

The Exercise of Gift in the Assembly

1 Corinthians 14

1 Corinthians 14. Having taken up the subject of divine love in a parenthesis (ch.13), Paul now returns to the subject of gift, more specifically *gift in exercise* in the local [assembly meetings](#). Often “*the assembly*” is mentioned, and the term “*in assembly*” is used, referring to official gatherings of the local assembly. This chapter is the single greatest resource we have regarding the order of assembly meetings. Christendom has disregarded this chapter, and has now become a vast arena where men strive for their own glory, rather than the glory of Christ. The great principle in this chapter is that the exercise of gift should be regulated by love (v.1). He shows that it is possible to minister in the assembly and it *not* be for profit. He picks up on one gift that is particularly prone to be used unprofitably, that is the gift of tongues. He picks up on another gift that stands in contrast to tongues, that is prophecy... one of the “best gifts”. Is this chapter relevant today? Yes. Sign gifts have faded, and their use today is almost or completely non-existent. Still, the principles laid out in this chapter are not limited to tongues and prophecy, but are broadly applicable to all Christian ministry.

Order: the False and the True. A great lesson to be learned from this chapter is that God’s order is imperative in the functioning of the local assembly. The Corinthians were experiencing a high degree of confusion because they were ignorant of God’s order. There is a parallel danger to Corinthian confusion; that is human order. There is a tendency in Christendom to set up human order to avoid the possibility of confusion, but it isn’t God’s order, and the genuine flow of ministry will be crippled. *It is better to be in a place where God’s order is held - albeit in weakness and failure - than to be in a place where human order has displaced the Spirit of God.*

Contents

- [Ministry should be Edifying \(14:1-6\)](#)
- [Ministry should be Clear and Understandable \(14:7-20\)](#)
- [Ministry should be in Accordance with Scripture \(14:21-25\)](#)
- [Ministry should be Orderly and Self-Controlled \(14:26-33\)](#)
- [Ministry should not Violate God’s Order in Creation: the Sister’s Place \(14:34-35\)](#)
- [The Authority of God’s Word in These Matters \(14:36-38\)](#)

- [Summary: Edification & Order in the Assembly \(14:39-40\)](#)

Ministry should be Edifying (14:1-6)

Love is the Proper Motivation (v.1)

CHAPTER 14

¶ Follow after love, and be emulous of spiritual *manifestations*, but rather that ye may *prophecy*. **v.1** The expression “*follow after love*” means that love should lead, or rule, or regulate the exercise of gift. When using our gift, we should always have the blessing of others in mind... never self-exaltation. It is good to desire spiritual gifts in general, but the chief desire is that we might *prophecy*. There are two kinds of prophecy in the New Testament. Those who received special revelations from God to pen the New Testament scriptures and even predict future events are sometimes called New Testament prophets (“*fore-telling*”). These gifts were part of the foundation of the Church (Eph. 2:20), and then passed off the scene. We no longer have prophets in this character today. However, there is another type of prophecy that we still do have today; the ability to speak the mind of God for the time (“*forth-telling*”); i.e. the “word of wisdom”. This gift is maximally beneficial to the assembly, and should be desired above all other gifts. This is why it is important for the local assembly to hold prophecy meetings (sometimes called “open for ministry as the Lord leads”; v.29). If the prophets are not given opportunity to speak, the assembly is essentially *muzzling* the source of greatest edification to the assembly!

Ministry is directed outward, not inward (vv.2-4)

2 For he that speaks with a tongue does not speak to men but to God: for no one hears; but in spirit he speaks mysteries. **3** But he that prophesies speaks to men *in* edification, and encouragement, and consolation. **4** He that speaks with a tongue edifies himself; but he that prophesies edifies *the* assembly. **vv.2-4** He that speaks with a tongue (a foreign language), when no one is present to interpret that language, that ministry only falls on the ears of God, regardless of how wonderful the ministry is; i.e. speaking great “*mysteries*”. By contrast, one who exercises a prophetic gift is actually a help to “*men*”... those in the assembly. The Corinthians actually thought that speaking in an unknown tongue was super-spiritual because it was exclusively for God. Paul turns this around and shows the very opposite. Gift is how ministry flows down from God to man; it has nothing to do with

worship which flows upward from man to God. The Corinthians therefore viewed tongues as more spiritual than prophecy. Paul shows that the opposite is true. The end of v.3 is not so much a definition of prophecy, but a description of the *results* of prophecy in contrast with tongues. It cannot be a definition because you cannot reverse the sentence. Prophetic ministry will result in: (1) “edification” which is *building* up, (2) “exhortation” which is *stirring* up, or (3) “comfort” which is *binding* up. Tongues without interpretation are only directed inwardly... they edify oneself, and not in a spiritual sense, but in a carnal sense, by “puffing up”. Prophecy on the other hand is directed outward, and it edifies the assembly. Love always reaches outside of itself to help or benefit others, often at personal expense.

