

Spiritual Gifts & the Church

I Corinthians 14 | Week Ten

Overview

The goal of the Fellowship is to create connections leading to authentic community, and provide biblical perspective on becoming a Christian scholar. Therefore, be sure to take time to hear from each other (15 minutes), review the lesson (30 minutes) and to pray for personal concerns and campus outreach efforts (15 minutes). Encourage participants to read the chapter in advance, using it for personal devotionals, reflecting on the Memory Verse and journaling insights from your Quiet Time. Try to connect with others outside of the Fellowship this week. In this way your spiritual and relational goals for the group can be met. Having leaders rotate discussion will allow each to share their perspective.

Where We Are Now

Last time we met the lesson was all about love—Christian love and its true, selfless expression. This love finds its source in God, which naturally should lead us to focus our love, compassion, and mercy on others.

This Week

This lesson is about the role of spiritual gifts in the church. Paul specifically mentions the gifts of tongues and prophecy, but the insights we gain from 1 Corinthians 14 can apply to any unique gifts God has blessed us with. We are to be mature in how we use our gifts, seeking order and structure over chaos and confusion in worship. These insights can also apply to our lives beyond church worship.

The Big Idea

Our spiritual gifts should be used to build up God's church. God desires peace and order in worship. We should be mature in our thinking.

Memory Verse | Cor. 14:20

Looking at the Text

Ask someone to read I Corinthians 14:1-5 - *Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. 2 For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit. 3 On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation. 4 The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but the one who prophesies builds up the church. 5 Now I want you*

- 1 | The Problem with Knowledge
- 2 | Wisdom of Man & Power of God
- 3 | Servanthood & Stewardship
- 4 | Sex, Holiness, & Worship
- 5 | Singleness, Marriage, & Calling
- 6 | Knowledge, Idolatry, & Surrender
- 7 | The Anatomy of an Idol
- 8 | All in the Family
- 9 | It's All About Love
- 10 | Spiritual Gifts & The Church
- 11 | The Resurrection & The End

Get Started

Open up the session by asking someone to pray. This will help break the ice and get everyone in the practice of listening to each other.

Don't Forget

Before you start calling on people to read Scripture or pray, make sure the individual you are calling on is comfortable with the task. You never want to put someone on the spot!

All provided Scripture quotations are in the English Standard Version.

all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up.

1. Paul reminds the Corinthians to “pursue love” in relation to all they do, then he compares the gifts of prophecy and tongues. Why does he say prophecy is more desirable?

Because prophecy builds up the church, not just the individual. John Piper describes it as: a regulated message or report in human words usually made to the gathered believers based on a spontaneous, personal revelation from the Holy Spirit for the purpose of edification, encouragement, consolation, conviction or guidance but not necessarily free from a mixture of human error, and thus needing assessment on the basis of the apostolic (Biblical) teaching and mature spiritual wisdom.

Ask someone to read I Corinthians 14:6-25 - *Now, brothers, if I come to you speaking in tongues, how will I benefit you unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching? 7 If even lifeless instruments, such as the flute or the harp, do not give distinct notes, how will anyone know what is played? 8 And if the bugle gives an indistinct sound, who will get ready for battle? 9 So with yourselves, if with your tongue you utter speech that is not intelligible, how will anyone know what is said? For you will be speaking into the air. 10 There are doubtless many different languages in the world, and none is without meaning, 11 but if I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be ca foreigner to the speaker and the speaker a foreigner to me. 12 So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church. 13 Therefore, one who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret. 14 For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful. 15 What am I to do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also; I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also. 16 Otherwise, if you give thanks with your spirit, how can anyone in the position of an outsider say “Amen” to your thanksgiving when he does not know what you are saying? 17 For you may be giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not being built up. 18 I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. 19 Nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue. 20 Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature. 21 In the Law it is written, “By people of strange tongues and by the lips of foreigners will I speak to this people, and even then they will not listen to me, says the Lord.” 22 Thus tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers, while prophecy is a sign not for unbelievers but for believers. 23 If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your minds? 24 But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, 25 the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you.*

2. Paul is concerned that tongues are being spoken in ways that are not building up the church, leading to greater understanding, or serving a broader purpose. How does this passage relate to church services today? Is there any application of these insights to your academic life and pursuits?

Church services today should similarly seek to build up and edify the church, doing so in a manner that is structured and sensible. We should watch out that

Think About It

Illustrate It

Regarding our unique gifts and calling, Os Guinness writes, “God normally calls us along the line of our giftedness, but the purpose of giftedness is stewardship and service, not selfishness ... In the biblical understanding of giftedness, gifts are never really ours or for ourselves. We have nothing that was not given us. Our gifts are ultimately God’s, and we are only ‘stewards’—responsible for the prudent management of property that is not our own” (*The Call*)

How might this approach change your outlook about your gifts and their role in God’s plans?

