

1 Corinthians Session 10: Eagerly Desiring Spiritual Gifts (1 Cor 14:1-40)

(Scripture references based on NIV)

1. Key Learning Objectives

Key pointers to keep in mind as you prepare and lead the session.

To understand:

- Key differences and relevance of the spiritual gifts of Prophecy and Tongues in today's world.
- That the purpose of spiritual gifts is to edify others rather than parade our spirituality.
- God's intended order of worship.
- Love is our guiding principle.

2. Warm-up activity / Starter Question

These questions are meant to establish a baseline level of understanding or tease the themes of today's passage. You may pick one of the two. There is no need to hear from everyone or correct any opinions here.

- What is a quality that you wish more people had/ you have always wanted to have?
- Is there a time when you felt excluded from a conversation or activity? What were some of the specific actions that made you feel this way?

3. Opening Prayer

Thank God for giving us the space and time to discuss and delve deeper into his word as a community these past weeks. Ask for open hearts and minds, as well as continued guidance in understanding His Word so that we may learn to apply it actively in our lives.

4. Context

Links to previous chapters

The earlier studies serve as an important backdrop through which we view this passage which discusses 1) how we should act in community and 2) decency and order within the church.

- 1 Cor 12 extensively covers the importance and role of all spiritual gifts. Therefore, Paul does not condemn any gift, he is simply emphasising their differing roles and relevance in the public sphere.
- 1 Cor 13 emphasises the utmost importance of using these gifts in love.
- 1 Cor 13 also teaches that each church member may have their own specific gifts but, ultimately, all are parts of the same body that work together for the common good.

Prophecy

- Someone with the gift of prophecy would act as a 'spokesperson' for God, 'speaking forth' the messages of God via direct and intelligible revelation.
 - This includes warnings of judgement (Jonah), insight on current issues (Nehemiah), and prediction of future events (Dan 2).
 - Although "telling the future" tends to be the most common view of prophecy, it is not the only aspect!
- In 1 Cor 14, Paul focuses on how these revelations serve as encouragement and advice used to edify and build up others.

Speaking in tongues

- Someone with the gift of tongues would be able to speak in a language they had never learned in order to either minister to someone who understands the language or speak to God.
- Two main definitions derived from Greek words:
 - "Xenolalia" - speaking in worldly, known languages, as the apostles did in Acts 2:1-11
 - "Glossolalia" - speaking in angelic languages, usually accompanied by an interpreter. (1 Cor 14:2 and 26-28)
- Paul specifically warns against the speaking of these unintelligible angelic languages in the congregation since the Corinthians were using it purely for self-glorification, rather than edification of the whole church.

Tensions in the Corinthian Church

- The wealthier and more powerful church members often dominated church discussions.
 - Members came from across a wide range of socio-economic groups.
 - These differences and divisions led to disruptions and clamouring during meetings.
- They were strongly influenced by the secular world and culture around them.
 - Both believers and non-believers often dined together.
 - Outsiders could easily drop in on church meetings (14:24-25).
 - This provided them with opportunities to preach and minister to non-believers.
- Corinthians might have revered and prized the gift of tongues above other spiritual gifts.
 - 1 Cor 14 focuses on the specific gifts (prophecy and tongues) that were causing divisions in the Corinthian Church.
 - Corinthians were heavily influenced by Greek philosophy and culture which emphasised eloquence in public speaking.

Cultural beliefs in relation to women:

- The most common view on v.34 is that Paul was addressing some form of disruptive speech. Some speculate that perhaps it was women who incessantly asked questions during meetings. Moreover, since women of that time were forbidden an education, they tended to ask inappropriate questions which made their lack of knowledge very obvious. This was then deemed “shameful” for both them and their husbands.
- Others speculate that in accordance with prevalent Roman culture, wives speaking with men who were not their husbands, were seen by their culture as flirtatious and hence shameful.
- 1 Cor 11:6 makes it clear that women can pray and speak in the church.

5. Scripture Reading

Assign three or four youths to read the passage aloud.

6. Discussion Questions

- 1) a) **Briefly scan through the whole chapter, then with specific reference to v1-6, what are some of the key differences between the gift of tongues and the gift of prophecy that Paul highlights?**

Leaders can further explain what the gifts of prophecy and tongues are from the information provided in the Context section. To help with identifying these differences, you might provide your members with the prompting questions in the ‘Comparison’ column.

Comparison	Prophecy	Tongues
Desirability - <i>How desirable is it?</i>	Should be eagerly pursued by all (v1).	Good to have, but no need to chase to an extreme extent.
Direction - <i>To whom is the usage of this gift directed?</i>	Speaks to People (v3) (horizontal)	Speaks to God (v2) (vertical)
Intelligibility - <i>Who can understand it? Can it be judged?</i>	Encourages, Strengthens, Comforts (v3) Fallible, open to critique (v29)*	Unintelligible, mysteries of the Spirit, No one understands them (v2) Cannot be understood and thus cannot be judged.

Edification - <i>Who does it edify?</i>	Edifies church (v4)	Edifies self (v4) and no one else (v17)
Purpose - <i>What purpose does it serve?</i>	Brings revelation, knowledge, instruction (v6)	Give thanks (v17) and pray/sing to God via our spirit (v14).

b) With reference to v6-19 and v20-25, why does Paul think that prophecy, not tongues, should be used in a communal setting? Is he issuing a ban on the use of tongues? Give reasons.

Leaders may want to split the group into two so that one group can focus on v6-19 while the other group focuses on v20-25.

