manifest*” (*phaneros*) is found two other times in this book (3:13; 11:19). In this verse it means “*disclosed*” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 3:413). Some have a “seared conscience” (1 Tim. 4:2), but the majority of people can have their heart opened by the gospel. A good example of God opening a person’s heart through His word is found in the life of Lydia. Lydia’s heart was “opened” (Acts 16:14), but this occurred by the words Paul “spoke” (Acts 16:13) to her. When she was “convicted” (verse 24), she obeyed the gospel (Acts 16:15).

In the middle of verse 25 Paul spoke about a non-Christian “*falling down.*” In the Bible the word *down* is sometimes associated with worship as well as recognizing God’s greatness. Just as we sing songs about “kneeling at the cross,” so the Bible speaks of “falling down” before deity. The Wise-men who came to see Jesus “fell down” before Him (Mt. 2:11). Satan not only wanted “worship” from Jesus, the devil wanted the Lord to “fall down” before him (Mt. 4:9). The man who owed a debt he could never repay “fell down” before his lord (Mt. 18:26). When Jesus was mocked, men “kneeled” before Him (Mt. 27:29). John the Baptist was a great man, but he said he was unworthy of “stooping down” and untying the Lord’s sandals (Mk. 1:7). A leper “knelt” and asked Jesus to be healed (Mk. 1:40). Demons “fell down” before Jesus (Mk. 3:11). A woman with a demon-possessed daughter came and “fell down” at the Lord’s feet (Mk. 7:25). When Jesus was among His friends (the house of Mary and Martha), Mary “fell down” at His feet (Jn. 11:32). *Falling down* is a way of acknowledging God or something about Him.

The end of verse 25 speaks of an unsaved person “*declaring*” (“*report*,” KJV) that God was in the midst of the assembly. *Declaring (apangello)* meant a convert or a potential convert would acknowledge he had found the truth and God was with the people in this assembly (compare verse 23). Gingrich and Danker (p. 79) defined *declaring* as “*tell openly or frankly.*” A person who concluded He had found the truth and the true God might make his *declaration* to the members of the congregation, his friends and family, or a combination of these groups. Basically verses 23-25 describe non-Christians who visited first century church services and, in at least some cases, were converted by the teaching that was done by people like prophets (verse 24).

Some have suggested that non-Christians were convicted of sin because Christians knew intimate facts about them (i.e. Christians knew the “secret sins” of the unsaved). Just as the Holy Spirit allowed Peter to know some private information about Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-4), so some think supernatural gifts allowed Christians to know the sins of others and this knowledge allowed Christians to “convict” the unsaved of their transgressions. This idea is interesting but very doubtful.

Ananias and Sapphira *were both Christians*; the people Paul described in 1 Cor. 14 were not. Another indication that Christians did not have intimate knowledge about the sins of unbelievers is found in the book of Acts. Every conversion in this book is based on the *hearing of God’s word* (Rom. 10:17), not a declaration of a sinner’s specific sins. We also need to consider human nature. How many unsaved people would have attended a service (or stayed at a service) if their most private sins were disclosed? Imagine a Christian standing up and saying, “You are a thief!” “You are an “extortioner!” “You are a drunkard!” “You are sexually immoral” (compare 1 Cor. 6:9-10). Moreover, what if Christians made these charges and a non-Christian attempted to deny them? Would God have provided Christians with even more specific information about the person’s sins to “convict” them? If Christians listed the specific sins of people, this could have easily led to gossip, one more issue the Corinthians did not need. Just as first

century Christians convicted people of sin by using the gospel (compare Acts 24:25), so this is what we now use. Compare Acts 2:36-37, 41.

Verses 23-25 provide us with some insight about personal evangelism. If people are not made aware of their sins and the penalty for them, they will have little reason to acknowledge their transgressions and have little incentive to become Christians. Salesmen use this same basic principle in their work. They know their prospect must see a need for their product and be motivated to buy what they are selling. Salesmen do not sell a product and *then* convince the buyer about the item's value. Today people must first see their need for the gospel and then they will obey.

14:26a: *What is it then, brethren? When ye come together, each one hath a psalm,*

In the preceding verses Paul explained how people could only be “*edified*” if they understood what was taking place in the assemblies (compare verses 16, 17, 19). In the next two verses Paul said tongue speakers could only use their gift if people understood the language(s) they spoke, or their speech was interpreted. The church is to be a place where people (even non-Christians, verses 23-25) can worship and receive instruction in the gospel. Some of the Corinthians’ *edification* was accomplished by the things listed here in verse 26.

As previously noted in the commentary on verse 23, the word translated “*come together*” had a technical sense (it described “the corporate church service/meeting,” CBL, GED, 6:195). This same word and meaning are also found in 11:17, 18, 20, 33, 34. As discussed in the “Introduction to 10:16 and an introduction to the Lord’s Supper (the Communion),” plus the commentary on 11:20b and 16:1, Christians *came together* on the first day of every week (every Sunday). Although 1 Cor. 14:26 does not mention a specific day, Paul did use the present tense to describe the Corinthians’ *coming together*. Paul said when these Christians assembled, “*each one*” had a “*psalm*,” a “*teaching*” (“*doctrine*,” KJV), a “*revelation*,” a “*tongue*,” and an “*interpretation*” (these words are defined below). Because Paul said *each one*, some have wondered if every Christian possessed each one of these abilities.

In some cases *each one* (*hekastos*) does describe every single person (see Mt. 16:27; Acts 2:38). In other passages this term does not describe every individual. One example of this is 1 Cor. 7:2 (if “every man” means *every person*, all men must be married!) In 1 Cor. 7:2 *each one* describes *every married man*. Here in 1 Cor. 14:26 *each one* means “*each one who has something*.” Since “*hath*” (“*has*”) is a present tense verb (the Corinthians *continually* had the gifts described in this verse), it appears there was no shortage of gifts and abilities among the Corinthian Christians. Those who were endowed with miraculous gifts and (or) natural talents were able to use their abilities in worship so fellow worshippers could be *edified*.

Some believe Paul listed things in the order they were used in worship and this may be correct. The first item in verse 26 is described as a *psalm* (*psalmos*). Some have understood this word to mean Christians sang solos. Others believe *psalm* refers to a song leader (perhaps some saints supernaturally received songs from God and then taught these songs to the congregation). Another viewpoint says the *psalms* were something like an inspired word (God gave Christians special information for the enrichment of the congregation). The Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament (3:495) said *psalm* “probably refers to songs composed by members of the congregation, which they then present in the worship service.” This definition and explanation is the one accepted by this author. If this interpretation is correct, these *psalms* were not a miraculous gift (many uninspired people have composed wonderful hymns). There is also insufficient proof to say these *psalms* were sung (they may have been read or quoted).

This chapter, just like 1 Cor. 11, tells us the Corinthians had multiple problems with their worship. We do not have enough information to know what all the specific issues were, but there are some interesting possibilities concerning the *psalms*. Perhaps a Christian composed and wanted to share an uninspired *psalm* with the congregation, or he was trying to lead a song he had composed, but the tongue speakers or prophets insisted that their gifts were more important. If the *psalms* (hymns) were uninspired, the prophets and tongue speakers could have claimed their gifts came “directly from God” and were “more

important.” Prophets and tongue speakers could have insisted that worshippers pay attention to them instead of those who had uninspired *psalms*. We do know that the previous chapter has a lot to say about love and kindness—qualities that were apparently missing from many of the Corinthian assemblies.

Whatever the exact nature of the *psalms*, we can say they were not something like a choir or solo. As noted in the commentary on 14:14-15, Christians are to “sing.” Rather than be entertained by soloists and choirs, or rather than just “make music,” God has specifically told people to “sing” (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). God has also said “each one” is to sing (Christians are to “*admonish one another*,” Col. 3:16). In Eph. 5:19 Paul said, “*speaking one to another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord.*” Choirs and solos do not have the reciprocal action described in Eph. 5:19 and Col. 3:16. A choir or soloist can “admonish” those who listen, but God says we are to “admonish one another.” This mutual admonishment can only occur if all sing.

Those who truly love God are committed to doing all things “*in the name*” of Jesus (Col. 3:16-17). This means we act by the Lord’s authority (the Bible must put the “stamp of approval” on what we do, whether this be in or out of worship). Stated another way, when it comes to spiritual matters, God says we must have divine permission for what we do. Jesus illustrated this point during the final days of His life. On the Tuesday before He died Jesus asked if John’s baptism was from “heaven” (had God authorized it?) or from “men” (had God not authorized it?). Today the things we do are either “authorized by God” (i.e. they are found in and supported by the Bible) or they are “authorized by men” (i.e. they are not found in and supported by the Bible). The religious activities authorized by men do not please God (Mt. 15:8-9).

Some have claimed that instrumental music and choirs are authorized for Christians because they are specifically mentioned in the Old Testament. Many appeal to David and his involvement with these things, but David and the Old Testament are not the standard for Christians. King David lived under the Old Testament, a law that specifically authorized instrumental music in worship (2 Chron. 29:25b; Ps. 150). The Bible says the Old Testament has been replaced by the New Testament (Rom. 10:4) and this new covenant specifically says people are to *sing* (Eph. 5:19) and sing “one to another.” If we “sing and play,” or we have soloists and choirs “sing to us,” we have “gone beyond what is written” (1 Cor. 4:6). For more information on this point see the study on “Singing and New Testament worship” in the commentary on 14:14-15.

If the Corinthians came together and carried out their worship in the proper way, Paul said they would receive “*edifying*” (*oikodome*, 26b), a word also found in verses 3, 5, 12 of this chapter. Here *edifying* means the church (Christians) would be “built up” by doing the things listed in this verse. This word reminds us that “unstructured meetings offer little, if any benefit to Christians. Neither a ‘let happen what will’ nor a cold, heart-killing formalism was recommended by Paul” (Allen, p. 177). Today, if Christians worship “in spirit and truth” (Jn. 4:24), they are also *edified*. For a brief study on worship, see the commentary just prior to 12:1.

