

Pentwater Bible Church

The Church Part 5

May 1, 2022



Entry into Jerusalem by Jan van Scorel cir. 1526

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For our purposes in chapter thirteen we must realize that all of His attributes are working together in perfect unison. One attribute does not outweigh another. So while this chapter focuses on one attribute, love, it does not mean that love overrides all the others. For example, as a human we can look the other way when a brother or sister in Christ does not treat us well or ignores us. However, sin must be called out for what it is. This does not mean that we do not love. When we correct our children we are administering love so they will know the truth and behave in a proper God-fearing manner. In the same way, when God corrects or administers His justice, it does not mean that He does not love us. He wants what is best for us at all times; He wants us to conform to Him.

Without love what we are trying to accomplish within the Body of Believers will fall flat. The exercise of our spiritual gifts in the Church must be done with love for each other. We just studied the reverse of this in the last chapter where some were exalting their gifts over others; some were asking to have gifts that God had given to others. Spiritual gifts are very important to the Body for its effective operation, but without love they lose their value and can't be administered as God has intended.

I Corinthians 14:1

¹Follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy (KJV).

When Paul says to pursue love and “*desire spiritual gifts*”, he means that spiritual gifts have great value but they must be kept in perspective. By “*desiring gifts*” the apostle is not saying we can obtain gifts from the Spirit, but he means that we should respond to and encourage those with the gift of prophecy that provides the greatest amount of benefit to the most people.

I Corinthians 14:2

²For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries (KJV).

Nobody will understand a person speaking in an unknown language. The Corinthians were backsliding into their pagan background, and even worse, blending it with their Christian beliefs. Their “ecstatic utterances”, therefore, were truly “mysterious”; and there were no interpretations to explain them. As a result, the expression of tongues became an exercise in futility for the assembly as a whole, with only the speaker deriving some benefit. God will not bless syncretism or ecumenism, which is a blending of God's truth with competing philosophies such as other religions, Aristotelian logic, or psychological analysis. The Corinthians wanted to continue to overemphasize this gift to the point that God was no longer blessing it.

I Corinthians 14:3-4

³But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort. ⁴He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church (KJV).

Paul made it very clear that speaking in tongues without the benefit of interpretation does not edify anyone but the individual speaker. The edification resulted from the user of this “gift” thinking that he was the individual object of God’s grace and able to offer praise to God. Though the speaker would not comprehend the content of that praise, his feelings and emotions would be enlivened, leading to a general exhilaration and euphoria. This was not necessarily bad. Paul certainly was not advocate of cold, dispassionate worship. The gifts were not given for personal enrichment, but for the benefit of others (12:7;10:24; I Peter 4:10). Personal edification and exhilaration were often natural byproducts of the legitimate exercise of one’s gift, but they were not the main reasons for the gift. In contrast to “ecstatic utterances”, the prophet is helping others grow in the Lord as well as encouraging and comforting them with a clear exposition of God’s Word.

I Corinthians 14:5

⁵I would that ye all spake with tongues but rather that ye prophesied: for greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying (KJV).

Paul was not depreciating the gift of tongues; he was simply interested in appreciating the gift of prophecy. There was nothing wrong with the gift of tongues; in fact Paul thought it would be good if everyone had the gift. Of course, he had said the same thing about celibacy (see 7:7), but in neither instance did he ever expect universal compliance with his statement. Since both were gifts from God, neither should be despised. In a Church gathering, however, the gift of prophecy was greatly preferred over unintelligible tongues.

As already stated, the tongues gift was given to confirm the establishment of the Church and thus was a temporary gift. We have already seen that love never fails; in the sense it will never come to an end. Positively stated, it is eternal. This is not true of the spiritual gifts. Some of the gifts were foundational (for example, prophecies and knowledge as found in Ephesians 2:20) and others confirmatory (for example tongues as found in II Corinthians 12:12; Hebrews 2: 4). Every gift is linked in some way to building the Church up to maturity. Some were functioning in the early years of the Church Age (prophecy, knowledge, tongues) and others continuing until the Church is perfected. When that perfection is achieved, the gifts will have served their purposes and will be rendered obsolete. Thus, those instructions, specifically directed to the Corinthians’ misuse of tongues, are not directives for the use of tongues today.

I Corinthians 14:6

⁶Now, brethren, if I come unto you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you, except I shall speak to you either by revelation, or by knowledge, or by prophesying, or by doctrine (KJV)?

