

Out of Control or Orderly

1 Corinthians 14:1-40

Introduction

Get to the Point: We get to **the point** of Paul's admonition in chs. 12-14. He talked about the church as a **body** with many parts (ch.12). We have one source (**triune God**) and can only be healthy if all the parts are doing their part in coordination with the rest. The foundation for this **cooperation** is **love**. Love is the indispensable requirement for all we do as a church.

- The issue at hand is the use (and abuse) of spiritual gifts, particularly speaking in tongues. But a lot of the challenges of this passage get cleared up when we realize **spiritual gifts are God-given, others-focused, and love-motivated**. The opposite is human-contrived, inwardly focused, and selfishly motivated.

Speaking in Tongues: The “elephant in the room” (or the “tambourine in the pew”) is the particular “problem” gift that Paul is addressing – **speaking in tongues** (or just “**tongues**”). This is a thorny issue for a number of reasons:

- **(1) What are tongues?** “A form of prayer or praise expressed to God in a language you do not understand” (Grudem).
 - Human language (e.g., Acts 2). 20-40% (James, J.D.)
 - Divine language. “If I speak in the tongues of men (prophecy) and of angels (tongues), but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal” (13:1). Spoken to God in a way that no one understand (14:2). 60-80%
- **(2) Who has, had, or should have tongues?**
 - Spectrum: Cessationist - Open But Cautious - Charismatic - Pentecostal
 - **Cessationist**. (Closest they come to speaking in tongues is reading the Greek from their Study Bible). Only for the pre-Scripture, apostolic era. Only mentioned in Corinth (why not ubiquitous then). Same Spirit then as today. These gifts don't end until heaven (face-to-face with Jesus; 13:8-9). Elevates the WoG!
 - **Pentecostal**. (Stretch before worship, keep a tambourine in your purse). All believers should experience sign gifts (something is wrong with you)! Expectantly takes the Spirit seriously. Why not any other church in the NT? The only description we have of this gift is a *problem*. Paul tell us not to pursue this gift.
 - **In the Middle**. Open but cautious (some are more open, some are more cautious), “Charismatic with a seatbelt” (the Spirit still works and can work how he wants, but most of the ways sign gifts are used in “so-called Spirit-filled” churches are neither biblical nor helpful (emotional manipulation, psychological tricks, mass hysteria).
- **(3) What does that have to do with us?** This may not be a specific problem for us, but it helps us deal with this issue when it comes up (in our culture), and it gives us important principles and reminders about how we relate to the Holy Spirit and how we relate to one another when we gather.
 - Healthy theology usually involves holding competing ideas in tension (ditches).

- (a) We want to desire and long for the Spirit of God to work among us (desire the spirit, not the gift). We welcome him.
 - Don't **quench** the work of the Spirit by -either- **restricting** what he can do -or- **demanding** he work a certain way.
- (b) Discern the genuine work of the Spirit from all the cheap imitations we see in our culture.

I hope, at the end of this, we will understand how to use our spiritual gifts *rightly*, in a way that helps others rather than glorifies ourselves.

1. Pursuing Love Prioritizes Others (vv. 1-5)

¹ Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. ² For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit. ³ On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation. ⁴ The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but the one who prophesies builds up the church. ⁵ Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up.

Pursue Love: Pursue love, What should be the thing we aim for? Love (particularly the kind of Christ-empowered, Christlike love seen in 1 Cor 13). 1 Cor 13 love is the kind that 'gives itself away,' it is 'others-oriented.'

- This is an interesting word because it's the same word that can be translated 'persecute' (διώκετε). "To do something with intense effort and with definite purpose" (L&N).
- 'Fall in love.' 'Lovestruck.' You are not going to trip and fall into this kind of love. It is a pursuit that requires dedication, determination, and perseverance. You have to structure your priorities and intentionally focus your life on this. We all drift toward self-centered ends. Sin causes us to curve in on ourselves. The gospel opens us up to love others.
 - Once we get this foundational step down, *then* we can move on to spiritual gifts.

Welcome the Spiritual: And earnestly desire the spiritual gifts. Desire spiritual things (πνευματικά). We long for the HS to work freely and powerfully in our midst.