14:26b: *hath a teaching, hath a revelation, hath a tongue, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying*

In addition to the Corinthians bringing *psalms* to their assemblies (the first part of verse 26), some also brought a “*teaching*” (*didache*). This is also known as the “doctrine of the Lord” (Acts 13:12). People like the Pharisees and Sadducees had their “doctrine” (same word, Mt. 16:12), but the Corinthians were to abide in God’s “doctrine” (compare Acts 2:42). If Christians failed to abide in the true (right) “doctrine” (teaching), they did not have God (2 Jn. 9-11). Today this point is still true. If we are holding to any other doctrine besides the “one faith” (Eph. 4:5), we have embraced a “different gospel” (Gal. 1:6) and we “do not have God” (2 Jn. 9).

In 1 Cor. 14:26 the word *teaching* refers to “the active sense of *instruction* or of *speech* and *exhortation in the form of teaching*” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 1:319). Gingrich and Danker (p. 192) defined *teaching* as “teaching, of what is taught.” The Corinthians received much of their *doctrine* through supernatural gifts because the New Testament was in the process of being written. Now we have God’s *teaching* (*doctrine*) through the fully revealed New Testament (1 Cor. 13:8-13).

The gift of “*revelation*” (*apokalupsis*) was apparently linked with the gift of prophecy (these two gifts are both listed in verse 6). Thayer (p. 62) defined *revelation* as “the disclosure of truth, *instruction*, concerning divine things before unknown,” especially “those relating to the Christian salvation – given to the soul by God himself, or by the ascended Christ.” This supernatural gift helped reveal the future and (or) helped people understand things about Christianity. Since this gift could have accomplished more than one thing and it has not been seen in nearly 2,000 years, it is impossible to precisely describe it. Basically *revelation* was one of the ways people received the various truths we now have contained in the completed New Testament.

In addition to the gifts of *teaching* and *revelation*, some had the ability to speak in a “*tongue*” (*glossa*). This gift, which is discussed in the commentary on 12:10b, 12:10c, the information prior to the commentary on 1 Cor. 13, and the commentary on 14:2, gave Christians the ability to communicate in languages they had never learned. Readers may also wish to see Rev. 5:9; 7:9 as these passages also use the word that is here translated *tongues*.

The word *interpretation* (*hermeneia*) is only found here and 12:10. As discussed in the commentary on 12:10c, this gift was “the interpretation of words in a different language” (CBL, GED, 2:598). “The meaning of this word carries with it more than the cognitive task of literal translation; implicit in the ‘interpretation’ is the idea of ‘explanation’” (ibid). The Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament (2:54) said those with this gift could “*translate* and make intelligible to the congregation what has been said in the tongues” (i.e. the foreign language used by the tongue speaker). Bengel (2:249) noted how the “word *hath*, repeated, elegantly expressed the distributed abundance of gifts.”

When it was time for worship, verse 26 illustrates how a variety of members could or did take part in the service; the Corinthians used their natural or supernatural gifts to help with the worship and “edify” others. The Corinthians’ willingness to help in worship is not always found in our day and time. Now some must practically be forced into helping with worship. Christians today should be taught to look forward to helping with every work of the church, especially worship.

Several of the Corinthians could help with worship because there was no “clergy-laity system” at Corinth. Unlike the Old Testament system of Judaism which required special men (priests), there are no “religious professionals” or “special priests” in true Christianity. Christianity says **all** the saved are “priests” (1 Pet. 2:5-9; Rev. 1:6; 5:10). Preachers may be trained in the Bible, but even they are just “one of the brethren” (Mt. 23:8). The only restriction when it comes to helping carry out worship is gender. Women are not allowed to take a leading role in the assembly if men are present (see the comments on 11:3 and compare 1 Tim. 2:8-13); any Christian males, however, can help with worship. If a congregation is truly part of the “one faith” described in 12:13 and Eph. 4:5, it will not have the type of clergy-laity system commonly found in the religious world. For more characteristics that help identify the church of the New Testament, see “An overview of New Testament Christianity” at the end of this book.

A third point of application is also seen in verse 26. If worship is turned into a performance (and it seems this was taking place at Corinth), people rob God of the glory and honor that should be directed to Him. Worship is a time to “edify” (*oikodome*—this word is defined in the commentary on 3:8-9; 8:1; 14:3; 14:26a) the body of Christ and glorify God.

14:27: *If any man speaketh in a tongue, (let it be) by two, or at the most three, and (that) in turn; and let one interpret:*

At least some of the Corinthians were misusing their spiritual gifts and it seems tongue speakers were among the worst offenders (compare verse 23). Perhaps one tongue speaker got up, spoke at length, and then a second tongue speaker “wanted his turn” and took “just as much time” as the first. Then a third tongue speaker wanted to do what the first two had done and maybe speak even longer to show that his ability was just as good as or perhaps better than the first two. Eventually the service ended and a lot had been said, but the congregation had not properly worshiped because few understood the language(s) that had been spoken (verses 14-16). Whatever the specific problems were, there was no *edification* at some of the Corinthian assemblies (verse 26) and this problem had to be corrected.

If the maximum number of people spoke with tongues (“at the most three”), and each tongue speaker talked for 20 minutes, tongue speakers would have consumed an entire hour. Since tongue speaking was supposed to be “interpreted,” this could have easily added a second hour to a worship service. If other gifts such as those described in verses 29-30 were used, a service could have easily lasted three or more hours. The singing (verse 15), the observance of the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor. 11:20), the prayers and the contribution (16:1-2) would have also helped lengthen the time spent at worship. Some services seem to have been so long that, as stated in verse 30, God put some restrictions on spiritual gifts.

We do not know if the rules in this chapter were given to every first century congregation or they were specifically designed for the Corinthians. Perhaps the rules were known to all the first century Christians who had spiritual gifts but the Corinthians “forgot” them, just as they had forgotten some other things such as brotherly love. It is also possible that these rules were intended for every first century congregation, but Christians in other places had never heard them because they did not misuse their supernatural gifts. Whatever the exact circumstances, Paul told the Corinthians they could use their various gifts, but they had to use them in the right way—a way that eliminated any possibility of competition or disorder. Since tongue speakers are listed first, this is one more indication that they were among the most disorderly.

Paul said tongue speaking had to be limited to no more than “three” people. MacKnight (p. 195) believed this means “two or three sentences” instead of two or three people. That is, tongue speakers could say just a few things before their words were translated. Although this author believes this is the wrong explanation (the “two or three” simply describes two or three speakers), it is true that foreign missionaries usually say a few words or speak a few sentences and then a translator “interprets” that information for the listeners. This was very likely the process that was used or should have been used at Corinth; in fact, the present tense of *speak* and *interpret* is perfectly consistent with someone saying a few sentences and then having a second person interpret. Paul said a maximum of three people could speak in tongues at an assembly, but this had to be done “in turn” and there had to be “interpretation.”

The word “*interpret*” (*diermeneuo*) is also found earlier in this letter (12:30; 14:5, 13). As noted in the commentary on 12:29-30, this word was also used in non-Biblical sources. In these documents, which were written earlier than the New Testament, *interpret* “normally has the sense of ‘translate’ from one language to another” (Spicq, 1:312). Here *interpret* means “translate” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 1:322). Since this verb is expressed with the present tense and the imperfect mood, it was an on-going command. Stated another way, interpreting the tongues was not optional; it was a divine order. Paul did not say who was to do the interpreting. It may have been a fellow tongue speaker or someone who possessed the independent gift of interpretation (for more information on the interpretation of tongues see the commentary on 12:10c).

If there was more than one tongue speaker in an assembly, the Corinthians had to go “in turn” (the KJV says “by course”). The word translated *in turn* (*meros*) has “a numerical sense: *each in turn*” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 2:409). Tongue speakers could use their gift, but they had to take turns and what they said had to be interpreted (this helped maintain order in the assemblies, verse 40). For more information on the gift of tongues (the ability to communicate in a language someone had never learned), see the commentary on 12:10b, 12:10c, the information prior to the commentary on 1 Cor. 13, and the commentary on 14:2.

Paul knew there might be a situation where a tongue speaker would want to use his gift but a translator was not present in the assembly. If this happened, what should be done? Could a tongue speaker still use his gift? This question is answered in the next verse.

14:28: *but if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God.*

This passage is easy to understand. If an “*interpreter*” was not available to translate what a tongue speaker said (i.e. the foreign language he was speaking—verse 27), the tongue speaker was not allowed to use his gift “*in the church.*” Gromacki (p. 176) said the “guarantee of interpretation had to precede the

actual tongues utterance.” This “guarantee of interpretation” stands in stark contrast to most if not all modern Pentecostalism. Today, when “ecstasy occurs, a person’s emotions are uncontrolled; the man who is going into a state of ecstasy does not stop to see if one is present to interpret what he will say nor does he have the ability to turn the state of ecstasy off and on as one would a water faucet. Hence, this verse is conclusive evidence that tongue-speaking was not ecstatic utterances” (Willis, p. 413). Paul reminded the Corinthians that they had full control over their supernatural gifts. In fact, in verse 32 Paul said, “*the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets*” (spiritual gifts never overpowered those who possessed them).

The word *interpreter* (*diermeneutes*) is found only here in the New Testament; as noted in the commentary on 12:10c, those who had the gift of interpretation were able to interpret the language spoken by tongue speakers or verify that what a tongue speaker said in another language was true. The CBL (GED, 2:128) noted how this term was rarely used after “its first appearance in 1 Corinthians. It did not appear again until the 12th Century A.D.” (CBL, GED, 2:128).

