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1 Corinthians

For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged. 1 Corinthians 14:31

Continuing on with the gift of prophesy, Paul says that "you can all prophesy one by one." This doesn't mean that all in the congregation have the ability. Rather, it means that all who have the ability to prophesy also have the ability to do so in an orderly fashion; one by one. The reason for this will be more fully explained in the next verse. However, the purpose of prophesying in this orderly fashion is explained in his next words which are "that all may learn and all may be encouraged."

If everyone prophesied at once, there would be no edification and there would be no encouragement. Instead, there would be confusion. But this is to be the purpose of everything done in the church. Therefore, it would make no sense for people to utter prophesies at the same time. Again, Paul is calling the church to orderly worship and to the use of gifts in a harmonious and edifying manner.

Like the misuse of supposed "tongues" which are spoken in many churches, the disorderly conduct of congregations where many people supposedly "prophesy" at the same time, claiming that it is under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is false. All one needs to do to determine this is to weigh what occurs in these meetings with the words of Paul. As the Bible is of divine origin, then what they are doing cannot be.

Life application: It is far better to learn from a biblically sound teacher than it is to attend a church which has great music, nice people, and an uplifting message, but which message isn't biblically sound.

And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. 1 Corinthians 14:32

To understand this verse properly, it should be considered with the instructions Paul has just given. Taken together, they read -

"Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge. ³⁰ But if *anything* is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent. ³¹ For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged. ³² And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets."

Those who have a word to impart should not start speaking at the same time as others who are speaking. But Paul has shown that they must remain silent as others are speaking. He then explained why by saying that in speaking one at a time "all may learn and all may be encouraged." However, someone may claim that the power of the Holy Spirit has taken them over like a rushing tide and they simply couldn't control themselves. In this ecstatic state, they claim they lost control, yielding to the greater power which was present.

This sounds pretty great, yes... "Look at me, I'm filled with the Spirit, even to overflowing! Why I simply couldn't control myself!" Paul says that this is not the case and it will never be the case because, "The spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets." The Holy Spirit will not usurp the spirit of the man. Instead, He will work harmoniously with the man to accomplish His purposes. As Paul's words are guided by the Holy Spirit, they are true and they precede any such display found in churches today. Therefore, any event in a church which violates Paul's prescriptions cannot be of the Holy Spirit.

Now consider this more fully. If this is true with prophecy, a greater gift, then it must be true with tongues, a lesser gift. As this is so, then "ecstatic tongues" and other violent reactions to "Holy Spirit power" such as being "slain in the spirit" are shown to be false. The Holy Spirit will not violate a precept in the word of God, ever. If someone is "slain in the spirit" it is because they have willingly allowed themselves to be duped by a charlatan, not the Holy Spirit. It may be a form of hypnosis, or it may be a form of self-induced delusion, but such an event is not of God.

Paul is clear concerning the spirit of the man; it is subject to the man.

Life application: Don't be duped by those who would make you feel you have less of the Holy Spirit than they do. The Holy Spirit is given upon belief. A believer will never get more of the Spirit than at that moment, but the Spirit can get more of the believer, just as a person can never get more married once they are married. Instead, a person can continually get more of their spouse (love, respect, bonding, etc) as the spouse yields to them.

For God is not *the author* of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints. 1 Corinthians 14:33

Too often this verse is taken out of its intended context to mean something other than what Paul is implying. It has been used, for example, to deny the doctrine of the Trinity because the Trinity is confusing. Because it is, it is claimed that it cannot be of God because God wouldn't promote confusion in the minds of His people from what stems from His very being. First, just because something is difficult for us to grasp, doesn't mean that it isn't of God. Secondly, the concept of the Trinity is clearly laid out in the pages of Scripture. And thirdly, this verse has nothing to do with such a matter.

Paul has been speaking about order in the church. When tongues are spoken, there is often disorder because they are either false tongues or because they are real tongues which are not translated. Likewise, prophecies are to be given one at

a time so that they can be assimilated by the other members of the church. It is these, and the other related principles, which Paul is referring to. In other words, he is writing about order and propriety in the conduct of the church.

