

Chapter 15: Orderly Public Worship: Part 3

1 Corinthians 14:1–40

Since 1 Corinthians 11:2, Paul has been working through a wide range of issues that have troubled the public worship of the church at Corinth. In the first half of 1 Corinthians 14, Paul focuses in on one more major question, namely about whether untranslated tongues (foreign languages) should be used in worship. Then, in the second half of 1 Corinthians 14, Paul addresses a number of general issues related to the details of their worship. Together, this rich chapter gives a strong argument for the centrality of God’s word in worship, since *worship is a dialogue between God and his people*.

Prophecy and Tongues (1 Cor. 14:1–25)

At the end of 1 Corinthians 12, Paul made a transitional statement to lead from his discussion of spiritual gifts into a careful study of the nature of love as they relate to the exercise of spiritual gifts: “But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way” (1 Cor. 12:31). That “still more excellent way” is love, and now that Paul has thoroughly mapped out the way of love, he returns to the subject of the exercise of the spiritual gifts.

The first verse of 1 Corinthians 14 is quite similar to the last verse of chapter 12: “Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy” (1 Cor. 14:1).¹ We should note, for example, that Paul used the same word “eagerly desire” in relation to the gifts in both 1 Corinthians 12:31 and 14:1.² Since Paul says virtually the same thing at the end of chapter 12 and the beginning of chapter 14, we learn something significant about his purpose for chapter 13, as well as about the direction Paul intends to go here in 1 Corinthians 14. Namely, Paul wants us to see how the *love* described in chapter 13 must be the basis for the exercise of the spiritual gifts in the church.

So, in regard to love, Paul tells us to “pursue love.” This word for “pursue” is quite strong, as Paul himself uses it elsewhere to describe his former intense pursuit of the church as a persecutor: “I *persecuted* the church” (1 Cor. 15:9).³ We must pursue love as relentlessly as Paul pursued the church: “But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison” (Acts 8:3). Paul commonly uses this word “as a metaphor for spiritual effort (cf. Rom. 9:30, 31; 12:13; 14:19; Phil. 3:12, 14; 1 Thess. 5:15; 1 Tim. 6:11; 2 Tim. 2:22).”⁴

Love, however, requires a context for its exercise. So, after urging the Corinthians to pursue love, he tells them that they should *then* earnestly desire the spiritual gifts.⁵ Love must govern the exercise of spiritual gifts, so that an individual Christian may use his spiritual gifts for the sake of others, and not to benefit himself alone.⁶ R. C. H. Lenski summarizes Paul’s point well: “Gifts are the hands through which love serves.”⁷ As we will see, the key test is whether the exercise of spiritual gifts “builds up” (1 Cor. 14:3, 4 [x2], 5, 12, 17, 26) others in the church.⁸ It is because of this building-up quality that Paul singles out the gift of prophecy as a gift that the Corinthians should *especially* earnestly desire (1 Cor. 14:1).

Before we examine Paul’s reasons for exalting prophecy above the other gifts (and especially above the gift of tongues), we should observe that, while Paul primarily used the word *charismata* (i.e., “grace-gifts”) in 1 Corinthians 12 (v. 4, 9, 28, 30, 31), Paul here uses the word *pneumatika* (i.e., “spiritual things”; 1 Cor. 12:1; 14:1, 37), a word that Paul consistently uses to refer to spiritual gifts related to speech.⁹ Thus, *charismata* may be the broader category (*genus*) that encompasses *all* the gifts that Christ gives to his church, while *pneumatika* contains only one subset of these gifts (*species*), particularly related to inspired speech. This distinction helps to see why specific (spiritual, *pneumatika*) gifts expired at the end of the apostolic age, while many of the other (grace, *charismata*) gifts continue in the church throughout all ages. The spiritual gifts were connected with the ministry of the apostles, who interpreted “spiritual things [*pneumatika*] to spiritual people [*pneumatikois*]” (1 Cor. 2:13). Elsewhere, Paul writes that he had the ability to impart “some spiritual gift” (*charisma... pneumatikon*) to a church as a part of his apostolic ministry (Rom. 1:11). Once the apostles died out, many of the *grace-gifts* (broad category; the *genus*) continued, but the *spiritual gifts* (subset of the broader category; i.e., one kind or *species* of *charismata*) could no longer be imparted.

No One Understands Tongues (1 Cor. 14:2)

Paul’s reasons against uninterpreted speaking in tongues will take us through verse 25 of this chapter. Paul begins, though, by contrasting uninterpreted tongues against prophecy according to the audience. The one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men, but to God, since “no one understands him,” while the one who prophesies speaks to people (1 Cor. 14:2–3). Some interpreters see the phrase “no one understands him” as proof that this gift is different from the tongues-speaking of Acts 2, where people understood what was spoken.¹⁰ This interpretation, however, reads too much into Paul’s words. Paul cannot mean that *absolutely* no one understands the speaker, since Paul will go on in just a few verses to identify someone who *does* understand: the one who interprets (1 Cor. 14:5). The word translated here as “tongues” is a word that refers to human languages, not ecstatic utterances.¹¹ Thus, in context, Paul clearly means that no one *present* could understand the languages that were being spoken, without the help of an interpreter.¹² As for “mysteries,” Paul probably means these “mysteries” in the same sense as he just used the word in 1 Corinthians 13:2: “And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge....”¹³ To utter “mysteries” is to prophesy, although in the case of uninterpreted tongues, only God can understand the meaning.

The difference between the situation in Corinth and the situation in Acts 2, then, is critical to understanding Paul’s meaning here in 1 Corinthians 14. In Acts 2, there were a *variety* of people present, who spoke a *great number* of different languages, and each of them heard the gospel in his own, native language: “And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language?...we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God” (Acts 2:8, 11). A bit later, Paul will state that “tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers” (1 Cor. 14:22). Taken together, we see the purpose of the gift of tongues in the early church: the supernatural, Spirit-inspired ability to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ to new (i.e., unbelieving) people groups in their own, native languages. This gift was used effectively on the Day of Pentecost to great effect, leading three thousand people to faith in Christ (Acts 2:41). The Corinthians, however, were misusing the gift of tongues. They were not seeking to reach new, unbelieving people groups with the gospel. Rather, they were showing off their spiritual eloquence among believers who spoke the same language in the context of a corporate worship service.

The Edification of Prophecy (1 Cor. 14:3–4)

In contrast to the uselessness of untranslated tongues in a corporate worship service of believers who all speak the same language, Paul commends prophecy in four ways: its vernacular language, upbuilding, encouragement, and consolation. First, Paul says that “the one who prophesies speaks to people” (1 Cor. 14:3)—that is, he speaks to the people in their own, vernacular language.¹⁴ Second, Paul here uses the word “upbuilding” or “edification,” the first of seven occurrences in this chapter (1 Cor. 14:3, 4 (x2), 12, 17, 26, 35).¹⁵ As we will see, Paul’s concern is toward building up believers in the teaching and doctrine of Christianity, training them “to piety, to faith, to the worship and fear of God, and the duties of holiness and righteousness.”¹⁶ Third, the word “encouragement” reflects a word (*paraklēsis*) that may be translated either along the lines of comfort, or of admonition and exhortation. Since the final word in this sequence touches on the former idea, we should probably understand this more along the latter lines.¹⁷ Indeed, this seems to be the idea when the same word appears in another passage about spiritual gifts: “...the one who *exhorts*, in his *exhortation*...” (Rom. 12:8). Fourth, the precise word for “consolation” appears only here in the New Testament, but the word appears in another form to describe the consolation given to the bereaved (John 11:19, 31).¹⁸ Thus, this word seems to get at the idea of giving comfort and encouragement in the midst of suffering and persecution.¹⁹

Taken together, Paul sees the work of prophecy as directly aimed at the hearers (i.e., in their own language), and set to accomplish a broad range of objectives. For upbuilding, we may see the work of a *teacher*. For encouragement and consolation, we may see the work of a *pastor*. Paul teaches that these two roles must go together when he speaks of the office of the “pastor-teacher” (Eph. 4:11). There is a sense, then, in which a pastor does the work of prophecy; however, the work that Paul describes here refers to the first generation work in the early church of receiving revelations from God directly. Pastors today do not receive new revelations directly from the Lord. Nevertheless, as pastors teach, exhort, and console the church today, they continue to put God’s once-for-all revelation to use in the same way as prophets did in the early church, as they were originally receiving it.

So, Paul observes that the one who speaks in a language unknown to the congregation “builds up” himself alone, while the one who prophesies (i.e., in the language of the people) “builds up” the whole church (1 Cor. 14:4). This phrase may suggest that the one speaking in tongues understood what he was saying, even when he was not able to translate it.²⁰ On the other hand, this may mean that the upbuilding for the speaker could have taken place apart from the mind (1 Cor. 14:14). Even here, though, Paul seems to understand that the speaker has some control over whether or not his mind will be involved in understanding what he is saying (1 Cor. 14:15).