“*Keep silence*” (*sigao*) comes from a present tense, imperative mood verb. In other words, Paul described an ongoing command to stay silent. This same term is again used in verses 30 and 34 as well as Acts 12:17; 15:12-13 and the references in Acts help illustrate the *silence* in 1 Cor. 14. Instead of describing *the absence of noise or speech*, Paul described a *cessation of activity*. In other words, the silence in 1 Cor. 14 describes being absolutely quiet at certain (specific) times. The “speaking in tongues is to cease” (The Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 3:242). Paul did not mean the tongue speakers were forbidden from singing or saying *amen* (verse 16).

If tongue speakers wanted to offer a public prayer, lead a song, or even preach in the language understood by those who were present at an assembly, they could do these things. If tongue speakers did not use the language understood by the people in the assembly, they had to stay “silent” with respect to their gift of tongues. As Gromacki (p. 177) noted, if a tongue speaker “could not add to the edification of the meeting, he was not to take away from it with an uninterpreted utterance.”

If a tongue speaker wanted to go off by himself, he could “*speak to himself and to God*” (a person could speak in foreign languages all he wanted in private). Modern charismatics believe *speak to himself and to God* means making some type of “heavenly sound” that only God can understand, but this is not what Paul meant. As shown in the commentary on 12:10b, 12:10c, true tongue speakers understood what they said. Paul even alluded to this fact here by saying, “*speak to himself*” (if a man “speaks to himself,” he understands the language he is speaking). For information on the phrase *unto God* and how it is misused by modern Pentecostalism, see the commentary on verse 2.

Paul’s point is somewhat reminiscent of children and toys. When a child receives a new toy or gadget, he may want to play with it again and again. In a similar way some of the tongue speakers apparently wanted to use their gift at every opportunity, even though this sometimes interfered with “edification” (verse 26). Paul told the tongue speakers to use their ability in the right way at worship or use it in a private setting (by themselves). God had some rules for the spiritual gifts and these rules had to be obeyed. Today God still has rules for Christianity and these rules must also be obeyed. The 27 books of the New Testament contain rules about worship, Christian living, the organization of the church, the work of the church, and the proper way to become a Christian. If we truly love Jesus (Jn. 14:15; 15:14), we will want to know what God’s rules are and we will do our best to follow them. For information about the word “*church*” (*ekklesia*), see the commentary on 11:16, 18.

14:29: *And let the prophets speak (by) two or three, and let the others discern.*

In the KJV this verse sounds somewhat awkward (“*Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge*”). Other versions help show that Paul meant, “let two or three prophets speak.” The number of prophets who were allowed to speak at an assembly was identical to the number of tongue speakers (verse 27). Both tongue speaking and prophecy were important, so those who had these abilities were encouraged to use them. However, since more than two or three prophets may have wanted to speak at the same service, God imposed a limit on the number of people who could use these gifts in a single setting

(there is nothing to indicate that God also specified a *minimum* number of tongue speakers and prophets for the Corinthian gatherings).

Paul did not describe how the prophets were to be selected. The choice may have been based on some type of rotation system. It is also possible that “elders” (1 Tim. 3:5 and see the commentary on 12:27-28) determined who would speak. *Prophets (prophetes)* are mentioned earlier in this letter (12:28, 29) and there are additional references to them in this chapter (see verses 32 and 37). For information on the gift of prophecy, see the commentary on 12:10a; 12:27-28; 14:31.

When the prophets spoke, *others* were to “discern” (*diakrino*). *Discern* is a compound term. A prefix (*dia*) is added to the normal word for “judge” (*krino*). By adding this prefix Paul strengthened the meaning of the word often translated “judge.” Kittel (abridged edition, p. 474) noted how adding the prefix gives *discern* (“judge,” KJV) a “stronger form.” Many today think Christians should not judge, but here God says judgments were right and necessary. As long as we “judge righteously” (Jn. 7:24), God is pleased. Here *discern* is expressed with the present tense and the imperative mood (i.e. this *discernment* was an on-going command).

The Corinthians were to *judge (discern)* a prophet’s teaching because God is a God of truth and Christians are to be people of truth (compare 1 Jn. 4:1; 1 Thess. 5:20-21; Acts 17:11). When Paul described love in the preceding chapter he said, “love rejoices with the truth” (1 Cor. 13:6). The nation of Israel had a standard for judging their prophets (Deut. 18:20-22) and God gave the first century spiritual gifts to help determine whether or not people were teaching the truth. The Bible also tells us that Christians tried to correct those who taught error (Acts 18:24-26). Some would not change so Christians were to make a judgment about these people as well (Rom. 16:17). Today Christians still need to *judge* those who teach and this judgment must be based on the truth contained in the completed New Testament. It is not enough to “hear” information from religious speakers; we need to listen carefully to what teachers say (compare Lk. 8:18) and then compare that information with God’s word.

“*The others*” (*oi alloi*) indicates there were other prophets in the assembly and these inspired men were able to evaluate and verify what was taught. It was as if these men were “*experts*” in the Christian faith. Of course, there may have also been some mature Christians in these assemblies who were not prophets and they, too, could have helped determine what was true and what was not. The KJV says “*other*” (singular), but the Greek text is plural and the preferred rendering is *others*.

Today it is still God’s will that people carefully listen to what is taught and closely evaluate what they hear, but many are lax in these things. A high percentage of people automatically accept what is said in a Bible class or worship service because it comes from a respected preacher or teacher. Paul said this is not how true Christians live. No matter who is teaching and no matter what subject is being discussed, we must evaluate and examine what teachers say. We may trust the person and have great confidence in him, but we must always verify what is taught.

14:30: *But if a revelation be made to another sitting by, let the first keep silence.*

Here Paul pictured a setting where Christians had “come together” (verse 26), presumably for worship. As one Christian offered instruction, “*another*” received a “*revelation*” (a message from God). Paul did not specify who might receive this “revelation,” but verses 29 and 31 suggest he was thinking of “prophets.” If one Christian was speaking and God gave another message to someone else in the assembly, the one who was speaking (“*the first*”) was to “*keep silence*” (stop speaking). Even though the first man’s teaching may have been inspired by the Holy Spirit, his opportunity to edify and instruct was to cease when another man received information from God. One of the reasons for God doing this has already been discussed in the commentary on 14:27 (the worship could have lasted for several hours if the spiritual gifts were not regulated. Since the Corinthians refused to do this on their own, God offered some extra help in this area. Verse 30 might be called a “divine nudge”). Verses 27-30 show that no person, no group, and no gift was to dominate a worship service. Lenski (First Corinthians, p. 610) said, “Paul is not in favor of prolonging the public service.” Paul reinforced this point with the information in verses 31-32.

The verb translated “*keep silence*” (*sigao*) is also applied to tongue speakers in verse 28 and women in

verse 34. In the ASV this term is translated “keep silence” in all three places. The KJV translates it “keep silence” in verses 28 and 34 and “hold his peace” in verse 30. Gingrich and Danker (p. 749) defined the *silence* in this verse as “*stop speaking, become silent.*” The Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament (3:242) said Paul meant, “And if a prophet is speaking when a revelation comes to another, the first should *be silent* (and sit down, v. 30).”

As noted in the discussion on verse 28, the tongue speakers had to be “silent” concerning their gift, but they could still sing and pray. Here the point is similar. Inspired Christians could engage in a variety of activities such as singing and praying, but they had to be “silent” with respect to their gift if someone else received a direct message from God. Apparently some of the Corinthians wanted to speak as much as possible and this prevented others from speaking or speaking very much. The Corinthians needed to realize there were “many members” in the local congregation (compare 12:14) and many of these members had something to contribute at their assemblies.

The word *revelation* is an important term. This word is used as a noun (*apokalupsis*) as well as a verb (*apokalupto*). In its noun form *revelation* describes being a *light* to the Gentiles (Lk. 2:32), preaching the gospel (Rom. 16:25), and the knowledge given to Paul (2 Cor. 12:1-7). Jesus used the verb form of this word in places such as Mt. 10:26; 11:25, 27; 16:17. Paul used the verb form of *revelation* here, as well as places like Rom. 1:17 (God’s righteousness has been *revealed*). He also spoke of *revealing* (same word) *the Son*, as well as *revealing Jesus* (Gal. 1:16) and the *faith* we are to follow (Gal. 3:23). A time is coming when God’s wrath will be *revealed* (Rom. 1:18). Here Thayer (p. 62) defined *revelation* as “God revealing to men things unknown... especially those relating to salvation.” The *revelation* received by the Corinthians and other first century Christians through supernatural gifts is now available to us through the completed New Testament (1 Cor. 13:8-13).

14:31: *For ye all can prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be exhorted;*

Prior to this verse Paul said tongue speakers (verse 27) were to speak “*in turn.*” Here he made this same point about those who could “*prophesy*” (compare verse 29). Just as small children may have difficulty waiting for “their turn,” so a similar thing was taking place in the Corinthian worship (many wanted to use their spiritual gifts or talents). Paul told these Christians to wait for their turn; this was not what they wanted to do, but it was possible to wait.

Paul knew the Corinthians might have been thinking or would have told him, “Paul, you don’t understand. I am being inspired by the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit controls what I do so I must speak and use my gift. Once I start speaking, I must finish.” Paul said these things were not true. The “*spirits of the prophets*” were “*subject to the prophets*” (verse 32). Stated another way, the Corinthians were able to control their gifts. Although the KJV uses the word “may” in verse 31, the word “*can*” (ASV) may best express the point. In the original text Paul used a word (*dunami*) that frequently described a person’s ability or power. This same term is found in 10:13; no temptation is stronger than we *can* bear. Here *can* is a present tense verb.

Up to three prophets could speak during the worship period (verse 29) and these Christians were to take turns using their gift (verse 31). If there were more than three prophets in an assembly, the others could wait until another time, presumably the next worship service. At the next assembly up to three more prophets could speak. The prophets had to take turns until everyone had received an opportunity to teach. It does not appear that every prophet spoke every week and there was some benefit in this arrangement (different lessons from different men was one way to meet the various needs within a local congregation). Today it is good to have a full time preacher, but there is also value in having others speak from time to time.

