

The Book of 1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 14:12-20

Session 60: Cutting Through the Confusion

We take up our reading with verse. 9.

1 Corinthians 13:9 For **we know in part**, and we prophesy in part.

This makes perfect sense. Think about how this worked. Paul received the initial doctrine from the Lord Jesus. Paul goes on his first apostolic journey where he goes into the synagogues and informs the Jews that their program is no longer in force, and that God is now offering salvation to the Gentiles apart from the agency of Israel.

As Paul witnesses to the Gentiles, they believe his message. Paul forms a local church and ordains elders. Not only does Paul do this, he instructs Timothy and Titus to do this as well.

Titus 1:5 For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee:

Once the Gentile converts are organized into a local assembly by either Paul, Timothy, Titus, or an elder of a church that was ordained of those men that organized the church, the Spirit gave gifts to the members to accomplish the operations of God in their midst; edification being the chief operation for the assembly proper, which is why Paul says to “covet earnestly the best gifts.”

Eventually, the gospel spreads to places where Paul has not yet been. Those groups of converts organize into churches, such as the church that was in Aquila and Priscilla’s home in Rome, before Caesar kicked out all of the Jews.

As to what the Spirit is revealing to those with the gift of a prophet in each assembly, I do not think the Spirit revealed anything ahead of Paul. Once it was revealed to Paul, then that may then be revealed to others who had the appropriate gift. So, what made the gifts so “partial?” Why were they waiting on the written revelation of scripture? I think there are two things at work here,

1) the scripture is coming entirely from Paul, not someone else with a spiritual gift, and that may have something to do with Paul's unique apostleship and authority as the Apostle to the Gentiles, and 2) the form which the truth took, as it was revealed to those with the gift of prophecy in a local church was different from how it shows up in Paul's epistles.

I don't mean the doctrines were different, but the way they were presented was different. In other words, I don't think any prophet, in any church, ever received 1 Corinthians 1:1-3 verbatim from the Spirit. Evidently, there was something in the nature of those revelations that was "less excellent" than the word of God from Paul.

Anyway, I say all of this to say that there was something about the spiritual gifts, that even though they were edifying the saints (and other operations), the best they could do was produce a partial knowledge.

You can't be edified by what you don't know, so if we "know in part," that is a problem where edification is concerned. Therefore, if a prophet only has partial knowledge, then his prophesying, or forthtelling the truth, is also partial. And that means the edification of the assembly is partial.

1 Corinthians 13:9 For we know in part, and **we prophesy in part.**

The word "prophesy" in the Bible is used in three ways. The first way is to predict the future. For example, the Old Testament prophets were often foretelling various prophetic events. I do not think this is what the New Testament prophets were doing.

The second way this word is used is to "forthtell the truth." This is what was happening with the spiritual gifts. The one with the gift of a prophet was getting a revelation of truth from the Spirit. He would then stand up in the assembly and reveal what was revealed to him. This was not a prediction, but it was still supernatural.

The third way the word "prophesy" is used has to do with hearing and learning the prophet's revelation, and repeating it to others that they encountered in the course of their daily lives. Because they are repeating what the prophet said, they

are said to be prophesying, even though they do not have the gift and received no supernatural revelation of truth.

We hear so little about this that you may not be familiar with it. When someone in the assembly repeated what was revealed to the prophet, they were said to be “prophesying.”

Just to give an example of this, Paul has plainly told us that there is no gift that is possessed by everyone. Not everyone was a prophet, not everyone was an apostle, not everyone was a teacher, not everyone had the gifts of healings, not everyone spoke in tongues, etc. I am making the point that this was true for every gift, including prophesying. In other words, not everyone had the gift of a prophet, not everyone received a supernatural revelation from the Lord by the Spirit, and not everyone prophesied in the sense of revealing that supernatural revelation to the assembly. That was only for the one with the gift of a prophet.

But even so, Paul expected everyone in the church to prophesy; to talk about, discuss, repeat, and make known the doctrine that came from the prophet.

1 Corinthians 14:1 Follow after charity, and desire spiritual *gifts*, **but rather that ye may prophesy.**

There are three things here: 1) charity, which is always in force, 2) desire spiritual gifts, and 3) but even more than desiring spiritual gifts, desire to prophesy. Well wait a minute, if this is the spiritual gift, which it isn’t, how could everyone do this? They couldn’t. Just for a moment, I am going to skip us down to verse 31 in chapter 14.

1 Corinthians 14:31 For **ye may all prophesy one by one**, that all may learn, and all may be comforted.

Why does Paul want everyone to prophesy? So that everyone can learn, and be comforted by the truth.

I mention all this so you can be on the lookout when you encounter the word “prophesy” without confusing it with the spiritual gift. Sometimes it is the spiritual gift, and sometimes it is not.