- "We want to be part of something that can only be explained by the power of God."
- If we take our weakness seriously, and the problems around us seriously, then we will be expectant and dependent on the Spirit of God (rather than on our own power).

Especially Prophecy: especially that you may prophesy **This is largely the point he makes.**

- All the Corinthians wanted (it seems) was to speak in tongues. They wanted some frenzied, ecstatic, undeniable spiritual gift. Why? To prove they were spiritually superior.
 - They want the gift, not to point to God or help others, but to show off (e.g., giving a gift to make yourself look good).
- You can tell they are misguided by the thing they want.

- I find it bizarre in some modern churches that people emphasize and seek “speaking in tongues” after what this passage says.
 - This is the **only chapter** in the Bible that gives instructions about tongues, it says *not* to seek them, and it certainly isn’t going well for this church!
- “Show muscles” vs. “Go muscles.”
- **Prophecy** (in this sense) is more a word for now than the future. It’s the spiritual gift of God to explain the words of God and the things of God to the people of God.
 - In some sense, I hope that an aspect of what I do when I preach each week is this, by the Spirit of God to explain and apply the things of God to you.
 - This is not simply being a good teacher, but the empowerment of God to give me the words, knowledge, and insight of what to say and when (in a way I couldn’t do on my own).
- These are not the Bible, the Word of God (that always has precedence). Our perceptions and intuitions are much more tentative and fallible, and everything we do must be tested by the Spirit against the revealed Word of God. Cf. Agabus Acts 21. *Basically* right prophecy but was wrong on some details (Romans not Jews bound Paul; Jews tried to kill not capture Paul). “The prediction was not far off, but it had inaccuracies in detail that would have called into question the validity of any OT prophet (or Scriptural writing)... This is exactly the kind of fallible prophecy that would fit the definition of NT congregational prophecy—‘reporting in one’s own words something God has spontaneously brought to mind’” (Grudem).
 - E.g., sometimes the revelation of God is not clearly received by my fallible mind or is somehow fumbled in the journey from my brain to my lips (e.g., telephone). God never misspeaks, but I sometimes *mishear*.
- Theology of Prophecy: **humility** (not “God said” but “God put on my heart”), **expectation** (places in our church where this is doable, not just “large gathering” but small group”; exercise the gift like evangelism), **affirmation** (confirm when others do this).

Why Prophecy More than Tongues: Tongues are for you, prophecy is for others. If we aim to speak in tongues, we are aiming to please ourselves. If we aim to *prophecy* then we aim to build others up.

- Why? He goes on to tell us!

2. Edification Requires Understanding (vv. 6-25)

⁶ Now, brothers, if I come to you speaking in tongues, how will I benefit you unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching? ⁷ If even lifeless instruments, such as the flute or the harp, do not give distinct notes, how will anyone know what is played? ⁸ And if the bugle gives an indistinct sound, who will get ready for battle? ⁹ So with yourselves, if with your tongue you utter speech that is not intelligible, how will anyone know what is said? For you will be speaking into the air. ¹⁰ There are doubtless many different languages in the world, and none is without meaning, ¹¹ but if I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be a foreigner to the speaker and the speaker a foreigner to me. ¹² So with yourselves, since you are eager for

manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church. ¹³ Therefore, one who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret. ¹⁴ For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful. ¹⁵ What am I to do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also; I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also. ¹⁶ Otherwise, if you give thanks with your spirit, how can anyone in the position of an outsider say “Amen” to your thanksgiving when he does not know what you are saying? ¹⁷ For you may be giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not being built up. ¹⁸ I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. ¹⁹ Nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue. ²⁰ Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature. ²¹ In the Law it is written, “By people of strange tongues and by the lips of foreigners will I speak to this people, and even then they will not listen to me, says the Lord.” ²² Thus tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers, while prophecy is a sign not for unbelievers but for believers. ²³ If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your minds? ²⁴ But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, ²⁵ the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you.

Analogies: What good does speaking in tongues even do?

(1) Instruments: ⁷ If even lifeless instruments, such as the flute or the harp, do not give distinct notes, how will anyone know what is played? Without arrangement, coordination, tuning, rhythm, etc. musical instruments are little more than noise. If you’ve ever been to a 6th grade band concert, you know what I’m talking about (#sanctification).