The Interpretation of Tongues (1 Cor. 14:5)

All of this does not mean that Paul devalues or denigrates the gift of speaking in tongues. To correct any misunderstanding, Paul insists that he wants *all* the Corinthians to speak in tongues (1 Cor. 14:5a; cf. Num. 11:29).²¹ More than this, however, Paul wants all the Corinthians to prophesy (1 Cor. 14:5b). Although both gifts are valuable in the church, there is a clear priority to the gift of prophecy: “the one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues...” (1 Cor. 14:5c). Of course, Paul is saying that the gift of prophecy is *functionally* greater, not that the prophet is

essentially greater than the one gifted in tongues (cf. 1 Cor. 12:12–30).²² God does not give any gifts in vain to his church.²³

Indeed, the functional superiority of prophecy over tongues does not have to do with the *content* of the message, but of the *comprehensibility* of the message. To those who understand the language being spoken, the gift of tongues carries great value (cf. Acts 2). Even for those who do not understand the language being spoken, the message spoken in tongues can *become* edifying if translated: “...unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up” (1 Cor. 14:5d). In other words, if someone interprets whatever is spoken in another language, this interpretation “had the effect of turning tongues into prophecy.”²⁴ This is a critical point, since it demonstrates that speaking in tongues and prophecy were essentially the same thing, but only in different languages. Speaking in tongues articulated prophecy to *unbelievers* in foreign languages to the speakers, but native languages to the hearers (Acts 2:8–11; 1 Cor. 14:22), while prophecy articulated prophecy to *believers* in the common language of the speaker *and* the hearers (1 Cor. 14:22). Whether the interpreter is the same person as the speaker, or a different person, is impossible to determine from the grammar of this verse.²⁵

The Benefit of Intelligible Speech (1 Cor. 14:6–8)

In v. 6, Paul begins to illustrate the benefit of intelligible speech against the uselessness of untranslated tongues in corporate worship in the church. When Paul asks, “...how will I *benefit* [ὠφελήσω, *ōphelēsō*] you...?” he uses the same word that he had used back in 1 Corinthians 13:3: “If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I *gain* [ὠφελούμαι, *ōpheloumai*] nothing.” Paul is asking here how he will benefit them *unless* (ἐὰν μὴ, *ean mē*) he offers some form of intelligible speech. The “unless” in this question is parallel to the “unless” (εἰ μὴ, *ei mē*) he made in the previous verse: “...*unless* someone interprets, so that the church may be built up” (1 Cor. 14:5).²⁶ Paul uses this phrase *unless* four times in this paragraph (v. 6, 7, 9, 11). Now, in verse 6, Paul contrasts the lack of benefits that come by untranslated tongues to the benefit of revelation, knowledge, prophecy, and teaching. These do not four different actions, but two, since *prophecy* is to speak *revelation*, and *teaching* to speak *knowledge*.²⁷ (Indeed, the word translated as “bring” in the ESV is the same word “speak” that is used twenty-four times throughout this chapter.) Or, to put this another way, *revelation* and *knowledge* refer to the possession of *content*, while *prophecy* and *teaching* refer to the action of *communication*.²⁸

Paul illustrates his point in two ways initially, later adding a third illustration in v. 11. In v. 7, Paul first appeals to inanimate musical instruments. If a flute or a harp do not play distinct melodies, then they make cacophonous sound, not music. The fault is not with the instrument, but with the one playing the instrument who fails to use the instrument according to its intended use.²⁹ In v. 8, Paul uses another instrument for a second illustration, the bugle. This time, however, the proper use of the instrument in view is not to make beautiful music, but something much more practical: as a summons to battle. The trumpet was used to alert soldiers of danger and to prepare for battle (Num. 10:9; cf. Joel 2:1; 1 Thess. 4:16).³⁰ In the days before digital or radio communication, trumpets were effective means of communicating instantly with an entire army in the middle of battle. If, however, the blast of the trumpet does not clearly signal “Advance” or “Retreat,” then the trumpet is not only worthless.³¹ Indeed, it is worse than useless, since an indistinct trumpet only adds to the chaos and confusion at a critical moment.

Intelligible Language (1 Cor. 14:9–11)

Paul transitions into v. 9 with a phrase that applies all that he has written to the situation in Corinth: “So with yourselves....” Furthermore, Paul’s phrase in Greek more clearly demonstrate the parallel thoughts between v. 9 and what Paul has written earlier than comes through in English translation. More literally, we might translate v. 9 this way: “So also you, through the tongue, *unless* [ἐὰν μὴ, *ean mē*] you *give* a clear word, how *will anyone know* what is spoken?” The “unless” is identical to the phrase Paul used in v. 6, and parallel to the “unless” he wrote in v. 5. The phrase “*give* a clear word” mirrors the language of v. 7 (“If even lifeless instruments...do not *give* distinct notes...”) and v. 8 (“...if the bugle *gives* an indistinct sound...”). Furthermore, the question, “...how will anyone know...?” parallels the identical question in v. 7: “how will it be known what is played?”³² Finally, when Paul concludes, “For you will be speaking into the air,” he echoes still another phrase used earlier: “I do not box as one beating the air” (1 Cor. 9:26).³³ The one who beats the air or speaks into the air does so to no effect.³⁴ Neither the blow nor the word lands, so that the energy is wasted.

Paul insists, though, that the problem is not with the language of the tongues, but with the fact that no one *understands* the language. In v. 10, Paul acknowledges that there are many different “languages” (*phōnōn*) using the same word he had used earlier to refer to the indistinct “sound” of the bugle (v. 8). This is a significant word, however, since it is the word used to translate “language” in the Septuagint (Greek) translation of Genesis 11, the story of the Tower of Babel.³⁵ Where the Babelites originally had *one* “language” (φωνή, *phōnē*; Gen. 11:1 LXX), their language was confused so that each could no longer understand “the language of [his] neighbor” (τὴν φωνὴν τοῦ πλησίον, *tēn phōnēn tou plēsion*; Gen. 11:7 LXX). In fact, the full phrase that Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 14:10 is “kinds of language” (γένη φωνῶν, *genē phōnōn*), and the word for “kind” (γένος, *genos*) may echo another significant phrase from the story of the Tower of Babel. When God assesses the situation, he says, “Behold, they are one *kind* [γένος, *genos*]....” (Gen. 11:6 LXX).

If Paul does indeed have the story of the Tower of Babel in mind, then the point Paul makes in v. 11 becomes clearer and more powerful. To begin, we should notice that Paul again uses the phrase “unless” (ἐὰν...μὴ, *ean mē*) in v. 11: “...unless I know the meaning of the language...” (1 Cor. 14:11; my translation). Paul, however, is not merely describing the *general*, frustrating experience of anyone who has tried to communicate with someone who speaks a foreign language.³⁶ Rather, he has a specific instance of this confusion in mind: the frustrated speech of the workers at Babel. We see further evidence for this idea by recognizing that the word Paul uses for “foreigner” is *barbaros*, from which we get our word “barbarian.” In Greek, this word is an onomatopoeic word (where the word sounds like what it describes), since foreign languages sounded like “bar bar” to the Greek ear.³⁷ In this, we should not forget that the word “*babel*” is also an onomatopoeic word to describe the “babble” of the confused languages at Babel (Gen. 11:9). Furthermore, we should note that the speaking in tongues on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2 has been widely recognized as a reversal of the curse at Babel.³⁸ In this light, Paul’s point is striking: what God had *ordered* by the gift of tongues, the Corinthians were plunging back into confusion and chaos by their misuse of that same gift.³⁹ Like the Babelites who had to abandon their construction of the tower because of their inability to communicate (Gen. 11:8–9), so also the Corinthian church will become divided and ineffective.

Eagerly Desire to Build Up the Church (1 Cor. 14:12)

In v. 12, we see the final piece of how Paul is portraying the Corinthians' worship as a reconstruction of Babel when Paul urges the Corinthians to "strive to excel in *building up* the church." If the Corinthians insist on continuing to speak in different languages, then they will not be able to continue to *build up* the church. Paul is warning the Corinthians that, like the Babelites, they will eventually have to abandon their unfinished project in shame and failure if they do not begin to speak the same language to one another, for there is no other way to "build up" the church.

Beyond this connection to the story of Babel, we should make a few other observations about v. 12. To open this sentence, Paul uses the same phrase, "So with yourselves" that he used to transition into v. 9. Next, we should notice that the word translated as "eager" in the ESV ("since you are *eager* for the manifestations of the Spirit") is the same word Paul used to urge the Corinthians to "earnestly desire" the higher spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:31; 14:1). Furthermore, the ESV has a good translation for "manifestations of the Spirit." The exact word is simply "spirits," but Paul clearly has in mind not various *spirits*, but various manifestations of the *one, Holy Spirit*.⁴⁰ Elsewhere, the Holy Spirit is called the "seven spirits of God" (Rev. 1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6).⁴¹ In this verse, Paul once again urges the Corinthians to pursue the building up and advancement of the church as a whole, rather than for each Christian to focus on his or her petty self-interest and upbuilding.⁴²

Praying to Interpret (1 Cor. 14:13–15)

What, then, should those gifted to speak in tongues do in order to use their gifts to build up the church? Paul gives the solution in v. 13, instructing the one who speaks in a tongue to pray for the ability to interpret (cf. 1 Cor. 12:30; 14:5).⁴³ If the foreign language is interpreted into the common language of the worshipers, then the tongue accomplishes the same effect as prophecy or teaching.⁴⁴ This cuts against the idea that the gift of tongues among the Corinthians was only exercised in prayer and praise (see comments on 1 Cor. 14:2).⁴⁵ Instead, Paul now addresses *praying* in a foreign language as one kind of expression of the gift of tongues.⁴⁶

Commentators are sharply divided over how to understand v. 14. Everyone recognizes that Paul recognizes a fundamental difference between "my spirit" and "my mind." While "my mind" correlates fairly closely to our own understanding of the mind, there are more options given for what Paul might mean by "my spirit," especially in regard to the way in which his "spirit" can be understood to pray.⁴⁷ Of the many different interpretations for "my spirit," I think C. K. Barrett most closely triangulates the significance issues at stake: "Paul's language lacks clarity and precision here because he is compressing into a few words the thoughts (1) that it is the Holy Spirit of God that is at work, inspiring Christian worship and prayer; (2) that the work of the Spirit is crystallized into a specific gift; (3) this gift is given in such personal terms to *me* that I can speak of it as *mine*—in short as *my spirit*, which, being what it is, operates through appropriate psychological channels independently of *my mind*."⁴⁸ It seems best to understand "my spirit" as a reference to the gift/manifestation of the Holy Spirit in me, guiding my spirit in prayer independently of the work of my mind.