The end of verse 31 describes the results of the prophetic messages. Paul said “*learning*” (*manthano*) and “*exhortation*” (*parakaleo*) could be experienced by “*all.*” The word *learning* described learning by both investigation (see how this term is used in Mt. 9:13) as well as instruction (see Mt. 11:29). Gingrich and Danker (p. 490) said in this verse Paul described learning through instruction. Brown (1:486) noted how this learning is not merely an “intellectual process by which one acquires teaching about Christ. It

implies acceptance of Christ himself, rejection of the old existence and beginning the new life of discipleship in him.” Jesus used this same word in Mt. 11:29 when He said, “*learn of me.*” Paul associated this word with women in 1 Tim. 2:11. Paul also said it is possible to *learn* (2 Tim. 3:7, same word), but never come to a “*knowledge of the truth.*” If there is anything contrary to the *sound doctrine we have “learned”* (same word, Rom. 16:17), we are to turn away from it. This word also occurs towards the end of this chapter (verse 35). Here *learn* is expressed with the present tense so Paul described *continuous learning*. This is one more reminder that the church is a place of education instead of a place of entertainment. God designed New Testament assemblies to (1) instruct people in the word of God, (2) encourage people to be obedient, and (3) provide an environment where Christians encourage each other to strive for eternal life (Heb. 10:24-25).

The word translated *exhortation* (“*comforted,*” KJV) is also a present tense verb and it is found elsewhere in this letter (1:10; 4:13, 16; 16:12, 15). In 1 Cor. 16:12 this term is translated “*besought.*” In 1 Cor. 16:15 it is rendered “*beseech.*” The words *learn* and *exhorted* show that first century prophets were to comfort and encourage God’s people, as well as help Christians live the type of life God wanted.

The need for *exhortation* (*parakaleo*) is found throughout the Bible. Jesus used this term in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5:4). Luke used this word several times in the book of Acts (a few of these references are Acts 11:23; 14:22; 16:40; 20:1-2). Paul classified this word as a *gift* in Rom. 12:8 and said *exhortation* is a necessary part of preaching (2 Tim. 4:2). In Heb. 3:13, the writer told Christians to “*exhort one another daily.*” See, too, how this term is used in Jude 3.

Prophets and prophecy were very important to the first century church and Jackson (p. 140, Bible Words and Theological Terms Made Easy) offered a good definition for them and their work: “‘Prophecy’ is a message from God; the act of bringing forth that message is ‘prophesying.’ ‘Prophecy’ derives from a compound Greek term consisting of *pro* (‘forth’) and *phemi*, ‘to speak,’ hence, ‘to speak forth.’ (a) Most frequently in the Bible, prophecy, when used of righteous people, reflected a divine gift by which one brought a message from God. The message could focus on events that had *occurred already*. For instance, when Moses recorded the information relative to the creation of the Universe, he functioned as a ‘prophet’ (cf. Dt. 18:15). He provided information that could not have been known naturally. Amos was acting in the role of a prophet when he spoke concerning *contemporary* conditions in Israel (Amos 1:1). Isaiah uttered *predictive* prophecy when he foretold marvelous things regarding the Messiah, who was to come centuries later (Isa. 53). Predictive prophecy is one of the amazing evidences of Bible inspiration. There are prophecies relating to: nations (Dan. 2), individuals (Isa. 44:28, 45:1), the coming Christ (Isa. 53), etc. (b) Occasionally, the term ‘prophecy’ appears to be used simply in the sense of ‘teach’ (2 Pet. 2:1 – note the connective ‘also’ between ‘prophets’ and ‘teachers’), or within a context of worship (1 Kgs. 18:29; 1 Cor. 11:4-5)...(c) The Scriptures also warn of false prophets; these are those who feign to speak for God but do not (Mt. 7:16; cf. Tit. 1:12). Many, who claim to have spoken on behalf of the Lord, will hear him say – at the time of judgment: ‘I never knew you: depart from me, you that work iniquity’ (Mt. 7:23).” The gift of *prophecy* (*propheteuo*) is found earlier in this letter (see 1 Cor. 11:4, 5; 13:9; 14:1, 3-5, 24). Paul also spoke of this ability in verses 32 and 39 of this chapter.

14:32: *and the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets;*

Paul knew some of his readers may have been thinking or saying, “I have no control over my supernatural gift. Once my ability begins to operate, I lose all control. I cannot stop speaking in tongues or stop prophesying because the Holy Spirit is at work in my life.” If Christians were thinking in these ways (and it sure seems like they were), the worship services would have been lengthy (compare verses 29-30) and chaotic (compare verse 40). This type of thinking could have also created strife within the congregation. Some of the Corinthians may have complained about how long the worship services were lasting and people like the prophets and tongue speakers said, “I had to speak for that long. The Spirit wouldn’t let me stop.” Today people often complain about how long *one preacher talks*. Imagine the complaints that could have come from a congregation that had multiple tongue speakers and prophets speaking at a single service! Here Paul said Christians could control their miraculous gifts. The tongue

speakers could speak “*in turn*” (verse 27) and the prophets could prophesy “*one by one*” (verse 31) because the spiritual gifts were “*subject*” to those who had them. A Christian was “not overwhelmed by a compulsive external power which moved him automatically without his control” (Boyer as cited by Gromacki, p. 177). Demon possession sometimes took control of a person’s body (Mk. 9:22), but such was not true for God’s gifts.

The word translated *subject* (*hupotasso*) is a present tense verb and this is one more proof that the Holy Spirit never overpowered Christians (supernatural gifts were *always* subject to those who had received them). Gingrich and Danker (p. 848) said the “prophetic spirits must be subject to the prophets in whom they dwell.” Although Paul only mentioned *prophets* in this verse, those who had other gifts also had full control over their abilities (compare verse 27 where Paul said tongue speakers could speak “in turn.” Saying the tongue speakers could “speak in turn” was just another way of saying this gift could also be controlled).

This verse is only five words long in the Greek text, but it is a key passage in refuting many modern Pentecostal claims (charismatics have often said the Holy Spirit “takes over their body” and virtually forces them to do certain things). Paul said these kinds of claims are absolutely false. Because this verse is so simple and so powerful, modern charismatics usually pay very little attention to it.

As noted in the earlier material on 12:10a, 27-28; 14:31, “*prophets*” communicated information to others. This information included “*edification*,” “*exhortation*,” and “*consolation*” (14:3). Prophets were so important that God made them part of the church’s “*foundation*” (Eph. 2:20).

14:33a: *for God is not (a God) of confusion, but of peace.*

This verse offers a conclusion to the preceding information, especially the material in verses 23-32. If those who had spiritual gifts refused to use their abilities in an orderly way (compare verses 27-31), there would be “*confusion*” instead of “*peace*.” The word *confusion* (*akatastasia*) meant: “disorder, unruliness, disruption of the peace of the community.” Outside the New Testament this term was sometimes used to describe political insurrections and revolutions. Here *confusion* means “*disorder, unruliness*” (Gingrich and Danker, p. 30). Kittel defined it as “charismatic exaggeration” (abridged edition, p. 387). This fuller definition is given in Kittel’s complete dictionary (3446): “orgiastic (frenzied, unrestrained, BP) impulses in the gatherings of the congregation.” Aside from this verse *confusion* occurs only in Lk. 21:9; 2 Cor. 6:5, 12:20; Jas. 3:16.

God *is not* (present tense) a God of disorder and unruliness in any area of life. If we look at our universe, we find order. Planets stay in their orbits. Seasons follow a set time (an orderly pattern). Animals bring forth after their “kind.” Everything in the creation demonstrates that God acts in an orderly way. Since God’s natural laws are orderly, we would expect to find that His laws and activities in the spiritual realm are also orderly. If things are *not orderly*, they are not of God.

Like verse 32, this passage is easy to understand but it is often neglected by people who profess to love and follow God. Many religious groups engage in disorderly behavior such as shouting, jumping, dancing and laughing and then claim that God, especially the Holy Spirit, is responsible for these things or the disorderly behaviors are a “sign of God’s presence.” Others claim to receive special messages from God, but these claims are also false. If God says He has given us His completed word (2 Tim. 3:16-17), but some are still receiving messages from Him, we are faced with two contradictory and confusing claims. True Christianity is an orderly system of religion and those who truly adhere to this faith act in an orderly way.

One of the *disorderly* claims seen in this author’s lifetime was “holy laughter.” Giggling and belly laughing were said to be “Holy Spirit joy” or “a sign of the Holy Spirit’s presence.” Some even claimed to have “a dose of Pentecostal joy” that left only a “few standing.” Those involved with *holy giggling* said this activity “broke Satan’s power to depress people” and *holy laughter* was a form of “spiritual warfare.” Rather than honor God, these claims mocked Him. These declarations also showed an ignorance of how dangerous the devil is (1 Pet. 5:8).

God is not only a God of order, He is a God of *peace* (*eirene*). *Peace* is “the opposite of disorder in the

church” (Brown, 2:780). The word *peace* was a way of telling the Corinthians their worship should have been *peaceful* and orderly. The division and faction described in places like 11:18 had to be overcome. Peace “is an order established by God as the God of peace (1 Cor. 14:33; cf. also Rom. 15:33; 16:20; Phil. 4:9; 1 Thess. 5:23; Heb. 13:20)” (Brown, 2:780). Richardson (p. 166) made reference to essentially the same verses cited by Brown and added, “God is called the God of peace principally where the unity and harmony of the Church is felt to be threatened.” Today God still wants *peace and order* among His people. Paul said these things were God’s will for “*all the churches of the saints.*” If congregations faithfully follow the divine pattern (2 Tim. 1:13), they can expect to reap *harmony* (peace) and *order*.

Barnes offered some useful points in his commentary on First Corinthians (p. 214) and the following thoughts are adopted from him.