The Goal is to Edify the Assembly (vv.5-6)

5 Now I desire that ye should all speak with tongues, but rather that ye should prophesy. But greater is he that prophesies than he that speaks with tongues, unless he interpret, that the assembly may receive edification. **v.5** Paul is not putting down tongues, but he is putting tongues in their proper place. He wished that all the Corinthians had the lesser gift of tongues, but rather that all had the gift of prophecy. This does not mean that all do have the gift of tongues or prophecy; see 1 Cor. 12:29-30. Any gift is good, but not all gifts are equal; for “*greater is he that prophesies than he that speaks with tongues, unless he interpret*”. It is clear from vv.5-6 that someone could have the gift of tongues as well as prophecy or some other gift, in which case tongues would be the means of getting the truth out to those of other languages. Why is prophecy greater than tongues without interpretation? Because one edifies the assembly, and the other does not. These principles are not limited to the first century Church. We must remember that the great goal of ministry is *the edification of the assembly*.

6 And now, brethren, if I come to you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you, unless I shall speak to you either in revelation, or in knowledge, or in prophecy, or in teaching? **v.6** Paul brings his point home. Tongues, unless they are used to communicate edifying ministry, are profitless. He then lists the four things that are spiritually profitable to the assembly:

1. **Revelation** is the sovereign action of God to *deliver* His Word to men. It is the first step in the three-part process in 1 Cor. 2:10-16. The New Testament apostles and prophets were given revelations, and they either spoke or wrote these things by the Spirit; a process called inspiration. We no longer have apostles and prophets, but we do have their writings.
2. **Knowledge** is the actual *possession* of the Word of God, after it has been revealed.

By accepting God's revelation, we gain knowledge.

3. **Prophecy** is the application the Word of God to the conscience; the mind of God speaking to the soul. It does not involve a new revelation. Clearly, this shows that "prophecy" in the context of this chapter is distinct from revelation.
4. **Teaching** is explaining the word of God in an understandable and clear way. It may be the principles of the Word of God, or it may be practical instruction.

Ministry should be Clear and Understandable (14:7-20)

The Futility of Uninterpreted Tongues in Public Ministry (vv.7-13)

7 Even lifeless things giving a sound, whether pipe or harp, if they give not distinction to the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped? **8** For also, if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself for war? **vv.7-8** Paul now gives the example of musical instruments, which are useful to convey information. He gives three examples of instruments; the pipe (*reed* family), the harp (*string* family), and the trumpet (*brass* family). These instruments are not only useful for musical art, but also as organizational devices. In any case, music is only meaningful when the instruments emit distinct notes. We have all heard a baby banging on a piano; this makes a loud noise, but the sound is meaningless because many keys are pressed at the same time. There is no discernible melody unless the notes are distinct and sequential. Now, there is little harm in spoiled entertainment, but there can be tremendous damage if soldiers are depending on these instruments for instruction in camp or on the battlefield. How awful to be left wondering what signal the trumpet was intended to give!

9 Thus also "ye" with the tongue, unless ye give a distinct speech, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye will be speaking to the air. **v.9** Public ministry, "with the tongue", is the same way. If it is not distinct and clear, it is nothing but wasted words; "ye will be speaking to the air." Notice the growing emphasis in Paul's words as he develops his point. Those who speak not for profit are said: to speak to God and not man (v.2), to edify themselves (v.4), and finally, to speak to the air (v.9).

10 There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world, and none of undistinguishable sound. **11** If therefore I do not know the power of the sound, I shall be to him that speaks a barbarian, and he that speaks a barbarian for me. **vv.10-11** There are “so many” different languages (“voices”) in the world, and none of them are “of undistinguishable sound”; i.e. they all have a distinct and recognizable dialect. This totally destroys the notion of the modern tongue speakers, that their gibberish is scriptural. When modern tongue-speaking is analyzed by linguists, they find that it consists of the same few syllables repeated over and over. It is impossible for so few syllables to compose intelligent information, as in every true language. In other words, modern tongue-speaking is of “undistinguishable sound”, and therefore not genuine. Getting back to the point, if we do not understand the language spoken by another, we are effectively *barbarians* to one another. Languages were what God used to “divide the earth” (Gen. 11:9), because communication is essential to co-habitation. Therefore, by insisting on using the gift of tongues, which was given to temporarily *overcome* the barrier introduced at the Tower of Babel, brethren can actually be driven further apart. As an application, if teachers insist on complex terminology that is “over the heads” of most in the assembly, it can have the same effect of estranging brethren from one another.

12 Thus “ye” also, since ye are desirous of spirits, seek that ye may abound for the edification of the assembly. **v.12** Now Paul gets down a little more to the root of things in Corinth. They were “*desirous of spirits*”... they were looking to feel an influence, and see outward displays of spiritual power! This was a carry over from Paganism. They were used to coming together to see some spectacular thing through demonic energy. The apostle has to write to show them the difference between the actions of the Holy Spirit and the actions of demons. Has this crept into Christianity today? Yes. The modern charismatic movement is full of people who are desirous of feeling a supernatural influence. This is a dangerous position. It is not possible for a true believer to be possessed by a demon, but it is possible for a Christian to act through demonic power. In the second epistle, Paul warns that the Corinthians were in danger of accepting “*a different Spirit, which ye have not got*” (2 Cor. 11:4). Instead of being desirous of spirits, we should be desirous of building up the assembly.

13 Wherefore let him that speaks with a tongue pray that he may interpret. **v.13** One who has the gift of tongues does not necessarily know what his is saying (see v.14). Therefore, it is essential that an interpreter is present, if the speaker does not already have the gift of interpretation. In fact, tongues should not be used unless there is an interpreter (v.28). But one with that gift could pray for help to interpret his own ministry, that it might be edifying to the assembly. In Nehemiah we get a nice Old Testament pattern for public ministry. The

leaders of the people “*read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading*” (Neh. 8:8). The children of Israel had returned from the Babylonian captivity, and over the seventy years, the majority had lost the ability to speak or read Hebrew, which they had exchanged for Aramaic, the “*tongue of the Chaldeans*” (Dan. 1:4). The children especially had no comprehension of Hebrew. Only the priests, scribes and some rulers had retained their full skills in Hebrew. Therefore, the leaders of the people read the scriptures in Hebrew *distinctly* for the older ones who grasped it a little, and gave *the sense* (translated) in Aramaic for the younger ones who knew no Hebrew at all. In Christian ministry we need to do the same. Read the scriptures and expound the truth of God distinctly, then give some exposition to boil it down (“*the sense*” of it) for the less mature. The result was that it caused them to “*understand the reading*”.

Importance of the *Speaker’s* Understanding in All Public Utterances (vv.14-15)

14 For if I pray with a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful. **15** What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, but I will pray also with the understanding; I will sing with the spirit, but I will sing also with the understanding. **vv.14-15** Having mentioned prayer, the apostle now turns to address, more broadly than ministry, *all* forms of public utterance. In vv.14-15 he mentions prayer and singing, which are primarily functions of priesthood. The principles given pertain not just to teaching, preaching, prophesying, etc. but also to praying publicly and singing publicly. How wonderful that there is a ministerial element even to our prayers and singing! We are edified – almost unintentionally – through prayers and singing. Not that we should try to teach in our prayers, etc. but that it will happen automatically. For instance, how much Christ-exalting truth is communicated in a hymn like “*Thou Art the Everlasting Word*” by Josiah Conder, and others? J.N. Darby once said he would rather have been the author of that hymn than of all other hymns combined in the English language. These verses give explicit instruction for assembly singing. Notice here that it is the speaker’s understanding that is referred to; i.e. the one with the gift of tongues. Why? Because the aim of the Holy Spirit in leading out public utterances is the communion or fellowship of the assembly. You can speak with tongues *without* your understanding being in it, but that is far inferior to when the Spirit acts *with* understanding of the speaker. Without the speaker’s understanding, the unity of the Spirit is not enjoined. God desires to have His saints in communion with one another over divine subjects... this is only possible when both speaker and audience understand it. The solution then is to pray and sing with the spirit (the human spirit acting according to one’s spiritual gift), but with

the speaker's understanding also. This means either (1) to speak only in our native tongue, or (2) to ensure that interpretation is occurring while speaking in tongues. We can apply this generally. We ought never to speak something in the assembly that we have not proven out ourselves individually.

Singing in the New Testament. From Ephesians 5 and Colossians 3 it is evident that early Christians sang psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. From 1 Corinthians 14 it is evident that these were sung regularly in the assembly meetings, as well as in private (James 5:13). These psalms, etc. are quite distinct from the inspired poetry in the Old Testament, written by David, Asaph, and others for the Jewish people. We have no indication that Old Testament inspired psalms were sung in the assembly of God. Nor do we have an indication that there is such a thing as inspired New Testament hymns, etc. Perhaps the closest thing is the likely short "spiritual song" in 1 Cor. 15:3-4. That may have been a song common to early Christians, but recorded by inspiration in Paul's epistle. As a side note, there is no mention of musical accompaniment with New Testament singing. The Church has brought in the use of musical instruments from "the camp" of Judaism (Heb. 13:13). Instead, we sing "*with your heart to the Lord*". Collective singing is a wonderful thing, because it brings all the hearts of the saints together in unison.

1. **Psalms** are about the wilderness experience (e.g. "*O Jesus, Friend unfailing*", "*Though dark be our way*", "*Though in a foreign land*").
2. **Hymns** are addressed to a divine person (e.g. "*Father, Thy name our souls would bless*", "*Thou Art the Everlasting Word*", "*Lord Jesus Christ, our Saviour Thou*").
3. **Spiritual songs** are songs about the truth of God (e.g. "*Amazing Grace*", "*We joy in our God, and we sing of that love*", "*How good is the God we adore*").

Importance of the *Audience's* Understanding in All Public Utterances (vv.16-17)

16 Since otherwise, if thou blessest with *the* spirit, how shall he who fills the place of the simple *Christian* say Amen, at thy giving of thanks, since he does not know what thou sayest? **17** For "thou" indeed givest thanks well, but the other is not edified. **vv.16-17** Not only does the speaker's understanding need to be engaged, but the audience's understanding as well. If you pray or bless in a tongue, those who are simple or uninstructed cannot intelligently agree with your prayer, because they do not know what you are saying. The goal of *public* prayer is broader in scope than *private* prayer. The Lord taught about private prayer in His sermon on the mount (read [Matt. 6:5-15](#)). The goal of

public prayer is not merely to pray a nice prayer between your soul and God, but to pray on behalf of all believers present. This v.16 shows that it is right and proper for all believers to say “Amen” at the conclusion of every public prayer. The word “Amen” simply means “surely” or “of a truth”. It is a statement of agreement to the sentiments of the preceding prayer. The point is simple; public utterances ought to be understandable to all present. We can apply this to the *manner* of speech as well as the *language* of speech. We need to use terminology that is accessible to those who are present. This might vary depending on the audience. An in-depth Bible study with learned scholars will allow for more advanced terminology. When speaking to children, the vocabulary should be kept simple, so as not to go over their heads. It has been noted that Jesus told Peter, “feed my lambs” not “feed my giraffes” (John 21:15). We also should endeavor to keep our *volume level* high enough so all can hear; i.e. try not to speak into your chair cushion in prayer meeting.

Importance of Discerning the Audience: Paul as a Pattern (vv.18-20)

18 I thank God I speak in a tongue more than all of you: **v.18** Paul was not motivated to write what he did by envy. He was not envious of the Corinthians’ gift... he could speak in foreign languages by spiritual power more than any of the Corinthians. Paul was thankful for this, not because it made him look good, but because it eliminated a potential avenue for the flesh to attack this epistle. However, Paul used tongues at the right time, in the right place, and for the right purpose.

19 but in *the* assembly I desire to speak five words with my understanding, that I may instruct others also, *rather* than ten thousand words in a tongue. **v.19** The Spirit sets Paul forth as a pattern in public ministry. It is proper that those who had the gift of tongues to learn from one who was preeminently gifted. When he was “*in the assembly*”, Paul would not speak in a tongue. In v.22 he will develop that “tongues are for a sign... to unbelievers”. But they do not edify believers, and therefore only “*five words*” with our understanding is more beneficial to the assembly than 10,000 words in a foreign language. We need to study to *be brief* in our ministry. “*Behold, the Lamb of God*”... “*the truth is in Jesus*”... “*I am crucified with Christ,*” are all short expressions that convey powerful truth. How sad that for centuries the Word of God was withheld from the masses, when it was only read to them in Latin by the clergy, a language the laity did not understand.

Importance of Spiritual Maturity in the Exercise of Gift (v.20)

20 Brethren, be not children in *your* minds, but in malice be babes; but in *your* minds be grown men. **v.20** There ought to be spiritual maturity coupled with the exercise of gift. The Corinthians were behaving as children, which are known for babbling nonsense as a method of self amusement. This is ignorance. The spiritually mature Christian will use his or her gift with the calculated intention to edify the assembly. The only area where ignorance is to be praised is in the flesh... "*in malice be babes*". This would indicate that the flesh was at work among the Corinthians (1 Cor. 5:8). Perhaps those who could speak in tongues were flaunting their gift before those whom they despised. In this the Corinthians ought to have known better.

Malicious Ministry. It is possible for someone to use the platform of ministry, or even prayer, to take jabs at certain ones in the audience. This ought never to take place among the saints of God. It is an awful manifestation of the flesh. However, I think the point in v.20 is more a subtle flaunting of sign gifts before those who had not. Yet we can certainly take the application.

Ministry should be in Accordance with Scripture (14:21-25)

21 It is written in the law, "By people of other tongues, and by strange lips, will I speak to this people; and neither thus will they hear me, saith the Lord." [Isa. 28:11-12] **22** So that tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe, but to unbelievers; but prophecy, not to unbelievers, but to those who believe. **vv.21-22 Scriptural Order.** The apostle next turns to the scriptures to get God's mind about the use of tongues. Quoting from Isa. 28:11-12, Paul shows that God promised foreign tongues as a sign to the nation of Israel, when the people were rebellious, and even the prophets had turned from the Lord. For them it would be the voices of their captors in a strange land, and they would slowly ("*line upon line*") learn that God meant what He said. Though Israel would receive this sign, still "*they would not hear*" the Lord nor return to Him. The point is this; tongues would be used when prophecy had failed. For those who hearkened to the voice of prophecy, tongues were not needed! This is a great lesson with all prophetic truth: it does not benefit those who

disbelieve it, but only those who believe it. Therefore, the use of tongues is a sign to unbelievers, and prophecy is for those who do believe! Note: this verse is also helpful to prove the meaning of “tongues” as actual foreign languages.

23 If therefore the whole assembly come together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and simple *persons* enter in, or unbelievers, will not they say ye are mad? **24** But if all prophesy, and some unbeliever or simple *person* come in, he is convicted of all, he is judged of all; **25** the secrets of his heart are manifested; and thus, falling upon *his* face, he will do homage to God, reporting that God is indeed amongst you. **vv.23-25 The Results of Scripture Ignored and Followed.** Paul next looks at the results of scriptural order worked out in the assembly. Paul takes the standpoint of a visitor that would come into the assembly, whether an unbeliever or a young believer. Paul describes them coming into the assembly on two hypothetical occasions, and the natural results in those circumstances:

1. **Scripture Ignored (v.23).** If all had the gift of tongues, and all were consumed with showing off their gifts regardless of whether or not the ministry is edifying, the result would be chaos. The simple believer or the unbeliever has enough common sense to say of a room full of believers all speaking in languages they do not understand, “YE ARE MAD!!” Broadly speaking, chaos is always the result when scripture is ignored. Charismatics, take note!
2. **Scripture Followed (vv.24-25).** On the other hand, if all had the gift of prophecy, and all were taken up with edifying ministry, a visitor would be convicted by the evident hand of God at work in the assembly, and would give God the credit for it, and say “GOD IS INDEED AMONG YOU!!” When scripture is followed, the leading of the Spirit is evident to all.

A visitor should feel that there is order in the assembly meetings, even though there is no visible leader. This is because the Lord is *president* in the assembly meetings, and He leads by the Spirit of God. Even the unbeliever is not outside the reach of prophetic ministry. It is very possible that the messages given to the prophets are intended to reach the consciences of both believers and unbelievers; so that “*he is convicted of all, he is judged of all; the secrets of his heart are manifested*”. This is the real benefit of prophecy. It brings the soul into the presence of God. It was when the Lord exposed the lifestyle of the Samaritan woman that she said, “*Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet*”. He mentions “all” speaking in tongues, and “all” prophesying. He just said in ch.12 that all do not have the gift of prophecy, nor all the gift of tongues. He is speaking hypothetically to make a point, not that there was ever a case where “all” were prophets or “all” had the gift of tongues. He addresses the issue of *limiting* the speakers in vv.26-33.

The Local Assembly. The context is clearly an assembly meeting; *“if therefore the whole assembly come together in one place”*. Now it would appear that Paul is speaking hypothetically, because it was not possible for all believers in the assembly in Corinth to come together in one place. Rather, they met in smaller gatherings (Matt. 18:20). But he pictures them all together to emphasize a point. Furthermore, this also shows that while the local assembly embraces all believers in a location, not all are involved in the fellowship of the assembly. Here, a simple believer comes in while the whole assembly is together.

The Unprofitability of Tongues. Improperly used, tongues are shown in this chapter to be:

1. Unprofitable to the *speaker* (v.14)
2. Unprofitable to the *audience* (v.16)
3. Unprofitable to the *visitor* (v.23)

Ministry should be Orderly and Self-Controlled (14:26-33)

The Disorder in Corinth (v.26)

¶ 26 What is it then, brethren? whenever ye come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done to edification. v.26 The subject changes in v.26 to order. While it is important for every member to use their gift, God insists that order should govern the use of gifts. This verse describes a time when the assembly comes together and the leading of the Spirit is not evident. When everyone has a psalm, teaching, etc. and they all insist on talking at once, the meeting is a free-for-all, and no one is edified. This type of behavior corresponds to grieving the Spirit (Eph. 4:30); acting independently of the leading of the Spirit according to the directions of the Head. We must be careful, because habitually grieving the Spirit of God can lead to chronic spiritual numbness, where we become desensitized to the leading of the Spirit. Not every gift is for public ministry. Scripture does not support every-man ministry. It is not necessarily a sign of a profitable meeting if 19 out of 20 brothers take part in a ministry meeting. Sometimes we strive to achieve every-man ministry for its entertainment value. (Priesthood is different; *“I will therefore that men pray every where...”*, 1 Tim. 2:8.) Furthermore, the individuals need to follow the Lord’s leading as to what they should say,

when they should say it, and how to say it. We need to defer to others, rather than insisting that our own voice be heard. While these verses are specifically referring to the open meeting (or “ministry / prophecy” meeting), the principles apply just as well to the reading meeting, or any other meeting of the assembly; *“whenever ye come together”*.

The Proper Order for Use of Tongues (vv.27-28)

27 If any one speak with a tongue, *let it be two, or at the most three, and separately, and let one interpret;* **28** but if there be no interpreter, let him be silent *in the assembly, and let him speak to himself and to God.* **vv.27-28** Scripture condemns every-man ministry (v.26), but it also condemns one-man ministry (v.27, v.29). Here we find that those with the gift of tongues could speak only if there was an interpreter, and they should speak “separately” (one-by-one), two or three in sequence. Following this scriptural order would prevent the vain display of sign gifts in the assembly, and ensure that the ministry was actually profitable to the assembly.

The Proper Order for Prophecy (vv.29-33)

29 And let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge. **v.29** The order for prophetic ministry follows. Like tongues, the prophets were to speak two or three in sequence. It is remarkable that with every assembly meeting there is a plurality of speakers. This allows for the Spirit of God to correct something that might be said wrong by one of the speakers. Three messages fall safely within the capacity of the human mind to take in ministry. This specifically describes what we might call the prophecy meeting, or open for ministry meeting. Two or three brothers who have a prophetic ministry will stand up and speak a burden laid upon them by the Lord. This is the primary outlet for the prophet to speak, but there is also much opportunity in what we might call a Bible reading (1 Tim. 4:13). It appears that only prophets are to speak, and the rest of the assembly ought to judge. There is not a certain “panel” of super-spiritual ones that judge (some think it means “let the others [prophets] judge”. No, it is the whole assembly’s responsibility. What is the assembly to judge? We are to judge if what is said is of the Spirit of God. If some brother is continually ministering in an unprofitable way, the assembly should address it, otherwise the flock will suffer damage. That being said, there is a danger that we would reject the prophetic message, much like Israel in the Old Testament, because we do not want to hear what the prophets have said; therefore, *“Despise not prophesyings”* (1 Thess. 5:20).

30 But if there be a revelation to another sitting *there*, let the first be silent. **v.30** Each speaker should leave room for another to speak. We must avoid run-on messages, or

speaking to fill the time. The word “let” comes up over and over in these verses, because the actions described ought to be led by the Spirit of God. The one speaker should be sensitive to the mind of the Spirit, that his message has been discharged, and it is time to sit down. Neither should the second speaker interrupt the first; rather he should “*let the first hold his peace*”. Self-will in ministry is destructive in the assembly. There are two different points that could be taken from v.30; perhaps both are true.

- First, the expression “*let the first hold his peace*” could be an exhortation to the first speaker, to be quiet when another has received a revelation. This would be more likely if the “revelation” mentioned here is a direct revelation of God’s Word, as given to prophets in the foundation-sense. Kelly may take this view, for he says, “*a revelation when thus given took precedence of all communication*”.
- Second, the expression “*let the first hold his peace*” could be an exhortation to the second speaker, to wait until the first speaker is quiet before speaking. Kelly also seems to take this view, for he says “*he could speak, the other being silent*”.

31 For ye can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all be encouraged. v.31 We were told in v.24 that it would be profitable if all were to prophesy (hypothetically), but this verse tells us the timing; “*one by one*”. It is never edifying to have speakers interrupting or talking over one another. The first “all” in v.31 refers to all prophets, not all the saints. There is no such thing in scripture as “a prophet for the occasion”. Paul had just said in ch.12 that all do not have the gift of prophecy, nor all the gift of tongues. All the prophets might prophesy, but one by one, at a maximum of three per meeting. The second and third “all” refer to the whole assembly; “*that all may learn and all be encouraged*”. The benefit of orderly ministry in the assembly is that all learn the mind of God for the assembly, and that all are encouraged.

32 And spirits of prophets are subject to prophets. v.32 One of the fruits of the Spirit is temperance, or self-control (Gal. 5:23). One of the characteristics of demonic power is the loss of self-control; “when ye were of the nations ye were led away to dumb idols, in whatever way ye might be led” (1 Cor. 12:2). A Christian cannot give the excuse “I couldn’t help saying what I said”. No, we are to retain control of our spirits. This is very practical. In a reading meeting, if a verse is explained not exactly to my liking, do I insist on explaining it over again? If the meeting is going a different direction than I had thought, do I insist on steering it back? The Spirit of God leads in the assembly... who am I to force my will against the Spirit? “*He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls*” (Prov. 25:28).

33 For God is not a God of disorder but of peace, as in all the assemblies of the saints. v.33

Paul connects the most practical detail, the order of the assembly meetings, with the very nature of God. He is not like the gods of the Greco-Roman culture, who were known for stirring up confusion and strife among men. *“God is not a God of disorder but of peace.”* An elementary proof of the existence of God is the existence of order in the universe. The Second Law of Thermodynamics states that the state of entropy of the entire universe - the measurement of disorder - will always increase over time. Therefore, there must be some organizing, sustaining influence in the universe, or the whole system would be at zero potential, if the universe were very, very old. Satan’s character is to disrupt, destroy, and throw into disorder. This is important when we come to vv.34-35. Satan wants to blur the lines between the sexes... but God has established an order that is for His own glory, and our blessing. The character of God (peace) ought to characterize *“all”* the assemblies of the saints. This is one of many occasions in this epistle where Paul explicitly declares that the doctrines contained herein are for the whole Church, *“all the assemblies”*; see 1 Cor. 1:2; 1 Cor. 4:17; 1 Cor. 7:17; 1 Cor. 11:16; 1 Cor. 16:1.

Cushi and Ahimaaz. Just because someone has a gift, does not mean they are automatically qualified to speak. We see this great lesson borne out in the messengers of Joab in 2 Sam. 18:9-33. Ahimaaz the son of Zadok was a swift runner, and he was anxious to bring a happy, positive message to David that the rebel army had been defeated. Joab had the wisdom to know that Ahimaaz was not the appropriate messenger. He chose Cushi instead, who was a little slower, but had seen the battle and death of Absalom. He was prepared in his soul for the message he had to deliver. Ahimaaz would be able to bear tidings another day. After Cushi departed, Ahimaaz begged Joab to let him run, and he beat Cushi to the podium. Seeing Ahimaaz coming, they assumed something about his message because of his character as a man. But Ahimaaz was not able to deliver the message David needed, and he had to be told to *“stand aside”*. When Cushi arrived, he quickly and briefly delivered his message, and it had the needed effect on David. The prophet who stands up in an open meeting must be *“the Lord’s messenger”*, and also have *“the Lord’s message”* (Hag. 1:13).