As important as the discussion about the meaning of "my spirit," the sharpest divisions arise to understand the meaning of "my mind is unfruitful." Does this mean that the mind is somehow "suspended" during the action of prayer in tongues?⁴⁹ No, Paul does not mean that *his mind* gains no

fruitful benefit from the prayer, but that his mind does not fruitfully pray for the fruitful benefit of *others*.⁵⁰ There are three reasons for understanding Paul’s concern as missing a benefit for *others*, not as missing a benefit *for himself*.⁵¹ First, most importantly, this fits best with the immediate context of what follows, when Paul insists that “Otherwise,” other people present cannot say “Amen” to the prayer (v. 16). Second, this interpretation fits best with the wider surrounding context of chapter 14, where Paul’s exclusive focus is on the “building-up” of the whole church. Third, this interpretation fits best with the wider usage of “unfruitful” in the Bible (Matt. 13:22; Eph. 5:11; Tit. 3:14; 2 Pet. 1:8). In each of these cases, the concern against being “unfruitful” has to do with bearing a fruit harvest from *others*.

The key question for interpreting v. 4, then, is not so much whether the spirit is *independent* of the mind, but how the two are *related*. If Paul is indeed worried not about whether his mind *gains* any benefit, but about whether his mind *gives* any benefit, then we must see a close relationship between the spirit and the mind, even though they are independent. Along these lines, Lenski must be correct when he writes, “When I pray in a tongue, and thus my ‘spirit’ prays, this is by no means an unconscious act. I know that I speak, and I know also and feel that the Holy Spirit moves my ‘spirit,’ and that I am uttering spiritual words and thoughts.”⁵² The spirit and the mind may operate independently, but neither faculty is sealed off from the other.

This understanding is critical for understanding Paul’s remedy to an unfruitful/unproductive mind in v. 15. He is not merely telling those who speak in tongues to be alert, lest their minds miss out on a benefit from the prayer. Rather, he is urging them to use their minds so that their prayer in their spirits would benefit others (v. 15a). That is, they could use their minds to shape the prayers of their spirit so as to be *intelligible* to others.⁵³ Anthony Thiselton writes, “Paul declares that being ‘spiritual,’ i.e., of the Holy Spirit, occurs ‘when the Holy Spirit controls both the spirit and the mind.’ If only the mind is active, everything remains at a theoretical level; if only the heart is active, the door lies open to self-deception and credulity. If both are open to the Holy Spirit, the result can build up the community and bear the fruit (v. 14a) of love for the other.”⁵⁴ This principle is true not only for spoken prayers, but for sung praises (v. 15b). These too should be intelligible

Building Up the Outsider (1 Cor. 14:16–17)

The next tricky question of interpretation has to do with the identity of “anyone in the position of an outsider” (v. 16). What does Paul mean by this phrase? Some think that Paul essentially means an inquirer or seeker into Christianity.⁵⁵ These interpreters understand Paul to be talking about the same group here as when he talks about the unbelievers who come to worship God in v. 22–25. Paul’s point, by this interpretation, is that prayers offered in tongues cannot benefit these seekers, but would instead be alienating and off-putting, preventing them from saying “Amen” to the prayers. The strength of this interpretation is the connection with what Paul writes later in v. 22–25. There are two weaknesses of this interpretation, however. First, Paul’s point in this whole passage is that *no one*—neither believers nor seeking/inquiring unbelievers—would understand the content of the prayer in tongues. Why suddenly speak about seekers as though this problem were exclusive to them? Second, how would unbelievers utter an “Amen” to the content of Christian prayers, even if they did understand what was being spoken?⁵⁶

The better interpretation arises when we recognize that this word “outsider” [ἰδιώτου; *idiōtou*] has a specific sense of *unlearned*, or *uneducated*, or *uninitiated*. We get our word *idiot* from this word,

but the English word is much more derogatory. The Greek word does refer to a lack of knowledge, training, or specialization, but without denigrating the person. So, our English word “layman” probably gets at the meaning best.⁵⁷ We can see how this word is used in two other contexts in the New Testament to get a good feel for how it functions. The first has to do with the lack of education and training for Peter and John in Acts 4:13: “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, *common* [‘untrained’ LEB; ἰδιῶται, *idiōtai*] men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.” Second, Paul uses the same word about himself in 2 Corinthians 11:6: “Even if I am *unskilled* [ἰδιώτης, *idiōtēs*] in speaking, I am not so in knowledge; indeed, in every way we have made this plain to you in all things.” Paul also uses this word a few verses later to describe a similar, but different, category of person from the “unbeliever” (1 Cor. 14:23, 24).

From this, a very simple interpretation arises: an “outsider” is anyone who did not have the ability (by natural learning, or by supernatural gift) to understand the language used by the one speaking in tongues.⁵⁸ This is a simple, ordinary, ungifted, and unskilled Christian, as distinct from the spiritual elites who were showing off their ability to speak in tongues. Today, we might refer to this group of people as those who are “on the fringe,” as opposed to those who are at the center of our ministry. Someone “in the position of an outsider” is therefore someone who is “a foreigner to the speaker and the speaker a foreigner to me” (1 Cor. 14:11)—the expressions are synonymous. The person who cannot understand the language is not able to respond, “Amen!” to the prayer of thanksgiving because he or she does not know what the person praying is saying. The “thanksgiving” is a prayer that blesses God, which may include both praise for who God *is* and thanksgiving for what God *has done*.⁵⁹ No matter how eloquently the speaker may be praying, the other person cannot be built up because he or she cannot understand the prayer (v. 17).

Speaking in Tongues vs. Instructing with the Mind (1 Cor. 14:18–19)

Paul has held back a critical point until this moment: he speaks in tongues more than all of the Corinthians (v. 18).⁶⁰ Nevertheless, Paul insists that speaking in tongues is not an end in itself when he is “in church”—that is, in the assembly of believers gathered for worship (v. 19).⁶¹ In that context, Paul would rather speak five words with his mind than ten thousand words in a tongue. Why does Paul believe that the former should outweigh the latter? The answer is simple: what he speaks with his mind is able to “instruct others.” His goal is to build up, not to impress others.⁶² While the Corinthians would have gloried in the ability to speak in tongues as extensively as Paul, Paul recognizes that tongues, if they do not edify, is nothing more than a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal (1 Cor. 13:1).⁶³

Mature Thinking about Tongues (1 Cor. 14:20–22)

At this point, Paul has made his case decisively that untranslated foreign languages in public worship does not benefit believers. Before he moves to address issues in the public worship at Corinth more broadly, he first tackles one more problem of untranslated tongues: the problem for unbelievers in their midst.⁶⁴ To transition into this subject, Paul addresses the Corinthians with the affectionate term “brothers” (v. 20). Then, he urges them not to be children in their thinking. The word for “thinking” refers to the chest region, including the heart and the lungs, which the ancient world referred to in reference to the human capacity for thinking and judgment.⁶⁵ To remain

children in their thinking means being “self-centered and vain, to call attention to themselves and to be enthralled by what is showy.”⁶⁶ Paul then qualifies his statement by acknowledging that there is a sense in which their thinking should be undeveloped, since they should be as “infants in evil.” Infants are younger than children.⁶⁷ In this statement, Paul describes not merely a lower stage of development, but total naïveté to the world’s wickedness.⁶⁸ Positively, Paul says that they should instead be “mature” in their thinking. This is a word that describes reaching the goal, where the goal is to use their thinking, reasoning, and judgment skills to understand their situation rightly.⁶⁹

Paul has a sobering reason for urging them to think with maturity. In v. 21, he points to an Old Testament text (“the law”) which reveals that their tongues-speaking is not an innocent diversion, but a symbol of God’s judgment against his hard-hearted, unbelieving people.⁷⁰ Paul quotes from Isaiah 28:11–12, but he freely adapts the text to apply it to the situation at Corinth.⁷¹ In the original passage, the Lord warns to send the Assyrians with their barbarian speech to speak to the Jews (cf. v. 11). Before this, the Lord had patiently taught his people with redundant repetition: “precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little” (Isa. 28:10, 13). Nevertheless, God’s people had not listened. The Assyrian invaders, then, would be the last warning to God’s people to repent, where their foreign speech would be a sign of impending judgment. Sadly, “even then they will not listen to me” (1 Cor. 14:21; cf. Isa. 28:12). The unintelligible, foreign speech would only confirm God’s judgment against his faithless people by further hardening their hearts.⁷²

Paul’s point in his adaptation of this Old Testament text is to underscore that when “God speaks intelligibly, it is to reveal. When God speaks unintelligibly, it is to judge.”⁷³ The Corinthians were not merely mistaken when they eagerly embraced tongues-speaking in their public worship service. Worse, they were cutting off the prophetic word of God from the people gathered by making God’s word unintelligible. The gift of tongues was indeed a blessing from the Holy Spirit, given to empower the church to preach the gospel to those who spoke other languages. By misusing the gift of tongues to show off their spirituality, the Corinthians were abusing the blessing to such a degree that they turned it into a curse.⁷⁴ These untranslated, unintelligible languages did not signal God’s favor, but rather created a self-imposed exile of God’s people in a foreign land, hearing foreign languages—like the Israelites when they were carried into captivity by the Assyrians.⁷⁵

In v. 22, Paul draws an inference from the function of unintelligible, foreign languages as a sign of judgment: tongues are a sign not for believers but unbelievers, while prophecy is a sign not for unbelievers, but for believers. This is a notoriously difficult verse, since Paul seems to contradict himself immediately in v. 23–25 when he describes how tongues would drive away unbelievers from a worship service, but prophecy would effectively convert them to faith. Paul is not confused, and neither does he contradict himself. Instead, we should understand Paul’s citation of Isaiah 28:11–12 in v. 21, and the scenario Paul gives in vs. 23–25 as helping to guide how we should interpret v. 22. Commentators offer a number of suggestions about how to interpret v. 22, but Charles Hodge’s explanation makes the best sense of the verses preceding and following:

The most satisfactory explanation is to take sign in the general sense of any indication of the divine presence. ‘Tongues are a manifestation of God, having reference, not to believers, but to unbelievers; and prophecy is a similar manifestation, having reference, not to unbelievers, but to believers.’ By tongues, however, is not to be understood the gift of tongues, but, as v.