- Where we find disorder we may expect to find little religion. Or, the religion we do find will be incorrect.
- True religion never leads to uprisings, violence, bloodshed, etc.
- Conversion to Christ has always been an orderly process. Those who fall to the floor, claim the Holy Spirit has “glued them to the floor,” or enter into some type of altered state have an experience that is not from God.
- If deity really did what many claim (God causes people to jump, shout, dance and lose control of themselves), deity is the author of *chaos* instead of *order and peace*.

14:33b: *As in all the churches of the saints,*

The word “*saints*” (*hagios*) meant “set apart for God’s use.” This term is found in every New Testament book except Galatians, James, Second and Third John. Although Catholicism uses this word to describe the deceased (some are considered for *sainthood* if they meet certain criteria), the Bible repeatedly portrays *saints* as living Christians. Here *saints* described Christians who worshipped in various places (“*in all the churches*”). Paul used a similar expression in 11:16.

The word *church* (*ekklesia*) is discussed in the commentary on 11:16, 18. Jesus used this word in Mt. 16:18 to say He would establish only one church (Mt. 16:18). There is only one true church, but there are several congregations of this body (compare 1 Cor. 16:1 where Paul said, “*the churches of Galatia*”). Today this church still exists and it can often be found in many communities by seeking out a group that designates itself as the “church of Christ.” This church can also be identified by using the information entitled “An overview of New Testament Christianity” located at the end of this commentary.

Jesus’ church is not the only one that exists in the world; there are thousands of counterfeit *assemblies* (churches). In fact, Jesus issued a strong warning about these imitations in Mt. 7:22-23: “*Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy by thy name, and by thy name cast out demons, and by thy name do many mighty works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.*” Here Jesus spoke of people who belonged to a group that professed to love and serve Him, but Jesus said He “never” knew these people. Jesus “never” knew these men and women because they “never” became part of the one spiritual body He purchased with His blood (Acts 20:28).

Since Jesus established only “one church,” the thousands of denominations that now exist were started by others (individuals as well as groups of people). Throughout history people have not been satisfied with God’s church so men and women have created alternative groups that offer people a variety of other beliefs and practices. Some of these “alternatives” involve worship, the way to be saved, church organization and even the work of the church. Men have created thousands of different groups, but Jesus said every one of these imitations will be “rooted up” (destroyed), Mt. 15:13. We must be part of the one church built by Christ instead of belonging to a church built by man.

Although verse 33 deals with the first century spiritual gifts, this passage contains an important principle about denominationalism (it tells us the religious division and confusion that exists in the world is not from God). When Jesus was on the earth He prayed for unity, not division (Jn. 17:20-21). If division in a local congregation is bad (1 Cor. 1:10), what can be said about the disunity that comes from thousands of “different churches”? God has given us the “perfect law of liberty” (Jas. 1:25) and told us to follow the “one faith” (Eph. 4:5) which was delivered “once for all time” to the saints (Jude 3). God has promised to save those who “hold fast His word” (1 Cor. 15:2). If we become part of “another gospel” (Gal. 1:6-9), and denominational churches do preach “another gospel” (this is what makes them all different), we will be lost. We must be part of the one church built by Christ.

Some say religious unity is impossible, but this is not what the Bible teaches. The first century church was unified in “heart and soul” (Acts 4:32). Paul spoke about unity in the Roman letter (Rom. 12:4, 16). He reminded the Corinthians about unity (1 Cor. 12:12-31) and rebuked them for not having it (1 Cor.

1:10; 3:3). In 1 Cor. 10:17 Paul said the Lord's Supper (observing it every Sunday) is one of the things that unifies true Christians. Paul also spoke about unity in Eph. 2:13-14. The religious world says unity is not possible, but God says we cannot have New Testament Christianity without unity. The religious world relishes division because it "gives people a choice," but God says He is "*not the author*" (KJV) of confusion and division. As the next verse shows, religious division is usually based on the fact that people are not willing to truly accept and follow the Scriptures. When people will not fully submit to Jesus' authority and the word of God, the end result is religious division.

Introduction to 14:34: Verse 34 is one of the better known verses in this book. This passage is not difficult, but it has created a lot of controversy because many do not want to let males be the leaders in the home (Eph. 5:22-24) and in the church (1 Tim. 2:8-15; 1 Cor. 14:34-35).

Verse 34 is easily interpreted and correctly applied by observing the context. In the previous verses (26-33) Paul spoke about disruptions in the Corinthians' worship. Tongue speakers and prophets were behaving in a disorderly way (verses 27-30). In verses 34-35 Paul added that some women were also behaving in a disorderly manner. Since Paul dealt with the disruptions from the tongue speakers and prophets in the preceding verses, it was now time to address the women who were creating problems in these same assemblies. This was one more area where "confusion" (verse 33) existed and it had to stop.

Some think Paul described women who had miraculous gifts. Just as tongue speakers and prophets were not properly using their gifts (verses 27-30), such was also true for some women who had supernatural abilities. This explanation is certainly possible (compare Joel 2:28-29 and Peter's citation of this passage on the Day of Pentecost, Acts 2:17-18). If some of the Corinthian women had spiritual gifts, verse 32 says they were in full control of these abilities so there was no excuse for them saying things like "The Spirit inspired me and I had to talk."

Some have said Paul was a male chauvinist who hated women and this is why he said women were to "*keep silence in the churches*," but this view cannot be right. Since Paul was inspired (he spoke for God), this explanation would mean God hates women. Also, in Gal. 3:28 Paul affirmed that neither he nor God hated women. Another incorrect view is that Paul commanded women to be *silent* in the assemblies when spiritual gifts were available, but now, since the gifts are gone, this restriction no longer applies. The gifts are gone, but there is still an abiding principle in this instruction, just as there are still several lasting principles in verses 26-40.

14:34a: *let the women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak;*

The words "*keep silence*" come from a single present tense verb (*sigao*). Paul used this same word in verses 28 and 30 of this chapter (in these preceding verses Paul told men to be *silent*). Many act as if the word *silent* is only applied to women. In fact, shortly after this author started his ministry someone slipped an anonymous note under his door that said, "Women make comments in your Bible classes. Please explain this in light of 1 Cor. 14:34." Since the word *silence* is applied to women one time and twice to men, one wonders why this question only inquired about ladies. In this verse and in this chapter, Paul was not referring to a woman making a comment in a Bible class, reading a Bible passage during a Bible class, correcting an unruly child during worship, etc. He was speaking about women taking a leading role in the worship service when men were present. Some women were apparently also disrupting assemblies with questions (verse 35).

As already discussed in the commentary on verses 28 and 30, male Christians had to be "silent" concerning their gift under certain conditions, but they could still sing and pray. Here the point is similar. Paul meant there were some occasions when women did not have the right to publicly address the assembly. Since God has given the role of public teaching to males, if men and women were both present in an assembly, a male was to do the teaching. Some of the Corinthian women were not abiding by this instruction, this was creating "confusion" (verse 33), and this had to stop. In fact, the word *silence* is a present tense verb (the women were to *continually* stay silent). This did not mean the Corinthian women were forbidden from singing; it means they could not teach in the type of assembly where men (verse 27)

were present. If the women had been in a different type of assembly (an all female gathering or an assembly where they were teaching children), they could have used their gifts and abilities. For more information on men being the designated teachers in mixed assemblies, see the comments on 11:3.

The word “*for*” (*gar*) in this verse is a conjunction. Paul said women were to be silent in the assembly *for* it was not permitted unto them to speak. In many places the word *for* describes the “cause or grounds” for something (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 1:238). Here Paul used it to say women did not have the *authority* to *speak*. When teaching needed to be done in an assembly where men and women were present, Christian women had no right (authorization) to offer any public teaching.

The word “*speak*” (*laleo*) may be understood as the public proclamation of God’s word (this was what the tongue speakers and the prophets were doing —see verses 27 and 29). Thayer (p. 369) said the word *speak* in this verse describes a “teacher” (women addressing the assembled congregation with a message). In fact, many authors have noted how the word *speak* in this chapter is often associated with spiritual gifts (see verses 2, 4, 5-6, 9, 13, 18-19, 23, 27-29, 39). It seems Paul had in mind situations where women would have assumed a teaching role when the whole “church” (verse 28) had gathered together for worship. This point is explained in even more detail with the word “*permitted*” (*epitrepo*). This term is used to describe a man who wanted *permission* to bury his father (Mt. 8:21). It describes demons that needed *permission* to enter into a herd of pigs (Mt. 8:31). Moses granted *permission* for divorces (Mt. 19:8). Here Paul said women did not have *permission* to teach in a worship service where men were present (compare 1 Tim. 2:12).

In some manuscripts *pernit* is a present tense verb; in other manuscripts it is expressed with the perfect tense. Whichever tense Paul intended to use, the point is unchanged: Women did not have the right to teach in the public assembly of the church if men were present. This verse is an everlasting declaration that women preachers are contrary to God’s will. God has specifically said that women are not allowed to teach “in the churches” (in assemblies where men and women come together).

Since the word translated “*women*” (*gune*) can refer to both adult females and wives (see how this same word is used in Mt. 5:28 and Mt. 5:31), this author contends that the *silence* applied to all women. In other words, Paul did not bind silence on just the “wives.” The word *women* includes *all women* (all females). Ladies could still do things like sing (see again the commentary on verses 28 and 30), but they could not offer any public instruction. Paul then expressed the universal nature of this rule with these words: *in the churches*.

In some places the word *church* (*ekklesia*) describes all the saved (i.e. the world-wide sense of the church). There are also places where this term refers to a local congregation. Passages describing *all the redeemed* include Mt. 16:18; 1 Cor. 12:28; 1 Tim. 3:15. For examples of where *church* describes *local congregations* see Acts 9:31; Rom. 16:1; 1 Cor. 1:2. Here Paul described a local congregation that assembles for worship (verse 26). He described “*a church meeting*,” a time when Christians came “*together in church*” (Gingrich and Danker, p. 240). For additional information on the word *church* see the commentary on 11:16, 18.

