

# Team Focus: Edification



## Topic

Spiritual gifts

## Theme

A church should declare God's truth in understandable 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

## 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 believers. His emphasis on edifying others through personal ministry in the church is timeless.

## Outline

- I. A Priority Gift (14:1–5)
  - A. Its identity (14:1)
  - B. Its importance (14:2–5)
- II. A Perspective about Tongues (14:6–12)
  - A. The clearly defined sound (14:7–9)
  - B. The intelligible language (14:10–12)
- III. A Procedure to Follow (14:13–40)
  - A. Interpretation (14:13–28)
  - B. 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).*



## 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 encouragement? *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:** Would you believe me if I said this is what it sounded like for a first century believer to talk in tongues?

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 believers in the infancy stage 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, long after the sign gifts given to the apostles have *vanish(ed) away* (13:8). The key verses that should direct us today are 14:26, 33, and 40.

### I. A Priority Gift (14:1–5)

#### A. 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 is the only passage in the Epistles that deals with the subject of speaking in tongues. Much of the passage concerns correcting abuses. That should demonstrate clearly that speaking in tongues cannot possibly be intended by God as a major emphasis 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 godly desire for spiritual gifts reveal about a believer?

*(Q3) It shows a person is eager to serve God and is aware of the Holy Spirit's part in helping him serve God.*

**READ:** 1 Corinthians 3:3. **ASK:** What fact about the church at Corinth proved tongues was not a sign of spirituality? *(Q4) 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.

### **B. 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 no one in the congregation understood, 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 tongues? *(Q5)*

*They love the attention it brings and the superficial 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 desperately needed 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? *(Q6)*

*God's 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).

## **II. 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 knowledge, by prophesying, or by doctrine. The prophet de-

*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 language and not some unknown, ecstatic, heavenly speech.

clared 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.

### A. The clearly defined sound (14:7–9)

If a wind instrument or a stringed instrument provided notes without variation 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 merry. Also, if a soldier blew 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 classroom has a piano, ask a non-musical person to play random keys for ten seconds. Compare this to a Corinthian's speaking in an unfamiliar language. Next, ask a pianist to play a few bars of a familiar hymn. Compare this to a Corinthian's prophesying in a familiar language.

### B. The intelligible language (14:10–12)

Thousands of languages exist 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 speaking 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:** Display resource 14. **ASK:** What could be some results of believers using spiritual gifts to promote themselves? (Q7) (Reveal or record answers.) *They fill with pride, compete for attention, become resentful when no one recognizes their work, and select service opportunities based on their visibility.*

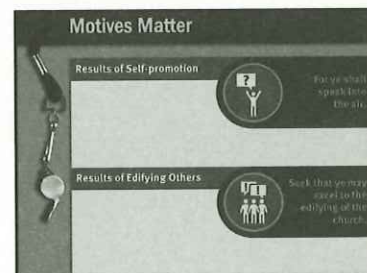
**ASK:** What could be some results of believers using spiritual gifts to promote others? (Q8) (Reveal or record answers.) *The church grows stronger spiritually, others are encouraged to use their gifts, souls are saved, and God is glorified.*

## III. A Procedure to Follow (14:13–28)

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

### A. Interpretation (14:13–28)

Paul bound understanding and emotion together as essential elements of worship (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 quotation 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 congregation convict an unsaved visitor and help 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 a sinner 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* (14:26b). We may rightly infer from Paul's inspired counsel that the church was to begin planning its services so that the beneficial 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 service, and then only with the assistance of an interpreter (14:27, 28). Otherwise, the person with the gift of tongues was to remain silent.

## **B. 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 evaluators were those with the gift of *discerning of spirits* (12:10). They were to act as checks on the person claiming to be a prophet and his assertion to be offering new revelation. This was vitally important because if someone received a new revelation, his prophesying 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. Again, 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 service helps or hinders a church's goal to edify believers? (Q10)

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 confusion. 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 seriously flawed with the presentation. 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? (Q11)

Paul applied the principle of order in worship to the women in the congregation in Corinth. If they had questions about what 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 may not be as sweeping as it first seems here. He is primarily addressing the specific issue of women being involved in prophesying and speaking in tongues in a church setting, that is *to speak (authoritatively) in the church* (13:35; 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 Corinthians had not originated the Scriptures so they therefore had no right to place themselves above the Scriptures (14:36). Their responsibility 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 elevate the value of prophecy above tongues without despising the legitimate use of the gift of tongues (14:39). In worshiping, they were to do everything *decently and in order* (14:40).

**TESTIMONY:** How has orderliness in a church service helped you benefit from the service? (Q12)

The church is called to bring glory to the Lord. One of its foremost duties, then, is worship. This will mean that our church gatherings must essentially be directed upward, to God, not outward, to people. The service should be composed in such a way that God will find the congregation's efforts to be pleasing and in tune with His character.

This is not to imply that there is anything mystical or esoteric about worship, however. First Corinthians 14 distills the necessary elements of worship. The declaration 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 share God's saving Word with that person. If this is the pervading influence in the church, the other components of the service are also sure to edify (cf. 14:26).

The gifts of tongues and prophecy ended when the New Testament was completed. Today, preachers declare God's Word as His fully authoritative message. In doing so, they exercise their spiritual gifts and pray that the lost will 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 fellow believers.

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 everyone's spiritual gifts.

## MAKING IT PERSONAL

### Goal Check

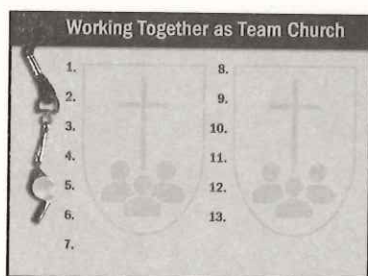
**ASK:** What are your goals when you attend church? (Q13)

**ASK:** What selfish or sinful goals, if any, do you need to forsake? (Q14)

### Edification Plan

**ASK:** What opportunities do you have to edify your fellow believers in the coming week? (Q15)

**ASK:** What opportunities to edify your fellow believers will you take advantage of in the coming week? (Q16)



### 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 opportunity to quote the verse in class next week.