(2) Battle Bugle: And if the bugle gives an indistinct sound, who will get ready for battle? The bugler (sounds like “burglar”) needs to play a specific tune to signify a specific strategic move (e.g., hand signals in special forces; “stop” in America with palm outstretched means “welcome” in Iraqi, problem for checkpoints).

(3) Languages: ⁹ So with yourselves, if with your tongue you utter speech that is not intelligible, how will anyone know what is said? For you will be speaking into the air. ¹⁰ There are doubtless many different languages in the world, and none is without meaning, ¹¹ but if I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be a foreigner to the speaker and the speaker a foreigner to me.

- If I say, “*Tuhan kita luar biasa*” and “*Saya sekarang sakit gas kuat.*” How do you respond? The first is Indonesia for “Our God is awesome,” the second is “I have really bad gas pain.” One deserves an “Amen” and the other an “oh, my.”

Misplaced Zeal: ¹² So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church. Their eagerness is not necessarily the problem, it’s what they are eager for. “Misplaced zeal.” This is the problem in everything from politics to spiritual gifts. When we are zealous for the *wrong* thing. It doesn’t matter if you hit the target if you’re aiming for the wrong thing. *Simple (at least to say): **Seek gifts that build up the body!**

- Are you doing what you’re doing to to serve or for show? Are you seeking to bless or boast? Are you pointing to God or yourself? Are you building others up or your own ego?

Turn on Your Mind: ¹³ Therefore, one who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret. ¹⁴ For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful. ¹⁵ What am I to do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also; I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also. Love God with your heart, but take your brain with you. “Your heart can’t love what your brain doesn’t know” (Wilkin). Love God but don’t leave your brain at the door.

- Praying in tongues doesn’t engage the mind. The mind is in neutral. Paul wants us to put our minds in gear.
- Worship is more than just a feeling. If all worship is for you is a tingle up your spine or a chill down your neck, then you are limiting worship.
- Feelings are good, but they are not everything. God has given us feelings and we should surrender them to him in worship.
 - But there are a lot of things I feel like doing that are sin (drivers in Philly).
- We need the truths of God’s character, revealed in God’s Word to lead our feelings. A huge part of counseling is replacing the lies of Satan with the truths of the gospel.
- Feelings are real and *can be* good or bad
 - “Feelings are like children when you are on vacation. You can’t put them in the driver’s seat or stuff them in the trunk. You have to listen to them, take care of them, protect them, and at times, put boundaries around them” (Scazzero).
- “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matt 22:37). Love with your mind, your affection, **and** your actions.

Who’s It Really For?: ¹⁶ Otherwise, if you give thanks with your spirit, how can anyone in the position of an outsider say “Amen” to your thanksgiving when he does not know what you are saying? ¹⁷ For you may be giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not being built up.

- If they don’t understand, how can they say “amen.”

Ace Up the Sleeve: ¹⁸ I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. The Corinthians thought they were really spiritual because they’d experienced a few of these miraculous gifts. Paul was like, “Just for the record, I’ve got you all beat. When I’m *not* writing Scripture, I’m taking to the third heaven (2 Cor 12:2), shaking vipers off my arm (Acts 28:1-6), bringing people back from the dead (Acts 20), an healing the sick with my hanky (Acts 19).”

- If Paul tells them to let go of this obsession with speaking in tongues, then maybe they should listen.

Paul’s Advice: ¹⁹ Nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue. In the church gathering (ἐν ἐκκλησίᾳ), when you’re with the body (what you do on your own time is another thing), I’d rather speak a *few* (five) words that you understand than *all* (10,000 is the largest single greek number; μυριάς, *myriad*; a *myriad myriad* = 10,000 x 10,000 = 100 million).

- Gathering is for the body (what you do on your own time is one thing).
- A simple and clear word is better than the most dynamic, emotionally powerfully, spiritually flamboyant display.

- You're not gonna hear me speaking in tongues in church because it doesn't do anybody any good. Saying, "Jesus the Hope of Salvation" is better than a gazillion words you don't understand just to make me *look* super spiritual."

