

## Topic

Spiritual gifts

## Theme

A church should declare God's truth in under­ standable words, in an orderly manner, and

for the edification of its members.

## Desired Learner Response

The learner will seek to edify fellow believers while using his spiritual gifts.

#### Materials

* Resources 1 and 14

Team Focus: Edification

## Scripture Focus

1 Corinthians 14

## Summary

The Corinthian church valued speaking in tongues above prophesying. Paul taught the Corinthians to value prophesying above speaking in tongues and to conduct their worship in an orderly manner for the edification of other believ­ ers. His emphasis on edifying others through personal ministry in the church is timeless.

#### Outline

1. A Priority Gift (14:1-5)
	1. Its identity (14:1)
	2. Its importance (14:2- 5)
2. A Perspective about Tongues (14:6- 12)
	1. The clearly defined sound (14:7-9)
	2. The intelligible language (14:10- 12)

Ill. A Procedure to Follow (14:13-40)

1. Interpretation (14:13-28)
2. Revelation (14:29- 40)

**Memory Verse** *"Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church"*

*(1 Corinthians 14:12).*

:6



# GETTING STARTED

**When *5* Is Better than 10,000**

Ask someone in the church who speaks a foreign language to speak a few words of encouragement to the class in the foreign language.

**ASK:** How encouraged are you because of the spoken word of encourage­ ment? *Not at all.*

In 1 Corinthians 14 Paul explained the proper use of tongues in church. He stressed how much better it is to speak five words that others can understand than 10,000 words they do not understand. His instructions help us to get a clearer understanding of the gift of tongues.

### Say What?

Go to Bible Gateway and look up 1 Corinthians 14 in a foreign language that has an audio option (e.g., Japanese Living Bible). Click the audio button and let your class listen to a few verses read in the foreign language .

**ASK:** What language are you hearing?

**ASK:** What is the main point of the message?

**ASK:** Wou ld you believe me if I s aid this is what it so unded like for a first century be li e ver to talk in to ngues ?

The Corinthians were fascinated with speaking in tongues because they liked to draw attention to themselves. Paul wrote to the Corinthian believers to remind them that mutual edification was far more important than speaking in tongues. Edification continues to be important for Christ's church today.

# SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

Although the gift of tongues was a valid spiritual gift for the Corinthian be­ lievers in the infancystage of the church age, they overemphasized its importance and misused it. Paul addressed these abuses in 1 Corinthians 14.

Paul's address of the use of tongues is rather complicated. As a result, faithful commentators will differ in their interpretation of its details. However, some of its most important points are also exceedingly clear. They serve to guide the church today, longafter the sign gifts given to the apostles have *vanish(ed) away* (13:8).

The key verses that should direct us today are14:26, 33, and 40 .

1. **A Priority Gift (14:1-5)**
	1. **Its identity (14:1)**

No matter what spiritual gifts the Corinthians had, they needed to exercise them in love. *Follow after charity (love),* Paul advised . He continued, *And desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy* (1 Cor. 14:1). It was wrong for indi-



First Corinthians 12-14 istheonly passage in the Epistles that deals with the subject of speaking in tongues. Much of the

passage concerns correct­ ing abuses. That should demonstrate clearly that speaking in tongues can­ not possibly be intended by God as a major empha­ sis in the life of the New Testament believer today (cf. 1 Cor. 12:30).

viduals to covet the most visible gifts, but it was not wrong for the church to desire spiritual gifts. The Corinthian believers erred by placing an undue emphasis on the gift of tongues.

**ASK:** What does a god ly desire for spirit ual gifts reveal about a be liever?

(03) *It shows a person is eager to serveGod and is aware of the Holy Spirits part in helping him serve God.*

*Unknown* is italicized in

1 Corinthians 14:2, 4, 13,

14, 19, and 27 of the King James Version, indicating that it was added by the translators. It seems best, therefore, to read *tongue* as meaning human lan­ guage and not some un- known, ecstatic, heavenly

speech.

**READ:** 1 Corinth ians 3:3. **ASK:** What fact about the church at Corinth proved tongues was not a sign of spir ituali ty?(04) *They were living as carnal Christians, controlled by the flesh instead of the Spirit.*

Of all the spiritual gifts, Paul gave priority to prophecy (14:1). This was the gift of sharing new revelation, including both the foretelling of future events and the telling forth of God's message, which ultimately would be written in the form of the New Testament.

### Its importance (14:2-5)

Paul compared the gift of tongues to the gift of prophecy. They were similar in that they both centered on God's truth. The difference was in whether the messages by means of the gifts were understood by the listeners. Paul contended that if someone spoke in a tongue (unlearned foreign language) that noone in the congregation under­ stood, then only God would understand the message (14:2).

Speaking in tongues was not always necessary when the Corinthian church gathered for worship. They were simply fascinated with the obviously supernatural aspects of the gift. Prophecy, on the other hand, conveyed God's truth because the one prophesying did so in his listeners' language. The message did not come with a language barrier.