Tips for a Better Discussion

Different Christian traditions disagree about the details of certain spiritual gifts, such as speaking in tongues and the gift of miraculous healing, and whether or not such gifts remain in the church today. Try not to get drawn into arguments or bickering about these kinds of spiritual gifts. Instead, focus on the underlying lessons and application 1 Corinthians 14 has for us today regardless of the kinds of gifts it is talking about.

church services don't become things they are not supposed to be, such as seeking merely to entertain the congregation over glorifying God and building up his people. Academically, answers will vary, but overall we should seek purpose, order, and understanding in our pursuits. Our academic life should help build us up, equipping us to do what we are called to do.

3. Verse 20 offers profound insights and advice. What does it tell you about the role of the mind in your daily life? About maturity? About evil?

It tells us that the role of the mind—thinking—is important. Spiritual maturity means thinking in a mature way about the Creator God, His relation to us, and His passion for the world. Thinking rightly about His world is part of our call to integration. Being “infants in evil” means that we should be holy followers, imitators of Christ in thought and actions.

Ask someone to read I Corinthians 14:26-40 - *What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up. 27 If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret. 28 But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God. 29 Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. 30 If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent. 31 For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged, 32 and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets. 33 For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. As in all the churches of the saints, 34 the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. 35 If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church. 36 Or was it from you that the word of God came? Or are you the only ones it has reached? 37 If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord. 38 If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized. 39 So, my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. 40 But all things should be done decently and in order.*

4. Verse 26 says, “Let all things be done for building up,” but the way the Corinthians were holding their services was disorderly. What steps can you take in your life to build up others? What can you do to bring more order where there is disorder?

Building others up requires that we have an outward focus, which means avoiding self-centeredness and the pride that can come with it. We should also place love as central to our motivations and actions. Making a deliberate effort to mentor a younger grad (Mentor Materials available on request). Encourage order and peace without stifling individuality or creativity in worship.

5. In verse 33 we read, “For God is not a God of confusion but of peace.” What sorts of Christian behavior today might give people the impression that God is associated with confusion? What can Christians do to overcome these misconceptions?

People might get the idea that God is associated with confusion if different kinds of Christians are constantly bickering with one another or trying to refute the points another church holds to in ways that are uncharitable or even harsh.

Women in Church: Verses 33-35 are the source of some controversy. Some interpreters see the verses supporting female submission to male authority. Others believe this passage is specifically about problems within the Corinthian church and culture and, as such, shouldn't be applied as normative for Christians everywhere. In 1 Corinthians 11:5 Paul states that women may pray and prophecy in church, so the command for women to “keep silent” (v. 34) seems either limited to the controversy within the Corinthian church or an admonition under certain circumstances during worship. Whatever the case may be, elsewhere we read that women are important participants in the church and are “one in Christ Jesus” regardless of race, class, or gender (see, for instance, Galatians 3:27-28).

Tie It Together

Verse 33 tells us that God is a God of peace, not confusion. 1 Thess. 5:23 also calls God the “God of peace,” while in John 14:27 Jesus said to his disciples, “Peace I leave with you.” We should strive to cultivate peace in our lives, while also avoiding falling into disorder and confusion in our own personal lives and in our participation in church worship.

To overcome these misconceptions we can seek to foster unity whenever possible (but not at the expense of core truths) and emphasize the many things Christians do agree about. We can show that we are united in what we believe about God, Christ, human nature, and salvation.

Wrapping Up

6. The reading concludes with these words: “But all things should be done decently and in order.” Although the passage is about church services, how would the advice Paul gives apply to your life outside of church—for instance, academically, in your work, or in your relationships?

It’s too easy to get caught up in disorder and confusion in life, studies, work, and relationships. If we’re constantly keeping a hectic pace, for example, then this leaves little room for us to bring order and peace into our lives and all aspects of it. Academically we can seek to establish both long-term and short-term goals, planning at least broadly how we will achieve those goals.

The *Life Application Study Bible* says of verse 40: “Too often, in resisting disorder, Christians have opted for rigid, predictable, and unvarying forms of worship in which God’s presence is as difficult to find as in disorderly gatherings. When there is chaos, the church is not allowing God to work among believers as he would like. Worship that ‘is done properly and in order’ should not, however, rule out God’s creativity, joy, and unpredictability. Do your part to have worship be a joyful, peaceful, winsome experience that draws people into it.” Similarly, in our lives we want to foster peace and order, but not at the expense of the joy God intends for us.

As your discussion comes to a close, end the session in prayer.