Grow Up: ²⁰ Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature. At some point, we gotta grow up. Discernment (what is best, Phil 1). When I was a kid, I was impressed by Chuck-E-Cheese (a dirty, rat casino for kids). When I was a kid, I hated naps, but now they are like the holy grail. I would question your maturity if you wanted to go to Chuck-E-Cheese on your own. 😊

Outsiders: ²¹ In the Law it is written, "By people of strange tongues and by the lips of foreigners will I speak to this people, and even then they will not listen to me, says the Lord." ²² Thus tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers, while prophecy is a sign not for unbelievers but for believers.

- A little bit of a cryptic quotation (Isaiah, called "the law," generic for OT/HB). It seems a little contradictory but I'll do my best to make sense of it in *context*.
 - Isaiah 28:11-12 is quoted while simultaneously commented on. In Isaiah the Israelites refused to listen to the prophet, mocking his prophecy as unintelligible baby talk. God's Word was gibberish to them. They refused the prophetic promise of rest and tried to build security through alliances with pagan nations. God turned the tables and sent foreigners (Assyrians) to judge the Israelites. By rejecting his *clear* prophetic warning they were judged by the unintelligible language of the foreign armies. *Also a little bit of why some think tongues are "human languages."
- So "tongues" become a negative thing for believers who reject the straightforward Word of God. And they are "for" unbelievers in the sense that unbelievers become a mechanism of God's judgment on his people.

Chaos: ²³ If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your minds? ²⁴ But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, ²⁵ the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you.

- So, what's the point of this kind of behavior? It isn't building up the church (because they don't understand) and if an outsider sees it they'll just think you're crazy (out of your minds).
- A room full of babbling believers does no one any good. It's just chaos.
- But prophecy is meant to speak with laser-like precision the Word of God to the soul.
- **We don't want spectacle and astonishment, we want clarity.** If you can leave worship "feeling good" but unable to articulate the gospel or unwilling to "sin no more" then it wasn't success ("moments" in worship for clarity not emotion; camp example).

3. Order Enhances Worship (vv. 26-40)

²⁶ What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up. ²⁷ If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret. ²⁸ But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God. ²⁹ Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. ³⁰ If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent. ³¹ For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged, ³² and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets. ³³ For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. As in all the churches of the saints, ³⁴ the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. ³⁵ If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church. ³⁶ Or was it from you that the word of God came? Or are you the only ones it has reached? ³⁷ If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord. ³⁸ If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized. ³⁹ So, my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. ⁴⁰ But all things should be done decently and in order.

Purpose Driven: ²⁶ What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up.

- The point is not the way they meet (though it could be instructive). They were in a house church, a less formal gathering, a free-flowing service where everyone contributes. This is not the pattern described universally in the early church, but the Corinthian situation contributes to the particularly chaotic and fractured issues encountered.
- Hymn (singing, ψαλμὸν), lesson (teaching, διδασκῆν), revelation (special revelation, ἀποκάλυψιν), tongue (γλῶσσαν), or interpretation (ἐρμηνείαν).
 - It's not that each person has to have this but that *any person* might have any of these (as the Lord gives). *Paul is speaking for rhetorical effect (preacher talk).
- These are all acceptable, fine to have (and good if they're from the Lord) but **we can see how this could quickly devolve into chaos.**
- Thesis: "All things be done for building up"
 - Ask yourself, is what I'm doing building up or tearing down? Is it lifting others or lifting me?

Take Turns: ⁷ If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret. ²⁸ But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God. ²⁹ Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. ³⁰ If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent. ³¹ For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged,

- We can be Spirit-led and under control. We can be sensitive to the Spirit and sensitive to each other. We can follow the leading of God and take turns.
- He gives some practical boundaries.
 - Not too long or too many. Take turns (one-by one).
- There's a sense of control. This idea that being led by the Spirit means being out of control is foreign to Paul's advice.

- The issue with many Pentecostal and Charismatic churches today is not their love for the Spirit of God it's that their worship services show none of the hallmarks of 1 Cor 14 (restraint, clarity, control, and order).
- But even generally, the gospel calls us to wait our turn, defer to others, and listen.