Why is this needed? Because "God is not *the author* of confusion but of peace." The term "confusion" is literally translated as "unsettlement." It indicates that which is mixed up rather than that which is harmonious. The Holy Spirit will never fill someone with a tongue that isn't a real language. He will never give a tongue which is not understandable to the congregation unless it will also be translated. And He will never give a prophecy which overwhelms the recipient to the point where he cuts others off as he spouts out his words.

These, and other such displays are merely attempts to draw attention to oneself. They are confused and they are not of God. As James says concerning such things

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"For where envy and self-seeking *exist*, confusion and every evil thing *are* there."
Jams 3:16

Such things are not of God. If you attend a church where people speak out of order, where people speak false tongues which have no meaning, or where people draw attention to themselves through supposed "ecstatic" displays of the Holy Spirit, leave that church. Their activities are not of God. We know this because Paul finishes with the notion that this is the case "in all the churches of the saints." No church will be conducted in such a disorderly manner if it is guided by the Spirit of God.

Life application: Context drives the meaning of verses. Always check the context when analyzing or quoting Scripture.

Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but *they are* to be submissive, as the law also says. 1 Corinthians 14:34

Paul's words here are as clear and as positively stated as any other prescriptions found in the New Testament. They bear the weight and authority of the Lord who inspired the words, and they are universal in scope. There is nothing stated here to indicate that what he says is cultural, limited in geographical considerations, or temporary - as many claim in order to ignore what is stated. Rather, they are universal in all ways and binding on the church in all ages. Further, the intent and substance of his words are repeated in 1 Timothy 2:11, 12. This shows that it is a matter of paramount importance. To reject these words will inevitably lead to greater problems within the church and within society, as has been plainly evident in recent generations.

Paul has been speaking on the issues of "tongues" and "prophesying." This is exactly what he is referring to here. Nothing has changed in the direction of his dialogue and he will continue to speak on both prophesying and tongues until the end of the chapter. His words for the universal church is to "Let your women keep silent in the churches." This is clear and cannot be taken in any other way than what it says. But Paul, understanding the wickedness of the human heart, knew that there would be people who would take his words and twist them if he didn't re-explain them. And so he does just that, repeating the prescription by saying "for they are not permitted to speak."

Understanding this, the exact same logic that was previously applied to tongues can be applied to this verse -

- 1) The words of the Bible are inspired by the Spirit of God.
- 2) The Spirit of God will never violate a precept which is found in the Bible, which He has inspired. Therefore,
- 3) Any practice or occurrence which is seen in a church and which violates the prescriptions of the Bible cannot be inspired by the Spirit.

With this in mind, we can use it as a tool concerning the matter at hand -

- 1) The Bible says that a woman is not permitted to speak in a church.
- 2) The Spirit of God will never violate a precept which is found in the Bible, which He has inspired. Therefore,

- 3) Any church gathering where a woman either speaks (particularly in a tongue or prophesying), violates the prescriptions of the Bible and what is said cannot be inspired by (nor condoned by) the Spirit.

In reading this one must ask, "Do I know more than God?" The answer is obvious. He has spoken and we are to obey. In today's modern church, many women claim the titles of "pastor," "reverend," "bishop," "prophetess," or whatever. These titles are false and these women directly disobey the word of God. They are to be rejected.

As a third way of repeating his thought, Paul continues with "but *they are* to be submissive, as the law also says." In Genesis 3:16, the woman was placed in a subordinate position to the man. Throughout the law, this precept continues to be seen in various ways. For example, Numbers 30 goes into some detail on the matter. What Paul has said is not an arbitrary decision made by a male chauvinist, but rather it is the proper order of things which has been ordained by God.

In three different ways, he has shown that women are not to be in any type of authority position in the church. They are not to speak, but are to remain silent. In the next verse, he will continue with his explanation, clarifying exactly what is expected in this matter..

Life application: Fame or exceptional teaching skills are not reasons to disobey God's word. Allowing women such as Beth Moore, Joyce Meyers, or a host of other supposed pastors and teachers, to preach from a pulpit shows direct disobedience to Him. Let us put aside star-struck eyes and return to obedience to Scripture.

