

CORINTHIANS - The MORE EXCELLENT WAY

STUDY 17

Excel in edifying

Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts,
try to excel in gifts that build up the church. I COR.14:12

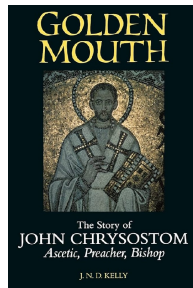
Study 17a: NOT BABES in UNDERSTANDING (14:1-20)

14:1-6 What is the vital difference between speaking in tongues and prophesying (i.e. speaking forth the Word)?

This whole passage is very obscure; but the obscurity arises from our ignorance of the facts described, which, though familiar to those to whom the apostle wrote, have ceased to occur. [John Chrysostom, 4th century]

[v.2] *No man understandeth him* makes it plain that the gift spoken of here is different from that in Acts ii, where all men understood. [Morris 191]

[v.4] ... when Christians assembled together hear the mind of God cogently declared in a language they can understand this promotes **their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation**. [Bruce 130]



14:7-11 According to Paul's military metaphor, on what does the success of Christian warfare depend? (Eph.6:10-17)

[v.11] Speech is an effective instrument of communication, but speech that is not understood is of no power at all. *Barbaros, barbarian*, is an example of onomatopoeia. It denotes a man whose language sounds like 'bar bar', i.e. whose language makes no sense. The word is often used in a derogatory fashion, of those beyond the pale of civilization (just as is the case with the English equivalent). Here Paul's primary thought is that of the unintelligibility of such a person's speech, but the derogatory associations of *barbarian* are in mind also. The ecstatic speech which seemed to the Corinthians a matter for such pride turns out to be the means of making them nothing more than *barbarians*. This would be even worse for a Greek than for us. [Morris 193 - **editor's note**: it is worth noting that the Hebrew pun that gives us the derivation of the name of Babylon (Gen.11) is based on a similar onomatopoeia, *balal*=confusion in Heb.]

14:12-20 With what characteristic does Paul seem to associate childhood? (13:11; Eph.4:14, 17-23; 5:1,8,15-18)

[vv.14,15] Up till this point Paul has concentrated on the value of the gifts to others

than those who exercise them. Now he points out that a man who prays in a *tongue* is not using his *understanding* (the word is *nous*, which stands for the mind, the intellect). The Christian life is considerably more than a mental exercise. But the man whose mind is *unfruitful* is not being true to his Christian calling. This passage is very important for its insistence on the rightful place of the intellect. Notice that this is secured without any diminution of spiritual fervour. Paul is not arguing for a barren intellectualism. There is a place for the fervour so strikingly exemplified in the use of 'tongues' does not provide. The two activities Paul singles out for mention are prayer and singing, functions specially appropriate to public worship (*sing, psallo*, properly means, 'sing to the accompaniment of a musical instrument', but here it is probably used in a general sense). It is still worth emphasis that these activities must be such that worshippers can enter into them wholeheartedly, with the mind as well as with the spirit. All too often prayers are offered in a kind of emotional jargon, and hymns are chosen on the basis of attractive tunes rather than sound theology. [Morris 194-5]

[vv.18-19] We should certainly never have guessed this had Paul not had occasion to say so in the course of the present argument, so careful is he not to encourage the irrational element in religion.

[Bruce 132]

[v.20] Over-concentration on glossolalia is a mark of immaturity. There is indeed a right way for Christians to be childlike — in their freedom from guile ... but in their intelligence they ought to be **mature**. [Bruce 132]

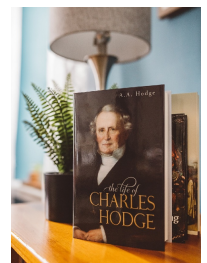
[v.20] It is indeed the characteristic of the child to prefer the amusing to the useful, the brilliant to the solid. And this is what the Corinthians did by their marked taste for glossolalia, and the sort of disdain they testified for prophecy and still more for teaching. [Godet p.715]

**"... so careful is he
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religion"**

Study 17b: GOD'S ATTRIBUTES VISIBLE (14:21-40)

14:21-25 Though tongues are a SIGN to unbelievers, in what does the saving power of God reside? (Rom 10:8-15)

The Jews had refused to hear the prophets speaking their own language, and God threatened to bring upon them a people whose language they could not understand. This was a judgment; a mark of displeasure designed as a punishment and not for their conversion. From this the Corinthians might learn that it was no mark of the divine favour to have teachers whose language they could not understand. [Hodge 293]



14:26-33 How may we rate Paul's priorities in church worship?

[v.27,28] This shows us that we must not think of 'tongues' as being the result of an irresistible impulse of the Spirit, driving the man willy-nilly into ecstatic speech. If he chose he could *keep silence*, and this Paul instructs him to do on occasion ... Just as those speaking with 'tongues' had the ability to keep silent when they chose, so it is with prophecy. It is not an irresistible divine compulsion that comes upon a man. [Morris 199-200]

[v.32-33] There is no thought here of prophesying under an uncontrollable impulse; the prophets' rational mind is expected to be in command, even in moments of inspiration, so that they can speak or refrain from speaking at will, whichever may be more expedient. The **spirits of prophets** are their 'spiritual gifts' or 'manifestations of the Spirit', as in verse 12; the Spirit of wisdom operates through men's higher faculties rather than their irrational drives. Since **God is ... a God ... of peace** (cf. Rom.15:33; 2 Cor.13:11; Phil.4:9), anything like **confusion** or disorder is alien to his nature and will. [Bruce 134-5]

14:34-40 Is there any possibility of ambiguity in Paul's view of women in the church? (11:4-13)

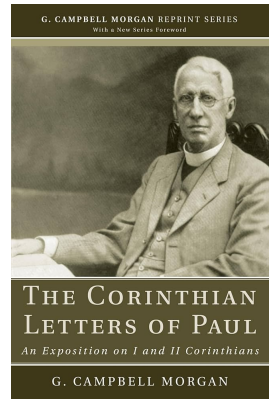
[vv.34-36] Christian women ought not to be 'forward', they should not seek needlessly to flout the accepted ideas of the day ... We must exercise due caution in applying his principle to our own very different situation. [Morris 201]

The saints, distributed in Churches, locally speaking, yet form only one great spiritual whole; the Corinthians should not isolate themselves from this community of saints by adopting customs rejected by all the rest of the body, such as the speaking of women in the assemblies ... For if women cannot put questions without going out of their sphere and shocking decorum much less can they teach without committing an impropriety ... The apostle is not ignorant of the manifold opposition which this injunction will encounter in the Church. Vers. 36-38 are addressed to those who, on the ground of an alleged higher inspiration, would affect to despise the direction which he has just given, as well as all those which had gone before. [Godet 738-42]

SUMMARY: The church must reflect the power, wisdom, holiness, and peace of God, if the world is ever going to bend its knee

How can you know you have the Spirit?

Many have said to me, I am praying for the coming of the Spirit into my life. If we are Christian that is a very foolish prayer, because that which makes us Christian is that the Spirit has come into our lives. Then they say, But we mean the fulness of the Spirit. That is a very different matter. People tell me they have sought it, and not obtained it. When one questions them as to the signs of the coming of the Spirit, they confess that they hoped there would be some definite experience, some entering of power into the life, an illumination and consciousness of the Spirit. Now the Spirit never comes to create a consciousness of Himself. He comes to create the consciousness of Christ. Many Christian people are very conscious of Christ, and yet have not seen that is the very evidence of the work of the Spirit. That is the sign. [Morgan 173]



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