21 requires, foreign languages, i.e. languages unknown to the hearers. The meaning is, that when a people are disobedient, God sends them teachers whom they cannot understand; when they are obedient, he sends them prophets speaking their own language.⁷⁶

The key observation Hodge makes is that there is a difference between *tongues* and *speaking in tongues*.⁷⁷ The former refers to the experience of those *hearing*, while the latter refers to the experience of those *speaking*. To hear *tongues* means to hear speech in an incomprehensible, foreign language, and this is the only verse in this whole chapter where the word *tongues* appears alone, without any word describing some kind of speech (cf. v. 2, 4, 5 (x2), 6, 9, 13, 14, 18, 19, 23, 27, 39), or implying speech (“has a tongue”; v. 26). By *tongues*, Paul here has the experience of *hearing* foreign languages in view, as opposed to the rest of the chapter, where he addresses whether people should be *speaking* in tongues. *Hearing* foreign languages is a sign in the sense that it is *fitting* for unbelievers who would make no benefit from the word of God, even if it were spoken in their own language. *Prophecy*, on the other hand, is *fitting* for believers since believers will heed what they have heard—whether for the first time (as when an unbeliever becomes a believer), or the thousandth time, in the long obedience of a faithful saint.

To *speaking in tongues*, on the other hand, refers to the experience of being empowered to speak in a foreign language supernaturally, apart from any natural learning. This was true of the apostles who spoke in tongues on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, and it was true for those speaking in tongues in public worship at Corinth. The difference between the two scenes, then, is not in the experience of the *speakers*, but the experience of the *hearers*. On the day of Pentecost, the people gathered for the Jewish festival spoke a wide diversity of languages, so that the tongues spoken by the apostles were understandable to them: “we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God” (Acts 2:11). So, while the apostles were *speaking* in tongues, the hearers at Pentecost did not experience the judgment of what Paul refers to as “tongues” (incomprehensible, foreign languages) in 1 Corinthians 14:22, since they were hearing their *own* languages. At Pentecost, speaking in tongues was a *bridge* to gaining understanding in the hearers. At Corinth, however, speaking in tongues was a *barrier* to the understanding of the hearers. There, because the congregation did not speak the foreign languages being spoken, they experienced the incomprehensibility and unintelligibility of *hearing tongues*. Like the Israelites in Isaiah’s day, God’s people were setting aside the prophetic word, and, like the Israelites in Isaiah’s day, their *hearing tongues* was a sign not of God’s blessing, but of God’s judgment.

As a final word about this section, Paul’s citation of Isaiah 28:11–12, and his conclusion that tongues are thus a sign for unbelievers in v. 22, decisively rejects the notion that Paul is in the least preserving a place for speaking in tongues that neither the speaker nor the hearer understands. Ideally, this gift is to give supernatural ability to the speaker to communicate intelligibly with those who speak another language. In Corinth, the next best was for the speaker to pray to interpret what he was saying so that others could *also* understand the content, *in addition* to himself (cf. v. 13). When no one understands the unintelligible speech (neither the speaker nor the hearer), then the hearing of *tongues* reflect God’s judgment, not God’s grace.

The Fruitlessness of Hearing Tongues (1 Cor. 14:23)

Paul has already demonstrated at many points that those who *hear* what those *speaking* in tongues are saying are not able to understand what is spoken unless someone interprets (v. 2, 5, 6–11, 13–17).

Paul does not now repeat what he has already said previously. Instead, he talks about a different circumstance: not the experience of a *believer* hearing tongues, but the experience of an *unbeliever* hearing tongues. This is a slightly different, but complementary, sense from how Paul talked about tongues as a sign for unbelievers in the previous verse. There, he stated that the experience of *hearing tongues* was a warning of judgment—an unintelligible warning that God sends not to convert an unbeliever, but to harden that unbeliever in their rejection of the gospel. In Isaiah’s day, the unbelievers were Israelites. Now, in v. 23, Paul considers the case of unbelievers (pagans with no previous relationship to Christianity) and outsiders (the ignorant who need to be built up in their faith) who *hear* tongues.

In the scenario Paul describes, he says that the “whole” church comes together, using a similar word that he has used elsewhere for the public worship of the church, especially to celebrate the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor. 11:17, 18, 20, 33, 34; cf. 1 Cor. 14:26). Next, Paul says that, in this scenario, “all speak in tongues” when “outsiders or unbelievers” enter the worship service. Since Paul repeats these two groups (outsiders and unbelievers) in v. 24, albeit in reverse order, it seems clear that Paul sees these two groups as similar in some ways, yet distinct. As stated above, the term “outsider” probably suggests that these were ignorant of the languages spoken. It is possible, however, that someone could be in both categories: an “outsider” in regard to the language, and an “unbeliever” in regard to faith.⁷⁸ Regardless of their precise identities, Paul says that these two groups of people would say that the Corinthians were “out of their minds.” As many commentators have pointed out, this is not necessarily as pejorative of a phrase as it sounds in English. Many ancient religions pursued ecstatic experiences where the whole goal was to become “out of their minds” in their worship.⁷⁹ Whether pejorative or not, Paul is underscoring that those *hearing tongues* will not come to faith, since they will not be able to understand what is spoken. Hearing tongues is a word of (unintelligible) judgment against unbelievers, rather than a word of gracious (intelligible) prophecy to draw people to faith.

There is one other observation we should make that is impossible to see in most of the major English translations. A full, literal translation of this first part of the verse would look like this: “Therefore, if the whole church comes together *in one place*....” Many English translations drop the phrase “in one place” (e.g., CSB, NIV, ESV, NASB, NET, along with the many other less popular translations), perhaps because it might sound redundant in English alongside the word translated as “comes together.” Only a few English translations render the phrase in full (e.g., KJV, LEB, NABRE). In some ways, this is understandable, since the phrase “in one place” only appears ten times in the New Testament, and half of those times its use is redundant (Matt. 22:34; Luke 17:35; Acts 4:26; 1 Cor. 7:5; 11:20). Nevertheless, four of the ten uses of this phrase all appear in Acts 1–2, immediately before and after the original experience of speaking in tongues at Pentecost (Acts 1:15; 2:1, 44, 47).

Here in 1 Corinthians 14:23, we see a fifth use of this phrase that is directly related to speaking in tongues, which suggests that Paul may be using this phrase purposefully. If so, this phrase “in one place” is not redundant, but a direct allusion to the original gift of speaking in tongues, which came when the church was all together “in one place” (Acts 2:1). Furthermore, Paul warns that unbelievers or outsiders would turn away from Christ if they saw the church speaking in tongues, since “will they not say that you are out of minds?” (1 Cor. 14:23). This also seems to parallel what happened on the Day of Pentecost. While some were amazed and astonished by those who spoke in tongues,

“others mocking said, ‘They are filled with new wine’” (Acts 2:13).⁸⁰ Just as Paul subtly appealed to the story of Babel from Genesis 11 in v. 10–12, so Paul seems to subtly appealing to Pentecost here. There is one more piece of Paul’s allusion to the story of Pentecost in the final two verses of this section, which we will look at next.

The Fruitfulness of Hearing Prophecy (1 Cor. 14:24–25)

The contrast to the fruitlessness of hearing tongues is the fruitfulness of hearing prophecy. If all prophesy, rather than speaking in tongues, then when the unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, called to account by all, and the secrets of his heart are disclosed. Paul is not suggesting that the congregation would swarm these newcomers to overwhelm them with prophecy. This is not “gang evangelism.”⁸¹ Rather, the word of God, spoken clearly by prophecy, does the work here. Through prophecy, God convicts people of sin, demands that sinners give an account, and discloses the darkest secret of the heart in the blazing light of God’s word. In response, these ignorant believers and/or unbelievers cannot respond in any other way than to fall on his face, to worship God, and to declare that God is really among them.

This last phrase, “that God is really among you,” is a reference to Isaiah 45:14 and Zechariah 8:23.⁸² In both of those contexts, Gentiles are pleading that Jews would take them to worship the living God, acknowledging that God is really among them. We should notice the stark contrast between these texts and the text from Isaiah 28:11–12 that Paul quoted in v. 21. In the first passage, Gentiles speaking unintelligible speech would come against them to carry the Israelites into exile. *Tongues*, then, were seen as a sign of judgment against the hard-hearted unbelievers amidst God’s people. Now, Paul cites passages where Gentiles demand to be taken into exile out of their own country to go with the Jews into Jerusalem to worship the living God, because of intelligible prophecy.

Consider also the parallel of this situation to the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. Peter insisted that speaking in tongues *was* prophecy, an event foretold by Joel (Acts 2:15–21; cf. Joel 2:28–32). They did not hear unintelligible tongues, but they heard the mighty works of God in their own languages (Acts 2:7–12). Then, Peter continued, proclaiming prophetically the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, whom they crucified. In contrast to those who mocked the apostles as being drunk, others present responded to Peter’s preaching with repentance and faith: “Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’” (Acts 2:37). That is, they were convicted, called to account, and the secrets of their hearts were disclosed. The result was that they worshiped God and acknowledged that God was really among the apostles. So, on that day, three thousand souls were added to the church (Acts 2:41). Prophecy not only builds up believers, but it converts unbelievers *into* believers. Speaking in tongues, on the other hand, is only valuable prophecy when those present can understand the languages being spoken. Otherwise, tongues is a sign for unbelievers to harden them against the gospel, driving them away from Christ.

