

Lesson 21
1 Corinthians 14:26-40

f. Orderly conduct in Christian worship -- 14:26-40

In this section on conduct in church worship, Paul insists that all the parts of worship should be conducive to instruction and edification. Tongues, prophecy, and other gifts were to be practiced under strict regulation (26-33a). Also, for the sake of decorum in the churches, women were not to speak in public worship (33b-36). Paul declares that what he is writing is the Lord's instruction (37, 38). He concludes by encouraging the Corinthian Christians to seek to prophesy and not to prohibit people from speaking in tongues, provided that the whole of the worship service is decorous and orderly (39, 40).

Vv. 26-30 The third person imperatives "it must be done" in these verses show that Paul is not so much addressing his remarks to particular individuals as to the corporate entity, the church, which itself should maintain this decorum. All these imperatives are in the present tense, indicating that the church was to keep a constant supervision over all these aspects of its service.

Vv. 26-28 Verse 26 gives us a short outline of the elements of worship in Corinth: a hymn, instruction, revelation, a tongue, an interpretation. Some of this is reminiscent of Jewish worship (cf. Matt 26:30; Luke 4:16-30). All is for strengthening the church. The one occurrence of *hekastos* used with each of the following five occurrences of the verb form *echei* ("each one has . . . each one has . . .") suggests again the unity and diversification of gifts in the church. One person has this ability, another that one; but all (*panta*) together are to be used to build up the church. As for tongues, they must be regulated, with only two or three speaking, one at a time and with someone interpreting (v.27). The phrase *anamerōs* ("in turn"), though used elsewhere in Greek literature, occurs only here in the NT. Though v.13 suggests that the speaker in tongues might do the interpreting himself, the inference here is that it would probably be someone else. Without an interpreter, there was to be no public tongues-speaking in the church. This apparently placed on the one speaking in tongues the responsibility of finding out first if an interpreter was present. If there were none, the speaker must be silent

in the church service and speak only to himself and God (v.28). Perhaps this means that if no interpreter was on hand, one should do his tongues-speaking at home.

Vv. 29-33a As for regulations for prophesying in church, only a limited number -- not over three -- should speak, lest so much be said as to cause confusion. The mention of revelation (v.30) suggests that the prophecy in mind involved a revelation, a special deep teaching, which, however, was distinct from the kind of revelation that Scripture is (2 Tim 3:14-17). Such teaching should be heard even from one who had not been on his feet to speak. In some way the person with this revelation was a spokesman for God in giving some edifying message to the church. The "spirits of the prophets" (v.32) are the spirits of the prophets themselves who were guided by the Holy Spirit in using this special gift. And these prophetic utterances are subject to being checked (*hypotasso*) by other prophets for accuracy and orthodoxy. All this leads to the peace and order of which God is the author (v.33). The word *akatastasia* is a strong one, indicating great disturbance, disorder, or even insurrection or revolution (Luke 21:9). Paul is afraid of unregulated worship that might lead to disorderly conduct and belie the God of peace who has called them to be orderly.

Vv. 33b-36 Paul now turns to the role of women in public worship, the implication being that men were to lead in worship. Paul's instruction for Corinth is that followed in all the churches. The phrase *tais ekklesiais ton hagion* ("the congregations [or, the churches] of the saints") is distinctive, occurring only here in the NT. The expression emphasizes the universality of the Christian community. All the churches are composed of saints (those set apart for God), and should be governed by the same principle of orderly conduct.

The command seems absolute: Women are not to do any public speaking in the church. This restriction is not to be construed as demoting woman, since the expressions "be in submission" (*hypotasso*, cf. v.32) and "their own husbands" are to be interpreted as simply consistent with God's order of administration (cf. 1 Cor 11:7, 8; Eph 5:21-33). "The law says" must refer to the law as set forth in such places as Genesis 3:16; 1 Corinthians 11:3; Ephesians 5:22; 1 Timothy 1:12, and Titus 2:5. Some have explained the apostle's use of the word "speaking" (v.34) as

connoting only general speaking and not forbidding a public address. But this is incompatible with Paul's other uses of "speaking" in the chapter (vv.5, 6, 9, et al.), which imply public utterances as in prophesying (v.5). A woman's request for knowledge is not to be denied, since she is a human being equal to the man. Her questions can be answered at home, and not by asking her husband in the public service and so possibly interrupting the sermon.