**ASK:** Why might some believers today attempt to speak in tong ues?(OS)

*They love the attention it brings and thesuperficial appearance of spirituality.*

Paul told the church that declarations of truth delivered in a familiar language would build up the listeners in the faith by edifying, exhorting, and comforting them (14:3). The Corinthian assembly desperate lyneeded to be edified by the truth instead of recognized for a flashy gift (14:4).

**READ:** 1 Corinthians 14:4. **ASK:** What is the purpose of God's truth? (06)

*Gods truth is meant to build up the Body of Christ.*

Paul was not opposed to the proper use of the gift of tongues in the Corinthian church during early church history and before Scripture was complete (cf. 13:10). The gift of tongues had much to offer if an interpretation of the foreign language made it understandable (14:5).

### A Perspective about Tongues (14:6-12)

In verse 6 Paul pointed out how foolish it would be to visit the Corinthian church and speak in an unfamiliar language. His visit would profit the church if he spoke by revelation, by knowledg,eby prophesying, or by doctrine. The prophet de-

dared revelation (truth disclosed from God) and the teacher declared what he knew. In both cases the congregation would be edified only by hearing the communication in language it understood. To clarify his point, Paul gave two illustrations.

* 1. **The clearly defined sound (14:7-9)**

If a wind instrument or a stringed instrument provided notes without varia­ tion of pitch and rhythm, the so-called music would not make any sense (14:7). An audience would not be moved by the music to be joyful or sad, melancholy or mer­ ry. Also, if a soldierblew an unfamiliar trumpet signal, no one in the army would prepare to go to battle (14:8).Similarly, no one in the church would understand a speaker's message if he spoke in an unfamiliar language (14:9).

**OBJECT LESSON:** If your class room has a pia no, ask a no n-mus ic al person to play ra ndom keys for ten seconds. Compare this to a Cor inth ian's speaking in an unfamiliar language. Next , ask a pianist to play a few bars of a familiar hymn. Com pare th is to a Co ri nth ian's prophesying in a famili a r language.

* 1. **The intelligible language (14:10-12)**

Thousands of languagesexist in the world, and each makes sense to those who speak it (14 :10 ). Paul told the Corinthians that two persons, each speaking a language the other did not know, would sound like barbarians to each other (14:11). Instead of speak ing to the congregation in an unfamiliar language, the

Corinthians were advised by Paul to desire spiritual gifts that would enable them to edify one another (14:12).

**RESOURCE:** Dis play reso urce 1 4. **ASK:** What could be some res ult s of belie vers using spirit ual gifts to promote themselves? (Q7) (Re veal or record answe rs.) *They fill with pride, compete for attention, become resentful when no one recognizes*

*their work, and select service opportunities based on their visibilitiy.*

**ASK:** What could be some resu lts of belie vers using spirit ua l gifts to pro ­ mote others? (Q8) (Re veal or record answe rs.) *The church grows strongerspi ri­ tually, others are encouraged to use their gifts, souls and saved, and God is glorified.*

1. **A Procedure to Follow (14:13-28)**

Paul believed worship shouldbe intelligent and not simply emotional.There was no point in praying, praising, or preaching in church in an unfamiliar lan ­ guage if no interpreter was present.

* 1. **Interpretation (14:13-28)**

Paul bound understanding and emotion together as essential elements of wor­ ship (14:13, 14). Only as people understood what was said could they add their *amen* to it (14:16, 17). Although Paul spoke several languages, he preferred to speak five words in a language his audience understood instead of 10,000 in a language they did not understand (14:19). He urged the Corinthians to consider that the purpose behind the gift of tongues was to demonstrate to the Jewish people that God was

Verse 21 includes a quota­ tion of Isa. 28:11, 12.

Paul's words in 14:23-25 offer correction against numerous errors in the practice of worship. The church service is not to be designed to appeal to unbelievers, but it is to be

open to the public and, as such, should not contain elements that appear to be strange or bizarre.

validating the gospel and that it was for all nations (14:20-22a; cf.1:22; Matt. 12:39 ) . The purpose of prophesying, however, was to benefit believers (14:22b).

Paul said that unbelieving Gentiles and Jews alike would be greatly offended if they attended a church service in which the Corinthians spoke in unfamiliar languages (14:23). They would think that believers were crazy! However, if an unbeliever heard and understood the congregation proclaim God's Word, he might come under conviction and turn to God (14:24, 25).

**ASK:** How might a co ng regat io n convict an unsaved visitor and he lp him trust in Christ as Savior? (Q9) *The Holy Spirit will use a church's proclamation of the gospel and testimony to its truth to convict asinner of his need to turn to God for salvation.*

Apparently, the Corinthian worship service was very unruly. Many wanted to contribute (14:26a), but no one wanted to wait his turn to do so. Paul instructed, *Let all things be done unto edifying* (14:26 b). We may rightly infer from Paul's in­ spired counsel that the church was to begin planning its services so that the ben­ eficial aspects of these elements could be presented in a logical and orderly way for the benefit of the entire assembly. The congregation surely must have included some capable people, but the way they were participating was making a mockery of the message they were trying to convey.