The gift of tongues was viewed as a measure of spirituality among the Corinthians and this is still true of some Christian traditions. This is why Paul described that natural inferiority of a gift that does not edify the entire Church. He gave the example of his next visit, which if he came speaking in tongues, it would not help them grow. However, revelation, knowledge, prophecy or teaching would be very beneficial to them.

I Corinthians 14:7-13

⁷And even things without life giving sound, whether pipe or harp, except they give a distinction in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped? ⁸For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle? ⁹So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the sky. ¹⁰There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world, and none of them is without signification. ¹¹Therefore if I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh shall be a barbarian unto me. ¹²Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church (KJV).

The same was true in a musical tune or a call to battle. To be profitable for others the notes of a flute or harp or trumpet needed to be clear and intelligible. If not, they amounted to no more than the venting of air with consequences of being an annoying cacophony (v. 7), that is devastating and would cause an army to lose a battle (v. 8).

Human communication operated on the same principles as instrumental communication. Human sounds, apart from a common understanding of their meanings, are worthless. Corinthian preoccupation with unintelligent tongues is also worthless. That is why Paul did not discourage their *interest* in spiritual gifts, but encouraged them to pursue gifts that benefited all in the Church (v. 12; 12:31; 14:1).

I Corinthians 14:13

¹³Wherefore let him that speaketh in an unknown tongue pray that he may interpret (KJV).

If no one was present who was able to interpret, the tongues-speaker should remain silent (14:28).

I Corinthians 14:14-15

¹⁴For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful. ¹⁵What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also (KJV).

So Paul says that it is also true that, however beneficial the gift of tongues might be to its recipient, when coupled with the gift of interpretation it had much more value because it involved not only

the feeling aspects of a listener, but his mental faculties as well. Paul wanted to communicate with the Spirit alone, and not in the assembly to cause confusion.

I Corinthians 14:16-17

¹⁶Else when thou shalt bless with the spirit, how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say Amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest? ¹⁷For thou verily givest thanks well, but the other is not edified (KJV).

The one who possessed the gift of tongues would find his worship enhanced by the use of the gift of interpretation (v. 15). It was also true that anyone listening to him, who did not have the same gift, could not pray with the tongues-speaker. Only another person with the gift of tongues could identify with the lofty experience in the exercise of this gift. However, a Christian with a different gift required intelligible communication if he were to gain any benefit from what was said and have a basis for affirming his agreement by saying an “Amen”. But such comprehension did not exist if the tongue were not interpreted, and so the brother was not edified.

I Corinthians 14:18-19

¹⁸I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all: ¹⁹Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue (KJV).

Paul appreciated the gift of tongues that God had given him. Paul was concerned with ministering to others and thereby glorifying God. He also realized speaking in tongues had limited value for building up the Church compared to what teaching and prophecy could accomplish.

I Corinthians 14:20

²⁰Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men (KJV).

Children prefer excitement to instruction. The Corinthians were like immature children, and their failure to mature spiritually resulted from their neglected study of the Scriptures. Where the study of God’s Word is neglected or not read in a literal manner, there is confusion; and license is taken with its interpretation, which is called “spiritualization”. The “spiritualization” of Scripture will cause many errors of understanding the Biblical text to creep into the Body. The Epistle to the Hebrews stresses this point.

Hebrews 5:12-14

¹²“For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. ¹³For every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness; for he is a babe. ¹⁴But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern

both good and evil (KJV) ”

Peter also stresses this point and wrote,

I Peter 2:2

²“As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby (KJV) ”

I Corinthians 14:21-22

²¹In the law it is written, With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that will they not hear me, saith the Lord. ²² tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not: but prophesying serveth not for them that believe not, but for them which believe (KJV).

Paul, ever the lawyer, summarizes his argument here with the citation of a portion of Isaiah’s prophecy against Israel (Isaiah 28:11-12). Because Israel refused to listen to God’s message proclaimed by His prophets, Isaiah predicted that another message would come. This one would be delivered in a foreign tongue (“*other tongues*”) unintelligible to the Israelites. The “*other tongue*” symbolized God’s rejection of, and disciplinary response to Israel’s stiff-necked rebellion against Him (II Kings 17:14; Acts 7:51). Foreigners, instead of Israel, became the temporary servants of God and their foreign tongue was a punitive sign to Israel of what had taken place (Isaiah 5: 26; Habakkuk 1:6; Matthew 21:43; Romans 10:19-21). Uninterpreted tongues had their place but not in the Church where prophecy benefited believers. Speaking in tongues will only confuse and be unconvincing to an unbeliever.

I Corinthians 14:23

²³If therefore the whole Church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad (KJV)?