The word *gyne* used in vv.34, 35 has the general meaning of "woman," an adult female (cf. Matt 13:33; 27:55). But the same word is used to indicate a married woman (cf. Luke 1:5). Here in vv.34, 35 Paul uses the word in the general sense when he declares as a broad principle that "women should remain silent in the churches." That he assumes there were many married women in the congregation is evident from his reference to "their husbands" (v.35). He does not address himself to the question of where the unmarried women, such as those mentioned in 7:8, 36ff., were to get their questions answered. We may assume, however, that they were to talk in private (just as the married women were to inquire at home) with other qualified persons, such as Christian widows (7:8), their pastor (cf. Timothy as a pastor-counselor, 1 Tim 5:1, 2), or with elders who were "able to teach" (1 Tim. 3:2). At any rate, a woman's femininity must not be disgraced by her trying to take a man's role in the church.

But what about the seeming contradiction between these verses and 11:5ff., where Paul speaks of women praying and prophesying? The explanation may be that in chapter 11 Paul does not say that women were doing these things in public worship as discussed in chapter 14. (See B.B. Warfield, "Women Speaking in the Church" in *The Presbyterian*, Oct. 30, 1919, pp. 8, 9.)

Paul's rhetorical questions (v.36) are ironical and suggest that the Corinthians had their own separate customs regarding the role of women in public worship and were tending to act independently of the other churches who also had received these commands. They were presuming to act as though they had originated the Word of God (i.e., the gospel) and as if they could depart from Paul's commands and do as they pleased in these matters of church order.

Vv. 37-40 Now, Paul steps delicately. He had given strict commands but

wants to soften their impact. He asks for those who have the gift of prophecy and are spiritually gifted to authenticate the fact that his commands are from the Lord (v.37). But immediately Paul returns to his strict injunction (v.38). The tone is abrupt, the meaning is clear: any one who ignores it will be ignored by Paul and the churches, or possibly even the Lord, and so be considered an unbeliever (1:18). (So Grosheide, in loc.)

The closing verses of the chapter (39, 40) revert to prophecy and tongues. Paul urges the Corinthians to keep on desiring to prophecy and not to prohibit people from speaking in tongues. But Christian worship must be marked by good order.

Summary

At this point a summary of the place of speaking in tongues in the apostolic community of the first century A.D. and also a discussion of tongues in the post-apostolic period and the relevance of tongues in the twentieth-century church is in order. First, in Paul's discussion of this and other gifts in chapters 12 to 14, he emphasizes priority of love over "tongues" and the other gifts (1 Cor. 13).

Second, in the list of offices (those of apostles, prophets and teachers and gifts for the church 12:27-31a), the office-gifts are listed first, with other gifts following, the last being tongues. This implies that Paul gives priority to office-gifts over "tongues." Furthermore, among the office-gifts, that of apostles, who were unique in having seen the Lord, ceased to exist in the first century A.D.

Third, in his treatment of tongues and prophecy in chapter 14, Paul again shows his preference for prophecy over tongues, since the former was the gift that brought edification to the church (vv.1-5). He minimizes the importance of the gift of tongues when he says, "In the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousands words in a tongue" (v.19).

Fourth, in his discussion in chapter 12 regarding the diversity of gifts and their functions in the church, the body of Christ, Paul uses the analogy of the human body with its various parts functioning in unique and distinct ways without

each one trying to usurp the function of another part. So he shows that the gifts, including tongues, were not to be sought for the sake of the gifts nor was everyone to seek to have the same gift, such as tongues.

Fifth, God does not have to work by miraculous means to accomplish his purposes; he usually uses ordinary natural means -- e.g., in the production of crops, he uses the sun, the rain, and the nutrients of the ground, as well as the hard work of men in farming the land. In connection with *charismata* (the Greek word from which we get the current term "charismatic"), which is translated "spiritual gifts" in NIV (1 Cor 12:4), it is significant that in 1 Corinthians 12:5-11 not all of the *charismata* mentioned are miraculous, as, e.g., the gifts of wisdom and knowledge (v.8), which are mentioned before the miraculous ones, including tongues. It is not essential that everyone have a miraculous gift; see 12:29, 30, where Paul uses rhetorical questions to show that not all Christians had, or were to have, one particular gift in common. The questions in the Greek sentences that comprise 12:29, 30 begin with the negative, which expects a negative response.