And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church. 1 Corinthians 14:35

Like the previous verse, this is a command. Far too many scholars and teachers say that this is merely a cultural or geographically isolated command. Where does such manipulation of Scripture come from? Paul says nothing of this. Rather, his words are clear, contained within an epistle to the Gentile church (which is prescriptive for the entire church age), and it contains nothing that can justify it being temporary or not all-inclusive.

Again, who is the ultimate Author of Scripture? It is the Holy Spirit working through the hand of a human author. In the case of 1 Corinthians, He is working through Paul. There is no need to point angry fingers at those who hold to the sanctity of these words. Rather, there should be willing obedience to them. Paul, having brought up the issue of women not being permitted to speak in the church, now gives further clarification of that. Not only are they to not prophesy or speak in tongues (which is what this chapter has been discussing), they have even further limitations placed on them. "If they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home."

As the men are conducting the affairs of the church, it would be disorderly for the wives to be having side conversations with their husbands. Anyone who has spoken in public will surely note that having people talk while they are speaking is a distraction to their attention. Cell phones ringing, babies crying, etc, all cause the mind to get sidetracked. Paul has already shown that those who speak in tongues and those who prophesy should do so in order. This is so that others will be edified. If someone is having a side conversation, it will be just as difficult for others to concentrate as if two were prophesying at the same time.

Instead of women asking their husbands about a matter during the church, he says that they should "ask their husbands at home." This will keep the church from being disorderly and it will allow the speakers to do so without breaking their concentration. But Paul goes further in his explanation. He not only says that they should ask their husbands at home, but he explains why. It is because "it is shameful for women to speak in church."

Understanding the roles of men and women in the Bible, which reveals a patriarchal society is the appropriate one, it is unruly, disorderly, and improper for women to speak in the congregation where men are present. It is actually a shame upon themselves and thus it then reflects shame on their head; the husband. Paul explained this in detail in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16.

His concern is for order and propriety in the church, leading to edification. If his words are ignored, there will always be a breakdown in that respect. Nobody would expect students in a university to be chatting during an important lecture on some great scientific principle, and yet the Bible is far more important than that. Time spent in a church each week for instruction is limited. Therefore, anything which detracts from those precious moments is to be restricted. This is Paul's intent and aim in his words.

Life application: The command in 1 Corinthians 14:35 is given for order and propriety. To violate it is to show a disregard for what God deems important. Let us always seek His will through His word, being obedient to it out of love and respect for Him.

Or did the word of God come *originally* from you? Or *was it* you only that it reached? 1 Corinthians 14:36

Paul's two questions form a scathing rebuke of the practices of those in Corinth. The entire chapter has obviously been one of repeated instruction, and the emotion has only increased in him as the ink flowed from his pen. He may have been thinking, "I've told them all of this already!" But they didn't heed.

He first asks, "Or did the word of God come *originally* from you?" It is a note of indignation. He is asking if they think they are the source of what should be considered church doctrine. Are they somehow the church which should establish doctrine for all the others? Paul is letting them know that it is he who brought them the word of Christ and established the church among them. His words of instruction demonstrate that they had fallen away from that. Instead they were

involved in illicit practices. The very fact that he is writing instructions to them shows this to be true.

They have misused the gift of tongues; they had been disorderly in the preaching of the word, talking over one another; and they had allowed women to engage in these activities rather than having them remain silent as he had previously instructed them. In essence, he is showing that they have held in contempt the word of God and attempted to establish their own parameters for church conduct. If that doesn't sound like many churches in the world today, it's hard to see what else could! The word is ignored, women are ordained and speak openly on matters of doctrine when they are not authorized to by Scripture, and congregations spout out false tongues and false prophecies at will.

Paul was fed up then and we should be fed up now! And so he continues, "*Or was it you only that it reached?*" It is a second line of indignation. "Suppose you don't feel you are the source of the word of God. Well then, the only other explanation is that you feel you are the only recipients of it; the only valid church."

They were acting as if they alone held the authority to interpret Scripture and thus their interpretation was however they saw fit. But the word had gone out to many churches. The message was consistent and it was clear. Other churches had properly followed the practices as they were received. But somehow, this dysfunctional church at Corinth had gone out on its own, teaching aberrant guidelines that were not in sync with the rest of the churches. Paul's lengthy letter demonstrates this.