Some have asked how these instructions about women can be reconciled with the information in 11:5, a passage where Paul said the Corinthian women “prayed and prophesied.” This is a difficulty and several explanations have been put forward to reconcile these seemingly conflicting passages. Some have said the information in 1 Cor. 14 is a “general rule” and the information in 1 Cor. 11 is an exception to the “general rule.” The explanation that seems to pose the fewest difficulties is that the Corinthians had more than one gathering; in some of these assemblies women were allowed to *pray and prophesy*. In other assemblies (the times when men were present), these kinds of activities were not allowed. The rules in 1 Cor. 14 were in effect when the entire church was assembled and the rules in 1 Cor. 11 were used when women were not in the presence of men.

Haberman (Women’s Role and 1 Corinthians 14:33b-37, pp. 24-28) believed there were at least three different assemblies at Corinth and this author concurs. There were the “churches (assemblies) of God,” 1 Cor. 11:16-17. These consisted of the regular Sunday worship that included teaching, the Lord’s Supper, praying, giving, and singing. A second assembly was the “churches (assemblies) of the saints,” 1 Cor. 14:23, 33-40. This was also a time for worship, but it was not the main Sunday service when the entire

church assembled (perhaps there were two gatherings on Sunday, just as Christians now often have). A third assembly is described in 1 Cor. 11:5; at these times women gathered together for worship or came together for a private meeting. In light of Acts 2:46, it is not hard to believe that the Corinthians had multiple assemblies. Today there are certainly many congregations that meet more than once a week and sometimes twice on Sunday. Here is a summary of the Corinthian assemblies:

<i>Sunday worship</i>	<i>Extra worship</i>	<i>Private gatherings</i>
11:16-17	14:23, 33-40	11:5
Divinely ordered	Not divinely ordered	Not divinely ordered
Women were <i>silent</i>	Women were <i>silent</i>	Women <i>spoke and prayed</i>
Entire church present	Entire church present	Part of the church present

14:34b: *but let them be in subjection, as also saith the law.*

The word *subjection* (*hupotasso*) is a present tense verb. Paul used this same term to describe married women in Eph. 5:22 and a Christian’s obedience to civil government in Rom. 13:1, 5. If this verb is interpreted as being in the middle voice, it means women were to *voluntarily subject themselves*. There were times when, just like the tongue speakers and prophets (verses 28, 30), they could be *out of order*. For women, offering instruction in assemblies where men were present was one example of being *out of order*. Verse 35 affirms that asking questions (apparently when spiritual gifts were being used) was another way to be *out of order*.

Paul based this *subjection* on the *law* (*nomos*); this is a statement of fact, but we do not know what *law* Paul had in mind. Some believe he was thinking of Gen. 2:18; 3:16 (support for this view is found in Gal. 4:21-31 where Paul also spoke of “the law” and actually referred back to the book of Genesis). When Paul discussed the roles of men and women in 1 Tim. 2:13-14, he mentioned Adam and Eve—characters who are also emphasized in the book of Genesis. When Peter discussed this same basic subject (1 Pet. 3:5-6) he, too, referred to the book of Genesis, using Sarah as his specific illustration. Others believe Paul was thinking of “Moses’ law” because this religious system taught male spiritual leadership.

Haberman (p. 45) proposed that this *law* was not a written law; according to this view, Paul was thinking of an *unspoken law* (people had a natural understanding of it). This belief is based on Heb. 7:14 (“*For it is evident that our Lord hath sprung out of Judah; as to which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priests*”). Haberman inferred from this passage that law can exist and be binding, even though it is not actually written. This view has some appeal to this author because of what Paul said in 1 Cor. 11:29. Just as “nature” should teach people about hair, *nature* should also teach people about the respective roles for men and women.

Although there is a definite article before the word *law* in the Greek text, and Paul expressed the point with the present tense, it is impossible to precisely identify what *law* is being described. Whatever source Paul had in mind, his point is clear. When the Corinthians came together for worship, the women had no right to preach or teach if males were present. If men and women were jointly assembled, the tongue speakers, the prophets, any anyone else taking a leading role in the worship had to be of the male gender. Today this is still true—those who preach and teach (unless the audience is composed of women and children) must be males (1 Tim. 2:12).

The Corinthians knew that in their culture women did many things (they maintained temples, they served as priests and priestesses, they composed hymns, they sponsored some of the ancient games, they helped with sacrifices and processions, and they made leadership decisions for large numbers of people. See the commentary on 14:23 for one example of how women took part in spiritual things. Compare, too, Acts 13:50; 17:4). The Corinthians may have been influenced by some of the work that women did outside the church. “If women could serve as priests in the world, why not let them take a leading role in Christian worship?” Beginning back in chapter 11 Paul reminded these Christians that spiritual leadership

and worship in mixed assemblies are to be carried out by males.

When it comes to public prayers, public speaking, and leading singing, the question is not: “Can a woman do these things better?” The real question is: “Has God authorized women to do these kinds of things in a mixed assembly?” The answer to this question is “no” and women should not feel slighted or cheated by this answer. As Olbricht (*Woman: A Biblical Quest*, p. 110) noted, the “Christian woman has opportunities to speak the Word of the Lord 168 hours of a week—but not the three hours or so when the church convenes as a whole. In some cases, she has more contacts and more opportunities than men. God expects her to use the hours when she can speak to spread the wonderful news of life. By speaking up when these opportunities arise, she can glorify God and influence many people to follow Jesus.”

14:35: *And if they would learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home: for it is shameful for a woman to speak in the church.*

As noted in the chart on verse 34, Paul was thinking of times when males and females came together for worship. Gingrich and Danker (p. 240) said Paul was describing “*a church meeting*,” a time when Christians came “*together in church*” (ibid). During these times it was wrong for women to teach (verse 34) or interrupt the assembly with questions (verse 35).

The word *ask* (*eperotao*) is a present tense verb that meant “approaching an authority for answers” (CBL, GED, 2:511); this same word and meaning are found in Lk. 2:46; 9:45. This term may also “indicate intensity since it can mean ‘demanding’ rather than just ‘asking’” (ibid). The present tense plus the CBL definition indicates women were being disruptive at worship. The point is clarified a little more by the fact that “*speak*” is a present tense verb (women were asking questions on a regular basis). Perhaps women justified their interruptions by saying they just wanted to “*learn*” (*manthano*. Paul also used this word in verse 31). Since the interruptions were leading to “confusion” instead of “peace” (verse 33), and they did not harmonize with a woman’s being “in subjection” (34b), Paul said ladies with questions had to “*ask their own husbands at home*.”

Telling women to ask questions at home did not mean Christian women had to wait until they had literally arrived at their residence before asking a question (*home* is a metonymy for *outside the assembly*). Paul meant husbands could answer questions after a service had concluded. A similar point is found in 11:34; when Paul spoke about “eating at home,” he was not forbidding Christians from eating in a public park, a restaurant, etc. Paul wanted the Corinthians to realize that if they sought an immediate answer to their questions (i.e. they asked questions in the assemblies), this contributed to the *confusion* instead of *peace* (compare verses 33 and 40).

Since not all women are married, some have wondered who answered questions for the unmarried women. Paul did not deal with this subject, but common sense suggests that an informed and thoughtful male Christian (perhaps one of the elders) helped unmarried women with their questions after a service ended. A Christian woman may also have had a father, a son, another relative, or a Christian male friend to answer her questions.

Some have understood verses 34-35 to mean that women were forbidden from saying almost anything in an assembly. If this point were true, a woman could never confess Christ before being baptized (1 Tim. 6:12), she could not sing (Col. 3:16), and she could not correct a disobedient child. An ultra-literal interpretation of verse 35 would even forbid a woman from having a man ask a question on her behalf because she would be *learning* “at the service” instead of “at home.”

The basic point of verse 35 is really no different than verse 34 and the opening verses of chapter 11 (men are to be the spiritual leaders in the home and in the church). The Corinthian women were to recognize male leadership in their assemblies by having men teach (verse 34) and by not interrupting the assemblies with questions (verse 35). Today these rules still apply when Christians come together *for worship*. Modern Bible classes are not worship and, in this author’s judgment, do not fit into the circumstance described in 1 Cor. 14. Bible classes are designed to be a period of study where both men and women have an opportunity to ask questions and make comments—comments that sometimes “interrupt” the teacher. Asking questions in a Bible class is often productive (compare Lk. 2:46), but

doing this in worship is disruptive and thus forbidden by Paul.

In some cases a Bible class student goes beyond asking questions; he (or she) may try to actually take over the class. There are cases when a student is so aggressive or outspoken that he (or she) essentially becomes the teacher in a class. This behavior is wrong. In addition to being rude, this may leave a bad impression with others in the class (compare verse 23 and see the commentary on this text). Students should be encouraged to participate in a Bible class, but they also need to know that Bible classes are times when all should act in a “decent and orderly” manner (verse 40). This means, among things, letting the teacher be the instructor.

If ladies did not heed the instructions in this verse, they were guilty of “*shameful*” (*aischros*) behavior (this same term is applied to women in 11:6). A good definition for *shameful* is “disgrace” (Brown, p. 564). “To take center stage would show a lack of submission. For this reason, it was disgraceful for women to address the congregation. In order to avoid any implications of having a place of authority in the general assembly, women were to ask questions in a private setting” (Olbricht, *Woman: A Biblical Quest*, p. 111).

As noted in the comments on 34a, some believe Paul was thinking of the prophets’ wives. As prophets offered revelations from God, their wives asked questions and interrupted their husband’s prophetic message. This explanation may be correct, but there is no reason to limit the point to wives of the prophets. Some husbands may have had the “word of knowledge” or “word of wisdom” (1 Cor. 12:8) and their wives also interrupted them as these gifts were being used. Even single women may have asked questions in these public assemblies, though there is no specific reference to them because a specific reference was unnecessary. If wives were not allowed to interrupt their husbands, certainly single women had no authority to interrupt those who were speaking.