1 Corinthians 13:10 But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.

So, the question is, when will that happen; when will the gifts be done away with? Paul writes, “when that which is perfect is come.” By “perfect,” he is talking about the completeness or fulness of knowledge. And we already know that the completeness of knowledge comes with the written revelation of scripture.

Even though some think so, “that which is perfect” is not referring to the Lord Jesus. I don’t think that is correct. Firstly, Jesus had already come. To that they answer, “Well, this is talking about His coming at the Second Advent.” But, Paul doesn’t use the right pronoun for us to think that. Paul did not say, “when he which is perfect is come,” he said, “that.” So, this is not talking about a person, it is talking about a thing. Again, the context is about knowledge, so this “thing” will be providing knowledge. That is not what is happening at the Advent.

Some have the idea that this refers to the kingdom, when it is established on the earth. But the context here is not about the kingdom on the earth, as that is part of God’s program with Israel, and Paul has introduced the mystery program.

Whatever thing this is, the Corinthians are told to look for it and expect it to come, and when it does, it will complete their knowledge. If this was something that wasn’t going to show up until long after the Corinthians were dead, there would be no need for Paul to talk about “the more excellent way,” if they were never going to have the knowledge they needed.

So, what is this thing that will complete their knowledge and bring them “unto perfection” (completeness)? It is the written word of God. When the word of God is completed and available, then their partial knowledge will be done away with along with the spiritual gifts which were temporarily given to help them gain knowledge.

God was accomplishing the operations that He wanted to get accomplished through those less excellent spiritual gifts; awaiting the time when the complete knowledge would be there, and the more excellent written word of God now accomplishes the operations of God.

God withdrew and did away with the spiritual gifts in the very lifetime of the apostle Paul and in the lifetime of the Corinthians to whom Paul wrote; and only the spiritual gifts which have been in operation since that time were counterfeits and fakes.

The truth is, we are much better off today, with the completed revelation of scripture than the Corinthians were with the spiritual gifts, even with the apostle Paul in their midst. People don't think about it that way, but it is true. And I don't want us to get ahead of ourselves but listen, the completed word of God is far superior to the spiritual gifts, especially when it comes to the issue of sufferings and the things that God wants to build in our inner man so we handle tribulations in a godly way; by patient endurance and the sufficiency of God's grace, and to experience God's strength being made perfect in our weakness.

1 Corinthians 13:11 When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

Paul is going to make an analogy of being a child and becoming a man. He isn't just talking about growing up physically, but he is talking about mental processes. Notice there are three of them listed in the verse; speaking, understanding, and thinking. These three issues match up with the three categories of gifts in chapters 12 and 13:8.

Paul says these things changed when he became a man because as a child, he only had partial knowledge. When that which is perfect is come is when Paul "became a man." When the gifts were done away with is when Paul "put away childish things."

When the Corinthians were utilizing their gifts, they were in the childhood portion of their education, but when the word of God was completed; that is the way God viewed it and He has Paul write this analogy so the Corinthians (and us) will look at this the way God does: now they are in "adulthood."

Paul has already told them they are like “babes” who cannot tolerate strong meat, but need milk. So, the doctrine being communicated to them through the spiritual gifts was in accordance with that; it was childhood doctrine.

But, this is not to say this was wrong; for beginning with childhood and moving into adulthood is the natural way things work. So, with the childhood stage, the gifts were helping to move them along; that was their function. But they were never intended to be the only way to accomplish the operations of God.

But what isn't natural is for children to never grow up. Paul's point is that once we have the completed revelation of scripture, we have the full realm of knowledge so that we no longer should act like children. And just like children, who naturally want to grow up (which is why kids always fudge their age upward) we also should have a zeal for growing up spiritually. If this doctrine was working with the Corinthians properly, they would have, from the time they heard of it, longed for the more excellent way.

Once we realize the childhood aspect of the gifts, we also ought to want that more excellent way. We ought to desire to be dealt with by God as adult sons and daughters. And part of the benefit is that there is a glory in having “that which is perfect.”

1 Corinthians 13:12 **For now** we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

Paul is referring to the present “partial knowledge” situation with the spiritual gifts.

1 Corinthians 13:12 For now **we see through a glass, darkly;** but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

Is that the way you want to see, “through a glass darkly?” When you look out a window if the thing is obscure and you can't see it clearly, is that what you want? There is no glory to have your vision dimmed; there's nothing wonderful about not being able to see clearly, but that was the situation at this time; their spiritual vision was dim, the eyes of their understanding could not be fully illuminated: this is the exact opposite of that concept in Ephesians chapter 1 when that which is perfect was arriving.