Test the Spirits: ²⁹... and let the others weigh what is said... ³² and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets. ³³ For God is not a God of confusion but of peace.

- Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good (1 Thess 5:19-21).
- Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world (1 Jn 4:1).
 - 1 Jn 4 gives criteria for testing.
- You are not your own authority. God sets the standard. Probably avoid the "God told me" language (impossible to argue, difficult to verify, and implicates God when you get it wrong). Often it's a form of spiritual manipulation.

Preceding or Following: As in all the churches of the saints,

- Repeat of churches (all the churches vs *those* churches)

Disruptive Women: ³⁴ the women (γυναῖκες) should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. ³⁵ If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.

- This is a hard section, it hits our "gender sensitive ears" in a particular way. Remember the Bible is progressive on issues of gender (husbands bodies belong to wives, not just *vice versa*). Some hear this passage and think it must be a later edition (but there is no manuscript evidence for such a view).
 - We take every word of the Bible seriously and this isn't the only passage that describes different roles for men and women in the home and the church.

We believe in distinct gender roles in home and in church. We believe the Bible is clear that God has called Christlike and humble men to lead families as husbands and churches as elders. But it is not to the exclusion of the gifts and ministries of women. Women bear God's image (Gen 1:27), deliver and judge God's people (Judg 4), pray and prophecy (1k 2:36-38, 1 Cor 11:5), and are co-laborers with the apostles (Ro 16:1-3).

- When done well, godly husbands reflect the provision, protection, love, and care of Christ to their wives and submission does not equal inferiority

But **in context**, I think this text is dealing mainly with husbands and wives (husbands in v. 35 must mean wives in v. 34; word for men/women is same as husbands/wives)

- All of Scripture is inspired but not all of it is equally easy to interpret or understand (interpret the hard from the easy). But the Corinthians knew (it's the distance of 2,000 years and many cultures that makes it hard for us).
- Paul already gave instructions for how women can pray and prophecy (ch. 11) so this seems to be saying something in this context of chaos about remaining quiet or "holding one's peace."

- Speculation? Some women seem to be behaving shamefully in worship (e.g., ch. 11). They are not following decorum, they are doing something that is rude to their husbands (perhaps interrupting the prophet or judging a prophet in a way that is different than their husband). Also, they're at a home (their home?) but it's really church so they need to act differently (house church problems).
 - Think wealthy women in Ephesus (gold and pearls in braids; *James and I disagree; able to divorce even when others can't).

Origin ³⁶ Or was it from you that the word of God came? Or are you the only ones it has reached? The WoG isn't from you (God) or only for you (Corinth), so you can't just "do what you want." No church is special, in that none of us get to do whatever we want. God has given us incredible freedom but not unlimited freedom. God gives us clarity.

- The only reason this would be a problem is if getting your way matters more than God's way.

Truly Spiritual: ³⁷ If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord. ³⁸ If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized.

- If anyone presumes they are a prophet or spiritual, then these instructions should be clear. Those mindful of the larger story of God and the larger body of Christ see the need and benefit for this. The truly spiritual discern this advice is spiritually wise (game recognize game). E.g., a true musician recognizes musicianship, a non musicians thinks its all the same.
- If you disregard these instructions, you run the risk of being disregarded

Conclusion

Aim for the Right Thing: ³⁹ So, my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. "Seek not, forbid not." We desire the things God tells us to desire. We don't control the Spirit (the wind blows where it wants). He's not going to do everything the same way in every church. **Aim for what builds up the church!**

Order: ⁴⁰ But all things should be done decently and in order. This idea that true spirituality is spur of the moment, out of control, and unplanned is not in Scripture. It is much easier to be flexible when you have a plan.

- Without structure, planning, and organization we will not grow in godliness. Weekly habits and daily disciplines are essential to grow in Christlikeness.
- Our church has beliefs to know, goals to accomplish, and vision to guide us, and programs to equip us. They are meant increase our personal growth and missional effectiveness (e.g., rowing in the right direction; Gym with a plan not random weights; nutritional plan, not what sounds good).
- Trust the process, help us hone the process, invest in the process.