Orderly Public Worship (1 Cor. 14:26–40)

In 1 Corinthians 14:26–40, Paul seeks to apply everything that he wrote in the first half. Paul makes this intention clear by the transitional phrase, “What then, brothers?” (v. 26a). For this reason,

Paul's instructions in the second half of 1 Corinthians 14 are far more practical than the doctrinal instruction Paul gave in the first half of the chapter. Even so, applying these practical instructions to our own worship today is a complicated task for at least two reasons.

First, while Paul offers a number of instructions about public worship, he clearly does not offer a comprehensive set of instructions about public worship. This is evident from the fact that Paul begins his practical instructions with the phrase, "When you come together..." (v. 26b). Earlier, Paul used the same word for "come together" five times in 1 Corinthians 11 to write about the church's "coming together" for the purpose of celebrating the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:17, 18, 20, 33, 34). Here, Paul does not even mention the celebration of the Lord's Supper, which demonstrates that the instructions Paul gives are selective, not exhaustive. Along these lines, we might also note that Paul's instructions are clearly bound up in the specific critiques for Corinth's worship, especially where tongues were given primacy over prophecy (1 Cor. 14:1–25) and women were attempting to take the roles and appearances of men in worship (1 Cor. 11:2–16).

Second, Paul is giving instructions for the worship of a church in the age of the apostles, before the completion of the New Testament. After the deaths of the apostles, the spiritual gifts (*pneumatika*; cf. 1 Cor. 12:1; 14:1) related to prophecy, tongues, and knowledge ceased. Thus, we cannot adhere to the details of what Paul commands here, just as we cannot adhere to the details for worship commanded in the Old Testament book of Leviticus.

This does not mean, however, that these instructions in 1 Corinthians 14 are of no value for us. On the contrary, these instructions are of great value, but we discover their practical value in the same *way* that we glean practical value from the book of Leviticus. Specifically, we must separate the specific, immediate *issues* of this passage from the general *principles* that are timeless for the worship of God's people. While the specific issues will always change in the churches of Christ, the general principles remain the same. In this passage, we see three general principles that we must apply to our worship.

The Substantive Elements of Worship (1 Cor. 14:26)

The first general principle from this passage addresses *what* we ought to do in our worship. Specifically, Paul is teaching that the prophetic word of God must occupy a place of prominence in our worship. Observe carefully the list of the *elements* of worship that Paul provides in v. 26: "When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation." Each of these elements for the *content* of their worship bring the word of God to people in various forms—by singing, teaching, or speaking. The substantive content of our worship cannot be whatever we want it to be, as Paul has proven decisively by arguing extensively against *untranslated* tongues in worship in the first half of this chapter. Only the prophetic word of God can build up, encourage, and console God's people (1 Cor. 14:3). So, tongues are permissible in worship, but only if someone can interpret what is spoken (v. 28).

Now, the rest of the New Testament—and, indeed, other parts of 1 Corinthians—prescribe other substantive elements of what should take place when the church "comes together" for public worship. In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul describes not only prophecy, but also *prayer*, as proper for the men leading public worship, with heads uncovered (1 Cor. 11:4, 7). Indeed, earlier in this chapter, Paul insisted that the public prayers must be made in such a way that the outsider can say "Amen" by understanding what is being prayed (1 Cor. 14:16). In addition, as we observed above, Paul uses the

word for “come together” five times to describe the administration of the *sacrament* of the Lord’s Supper in the public worship of the church. The word, sacraments, and prayer, then, are the only *substantive elements* of worship God has commanded us to use in our public worship. As question #88 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism puts it, “The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption, are his ordinances, especially the word, sacraments, and prayer; all which are made effectual to the elect for salvation.”

All Things for Building Up; All Things Decently and in Order (1 Cor. 14:26, 40)

If the first general principle dealt with *what* we should do in worship, the second general principle of this passage deals with *how* we should do what we do in worship. Specifically, Paul teaches that *order* in worship is essential for *building up* the church—and, by extension, as an essential requirement for fulfilling the mandate of *love*.⁸³ To see how Paul articulates this principle, we need to observe the sheer number of commands Paul gives in this passage, a detail that is sometimes obscured in our English translations. What makes it so difficult to translate Paul’s commands (in Greek, the *imperative* mood) is that these are not *second-person* commands, but *third-person* commands. We regularly employ second-person imperatives in English. We find a good example of second-person imperatives in v. 39: “So, my brothers, *earnestly desire* to prophesy, and *do not forbid* speaking in tongues.” With second-person imperatives, we are commanding another person (or group of people) to do something *directly*. In Greek, however, there is also a clear way to give a command to someone in the third person. English has many ways of expressing this kind of thought, but there is no way to express an indirect command that clearly lines up with the Greek third-person imperative. So, the English Standard Version sometimes translates the phrase with the word “let...”: i.e., “*Let all things be done* for building up” (v. 26; cf. v. 27, 28, 29 (x2), 30, 35). Other times, the English Standard Version uses phrases with the word “should...”: i.e., “...the women *should keep silent* in the churches...but they *should be in submission*, as the Law also says” (v. 34; cf. v. 37, 40). Both “let” and “should” translate these third-person imperatives as well as it is possible to do, given the limitations of the English language. It may have been better, however, to translate these phrases consistently through this passage in order to give a better sense of the consistency of Paul’s language.

In all, Paul gives twelve of these third-person, imperative commands in this passage. Ten of those third-person imperatives concern specific classes of people: those who speak in tongues, those who prophesy, those who are “spiritual” (v. 37), or women. The first and final imperatives, however, frame the first general principle for public worship that Paul gives us in this passage. In these two imperatives, Paul instructs us about how *all* things should be done: “Let all things be done for building up” (v. 26) and “all things should be done decently and in order” (v. 40). Everything Paul writes between these two commands, then, are merely specific applications of these general, universal principles of how “all things” ought to be done in worship. In fact, we may also observe that these two principles really summarize everything Paul has stated about the use of spiritual gifts in worship in this whole section of Paul’s Letter, from 1 Corinthians 12–14.

Substantive Content vs. Circumstantial Order

This primary value of the second half of 1 Corinthians 14, then, is to provide us a model of how to navigate the relationship between *what* we do in worship and the details of *how* we do “all things decently and in order.” It is important to see how the Bible acknowledges the *substantive elements* of

worship (*what* we do to worship God) to be inviolable and sacrosanct, while Paul here speaks of the *order* in our worship (*how* we use these elements to worship God) as flexible and guided by general principles rather than any fixed rule. Historically, the *order* concerning worship has been classified as the *circumstances* of our worship, which are carefully distinguished from the *substantive elements* of our worship. The Westminster Confession of Faith cites 1 Corinthians 14:26, 40 (Paul’s two commands about how “all things” should be done) as the prooftexts for the final statement about *circumstances* in the final sentence of this paragraph:

The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man’s salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men. **Nevertheless, we acknowledge** the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word: and **that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed.** (WCF 1.6)

On the one hand, when it comes to the *substantive elements* of worship, the whole counsel of God contains “all things necessary” for us to know. Beyond these substantive elements of worship that God has explicitly commanded, the Church dare not add anything else to our worship: “God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are, in anything, contrary to his Word; or beside it, if matters of faith, or worship.”⁸⁴ God alone regulates the substance and content of our worship.

On the other hand, when it comes to the *circumstances concerning the worship of God*, then we must consider the light of nature, Christian prudence, and the general rules of the Word. In regard to these *circumstances*, this passage demonstrates the role of the Church to regulate the order and structure of *how* we worship the Lord. Here is how the Westminster Confession of Faith articulates this principle:

It belongeth to synods and councils, ministerially to determine controversies of faith, and cases of conscience; **to set down rules and directions for the better ordering of the public worship of God**, and government of his church; to receive complaints in cases of maladministration, and authoritatively to determine the same: **which decrees and determinations, if consonant to the Word of God, are to be received with reverence and submission; not only for their agreement with the Word, but also for the power whereby they are made, as being an ordinance of God appointed thereunto in his Word.** (WCF 31.2)

These “rules and directions for the better ordering of the public worship of God” would include any (circumstantial) details such as how many should speak, how long they should speak, and the order of when each speaker will lead in public worship. In 1 Corinthians 14:26–40, Paul does not raise any

questions about *what* should happen in worship (v. 26), but only about the order of *how* it will happen.

Importantly, we should also notice from Westminster Confession of Faith, 31.2, that God does not leave decisions about the circumstantial details of our worship to individual Christians. Biblically, Paul makes this point clear when he speaks of order that must be imposed upon the various worshipers who come with their hymns, lessons, revelations, tongues, or interpretations. Specifically, it is *the elders* of the church who establish the rule of Christ's reign in the church (cf. 1 Tim. 3:1; 5:17). It is *the elders* of the church who have charge to make sure that all things are done “decently and in order.” Theologians call this the “power of order,” or the “diatactical power” (from the Greek words *διά*, *dia*, “through”; and *τάξις*, *taxis*, “order”; v. 40) of the church.⁸⁵ This power is not a *legislative* power to decree new laws, but only a *ministerial* and *declarative* power to apply and administer what God has commanded in his Word. G. I. Williamson stresses this point in his commentary on the Westminster Confession of Faith:

It is important to stress the fact that the power in evidence here is strictly limited. It is limited to the *declaration* of that which God has said in his Word and the proper *order by which* the commands of God are to be observed. For example, it would be proper for a synod to make rules concerning the *order* of worship to be observed in a church where difficulty has arisen over such a question. But it would not be permissible to make new laws additional to the Bible as to the proper elements of divine worship. No synod may lawfully legislate the *content* of true worship. It can only decree with respect to the *order* of worship.⁸⁶

Christ alone regulates the *content* of his worship, but he delegates to the officers of his church the authority to regulate the *order* of how that biblically-regulated worship should be carried out.