1 Corinthians 13:12 For now we see through a glass, darkly; **but then face to face**: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

At that time, they see through a glass darkly, but then, when that which is perfect, it will be like “face to face.” It will be as you see me right now, face to face. In other words, you will see clearly when that which is perfect is come.

1 Corinthians 13:12 For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: **now I know in part**; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

They were in the partial knowledge situation.

1 Corinthians 13:12 For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; **but then** shall I know even as also I am known.

But then, when? When that which is perfect is come; when the word of God is completed.

1 Corinthians 13:12 For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then **shall I know even as also I am known**.

When the completed revelation from God arrived, the realm of knowledge would be complete, for then we have knowledge. What knowledge? Knowledge about the fulness of how God sees you in Christ: not just that we are forgiven in Christ, but that we are justified, reconciled and sanctified.

For example, the doctrine of our sanctification in Christ had not yet been revealed when Paul wrote this to the Corinthians. They were unaware of that which we have been over time and again; that we are dead to sin, alive unto God, and adopted sons and daughters.

As children, they did not have the perfect (complete) knowledge of who they were in Christ – that is what Paul means by “then shall I know even as I am known.”

They did not yet know that they have a heavenly vocation; that they are seated with Christ in heavenly places, far above all principality, power, might and dominion. But when they get the completed revelation of scripture, they will have it all! Their knowledge will no longer be partial. We can know ourselves even as God knows us. And isn't there a glory in that knowledge?

This is the knowledge that allows Paul, when he is locked up in prison, to not be concerned about that, because he is focused on the glory of who he has been made to be in Christ, the fulness of the riches that are his in Christ, and the prospect of his eternity! This is so much better than the opaque, partial, childhood knowledge of the spiritual gifts. Who wouldn't want that which is perfect instead of that which is in part?

1 Corinthians 13:13 And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these *is* charity.

The Holy Ghost is interested in preserving the three things listed here in verse 13, and they all have to do with the communication of God's word. And the greatest of the three is our education in the charity of God.

The Corinthians were told the gifts were all going to be done away with, but something is going to remain. Three things the Holy Ghost is concerned with doing: they all concern the communication of God's word and one is the greatest of them all, the more excellent ministry of them all; that's your education in the charity of God.

To sum up chapter 13; that which is perfect has come. Paul did not die until the more excellent way was in effect. That more excellent way replaced the spiritual gifts. We have seen the why and the when of that. The more excellent way is the issue of the completed revelation from God, the completed written word of God.

God's word is the superior way for accomplishing the operations that God wants accomplished, and that is being put on display in this dispensation of grace.

The Book of 1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 14:21-40

Session 61: Cutting Through the Confusion, cont.

1 Corinthians 14:1 Follow after charity, and desire spiritual *gifts*, but rather that ye may prophesy.

Charity is in force during the time of the spiritual gifts; it is not waiting for the more excellent way. In view of the more excellent way, Paul does not want them to despise the gifts, as those are, at that time, the way the operations of God will be accomplished. So, he says for them to “desire spiritual gifts.”

But the interesting phrase is the last one; “but rather that ye may prophesy.” In order to fully understand what Paul is getting at, look down to verses 22-25, where Paul is talking about the gift of tongues in connection with their local assembly. Paul is going to explain the role of tongues.

1 Corinthians 14:22 Wherefore 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.

We covered this back in chapter 12 when we looked at the gifts in connection with their particular operation. We learned that tongues were the final sign to unbelieving Israel of His (God’s) displeasure with their unbelief.

The problem with the Corinthians is that they had elevated the gift of tongues and they were all trying to speak in tongues in the local assembly. Paul is going to address all the aspects of this in chapter 14.

Again, here in chapter 14, we see in verse 22 that tongues are for a sign, not to believers but unbelievers. On the basis of verse 22, Paul is going to contrast impact on the assembly if they all speak in tongues, or if they all prophesy (which is not referring to the spiritual gift).

1 Corinthians 14:23 If 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? ²⁴ But if all

prophecy, and there come in one that believeth not, or *one* unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all: ²⁵ And 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.

In verse 23, Paul is setting forth a situation that is actually counter to something he said back in chapter 12, verses 11; 29-20, where he said that not everyone has the same gift.

1 Corinthians 12:11 But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, **dividing to every man severally** as he will.

Look at the Oxford English Dictionary definitions: Severally - individually, separately, each of a number of persons by him or her self. Apart from others, not together, independently. Differently, variously. Specially, particularly.

The obvious deduction is that not everyone got the same gift, but the gifts were distributed among the assembly according to the will of the Spirit of God. That is why when Paul writes verse 29ff, he can ask the rhetorical questions.