Some thoughts on female translators:

The information in verses 34-35 has caused some to ask if women can translate for male missionaries working in foreign countries or serve as a translator for the deaf in a public assembly. Christians differ on these two points, but Olbricht’s reasoning (*Women: A Biblical Quest*, pp. 111-112) makes sense to this author. “When a man addresses an assembly and a woman translates, she is not the one addressing the assembly. She is only the ‘mouthpiece’ for the one making the address. The message she translates is not considered her message any more than the writings of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, James, Peter, and Jude are considered to be the writings of Bible translators. A female translator is not giving her message and has not taken a place of authority, but remains under authority, unless she speaks where the speaker has not spoken. The Bible remains God’s Word when translated into different languages; likewise, a gospel message is delivered by the preacher, though it is translated or transcribed for the deaf or others by someone else.

“Paul did not state concerning the one speaking in another language, ‘If there is no *male* interpreter present, let him keep silent in the church.’ The woman did not have the right to give an address on her own, but no prohibition is given concerning translation. The restriction of silence on her part included addressing the assembly and asking questions, but it did not include her interpreting. If God had said, ‘The men are to translate,’ then women would have been excluded; but God made no choice. Dare we make restrictions where God has made none?”

14:36a: *What? was it from you that the word of God went forth?*

Here Paul asked the Corinthians if the “*word of God*” had come “*from*” them. Gromacki (p. 178) defined the *word of God* (the gospel) as “the authoritative written and spoken divine directives.” Paul wanted to know where people had first become Christians and how the Corinthians had learned about the Christian faith. Did they know about the gospel because it had originated with them? Or, did the gospel originate elsewhere and someone eventually took this information to the Corinthians? Barnes (*First Corinthians*, p. 276) described Paul’s question as “Is the church at Corinth the *mother church*?” Paul

attacked “the abuses of the Corinthians by pointing out they were not the source of the gospel” (Rienecker and Rogers, p. 438). A similar point is found in 11:16.

If the gospel had originated in Corinth, and the Corinthian practices varied from what was being done in and by other congregations, the other congregations (places such as Jerusalem, Philippi, Thessalonica, etc.) would have been wrong because they were not following the pattern instituted at Corinth. On the other hand, if the gospel had originated elsewhere (and it did—Jerusalem—Lk. 24:47; Acts 1:8), and those at Corinth were not doing what Christians at the founding congregation were doing, the Corinthians had deviated from God’s plan and they were in error. This verse is just one more reminder that God has a specific pattern for Christianity and this pattern must be followed (for more information on this point see “An overview of New Testament Christianity” located at the end of this commentary). Those who truly follow Christ embrace God’s blueprint for conversion, worship, church government, Christian living, and everything else associated with Christianity. This point is enormously important, but it is often not understood or obeyed. In fact, many seem to prefer the philosophy of an ancient Hebrew king (Jeroboam).

Jeroboam ruled over the northern section of Israel and he made several changes to the Jewish worship (1 Kgs. 12-13). He changed the *place* of worship, the *object* of worship, the *tribe from which priests came*, the *feast days*, etc. Today many still try to alter the pattern found in the New Testament. Some have tried to change the day of worship from Sunday to some other day. Others have made changes to the Lord’s Supper (not everyone is allowed to partake of it or people partake less often than every Sunday). Congregational singing has sometimes been replaced with a performance (soloists and choirs). Preaching has often been exchanged for inspiring stories. God has told man to worship, but He has also said our worship must be “in truth” (Jn. 4:24). This means we follow the information in the Bible (Jn. 17:17). We either follow God’s divine “pattern” (2 Tim. 1:13 and compare Mt. 15:8-9) or we engage in “will-worship” (Col. 2:23), a pattern devised by us or other human beings. Jesus is very familiar with those who “leave the commandments of God” and hold to the “traditions of men” (Mk. 7:8) and He said this choice does not please God. Many “reject” God’s commandments so they can keep their religious “traditions” (Mk. 7:9). Paul warned about those who “turn away from the truth” (Tit. 1:14). John was even more direct in 1 Jn. 2:3-4: “*And hereby we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him*” (emphasis mine, BP).

Barnes (First Corinthians, p. 276) said, “You have adopted customs which are unusual. You have permitted women to speak in a manner unknown to other churches...You have admitted irregularity and confusion unknown in all the others. You have allowed many to speak at the same time, and have tolerated confusion and disorder. Have you any *right* thus to differ from others? Have you any authority, as it were, to dictate to them, to go teach them, contrary to their uniform custom, to allow these disorders? Should you not rather be conformed to them, and observe the rules of the churches which are older than yours?” Today many believers should be asking these same questions. Are our religious practices from *heaven* (God) or *men* (not from God), Mk. 11:30?

14:36b: *or came it unto you alone?*

This verse ends with another question. Paul wanted to know if the gospel had “*only*” (KJV) come to the Corinthians (the ASV says “*alone*”). The word *only* (*monos*) meant “only, alone, solitary, no other.” Jesus used this same word to say man shall not “live by bread *alone*” (Mt. 4:4). We are to “only” (same word) serve God (Mt. 4:10). The showbread associated with the Old Testament was “only” for the priests (Mt. 12:4, same word). “Only” (same word) God has immortality (1 Tim. 6:15). Paul used the word “*came*” (*katantao*) to “sarcastically” ask the Corinthians if the gospel had come *only* to them (CBL, GED, 3:278). If the Corinthians did not pay much attention to the first part of this verse, the information given here should have gotten their attention.

It was imperative for the Corinthians to think about where the church had started and how they were obligated to follow the pattern set forth by the first Christians in Jerusalem (Acts 2). Today this point is still true. Since the church did not start with us, we need to compare our religious practices with what was

done by the first century Christians. If our beliefs and practices do not match up with what is described in the New Testament, we need a different set of beliefs and practices! All have a duty to compare what is done in their place of worship to the examples and commands found in the Bible because “true worshippers” (Jn. 4:23) worship “in truth” (Jn. 4:24).

14:37-38: *If any man thinketh himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him take knowledge of the things which I write unto you, that they are the commandment of the Lord. 38 But if any man is ignorant, let him be ignorant.*

The word “*think*” (*dokimazo*) is a present tense verb that meant “to test.” This term indicates that some of the Corinthians had looked at themselves and concluded they were “spiritual giants” or “spiritually advanced” (perhaps this point is related to 2 Cor. 10:12 where Paul said some “judged themselves by themselves”). Warren Wiersbe (Second Corinthians, p. 667) said false teachers “belonged to a ‘mutual admiration society’ that set up its own standards and measured everybody by them. Of course, those inside the group were successful; those outside were failures. Paul was one of the outsiders, so he was considered a failure.”

While some based their spiritual prowess on their own subjective judgment, Paul said there was an objective standard to test whether or not people were as strong, faithful, and spiritually advanced as they supposed. One test of and for spirituality is expressed in verse 37. If a person at Corinth was truly “*spiritual*” (*pneumatikos*, a term found earlier in 2:13, 15; 3:1; 9:11; 10:3, 4; 12:1; 14:1), or he was really a “*prophet*,” he would “*take knowledge*” (“*acknowledge*,” KJV) that Paul was inspired. That is, a person would agree that Paul’s writings were from God.

The word translated *take knowledge* (*epiginosko*) is a present imperative verb; the literal idea is “let him *ever* acknowledge (recognize) that my writings are authoritative.” This acknowledgement, which certainly had a “mental” aspect to it (CBL, GED, 2:526), was to be absolute. Instead of saying or thinking, “This is what Paul believes,” “Paul may be inspired,” or “we will accept Paul’s writings this time,” the Corinthians were to treat this letter (and any other communication from him) as a message from God. Since *I write* (*grapho*) is a present tense verb, the Corinthians were to also acknowledge that *this letter* was a direct message from God. Not everything that Paul said was a commandment to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 7:6), but most things were.

The information in the Bible was written by human beings, but this information was “inspired by God” (see 2:13 where Paul said the things he wrote were *from the Holy Spirit*). Before going to the cross Jesus said the Holy Spirit would come and help the apostles (Lk. 24:48-49; Acts 1:8). The initial fulfillment of this promise came on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-38). Luke specifically said the Holy Spirit directed the apostles’ speech on this day (Acts 2:4). Peter and the other apostles received the facts about Christianity that allowed them to “bind” rules (commands) on people (compare Mt. 16:19; 18:18). An example of Paul *binding* something is seen in 1 Cor. 16:1; Paul had given an “order” to various congregations. Jesus also said (Mt. 16:19; 18:18) the apostles would have the authority to “loose” things (an example of this is found in Acts 2:38, “forgiveness of sins”). The apostles communicated with people orally as well as through written letters (Eph. 3:3-5; 2 Thess. 2:15). When this written word was completed, the first century gifts were removed (this point is more fully discussed in the commentary on 1 Cor. 13:8-13).

Many statements in the Bible affirm that those who spoke and wrote for God were *inspired*. In fact, the Old Testament prophetic books contain more than 1,200 statements that say the prophets were speaking for God. In the non-prophetic books we also find this same type of claim and we find it about 1,200 times as well. Whether we look at the Old Testament or the New Testament, the Bible claims that its writers were speaking for God.

When people speak of the Bible being “inspired,” they sometimes mean different things. Some believe in “partial inspiration” (this idea says some parts of the Bible are truly God’s words, but some other parts are not. It is up to us to decide which parts are inspired). Others think the Bible is “inspired” in the sense that a person is “inspired” to paint a picture (there is no supernatural element to the Scriptures). Some

believe God's word is "inspired" (God gave it to men), but God specifically dictated every word (this view fails to account for the various stylistic differences). The Bible view of inspiration is found in places like 1 Cor. 2:13 and the preceding information. The Holy Spirit came to the apostles and He "guided the apostles into all the truth" (Jn. 16:13-14). Stated another way, the authors of the New Testament as well as the Old Testament were overshadowed by the Holy Spirit to write just the right things, with just the right words, in just the right way (2 Pet. 1:21), so we could have the "perfect law of liberty" (Jas. 1:25) and the world could have a document that contains "*all things that pertain unto life and godliness*" (2 Pet. 1:3).