We should observe the way that Paul entrusts this power to the elders of the Corinthian Church in v. 36–40. First, Paul rejects the idea that this power permits the Corinthian *Church* to do anything they please: “Or was it from you [plural] that the word of God came? Or are you [plural] the only ones it has reached?” (v. 36). No single congregation is on an island, making these directions, decrees, and determinations for themselves alone. They are connected to the wider body of Christ, so that their intent should be to conform to the *catholic* (i.e., universal) practices of the church.⁸⁷

Second, Paul critiques individuals who refuse to submit themselves under the authority of the Church in regard to these circumstantial matters: “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. If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized” (1 Cor. 14:37–38). The general principles come by the command of the Lord, so that the *ministerial application* of those principles by the elders of the church are the outworking of the command of the Lord. This is why the Westminster Confession of Faith (quoted above) insists that such “decrees and determinations, if consonant to the Word of God, are to be received with reverence and submission; not only for their agreement with the Word, but **also for the power whereby they are made, as being an ordinance of God appointed thereunto in his Word.**” Again, G. I. Williamson is helpful on this point:

If the decrees and determinations of church assemblies are “consonant to the Word of God,” they are to be “received with reverence and submission.” This is true not only because these

decrees are scriptural (although that is of primary importance), but also because these decrees are made by a church government instituted by Christ. There is authority not only in Scripture, which is declared, but also in the synod which declares. For example, if a synod decrees that the Lord's Supper be observed at least four times every year, this ought to be done not only because Christ has commanded the frequent observance of the sacrament in the Bible, but also because an assembly of Christ's Church has decreed a particular order, lawfully, in his Church. To disregard a particular order which is agreeable to the Word of God, is sinful not only because of the general command which the order implements, but also because of the specific command by which it is implemented. To disregard a specific decree which implements a general command of Christ is sinful because Christ has authorized church courts to make such decrees.⁸⁸

Elders of the church are to determine *how* God's biblically-regulated worship will be carried out. If an individual Christian refuses to submit to these biblically-consonant decrees and determinations for the circumstantial order concerning worship, he is not merely rejecting the authority of the elders. Ultimately, that person is rejecting the authority of Christ.

Worship as a Dialogue Between God and Us

With this basic distinction between the fixed elements of worship on one side, and the flexible circumstances concerning worship on the other side, let us now consider the specific instructions Paul gives to the Corinthians for public worship. A close reading of this passage helps to recognize that decisions about circumstances are not entirely flexible. As churches seek to give order to their worship, there may be some variation from church to church; however, Paul organizes everything he says in this passage around an inviolable principle that *worship is a dialogue between God and us*. Worship is an activity where God speaks to us in his word and sacraments, and we speak back to God by prayer and singing praises. Although some of the specific forms of God's speech may have looked different in the earliest church than they do today, the general principle remains the same.⁸⁹

Submissive Silence, Not Self-Promoting Speech

In addition to the principle that worship is a dialogue, Paul adds a corresponding principle that must guide our worship: *We participate in worship not by self-promoting speech, but by submissive silence*. While Paul focused the first half of the chapter on what kind of speech should take place (clear, intelligible prophecy, rather than incomprehensible, unintelligible foreign tongues), now Paul talks about the significance of *silence* in the congregation. Paul teaches this explicitly through three commands about who should keep silent, and when (v. 28, 30, 34).

Those commands are not the only places where Paul urges silence, however. Notice also that Paul places clear limitations on the *number* of speakers, along with the requirements that the speakers take turns speaking, "one by one" (v. 27, 29a, 30–31). So, when someone else is speaking, everyone else should be silent. The biblical emphasis for public worship is not that we should provide ample space for every person to speak, but to take care so that God's word is not distorted by an endless parade of speakers wanting to offer their own thoughts, or by the clamor of people trying to speak over one another. When someone is speaking God's word to the congregation, all others should be silent.

It is in this connection that we can understand why Paul also adds a limitation on the speakers *themselves*, restricting individual speech in public worship to qualified, gifted men only. Paul explained in 1 Corinthians 11:2–16 that God has given men the responsibility for openly and visibly declaring God’s word in public, and that their appearance without a head covering should reinforce this activity. For this reason, Paul insisted that women should neither take up the activity of men (public prophesying and praying), nor the appearance of men (without a head covering) in public worship. Here in v. 33b–35, Paul is saying the same thing: in public worship, women should remain silent throughout. If, however, all the rest of the congregation must remain silent when any one (man) is speaking God’s word to the congregation, this does not represent an overly burdensome restriction. Women are not *excluded* from worship—they simply join *all* others in the congregation who listen silently when any *one* (man) is speaking God’s word to the congregation.

Finally, we should notice Paul’s multiple emphases on the importance of an attitude of submissiveness from worshipers. Let’s consider these instructions from the broadest to the narrowest scope. First, and most broadly, Paul addresses the church in Corinth as a whole. So, Paul teaches that each individual *church* should submissively conform their practices to what is done “in all the churches of the saints” (v. 33b). Then, Paul rebukes any congregation who arrogantly acts as though the word of God came from them, or reached them alone (v. 36). Second, Paul addresses the leaders in the church. To those who would speak in tongues, Paul insists that they must submissively refrain from speaking publicly if there is no one to interpret (v. 28). To the prophets, Paul insists that each prophet should submit to the judgment of the other prophets who will weigh what the first speaks (v. 29), so that “the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets” (v. 32). Furthermore, Paul says that one prophet should keep silent if a revelation is made to another prophet sitting there (v. 31). Third, Paul addresses the women in the congregation, reminding them that they should “be in submission, as the Law also says” (v. 34). We should note that the word for “submission” (ὑποτασσεσθῶσαν, *hupotassesthōsan*) here is the same verb Paul uses to describe the subjection of the spirits of prophets to the prophets (ὑποτάσσεται, *hupotassetai*; v. 32). Fourth, Paul insists that each individual must submit to Paul’s instructions as “a command of the Lord” (v. 37), so that if “anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized” (v. 38).

In our culture, the instructions for women to submit silently in public worship becomes such a lightning rod of controversy that it distracts our attention from the context of the rest of the passage. Yes, women should worship in silent submission in church, *but so must everyone else* who is not speaking God’s word at any given moment. Even men gifted in tongues or prophesy must be submissively silent when another man is speaking. All the rest of the congregation may speak together, with one voice, in the responsive readings, in prayers, and in singing.

Silence: Participatory Worship in Spirit and in Truth

What value is there in silence, though? Kenneth Campbell offers a breathtaking defense of silence as the highest manner of worship, made possible only by the provisions of the new covenant:

Silence is indicative of the internalized character of worship. Worship in the age of covenantal fulfillment is in “spirit and in truth” (John 4:23–24). With the church’s baptism in the Spirit (Acts 2:33, I Corinthians 12:13) a new dimension and a new dynamic was added to the exercise of worship. The impersonal externalism of the old covenant worship was

replaced, because of the redemptive accomplishments of Christ, with the personal intimacy of the internalized new covenant worship. With access to the throne of grace opened by the high priestly work of Christ (Hebrews 10:19–22) and with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 3:16–17), a new interaction with God through His Word has been made possible (I Corinthians 2:12–13). The silence of worship involves this very active interaction with God. As the voice of God is heard through the reading and the preaching of the Word or is seen through the elements of the sacraments, there is an expected internal consideration and response. The activity of worship is going on in silence in this meeting between God and His people. Indicative of this internalized worship are the words of I Corinthians 14:28, “but if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God.” The context of these words is corporate worship....It is helpful to notice that Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 insofar as they are addressing worship (whether private or corporate) emphasize the internalized nature of worship. Even the outward form of worship, for instance singing, is of consequence only when it is from within, from the heart. The qualifications of these passages “making melody with your heart” and “with thankfulness in your hearts to God” demonstrate that the essence of worship is internal. Silence participates in this essence of worship just as much, if not more, than the audible expressions of worship.⁹⁰

It is helpful to tease out the progress of worship in redemptive history a bit further. In the sacrifices, rites, and ceremonies of the law of Moses, the people experienced worship as something that was *external* and *impersonal*. They watched from afar the worship that the priests offered on their behalf—at least, they watched until the priest disappeared into the tabernacle or temple to finish the rest of the ceremonies prescribed for worship, completely out of the view of the common people.

Nevertheless, while the sacrificial system remained in place until Christ offered himself up as a once-for-all sacrifice for his people, G. Duncan Lowe observes that, during that period of time, the compilation of the Psalms of David represented a major step forward in the history of the worship of God’s people toward a much more *internal* and *personal* experience:

The nature of the change is that the relatively impersonal system of law and worship that God had previously established through Moses now becomes something with a definite personal character through David. This is a progress in God’s grace. God is becoming more and more personally recognizable among his people through His chosen representative. This progress is nowhere near complete in David, but it does indicate the kind of fulfillment that would eventually be accomplished in the person of Jesus.⁹¹

With the writing of the Psalms, worshipers were given words to guide their own *personal* worship. Worship was becoming less of something the priest did for them, and more of something that they could do *internally*, from their hearts. This trajectory finds its fulfillment in the submissive silence of new covenant worshipers during public worship as they give careful attention to the word of God in spirit and in truth.

Why Silence? For our Good, and for God’s Glory

Paul is not recommending submissive silence in worship arbitrarily. Rather, he roots these

recommendations for the circumstances concerning worship in two values, which were summarized in the first and last command given in this passage. First, we submissive silence allows “all things [to be] done for building up” (v. 26). In v. 31, Paul insists that even the prophets must prophesy one by one, “so that all may learn and all be encouraged.” The word for “learn” (μανθάνωσιν, *manthanōsin*) is the verb from which we get the noun “disciple” (μαθητής, *mathētēs*), which means “learner.” Then, the word for “encouraged” (παρακαλῶνται, *parakalōntai*) is a word Paul used earlier in v. 3 about the benefits of prophesy. This word can refer to two kinds of “encouragement,” either the encouragement of exhortation, or of comfort. Worship builds up as people *learn* the word of God, in order to be *exhorted* to believe it and obey it, and to be *comforted* by its promises.