More explanation should be offered for the reasons given in v20-25 as the contradiction can be confusing. However, the dissection and explanation of Paul's reasoning is not the most important point here so there is no need to spend too much time on it.

v6-19:

1. Speaking in tongues is useless in the community (without an interpreter) since it is unintelligible (v9).
 - Similar to:
 - A musical instrument that produces a single tone. (v7)
 - A battle cry that is not clearly distinguishable. (v8)
 - Just like French, English or Chinese, tongues are a method of communication that is made meaningful through understanding (v11).
2. Clear and intelligible communication is fundamental to build meaningful connections within the church.
 - Unintelligible tongues create distance between church members as though they were mere “foreigners” (v11).
 - Paul continuously addresses the Corinthians as his “brothers and sisters” (v6, 20). Think about the implication of the Church as one big spiritual family.
 - How would this familial love affect the way you communicate with other family/ church members?
3. Paul does not ban tongues as long as they are used appropriately.
 - Paul thanks God for the Gift of Tongues and uses it often himself (v18).
 - Further reinforced by Paul in v39.
 - It is our responsibility to prayerfully ask God to help us interpret the tongues we speak in (v13).
 - Worship and prayer should be with both our spirit and minds (v15).

- This allows our thanksgivings to reaffirm and encourage other church members (v16-17).

v20-25:

1. Prophecy affirms the reality of God in the church to both believers and unbelievers.
 - To unbelievers:
 - Prophecy exposes the “secrets of their hearts”, prompting them to realise their sinful ways (v24).
 - Prophecy enables them to recognise the presence of God in the church (v25).
 - To believers:
 - Conviction of unbelievers (“God is really among you!”) is an encouragement to reaffirm the reality of their faith.
2. Unintelligible tongue speaking might alienate people from God, rather than bringing them closer.
 - An outside observer witnessing Christians speaking in tongues might imagine it to be nonsensical ravings (v23). The perception of a church full of crazy people would push them further from God.
 - In Isaiah 28, God passes judgement on the unfaithful Israelites through the foreign tongues spoken by their enemies causing them to feel distant from God.
3. To act out of love for both believers and unbelievers requires us to be conscious that our actions will affirm the reality of our faith, rather than hinder others from drawing close to God.

2) a) With reference to v26-33, how should the Corinthians act when they gather in their spiritual communities? How would you summarize Paul's priority for the church when they gather?

When they gather, the Corinthians should:

1. Provide instruction and encouragement to everyone (v31), for overall edification of the Church (v26).
2. Everyone should contribute.
 - Contributions can take many forms: teachings, interpretations, testimonials (v26).
 - Church leaders are not the sole source of meaningful contributions (v31).
3. Maintain decency and order in sharing.
 - Done out of love and respect for other members.
 - All believers should model God's orderliness and perfect peace (v33).

To guide the Corinthian church, Paul outlines four main practices:

1. Only 2-3 members should speak during one session (v27).
2. People speaking in tongues should always be accompanied by an interpreter. If not, they should pray silently to God (v28).
3. Every member should carefully evaluate what is being prophesied (v29) since they are subject to human expression and mistakes (v32).
4. If someone else begins to speak, the first speaker should keep silent (v30).

In a nutshell, Paul would like them to conduct worship in an orderly manner (v33, 40).

b) Does Paul forbid women from speaking in the church?

This is an interesting passage although it may not directly relate back to the main theme in this chapter. Leaders can allocate time for this question as they deem appropriate. Refer back to context and Annex 4 for better understanding.

Paul's two main concerns for the Corinthian church are (i) decency and order in worship and (ii) continual edification.

- Paul does not forbid women from speaking, as women still have their own role in the edification of the church.
- Paul wants them to practise self control by learning in a quiet and peaceful manner during public meetings out of respect for fellow Christians and God.
 - He reminds the Corinthians (specifically women in this context) to ensure that their questions do not create chaos or disorder in the meeting.
- Paul's seeming condemnation of them as 'disgraceful' could refer to the secular Roman culture of the time. (see Context)

3) With reference to Paul's first statement and v36-40, how would you summarise the first and final reminders given to the Corinthians regarding their gatherings?

- First reminder: Love is the metric of measurement used to weigh all actions.
- Final reminder(s):
 - Actively seek to prophesy or speak in tongues (v39) as is most fitting to the situation (v40).
 - Let go of your own prideful ideals and ego (v36). Instead, take special care to follow God's command (as relayed by Paul) (v37-38)

7. Main Discipleship Takeaway

Split up into smaller groups to share. Leaders are encouraged to have prepared their own thoughts and sharings for the application questions.

By basing all actions on love, put aside notions of self-glorification and make appropriate use of the spiritual gifts to build one another up.

8. Application / Reflection

Split up into smaller groups to share. Leaders are encouraged to have prepared their own thoughts and sharings for the application questions. Try to allocate more time for this section.

- 1) How have we regarded some gifts, spiritual or otherwise, as of greater value/importance than others?
- 2) Are there ways that we (or others) use our gifts for self-glorification? What should we do instead?
- 3) How has today's study helped you to understand / appreciate the sequence of events (liturgy) the church uses in worship services?
- 4) Based on the principles that Paul gives in today's passage, what are some ground rules your YSG can set to ensure everyone feels heard and included? (come up with a minimum of 3)
 - *Think about your own YSG sessions, are there times when you have gotten carried away talking about yourself? What were your motivations when sharing?*

9. Closing Prayer

Remain in your smaller groups and take turns to pray for each other. Where there is time, encourage members to share specific areas for prayer and thanksgiving in their lives.

- Thank God for the unique gifts he has given each of us.
- Ask God to show us the ways in which we can bless others.
- Ask God to help us act out of love in every situation.