The situation in Corinth also required placing restrictions on the use of tongues. When tongues were in operation, the inspired rule was that no more than two or three should speak in tongues (of unlearned foreign languages) in any ser· vice, and then only with the assistance of an interpreter (14:27, 28). Otherwise, the person with the gift of tongues was to remain silent.

* 1. **Revelation (14:29-40)**

Even prophets needed to follow an orderly procedure. Two or three could speak in a service, and their words were to be evaluated by others (14:29). Most likely, the evalu­ ators were those with the gift of *discerning of spirits* (12:10) . They were to act as checks on the person claiming to bea prophet and his assertion to beoffering new revelation. This was vitally important because if someone received a new revelation, his prophe­ sying had precedence over the prophesying of previously revealed truth (14:30).

Furthermore, the prophets were required to take turns prophesying (14:31), and every prophet was supposed to exercise self-control. In other words, no prophet's tongue was to be in high gear while his mind was in neutral. Agai n, the goal was for the congregation to *learn* and *be comforted* (14:31).

**READ:** 1 Corinthians 14:31- 33. **ASK:** Do you think a prescribed order of se r­ vice helps or hinders a church's goal to edify believers? (Ql O)

Paul's entire focus is encapsulated in 1 Corinthians 14:33. The Lord's peace must be the theme that underlies all worship. It should contain no hint of confu­ sion. If a reasonable person walks away from a church service,a pastor's sermon, or a Sunday School class wondering about its intent , there was something serious­ ly flawed with the presenta tion. Even with the ongoing revelation in the days of the early church, Paul demanded orderly worship services.

**ASK: What** could we do to promote orderly worship in our church? (0 11)

Paul applied the principle of order in worship to the women in the congrega­ tion in Corinth. If they had questions aboutwhat the prophets taught, they were not to interrupt the service but were instead to wait until they could ask their husbands at home (14:34,35). Of course, this injunction required husbands to be competent learners of God's Word.

Paul's teaching regarding the role of women in the Corinthian church maynot be as sweeping as it first seems here. He is primarily addressing the specific issue of women being involved in prophesyingand speaking in tongues in a church setting, that is *to speak (authoritatievly) in the church* (133: 5; cf. 11:2-16; 1 Tim. 2:11, 12). The modern equivalent of this would be preaching to the congregation. Paul is not demanding total silence from women while they are in church.

Paul began to wrap up his discussion on worship by stating that the Corinthi­ ans had not originated the Scriptures so they therefore had no right to place them­ selves above the Scriptures (14:36). Their respo nsibility was to obey the Scriptures (14:37.)Those who failed to recognize the Lord's authority in Paul's writing would show themselves ignorant (14:38).

Paul finished his instructions on worship by exhorting the Corinthian church to elevatethe value of prophecyabove tongues without despising the legitimate use of the gift of tongues (14:39). In worshiping, they were todo everything *decent­ ly and in order* (14:40).

**TESTIM ONY:** How has order liness in a church service helped you benefit from the service? (012)

The church is called to bring glory to the Lord. Oneof its foremost dutie s, then, is worship. This will mean that our church gatherings must essentially be directe d upward, to God, notoutward, to people. The service should be composed in such a way th at God will find the congregation's efforts to be pleasing and in tune with His character.

This is not to imply that thereis anything mystical or esoteric about worship, however. FirstCorinthians 14 distills the necessary elements of worship. The decla­ ration of God's truth is foremost among them. When the saints gather as a church for worship, this is a prime opportunity to *teach others also* (14:19;cf. 2 Tim. 2:2). Then, if *there come in one that believeth not,or one unlearned* (14:24), the people of the congregation will be able to shareGod's saving Word with that person. If this is the pervading influencein the church, the other componentsof the service are also sure to edify (cf. 14:26).

The gifts of tongues and prophecy ended when the New Testament was complet­ ed. Today, preachers declare Go d's Word as His fully authoritative message. In doing so, theyexercise their spiritual gifts and pray that the lostwill trust in the Savior and that the saved will grow spiritually. However,every believer ought to communicate God's Word by witnessing to the unsaved and encouraging fellowbelievers.

Yes, every believer has the responsibility to edify other believers. When a church has this goal, the setting will be conducive to the profitable use of every­ one's spiritual gifts.

### Goal Check

**MAKING IT PERSONAL**

**ASK:** What are your goals when you attend church? (Ql 3)

**ASK:** What selfish or sin ful goals, if any, do you need to forsake? (Ql 4)

### Edification Plan

**ASK:** What opportunities do you have to edify your fellow believers in the coming week? (Ql 5)

**ASK:** What opportu nities to edify your fellow believers will you take advan­ tage of in the coming week? (Q16)

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### Summary and Memory Verse

Use resource 1 to review the response for this lesson: Edify other believers in your service for God.

Encourage your learners to memorize 1 Corinthians 14:12. Give them an oppor­ tunity to quote the verse in class next week.