Sixth, on the basis of the phenomenon of foreign languages spoken of in Acts 2:5-12, we have argued that the tongues referred to in 1 Corinthians 14:13-15,20-25 were also foreign-language tongues -- not ecstatic utterances, gibberish, or nonunderstandable erratic variations of consonants and vowels with indiscriminate modulation of pitch, speed, and volume.

Seventh, the essential offices for building up the body of Christ, the church, are, according to Paul (Eph 4:11-16), those of apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors-teachers (the one Greek article unites the pastor-teacher gift and office). He says nothing there about the necessity of miraculous gifts either in evangelism (Eph 4:11) or in the teaching-edifying ministry of the church (vv.12-16).

Eighth, the other NT passages in which Christian worship patterns are set forth do not include, or as in the exceptional case of the Corinthian church, do not emphasize, miraculous gifts and functions. This is true not only for worship in the developing church under Paul's ministry as portrayed in the last half of Acts and in the epistles, but also in the worship of the OT and early NT periods involving predominantly Jewish Christians -- worship patterns taken over largely by the

developing Jewish-Gentile Church. These important elements of worship were: the reading of Scripture and expounding it with understanding (Neh 8:1-8; Luke 4:16-30; Acts 2 and other sermons in Acts); prayer (1 Kings 8:10-61; Acts 14:23; 16:25); singing (1 Chron 25; Acts 16:25; Eph 5:19); Christian *koinonia* or fellowship (2 Kings 23:1-3; Acts 2:42); Christian ceremonies or sacraments (as the Passover [Exod 12] and the Lord's Supper [Acts 2:42; 20:7; 1 Cor 11:17-32]); and fasting (Acts 14:23). Miraculous gifts, including tongues, are (apart from the unique situation at Corinth -- 1 Cor 14:26), absent from these contexts, the conclusion being that they were not to be a necessary part of the general worship patterns of the church.

Ninth, miraculous activity, including speaking in a tongue, did come in biblical times from other sources than the Lord. Witness such activity induced by evil spirits and satanic forces -- the Gerasene demon-possessed man (Luke 8:26-39), the spirit-possessed girl (Acts 16:16-18), the image of the evil beast that is given the power to speak by the other satanic beast (Rev 13:15). Psychological factors were involved in the superhuman strength and tongue-speaking activity of the Gerasene demon-possessed man, for upon his deliverance from the demons, he was found to be in his "right mind" (Luke 8:35). Therefore caution and balance are needed in relation to such miraculous activities as speaking in tongues.

Having pointed this out, we must also recognize that the Bible shows that other gifts were also perverted by Satan. The OT speaks more than once of false prophets, as does the NT. The Bible speaks of false pastors (e.g., "worthless shepherd," Zech. 11:17; "hirelings," John 10:12, 13) and frequently warns against false teachers. Yet no one would insist that either prophecy in its valid sense of speaking out for God to the people or the pastoral-teaching ministry is no longer valid. Misuse of a gift does not invalidate the gift itself. However, because of their intimate psychological nature, "tongues" must be viewed with special caution and not be overstressed.

Tenth, it is to be noted that directly after the first-century-A.D. apostolic period legitimate miraculous gifts, such as tongues, practically ceased. According to Warfield, there is little or no evidence at all for miracle-working during the first fifty years of the post-Apostolic Church; it is slight and unimportant for the next

fifty years; it grows more abundant during the next century (the third); and it becomes abundant and precise only in the fourth century, to increase still further in the fifth and beyond. (Miracles: Yesterday and Today [Grand Rapids Eerdmans,1953], p.10.) In discussing the witness of the apostolic fathers (the early Christian writers of the late first century A.D. and the first half of the second century) Warfield goes on to say, The writings of the so-called Apostolic Fathers contain no clear and certain allusions to miracle-working or to the exercise of the charismatic gifts, contemporaneous with themselves. *ibid.*)

In the place of these authentic apostolic miraculous gifts, including tongues, there arose in later centuries reports of many preposterous miracles. One such story is told in *Los Evangelios Apocrifos* (ed. Aurelio de Santos Otero, 2nd ed. [Madrid,1963], p.219). According to the story, the infant Jesus, on the trip to Egypt, caused a palm tree "to bow down" so that a coconut might be picked for his mother. Such so-called miracles occur in the writings of the NT Apocrypha, both in the apocryphal gospels and the apocryphal apostolic and early church writings (E. Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha*, ed. W. Schneemelcher, Engl. trans. R.McL. Wilson, vols. 1,2 [London: Lutterworth Press,1963, 1965]). The questions to be asked are these: Why did the authentic miraculous gifts cease? Are such miraculous gifts to be sought today?