In short, the way the Corinthians were speaking in tongues in the Church was of no benefit to anyone. Spiritual gifts are supposed to benefit the entire Body of Christ, not single individuals alone. Without interpretation those who came into the assembly from outside would think they were crazy, scare off unbelievers or new people in the faith, and hurt the witness of the Church.

I Corinthians 14:24-25

²⁴But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all: ²⁵And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth (KJV).

There is no understanding from the showy speaking in tongues without a translator compared to the one who prophesies, so that all in the assembly are learning God's Will. The listener will know that only the Supreme God of all creation can truly discern what is in their hearts and will bring these things out in confession and worship of our Lord.

I Corinthians 14:26

²⁶How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying (KJV).

Paul is addressing the Christian community in Corinth as “*brethren*”. This is a general term including both sexes (I Peter 5:9). When the church met, everyone was free to participate (both men and women) by contributing a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation from one gifted in prophecy, or a word from one gifted in a tongue followed by an interpretation of what was said. The controlling principle in this free participation was the rule of love. All that was said and done was to have as its goal the need of strengthening the Body of Believers. Everything should edify; everything done should build up the Body, not tear it down.

I Corinthians 14:27-28

²⁷If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course; and let one interpret. ²⁸But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God (KJV).

Tongues could be used in the early Church but with specific rules of order and appropriate restraint. If they were used, there must be an interpreter, or the speaker should confine his gift to God and not the congregation.

I Corinthians 14:29

²⁹Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge (KJV).

Now comes the regulation on those with the gift of prophecy. This gift, like all the others, had to be regulated by love, order, and edification. Only two or three at the most could speak in the assembly. Finally the others in the congregation would judge the merit of the speaker's message.

I Corinthians 14:30

³⁰If any thing be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace (KJV).

A prophet might relate a revelation received sometime prior to the meeting of the church. However, a prophet might also experience a new revelation during the church service. If that happened, the prophet in the course of speaking should conclude his message and let the other prophetically gifted member speak. This is another phase of order in those services.

I Corinthians 14:31

³¹For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted (KJV).

This is again the principle of order in process. Prophecy one by one, not all talking at the same time. This should be done in an ordered, controlled, and appropriate manner.

I Corinthians 14:32-33

³²And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. ³³For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints (KJV).

The prophets had instructions similar to the tongues-speakers (v. 28). The “*spirits*” referred to a prophet’s spiritual gift, which he controlled it, not the other way around (v. 30). This means we use self-control to regulate our behavior in the church service. If two or three prophets spoke in a particular service, others so gifted with something to say could do so on another occasion. The church was not a forum for personal pontification or self-glorification; it was a place God was to be honored, but not by everyone talking at the same time. The service, and those who took part in it, should reflect the character of God. He is a God of peace, not disorder; and His Spirit worked to produce the same fruit in believers’ lives (Galatians 5:22). Conversely, if there is confusion and disorder we know that this comes from Satan and is a sure sign that something is amiss.

I Corinthians 14:34-36

³⁴Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience as also saith the law. ³⁵And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church. ³⁶What? came the word of God out from you? or came it unto you only (KJV)?

The central context of this section of Scripture has been order in the worship service. When Paul came to this issue he did not mean that in all circumstances women were forbidden from speaking in a worship service. In chapter eleven we saw that women were encouraged to exercise their spiritual gifts, so it can’t mean not to speak at all. In their services all women, both married and unmarried, were separated from the men and sat at the rear of the meeting room with men in front. This was probably done so they could care for the infants and very young children, which might cause the young married women to leave the service. Some young unmarried women were chattering amongst themselves and caused a disturbance. Others who were married were asking their husbands questions in an elevated voice across the room. Paul instructed married women with questions to ask their husbands the questions within their home, not by shouting out in the church service. Both outbursts were disrupting the order and decorum of the service.

I Corinthians 14:37-40

³⁷If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord. ³⁸But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant. ³⁹Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues. ⁴⁰Let all things be done decently and in order (KJV).

Here is Paul's conclusion not only to the immediately preceding instructions but also to his entire discussion about inappropriateness in worship and the needed corrections (11:2-14: 36). He expected some opposition but warned that those who opposed him did so at their own peril. Anyone who ignores the Lord's commands would find himself ignored by Him at the last day because his actions would show that he never knew the Lord.

The conclusion was that the Corinthians should give special attention to the gifts that were most beneficial to the Church as a whole without denigrating the other gifts, and conduct the service in a proper and orderly manner.

Next message: THE CHURCH AND ITS PURPOSE AND NATURE PART VI
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