1 Corinthians 12:29 *Are* all apostles? *are* all prophets? *are* all teachers? *are* all workers of miracles? ³⁰ Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret?

The obvious answer is “no.” Everyone was not an apostle, everyone was not a prophet, everyone did not have the gifts of healings, and everyone did not speak in tongues. But look at what Paul writes in verse 23.

1 Corinthians 14:23 **If 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?

Is Paul describing an impossible situation in verse 23? Yes, and no. In one sense, everyone could not be speaking in tongues because not everyone had the gift. So what is Paul talking about? Why is he warning them about a situation that could not occur? Because that is exactly what was happening in the Corinthian assembly; everyone was speaking in tongues.

What does that mean? If everyone is speaking in tongues, but the gift was not given to everyone, then you have four things going on the assembly: 1) you have people with the legitimate gift of tongues, 2) you have some exercising a satanic counterfeit, which is to say that they truly spoke in tongues but it was not by the Holy Spirit, but by the Adversary, 3) you have some who are faking the gift, who are just jabbering as though they are speaking a language, and 4) and you have some who were bilingual, who knew more than one language. These other languages which they had learned could easily be spoken as if they had the supernatural gift of tongues, which they did not.

The point here is that when all of the Corinthians acted like they had the gift of tongues; it had the very opposite effect on the unbelievers who attended the assembly, than it was supposed to have.

1 Corinthians 14:1 Follow after charity, and desire spiritual *gifts*, **but rather that ye may prophesy.**

Paul is saying to the Corinthian assembly, I want you guys to exercise charity in all you do, and I want you all to exercise your gift appropriately, but when it comes to the assembly, I would rather that you all prophesy, or testify to some truth that has been previously revealed by one with the gift of a prophet. Paul says, if they all prophesy, then when an unbeliever (or unlearned) comes in, that positive response of verse 25 is the result.

1 Corinthians 14:24 But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or *one* unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all:
²⁵ And 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.

That is a pretty good outcome. But, how can they all prophesy if they all don't have the gift? Paul isn't asking them all to exercise the supernatural gift of a prophet because obviously, they don't all have that gift. When Paul uses the word "prophesy" here in chapter 14, he is using the word to mean something different from the exercise of the gift of a prophet.

How many times have we seen that words have more than one meaning? This is one of those times. In this case, to prophesy means for the saints (all of them) to take what has come through the one with the spiritual gift of prophet; and then deal with it among themselves unto edification. To see this, look at verse 6.

1 Corinthians 14:6 Now, 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?

In this verse, Paul identifies four different communications that benefit the local assembly, but only one of them (revelation) is associated with the gift of a prophet. Skip down to verse 29.

1 Corinthians 14:29 **Let the prophets** speak two or three, and let the other judge.³⁰ If *any thing* be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace.

In verse 29, Paul is talking about those with the gift of prophet.

Now put these verses together with verse 6. The one with the gift of prophet gets the revelation, but notice in verse 6 that Paul talks about revelation, or knowledge, or by prophesying, or doctrine.

Paul uses the word “prophesying” when he’s not necessarily talking about what comes through one who has the gift of prophet. We would understand this if we have been paying attention to some things in chapters 12 and 13. And we would understand this if we also fully understood the confusion issue. By that I mean, we must understand the depth and nature of the confusion: what is producing the confusion, especially when it comes to the counterfeiting and faking of the gift of tongues.

Can you see how confusing it must be when you have four different things taking place with regard to tongues, and three of them are not of God? Then, add to that the ignorance of the fact that the word “prophesying” is used as a separate issue from the one with the gift of a prophet. No, the whole assembly does not have the gift of a prophet, but they can all desire to prophesy, in the sense of testifying to what they learned from the prophet, and then dealing with that truth

among their fellow members. That is the “prophecy” of 1 Corinthians 14:1. This is the same meaning of the word in 1 Thessalonians 5, where Paul told them not to despise prophesying; he wasn’t referring to the spiritual gift, but to the spiritual work among the members of the assembly.

In the first five verses of chapter 14, Paul explains the foolishness of speaking in an unknown tongue in the church, seeing that the purpose of the assembly is the edification of its members. If people are speaking in tongues, edification is not taking place.

What Paul is about to say covers all four kinds of “tongues” that are going on in the Corinthian assembly; the legitimate ones and the illegitimate ones. And just to say it, the ones with the legitimate gift of tongues are eventually persuaded by Paul to stop using their gift within the local assembly. But, it took some time. But when they did start using their gift properly, outside of the church, everyone could tell the counterfeit and fake use of tongues because they were the ones still trying to use their gift within the local assembly.

What Paul is saying in 14:1-5 is primarily addressed at the counterfeits and fakes.

In 1 Corinthians 14:6-12, