

# 1 Corinthians

## Chapter 14

For this chapter, I am again relying on material from *First Corinthians* by Richard B. Hays from the Interpretation series.

In this chapter it seems that some of the Corinthians feel that the gift of tongues is the superior gift. Because of the elevation of that gift, those who “spoke in tongues” and those who aspire to “speak in tongues” were causing disarray in the service. Paul has already said that speaking in tongues is one of the gifts of the Spirit. But he also feels that the service and all activities of the Body of Christ should be for the building up the body, not causing rifts. As chapter 13 highlights, Paul believes that love is the basis for the work/worship/activities of the church. So, Paul’s solution is to say that speaking in tongues is a powerful manifestation of the Spirit. If speaking in tongues takes place in the church, there should be someone present who can interpret the message being given. He stresses that speaking in tongues is a powerful way for an individual to offer his/her prayers in private.

Paul stresses in this same passage the importance of the gift of prophecy. Prophecy is intelligible and builds up the Body of Christ. Building up the Body of Christ is always a concern for Paul.

Verse 22 seems a little disjointed. In the worship of some of the Greek/Roman gods some of the people spoke in tongues. Perhaps, Paul is concerned that speaking in tongues might be seen by unbelievers as worshiping one of the culture gods. Paul would not want the church to be seen as another site for worshiping such gods. The second part of that verse is equally confusing, especially, in light of what follows. Perhaps, Paul feels that if the believers are not strong in their faith through prophecy, they might be led astray.

Verses 23 through 25 seem to contradict verse 22. Paul, now, seems to be saying that if unbelievers came into the service and heard everyone speaking in tongues they would think the entire group was out of their minds. He continues with that if unbelievers entered and heard prophecy, it would be intelligible and they might become believers.

The second part of the chapter concerns orderly worship. There are 2 verses that seem problematic, verses 34 through 36. These two verses concern women keeping silent in the churches. There are different ways of understanding them. Some groups have taken them very literally and said that women should not be leaders, particularly of adults, in the church. Others have said that Paul is concerned with a particular issue concerning women in a particular church. Many scholars say that the verses are a dilemma and will continue to be a dilemma since we cannot ask Paul directly for clarification. We do need to remember that Paul talks about slavery. The New Testament does not speak out against slavery, yet over time Christians have come to believe that loving the neighbor precludes holding our neighbors as slaves. So, as Christians love their neighbors, women are seen as equals and not subservient.

We always need to remember that Paul felt that love should be the basis of all that happened in the church. When Jesus was asked to cite what commandment was the greatest, he said, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength. And the second is like unto it. Love your neighbor as yourself.” When Jesus spoke these words he was quoting Hebrew scripture. The entire Bible is built upon the foundation of love for God and love of neighbor.

What is something that happens in worship that might be confusing to an outsider?

Does the church of today radiate love of God and love of neighbor? If so, how? If not, what could be done to reflect these fundamental attributes of faith?

© pending