Second, Paul insists that submissive silence allows worship to be “done decently and in order” (v. 40). The reason for doing things decently and in order is partially to build up the church, but ultimately to reflect accurately the character of God: “For God is not a God of confusion but of peace” (v. 33). When everyone is clamoring to speak individually, talking over one another, and when those whom God has not qualified and gifted to deliver his speech to the public congregation, then we dishonor God by suggesting that he is a God of confusion. When we worship decently and in order, however, we honor and glorify the God of peace.

The world chafes at this passage of Scripture because the world understands the act of speaking as power, and the act of silence as oppression. The word of God reframes this teaching for us away from notions of human power into the proper framework of divine authority. The question is not, “How do we let everyone do everything, whenever they want, so that everyone has equal privileges?” The question is rather, “How has God called us to administer his authority, and how do we all submit to that authority?” Or, to adhere more closely to the language of this passage, “How has God instructed us to build up the church in worship in a way that glorifies him as the God of peace?”

Implications for Modern Worship

Let us close our discussion of 1 Corinthians 14 by listing out a few implications from these principles for our worship today, on the other side of the age of the apostles. *First*, all worship, but especially *public* worship, should be a dialogue between God and his people. This is why God’s word must take center stage in our worship, so that we devote our worship to the action of listening carefully to the voice of God in worship. Then, this is why we must respond by speaking his word back to him in responsive readings, in prayer, and in singing. Worship is not whatever we want to make it; worship is a *dialogue* between God and his people.

Second, we must continue to limit leadership of the public reading, praying, and preaching of God’s word to gifted and qualified men. In the age of the apostles, the *gifting* of leaders was clear according to whether they could speak prophetically or not. The *qualification* of leaders was determined as the other prophets weighed what every prophet spoke (v. 29), for the spirits of prophets are subject to other prophets who would compare what any given prophet was saying with the rest of what God had revealed in his word (cf. Deut. 18:20–22; 1 Thess. 5:20–21; 1 John 4:1). Today, this principle will ordinarily mean limiting worship leadership to those who have been officially recognized as gifted and qualified men by ordination and installation to the office of elder, and especially those who hold the office of *teaching* elders. In our denomination, the process toward ordination includes thorough training, evaluation, and examination by other elders in our local

congregation’s Session (for ruling elders) or in the wider, regional Presbytery (for pastors). We want to assess whether men aspiring to the office of elder are gifted to engage in the ministry of the word, whether they qualified by their conduct and their ability to teach pure biblical doctrine (1 Tim. 3:1–7).

The necessity for this thorough process of vetting elders who will lead us in worship is reflected in this passage. Namely, it is a serious thing to act as God’s voice to God’s people by declaring his word, since to do so is to establish the rule of Christ’s reign in the congregation. Paul touches on these ideas when he writes, “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching” (1 Tim. 5:17). The ministry of the word—especially by preaching and teaching—is nothing less than *ruling* in Christ’s church. The implication, of course, is that this *rule* may not be abused by binding the consciences of believers with human doctrines and commandments. Rather, to lead in public worship is to speak on behalf of *God* to the people by God’s word, and to represent the people before God by leading the congregation in prayer.

Third, we must all fully participate in worship by *submissive silence*. Whenever we are not the single person speaking God’s voice to the congregation at any given point in the worship service, we must submit ourselves silently to the word of God as our act of worship. Certainly, we must be active in mind and in spirit to listen to, consider, believe, and obey the word of God, but we should do so in silence. This is true at all times for women and for most men, but the exact same requirement is true even for elders whenever they are not acting as God’s voice.² Just as the prophets had to be silent while another was speaking (v. 30–31), so elders must be submissively silent when another is reading, preaching, or teaching.

Speaking personally as a pastor who often does bear the responsibility to speak with God’s voice by reading, preaching, and teaching God’s word, I would note that I experience some of the greatest freedom in worship when I can be seated in the congregation and listen to someone else speak God’s words to me. In those moments, I do not have the mental, emotional, and spiritual strain of trying to speak God’s voice with clarity, but only the joy of simple, silent submission to the word of God. It is a joy to lead God’s people in worship, but my greatest joy must always remain in my personal, silent, submission to God’s word. Without the latter, I cannot properly do the former.

Discussion Questions

1. How does Paul understand the relationship between *love* and *gifts* (1 Cor. 14:1)? What is the difference between *pursuing* love and *earnestly desiring* the spiritual gifts? Why does Paul put such a priority on love? Why does he relegate gifts to a secondary role, in relationship to love? What should we make of the distinction Paul makes between the broader category of *gifts* (*charismata*), compared with the smaller subcategory of *spiritual gifts* (*pneumatika*)?
2. What are the various possibilities for understanding the one “in the position of an outsider” (1 Cor. 14:16)? For whom do you think is Paul concerned when he writes this? Why does Paul care that the “outsider” should be able to say “Amen” to the prayers offered? What implications does that concern have for our goals in our own worship? What principles might we adopt toward achieving those goals in our worship?

3. What does the text Paul cites in v. 21 from Isaiah 28:11–12 communicate about *hearing* tongues as a sign of judgment toward unbelief? What do the texts from Isaiah 45:14 and Zechariah 8:23, to which Paul alludes in v. 25, describe about the role of clear prophecy as the means of drawing the nations to worship the true and living God? How does Paul reference the basic structure of the story of the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2 in this passage? What might we learn from all these Bible references, taken together, about God’s plan to save people from every tribe, language, people, and nation?

4. What do we mean when we talk about the *elements* of public worship? How are the list of elements of public worship in 1 Corinthians 14:26 similar to the elements of public worship that we employ today? How are they different? Which other biblically-commanded elements does Paul leave out of the list in v. 26? Where do we find biblical support for those other elements? Why does God want his own word to take center stage in our worship? Why should we limit our worship to only the elements that God explicitly commands in his worship?

5. What do we mean when we talk about the *circumstances* of public worship? What examples can you give about the kinds of decisions for worship that would be about circumstances, rather than elements? How much information does the Bible give us to guide those decisions in the church (WCF 1.6)? Why is it important to keep in mind that questions about elements are *biblical faithfulness* questions, while the circumstances of worship are only *wisdom* questions?

6. Do you think about worship as a *dialogue* between God and his people? In what ways does it change our approach to worship when we recognize that worship is a conversation between God and us? How does Kenneth Campbell justify his assertion that “Silence participates in this essence of worship just as much, if not more, than the audible expressions of worship”? Do you agree with this idea? Why or why not?

Notes

1. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 631.

2. Hodge, *A Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians*, 278.

3. Barnett, *1 Corinthians: Holiness and Hope of a Rescued People*, 252.

4. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 631.

5. “The little conjunction after *Pursue love* can be translated either as ‘and’ or as ‘but,’ and in my larger commentary I proposed ‘but.’ On further reflection over five more years I conclude that more than a contrast alone is at stake, and follow NRSV’s ‘then,’ to translate: *Pursue love and then be eager for gifts.*” (Thiselton, *First Corinthians: A Shorter Exegetical & Pastoral Commentary*, 236.)

6. “Love is to be yoked to the Corinthians’ zeal for spiritual gifts. With love as their aim, it will prevent them from being zealous only for those gifts that will enable them to steal the show and outshine others.” (Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 631–32.)

7. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians*, 576.

8. Hays, *First Corinthians*, 234–35.

9. “Paul returns to the Spirit-language (τὰ πνευματικά, *ta pneumatika*) with which he opened this discourse in 12:1, rather than continuing with the grace-gift language he took up in 12:4 and used in 12:9, 28, 30, 31. I agree with the distinction that Ellis (1978: 24) makes that τὰ πνευματικά applies specifically to ‘gifts of inspired perception, verbal proclamation and/or its interpretation.’ It is related to speaking in the Spirit (see the discussion on 12:1). Thiselton (2000: 1083) thinks that the term refers to ‘the gifts of the Spirit for utterance’ within the context of worship (though Thiselton gives the term a completely different meaning in 12:1 [see 2000: 930]). The predominance of the verb ‘to speak’ (λαλεῖν, *lalein*), twenty-four times in chapter 14, makes clear that Paul has in mind gifts of speech: glossolalia and prophecy.” (Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 632.)
10. For example, Morris, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, 184.
11. Schreiner, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, 286.
12. Hodge, *A Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians*, 279.
13. Beale and Gladd, *Hidden But Now Revealed: A Biblical Theology of Mystery*, 126.
14. Hodge, *A Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians*, 280.
15. Hays, *First Corinthians*, 234–35.
16. Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, vol. 1, 436. Available online: <<https://ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom39/calcom39.xxi.i.html>>
17. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians*, 578.
18. Morris, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, 184.
19. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians*, 578.
20. Hodge, *A Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians*, 281.
21. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 634–35.
22. Schreiner, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, 287.
23. Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, vol. 1, 437. Available online: <<https://ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom39/calcom39.xxi.i.html>>
24. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 316.
25. Thiselton, *First Corinthians: A Shorter Exegetical & Pastoral Commentary*, 238.
26. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians*, 583.
27. Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, vol. 1, 438. Available online: <<https://ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom39/calcom39.xxi.i.html>>
28. “Revelation and knowledge go together since they are possessions, prophecy and teaching go together as activities. Yet again, revelation and prophecy go together since a prophet needs revelation in order to prophesy; and knowledge and teaching go together since a teacher must have knowledge in order to teach.” (Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians*, 584.)
29. Hodge, *A Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians*, 283.
30. Schreiner, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, 288.
31. Morris, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, 185.
32. In Greek, v. 7 has two passive participles: “...how *will it be known* what is played [on the flute] and played [on the harp]?” Then, v. 9 employs a similar passive participle: “...how *will it be known* what is spoken?” The ESV translates these by supplying a subject (“anyone”) and making them active (“know”, vs. the passive “be known”), but because the ESV translates these phrases consistently, I have left them as they are in my exposition.
33. Hodge, *A Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians*, 284.
34. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 318.
35. Hodge, *A Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians*, 285.
36. Pace Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 637.
37. Morris, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, 186.