Ministry should not Violate God’s Order in Creation: the Sister’s Place (14:34-35)

¶ 34 Let *your* women be silent in the assemblies, for it is not permitted to them to speak; but to be in subjection, as the law also says. v.34 Evidently, women were speaking in the

Corinthian assembly. Paul clears up this disorder as well, stating emphatically that *women are not permitted to speak in the assembly*. This is not because of a lack of gift, because every believer has a gift. For example, the four daughters of Philip the evangelist had the gift of prophecy (Acts 21:9). It is right for women to use their gifts, but God's order in creation should not be violated. Women are in the place of subjection to man, and they need to act accordingly. How backwards Christendom has gone today with women pastors leading churches. The law (Old Testament) also demonstrates generally the subject place of the woman, because it is part of God's order in creation. Paul told Timothy, "*I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence*" (1 Tim. 2:12). That applies to women when men are present, any time and any place, because in 1 Timothy it is the house of God in the universal aspect. But in 1 Corinthians it is the local assembly that is in view.

35 But if they wish to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is a shame for a woman to speak in assembly. **v.35** Even asking a question in the assembly is prohibited for women, because "it is a shame for a woman to speak in assembly". This is because public speaking in the assembly is speaking on behalf of the whole assembly. God has put man in the place of headship, as representing both. It wrongs the order God set up in creation to have a woman speak on behalf of the assembly (1 Cor. 11:14). Certainly, women can ask questions, and God want's their questions answered, but they should "*ask their own husbands at home*". Notice the wisdom of this; "*her own husband*". How unseemly it would be for a woman to ask another man who was not her husband! The Spirit of God is careful to guard against unseemly behavior. The word translated here "husband" is really 'andras', or "men/menfolk". It would encompass any Christian men in her family or acquaintance. Thus, the apostle happily allows for a single or widowed woman to ask questions, so long as it is not in the assembly meetings.

Objections. We can see around us today the utter rejection of Paul's teaching on the matter of women speaking in the assembly. Here are a few objections and answers.

- *Silence doesn't mean silence.* Some point to ch.11 where Paul speaks of women praying and prophesying, which they certainly can and do. They then make an unjustified leap that ch.11, vv.1-16 are in the context of the assembly meetings. Then they make another leap, that the women in Corinth were very chatty, and the command to "let them keep silence" has to do with gossip, rather than ministry. However, it is plain to see that the whole context of the chapter is ministry in the assembly, not gossip.
- *It was only a temporary injunction.* Some teach that Paul was dealing with a recent

episode of female misconduct in Corinth, and that he was essentially telling them to keep quiet for a while. Nothing in the text would suggest that this was only a temporary injunction.

- *It's just a suggestion.* Some are so bold as to say that because Paul says "Let", it means that the exhortation is optional. Rather, we read in v.27 that they are really the commandments of the Lord.
- *That was for the Corinthians.* Others admit the plain meaning of these verses, but shrug them off as pertaining only to the early Church, or only to the Corinthian assembly. Paul rebukes this in v.33 and v.36.

The Authority of God's Word in These Matters (14:36-38)

36 Did the word of God go out from you, or did it come to you only? **v.36** In conclusion, the apostle sternly rebukes the attitude that had arisen among the Corinthians, and even now threatened to see Paul's letter discarded. Does the Word of God come out from the Church? No! The Church does not and should not teach... the Church is taught. And the Word of God is universal. It did not come to the Corinthians only. It is addressed to the *whole* Church, in every period.

37 If any one thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him recognise the things that I write to you, that it is *the* Lord's commandment. **38** But if any be ignorant, let him be ignorant. **vv.36-38** The only way to be preserved is to walk in the light of the Word. True greatness is seen in bowing to the Lordship of Christ, through obedience to the "*Lord's commandment*" in the inspired writings of His apostles. If any one thinks himself to be one who speaks for God (a prophet), or one who understands the things of God (spiritual), he should recognize this truth. One whose will is set against the Lord's commandments cannot be reasoned with; "*let him be ignorant*". We are not to argue with such persons, but we are responsible to judge evil. It is liberating to realize that we do not have to apologize for the Word of God... it didn't come from us! William Kelly made a striking observation about the Corinthians:

The Corinthians were the first to depart from the apostolic order established everywhere. It was the beginning of ecclesiastical revolt. The church is to be subject. The word of God commands, and commands all assemblies alike. - W. Kelly

Summary: Edification & Order in the Assembly (14:39-40)

39 So that, brethren, desire to prophesy, and do not forbid the speaking with tongues. **40** But let all things be done comelily and with order. **vv.39-40** To summarize his teaching on the exercise of gift, Paul concludes with several points:

1. It is good to desire the exercise of gift, but priority should be put on those gifts that edify. Tongues are not be forbidden if used in the proper way. But prophecy is more beneficial to the assembly.
2. Order in the assembly meetings is of the highest importance, because God is a God of order, and without order the assembly is not edified.