But it must be understood that if this church wasn't so dysfunctional, there would have been no letter to the Corinthians and then there would have been no written set-doctrine for later churches to follow. God, in His wisdom, allowed the church at Corinth to depart from Paul's sound instruction in order to give all of us a sure word, in writing, which is understandable and clear. With it, combined with the other Pauline epistles, we have right doctrine to lead the church. And yet... we ignore it and continue with the same dysfunctional problems that Corinth faced.

Can one not see the absolute importance of the Word of God when reading this letter to Corinth? How precious a treasure and yet how ignored it is! Let us leave misguided passion, emotion, and self-seeking ostentation at the door and enter into the church with the desire to honor the Lord by following His word!

Life application: Find a church which doesn't follow the crazy practices Paul outlines in his letter to the Corinthians.

If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord.

1 Corinthians 14:37

What a logical way to determine if certain conduct within the church is truly of the Spirit or not! The Bible proclaims that it is the word of God. It also shows us how that word came about. Prophets and men of God, under divine inspiration, received the words of the Lord. They are inerrant, infallible, and are intended to guide the church. And so, in order to determine if Paul's words are truly inspired, we can follow a logical process.

First, we can go to our thoughts about Jesus. Do we believe that the story about Him is true? If so, do we believe that He has the authority the Bible proclaims? If so, does that authority include the appointing of His apostles? If we have said "Yes" so far to each of these questions, then we can next go to find the Apostle Peter's recorded appointment.

Peter's selection, along with the other apostles, is found in Matthew 10, Mark 3, and Luke 6. His apostolic status is also noted in the Gospel of John and in Acts. If Peter is not accepted as an apostle, then there would be no point to accept any of the New Testament. It is as certain as it could be that he is, in fact, an apostle. Understanding this, we can then go to his second epistle for a note concerning Paul -

"Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; ¹⁵ and consider *that* the longsuffering of our Lord *is* salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, ¹⁶ as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable *people* twist to their own destruction, as *they do* also the rest of the Scriptures." 2 Peter 3:14-16

Peter clearly identifies Paul as authoritative, and he places Paul's epistles on the same level as "the rest of the Scriptures." In other words, it is an explicit reference to the inspiration of Paul's letters. Now, combining that with the selection of Paul as an apostle by Jesus' own mouth, we can demonstrate that he has both the authority and the inspiration to back up his words to the Corinthians. In response to a question by Ananias, Jesus proclaims Paul's commission and apostolic authority -

"Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. ¹⁶ For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake." Acts 9:15, 16

It is impossible to deny Paul's authority and his inspiration without denying the rest of the New Testament. They are inextricably intertwined. Therefore, Paul has the right to state, "If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord."

Understanding this, we have been given a valuable tool to refute the speaking of false tongues, to direct the order of prophesying within the church, and to confirm that women are not to speak in the congregation (which includes having any authority over a man - see 1 Timothy 2:11,12 which is tied into his thoughts of 1 Corinthians 14 on this issue). When identifying any of these false practices, the one so charged must deny the authority of Scripture and thus the authority of Christ. Or, they must admit that their conduct is not in accord with Scripture and Christ's authority; they are being disobedient to both.

Life application: Paul's letters are prescriptive, they are of divine inspiration, and they bear the authority of the Lord Himself. To dismiss Paul's commandments is to directly ignore the Lord's authority. Do you want to be found in such a position of disobedience? If not, adhere to Paul's words which are set doctrine for the church age.

But if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant. 1 Corinthians 14:38

There are two variant readings on this from the Greek texts. Compared side by side they say -

But if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant. (NKJV)

But if anyone ignores this, they will themselves be ignored. (NIV)

Either way, it is a continued rebuke on those who reject the word of God either ignorantly or purposefully. If ignorantly, the blame still rests upon the individual for speaking without first knowing. In this case, Paul is saying that if they should purpose to speak without knowledge, then let them remain in their ignorance. As Ellicott says in this situation -

"...a person who could not recognise such an evident and simple truth must be of a perverse mind—his opposition would give the Apostle no further concern."