Some editions of the Bible have "red letters" in various places, especially the accounts of Jesus' life (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John). These "red letter edition Bibles" have led some to conclude that what is written in red is very important and must be believed or followed, but the information in black is less important or can be disregarded. Verse 37 refutes this notion. What Paul wrote were "*commands of the Lord.*" Paul's words (which were actually guided by the Holy Spirit, 1 Cor. 2:13) were and are just as authoritative as any of Jesus' words. There is no such thing as "important" and "unimportant" words in the Bible. The "red words" were added by men to help identify Jesus' words.

The ASV says *commandment* (*entole*) and the KJV says *commandments* (plural); this difference is due to a variation in the Greek text. Whichever reading is right, the point is unchanged. If Paul presented one commandment or a thousand, the information that came from him was binding. In this letter his *commandments* included the information about women and their role in the church, commandments about the Lord's Supper, commandments about giving, commandments about putting an end to the division, etc. In this letter the word *commandment* occurs only here and 7:19.

Paul knew that not everyone would accept him and his writings ("*take knowledge,*" verse 37), just as some today will not accept the completed New Testament. Here Paul said all who rejected him and his authority were "*ignorant*" (*agnoeo*), a word that meant "*not to know*" (this term is also found in 10:1 and 12:1). Brown (2:407) rightly rendered the thought, "If anyone does not recognize, he is not recognized" (i.e. recognized by God). The word *ignorant* is used twice in this verse and in each case it is a present tense verb. MacKnight's expanded translation (p. 196) helps clarify the thought: "*And if anyone, after that, is ignorant that my precepts are the commandments of the Lord, let him be ignorant. His ignorance being willful, I will trouble myself no farther with him.*" It seems Paul was thinking of what Jesus described in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 7:6): "*Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast your pearls before the swine, lest haply they trample them under their feet, and turn and rend you.*" Paul and God would reject those who would not accept inspired men and (or) their writings.

Some of the Corinthians claimed to be very spiritual and even led by the Holy Spirit (compare 12:3 and see the comments on 12:3a, 12:3b), but they would not (present tense) acknowledge Paul's authority. It was as if some had closed their eyes to Paul's authority as an apostle. This was such a serious matter that Paul expressed it with the present tense (if a person continually refused to acknowledge Paul and his writings, God would continually refuse to recognize Him). Instead of being among the spiritual elite, or even being spiritually weak, those who rejected God's message through Paul were not regarded as Christians (rejecting God's commandments destroys people. This is a sure way to commit spiritual suicide). Today, if we reject God's commandments (which are now found in the completed Scriptures), we, too, will be "ignorant" and unsaved. Since the Corinthians prided themselves on their knowledge (8:1; 8:11), they would not have wanted to be regarded as *ignorant*. Verse 38 was one more example of the "shock therapy" Paul used to help correct things at this congregation.

14:39-40: *Wherefore, my brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues. 40 But let all things be done decently and in order.*

As discussed in the commentary on 13:8-13, the first century Christians had supernatural gifts instead of a completed New Testament. These gifts helped Christians evangelize the world (Mk. 16:17, 20) and edify others (1 Cor. 14:1-5). All the gifts had a purpose, but they did not all have the same degree of usefulness (12:28). Thus, Paul wanted these Christians to pursue the "greater gifts" (compare 1 Cor.

12:31) and one of these greater gifts was *prophecy* (this gift is discussed in some detail in the commentary on 11:4a; 12:10a, 27-28; 14:31). Paul told the Corinthians to “*desire earnestly*” (the KJV says “*covet*”) this ability. *Desire earnestly (covet)* is based on a single word (*zeloo*) that here means a “desire to attain goals or to be devoted to something” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 2:100). This term, as well as the point being made here, is discussed more fully in the commentary on 14:1. For information on how the first Christians received spiritual gifts, see Acts 8:18 and the commentary on 1 Cor. 12:11.

Paul said *prophecy* was the preferred supernatural gift, but “tongues” also had a purpose. Tongue speaking allowed first century Christians to communicate in foreign languages they had never learned. Although tongue speaking was useful, it paled in comparison to prophecy because prophecy could usually be used to teach more people (compare verses 1-4 and the commentary on these passages). Gromacki (p. 179) correctly said, tongues were a “revelatory gift” and “had minimal value. In the time that God was revealing His word (cf. 4:36), no mode of revelation could be forbidden. The questions for today are: Is divine revelation still going on? Is God adding to His Word (cf. Rev. 22:18-19)? If not, then the purpose of these gifts has ceased and with it their basis of existence” (ibid). For information on tongue speaking and how Bible tongues are different from what people now claim, see the commentary on 12:10b, 12:10c, the commentary prior to chapter 13, and the commentary on 14:2.

The word “*forbid*” (*koluo*) is a present tense verb and it described restraining an action or activity. “Paul recommends, in the context of the precedence given to prophecy, that the Christians not *hinder* the gift of tongues, as long as the proper order is maintained” (The Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 2:333). Christians could “speak” (present tense) with tongues and use gifts that “built up the church” (verses 3, 5, 6), but these things had to be done in harmony with God’s rules (compare verses 5, 13, 22, 26-28, 32-33). Present day charismatics often quote the end of verse 39 (“forbid not to speak with tongues”), but they overlook most or all rules in this chapter, as well as 1 Cor. 13:8-13, where Paul said “tongues would cease” when “the perfect” (the completed New Testament) came.

Verse 40 again affirms that the Corinthians could use whatever abilities they received from the Holy Spirit **if** they abided by the rules governing these gifts. Paul ended the thought by saying “**all things**” were to be done (present tense) “*decently*” and “*in order*” (compare this point to the word “*unseemly*” and the discussion of this term in the commentary on 13:5). *Decently (euschemonos)* literally meant “*of good external appearance.*” In other words, there should have been “good behavior” at worship. This adverb occurs only here, Rom. 13:13 and 1 Thess. 4:12. The church has never been a place for people to “cut loose” and behave in whatever way they want.

The phrase *in order* comes from a single term (*taxis*) that meant “*in an orderly manner.*” Josephus used the negative form of this word to say “the Roman army did not erect its camp in disorderly parties” (Rienecker and Rogers, p. 438). Paul wanted these Christians to conduct themselves in a way that would end all the confusion and disorder (compare verse 33). If this were not done, non-Christian might have been puzzled or frightened (verse 23) and the Corinthians would not have received as much instruction and edification from the services as God wanted. Today worship still needs to have a *good external appearance* and be *orderly*. Two things that help accomplish these goals are good organization and planning. Good leadership (elders) is also necessary (for some information on these men see the commentary on 12:27-28).

Those involved with religious groups not founded by Christ have sometimes been involved with disorderly behavior. One interesting and unusual example of this occurred in 1828. A young man made a frantic grasp for a vine dangling from a maple tree while exclaiming, “I have at last found him whom my soul has been seeking. I see him in the treetop! Come, friends, and help me get my Savior down!” This man, thinking he had “treed the Savior,” made a few desperate tugs on the vine and then collapsed on the ground. Today there are still people who think their shouting, kicking, screaming, squealing, weeping, and collapsing on the floor occurs because the “Holy Spirit” has come upon them. Paul told the Corinthians that all such claims are false. God is specifically said to **not** be involved with these kinds of things, for these activities create panic and concern instead of “peace” (verse 33).

Introduction to chapter 15:

The next chapter is long, but it is easily divided into seven major sections: (1) Verses 1-4 describe the gospel Paul preached to the Corinthians. (2) Verses 5-7 describe the resurrection appearances to Peter, James and more than 500 others. (3) Verses 8-11 tell of Paul becoming an apostle. (4) Verses 12-34 discuss questions associated with the future resurrection. (5) Verses 35-49 describe the way in which people will be raised from the dead. (6) Verses 50-57 offer a quick overview of what will happen at the end of time. (7) Verse 58 contains a conclusion based on verses 1-57 (i.e. Christians are to remain steadfast and loyal in their service to Jesus Christ). Lenski's outline (First Corinthians, p. 625) is also good: "Verses 1-11 restate the facts of the Christian faith regarding the resurrection of Christ. Verses 12-34 establish the resurrection of the dead. Verses 35-54 answer the question regarding the resurrection body. Verses 55-58 close with a word of triumph and cheer."

We know what this chapter discusses (Jesus' resurrection and the future resurrection of all people), but we are not sure why Paul discussed these topics. Some of the previous subjects in this letter were discussed because the Corinthians had asked about them. We do not find any evidence of the Corinthians asking questions about the resurrection. Many have supposed there were people at Corinth who denied a future resurrection so Paul believed it was necessary to discuss this subject. Others believe some of the Corinthians had been former Sadducees, a view that is possible but not probable. It seems best to believe that some were teaching error about the resurrection, Paul was aware of this, and this chapter was written to combat the false doctrine.

When Paul had previously preached in Athens, an area located less than 50 miles from Corinth, he had some opposition from people who mocked the idea of a resurrection (Acts 17:32). Since Corinth was a Greek city, there may have been some Greeks in the church who found it difficult to believe in the future resurrection of all people (compare verses 12, 29, 32) and perhaps even the Lord's resurrection. Wiersbe (First Corinthians, p. 617) noted how most "Greek philosophers considered the human body a prison, and they welcomed death as deliverance from bondage." Gromacki (p. 181) said, "Greek thought accepted the immortality of the soul, but rejected the resurrection of the body." "This pagan dichotomy, brought into the church, was heretical and had to be corrected" (ibid).