38. e.g., Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, Contours of Christian Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 60. G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 201ff.
39. “Paul’s fear is this: if persons chattering in tongues without interpretation dominate the worship, then the church will become a Babel-ground of competing gibberish.” (Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 637.)
40. Hodge, *A Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians*, 285.
41. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians*, 590.
42. “Paul, however, does not hereby give permission to any one to cherish an ambition to excel, even to the benefit of the Church, but by correcting the fault, he shows how far short they come of what they are in pursuit of, and at the same time lets them know who they are that should be most highly esteemed. He would have a man to be held in higher estimation, in proportion as he devotes himself with eagerness to promote edification. In the meantime, it is our part to have this one object in view — that the Lord may be exalted, and that his kingdom may be, from day to day, enlarged.” (Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, vol. 1, 442–43. Available online: <<https://ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom39/calcom39.xxi.ii.html>>)
43. “This ἵνα states the object of ‘pray,’ i.e., the contents of the prayer. The point is immaterial whether this prayer is: ‘Lord, enable me to interpret,’ namely what I now speak with a tongue, or: ‘Lord, grant me *the gift* of interpretation’ for’ all my speaking with a tongue.” (Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians*, 590.)
44. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 319.
45. Hodge, *A Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians*, 286.
46. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 319.
47. “What does Paul mean by saying, His spirit prays? There are three answers given to this question. 1. That *spirit* (my spirit) here means the higher intellectual powers of the soul, as distinguished from the understanding. This verse and those which immediately follow, are the principal foundation of the theory that the speaker with tongues was in a state of ecstatic excitement in which his understanding was not exercised, so that he knew not what he said or did. How inconsistent this theory is with the facts of the case has already been shown. This view of the passage, therefore, cannot be admitted. Besides, it has already been remarked, that the Scriptures know nothing of this distinction between the *reason* and the *understanding*. 2. Others say that *spirit* here means the affections. ‘My feelings find utterance in prayer, but my understanding is unfruitful.’ This would give a good sense; but this meaning of the word spirit is of rare occurrence. In most of the passages quoted by lexicographers as examples of this use of the term, it really means the Holy Spirit. *And in this whole discussion, spirit is not once used for the feelings*. 3. My *spirit* may mean the Holy Spirit in me; that is, my spiritual gift; or, my spirit as the organ of the Spirit of God. Each man has his own spirit, (comp. 1 Corinthians 14:12) i.e. his own spiritual gift. And Paul means to say, that when a man prays in an unknown tongue, his spiritual gift is indeed exercised; in other words, the Holy Spirit is active in him, but others are not profited. The speaker with tongues is not to be set down as an enthusiast, or as a man in a frenzy, or, as the mockers said, as a man full of new wine. He is really the organ of the Holy Ghost. But as the influence of the Spirit under which he acts, is not irresistible, he should not exercise his gift where it can do no good to others. He may pray in silence, v. 28. This interpretation seems much more in accordance with the use of the word and with the whole drift of the chapter.” (Hodge, *A Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians*, 287.)
48. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 320.
49. “voũς,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 4, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1967), 959.
50. “Paul’s use of ἄκαρπος precisely clinches his point. However, many translations spoil it with such renderings as *my mind is barren* (REB), *my mind is unfruitful* (NIV) or *my mind derives no fruit from it* (NJB). As

Käsemann insists, Paul's point is *not* that *the tongue-speaker* misses out, but that the *church community* misses out. Of the major translations NRSV's *my mind is unproductive* is best at this point since *produce* can serve others. The same might be said of Collins's translation *useless*. However, it may perhaps still more clearly convey Paul's logic to translate **but my mind produces no fruit from it**, i.e., means **by which to benefit others.**" (Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 1111.)

51. The following reasons come from Hodge, *A Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians*, 288.

52. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians*, 592.

53. "When a man spoke τῷ πνεύματι [*tō pneumati*], with the Spirit, the Spirit was the *principium movens*, the moving principle, determining him to speak, and what to say. When he spake with τῷ νοῖ [*tō noi*], with the understanding, the understanding was that controlling principle. These two could be combined. The man could so speak under the guidance of the Spirit as to be intelligible to others." (Hodge, *A Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians*, 289.)

54. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 1113.

55. e.g., Morris, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, 187–88.

56. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 641.

57. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians*, 592.

58. Hodge, *A Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians*, 290.

59. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 1114.

60. Hays, *First Corinthians*, 237.

61. Hodge, *A Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians*, 292.

62. Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, vol. 1, 450–51. Available online: <<https://ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom39/calcom39.xxi.iii.html>>

63. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians*, 596.

64. Hays, *First Corinthians*, 238.

65. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians*, 597.

66. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 645.

67. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 322.

68. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 645.

69. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians*, 598.

70. Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, vol. 1, 452. Available online: <<https://ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom39/calcom39.xxi.iii.html>>

71. For a list of the nine variations from either the Septuagint (LXX) or the Masoretic (Hebrew) text, see Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 646–47.

72. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians*, 599–600.

73. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 648.

74. Hodge, *A Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians*, 293.

75. Thiselton, *First Corinthians: A Shorter Exegetical & Pastoral Commentary*, 244.

76. Hodge, *A Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians*, 295–96.

77. "When used aright, that is, when employed in addressing those to whom the language used was intelligible, it was prophecy. The obscurity of the passage arises in a great measure from the ambiguity of the expression to speak with tongues. It means to speak in foreign or unknown languages. But a language may be said to be unknown either in reference to the speaker or to the hearer. It is said to be unknown to the speaker, if not previously acquired; and it is said to be unknown to the hearers if they do not understand it. The apostle uses the expression sometimes in one sense and sometimes in the other. When it is said that the apostles, on the day of Pentecost, spake with tongues, it means that they used languages which they had never learned; but when Paul says he would rather speak five words intelligibly than ten thousand words with a tongue, he means

in a language unknown to the hearers.” (Hodge, *A Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians*, 296.)

78. “The two classes (the unlearned and the unbelieving) are not so distinguished that the same person might not belong to both classes. The same persons were either ἰδιῶται or ἄπιστοι, according to the aspect under which they were viewed. Viewed in relation to the languages spoken, they were unlearned; viewed in relation to Christianity, they were unbelievers.” (Hodge, *A Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians*, 297.)

79. Hays, *First Corinthians*, 238–39.

80. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians*, 602.

81. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 652.

82. Schreiner, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, 293.

83. Thiselton, *First Corinthians: A Shorter Exegetical & Pastoral Commentary*, 246.

84. *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 20.2.

85. There is the ‘potestas διατακτικη,’ the power belonging to the Church in the way of administering ordinances and government in the Christian society. This power comprehends the right to carry into effect the institutions and laws which Christ has appointed within the Church: it does not involve the power to bind the conscience or obedience of its members to the observance of new or additional ordinances, enacted by itself. In regard to ordinances, the authority of the Church in the dispensation of them is purely administrative; the Church communicating to them no authority and no virtue from itself, but dispensing them solely as the appointed channels through which the Spirit of God conveys a spiritual influence to those who use them in faith, and not as charms to which the Church has imparted grace of its own. In regard to laws, the authority of the Church is no more than declaratory, and can neither enforce the obedience nor punish the transgression of them by any other than the authority wherewith Christ has made them binding, or the censures wherewith Christ has given sanction to their hold on the conscience.” (James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ* (First published 1869; Reprinted by the Banner of Truth Trust: 1960, 1974; Revised Reprint Ed. Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2015), 237.)

86. G. I. Williamson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith For Study Classes*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2004), 322.

87. We should distinguish the word *catholic* (from the Greek words καθ’ ὅλος, *kath’ holos*, “from the whole,” meaning “universal”) from the Roman Catholic Church. True catholicity was perhaps best summarized by Vincent of Lérins (d. 445 AD): “that faith which has been believed everywhere, always, by all.” On the one hand, the Roman Catholic Church claims to be the universal church, but, on the other hand, the Roman Catholic Church also insists on the primacy of the Roman church in particular. Ultimately, the Roman idiosyncrasies of that church corrupt her claim to catholicity.

88. Williamson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith For Study Classes*, 322–23.

89. For the rest of this section, I am deeply dependent on insights contained in the “Report of the Committee on the Involvement of Unordained Persons in the Regular Worship Services of the Church,” a report presented to the fifty-eighth (1991) General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. All three individual reports contained in the overall report are well worth reading. The details of the recommendations offered in the three reports differ, but each report brings out a different set of preliminary principles that are critical for rightly understanding new covenant worship. In particular, I find “Minority Report #2” by Kenneth J. Campbell persuasive, and I am drawing heavily on his exegesis here. <<https://opc.org/GA/unordained.html>> Accessed September 28, 2020.

90. Kenneth J. Campbell, “Minority Report #2 of the Committee on the Involvement of Unordained Persons in the Regular Worship Services of the Church,” §C.4.b. <<https://opc.org/GA/unordained.html>> Accessed September 28, 2020.

91. G. Duncan Lowe, “Understanding the Psalms as Christian Worship,” in *The Book of Psalms for Worship* (Pittsburg, PA: Crown & Covenant Publications, 2010), vi.

92. “A women’s individual voice is not to be raised audibly except when it is a part of the whole body speaking in harmony. But, it needs to be stressed that this is normally the case for every other participant—non-qualified men, children, inactive qualified men—excepting those qualified men who are officiating the worship. Almost all within a given body of corporate worship exercise the role of submissiveness and so silence in the sense explained.” (Campbell, *Minority Report #2 of the Committee on the Involvement of Unordained Persons in the Regular Worship Services of the Church*, §D.c.(12).)