On the other hand, if the person is acting against the word purposefully, they have replaced their personal conduct above the explicit word of God. Such a person should be completely ignored. Only the word of God should guide the conduct of the saints. Therefore, if someone claims that speaking in incoherent tongues is acceptable, ignore him. If someone starts speaking (prophesying) while another person is speaking, then ignore him. And if a woman inappropriately speaks words of instruction in the congregation, ignore her.

This is the context of the passage and it is the intent of Paul's words now. Unfortunately, they are often ignored in modern times. There has been a falling away from adherence to the word of God and an acceptance of that which is inappropriate. Let us turn our hearts and minds back to God's word and away from those who manipulate it, either willingly or in ignorance.

Life application: The only way to know if a person is misguiding you in their words about Scripture is to know Scripture yourself. Read and study your Bible!

Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues. 1 Corinthians 14:39

Here in the final verse of Chapter 14, Paul inverts the order of the major areas of discussion of the chapter. In his comments, he first discussed tongues and then he moved to prophesying. After having demonstrated the superiority of prophesy, he places it first here.

"Therefore" is his conclusion on the matter. In essence, "Based on this detailed evaluation and the commands which I have issued, do the following."

"Brethren" is his way of showing that he recognizes that they are in the faith and that his words ahead are exhortations for them to conduct themselves in that manner.

"Desire earnestly to prophesy." As this is to be considered a more valuable gift than tongues, it should be the hope and aim of the brethren to speak words of instruction and edification. By doing so, not only will they be built up, but so will those who hear their words.

"And do not forbid to speak with tongues." He has given strict guidelines concerning tongues. If those guidelines are adhered to, then the tongues may

serve a valid purpose. If not, there will be no edification and they are not to be spoken.

Life application: Chapter 14 has many important points for us to consider and to remember. It contains commands which are to be adhered to and exhortations meant for orderly church conduct. Logically, we have seen that if someone violates these through supposed tongues, prophesying, or violating the precepts concerning women preaching or teaching, their conduct is not of God. One cannot truthfully claim they are led by the Spirit while being actively disobedient to the word of God. Let us apply truth and honesty to our actions in the congregation by being obedient to His word. Everything we do in the church should be for the glory of God and for the edification of others.

Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, 1 Corinthians 15:1

Paul now enters into a new chapter with a new direction. This chapters concerns, above all else, the doctrine of the resurrection. It is divided into six noticeable parts as follows:

1. The good news of Christ which is realized in His resurrection (verses 1-11)
2. Our hope in the resurrection of Christ (verses 12-19)
3. Dead in Adam; alive in Christ (verses 20 - 28)
4. Remaining awake to righteousness (verses 29-34)
5. A contrast between our present earthly body and our coming heavenly body (verses 35-49)
6. Victory in Christ (verses 50-58)

This chapter, along with 1 Corinthians 13, stands out as one of Paul's most notable passages. In it is the hope of the believer and the surety of our faith. It gives us hints of the coming rapture, and it shows our unique and unbreakable tie to Christ our Lord. Should we find ourselves in a mental slump, we can come to the words of Chapter 15 and renew our souls in the hope we possess.

And so he begins with "Moreover." The Greek conjunction can mean something like, "in addition to," or "now I am about to say," or something similar. In this case, it is a transition away from the doctrine of tongues and prophesying, and into that of the resurrection. This is directed to the "brethren." In other words, what he will say does not apply to all people. It only applies to those who are in Christ.

Next he notes, "I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you." In the coming verses, he will sum up the good news of Christ; the gospel of salvation for all who believe. The word he uses is *gnorizo*. It means "to make known." But Vincent's Word Studies notes that he is stating this reproachfully; having to make known all over again this news. It is as if they had forgotten the very basic information which they had believed at the beginning.

This gospel is the good news "which also you received and in which you stand." He is making an effort to repeat the very basics which brought them to salvation and which continues to save them. But it is right and proper that Paul needed to repeat this to them in writing, because his letter to the Corinthians contains the same words which are now included in the Bible. Their failing memories prompted Paul's hand to write the words of Scripture which continue to instruct the faithful 2000 years later.

Life application: Let us pay heed to the words of 1 Corinthians 15 and stand fast in the good news which Paul presents to us there. Let us apply them to our minds and fix them in our hearts in order to carry us through even the darkest moments of our continued walk in Christ.