The first question leads us to ask why there was a preponderance of miraculous gifts, including tongues, at the time of the ministries of Jesus Christ and his apostles. Certainly, miraculous gifts do not appear as a part of God's working among the believers in all parts of the biblical record. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the twelve patriarchs did not possess or use miraculous gifts (apart from receiving the Word of God in visions and dreams in a day when the Scriptures were being given). The same is true of David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and others. However, when certain prophets of God needed particular support and verification, then God performed great miracles through them, as with Moses and Joshua (Exod 12-40; Joshua 1-7, et al.) and Elijah and Elisha (1 Kings 17-2 Kings 13).

Likewise, in the time of Jesus' ministry and that of his apostles, God verified the message and work of Jesus and the apostles, who had witnessed to God's work in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, by performing mighty miracles through the

apostles, including speaking in tongues. Then miracles ceased when the need for the particular witness was ended and the writing of the Scriptures was complete. Thus Warfield argues when, in speaking about the charismatic gifts, he says,

It is required of all of them [the gifts, such as tongues] that they be exercised for the edification of the church; and a distinction is drawn between them in value, in proportion as they were for edification. But the immediate end for which they were given is not left doubtful, and that proves to be not directly the extension of the church, but the authentication of the Apostles as messengers from God. This does not mean, of course, that only the Apostles appear in the New Testament as working miracles, or that they alone are represented as recipients of the charismata. But it does mean that the charismata belonged in a true sense, to the Apostles, and constituted one of the signs of an Apostle. (Miracles, p. 21.)

Now as to the relevance of tongues-speaking in the church today, we may observe, in addition to the foregoing discussion, first, that the requirements Paul gives for the important offices of elder and deacon (1 Tim 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9) say nothing about the necessity that the bearers of these offices have such gifts (cf. also Eph 4:11-13).

Second, the instructions given Christians as to how they are to live together in the various units of society (Eph 5:21-4:9; Col 3:18-4:1; 1 Peter 2:13-3:7; 5:1-7, et al.) say nothing about the exercise of these kinds of gifts.

In conclusion, the writer believes that the best answer to the question of the relevance of the gift of tongues today is found in the principle that God used this and other miraculous gifts in OT and apostolic times to authenticate the messengers of his Word, and that the present-day Christian is not to seek such gifts. This is not to say, however, that the churches collectively and individually should not pray that if it is God's will, the sick may be healed by his power, or that the church should not pray for deeper illumination in understanding God's inerrant written Word.

Having said this, the writer realizes that there are many Christians of orthodox and evangelical commitment who hold that the gift of tongues as set forth

in Acts and I Corinthians 12-14 is relevant today. Some of them would no doubt recognize that speaking in tongues is the least of the gifts, as suggested in 1 Corinthians 12:28-30, where Paul placed it last in the list, or in 14:5, 18-20, 22-24, where he subordinates it to prophecy. But they would insist that the gift is not completely ruled out for this modern era, since Paul declares, "Do not forbid speaking in tongues" (14:39).

Moreover, some Christians who accept the present validity of tongues would doubtless say that contemporary conditions seem to point to the end time and are the reason for a resurgence of tongues. For corroboration, they point to actual instances of tongues speaking, especially on the mission field. (For examples of the latter, see David Howard, *By the Power of the Holy Spirit* [Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973], pp. 29, 30, 107-110.) Also, they would emphasize that any practice of tongues-speaking today must be done in accordance with the guidelines laid down by Paul (14:26-40). Perhaps most would say that tongues-speaking may best be practiced in private (especially when there is no interpreter) where one can speak in a tongue to God alone (14:2, 8).

These present-day advocates of tongues would undoubtedly agree that this gift, as well as any of the other gifts, is not to be considered an end in itself but must be exercised in love (1 Cor 13:1-39) not as a spiritual ornament to be seen or as a test of spiritual attainment. Rather, they would say, it is to be used as an instrument for the service and glorification of God.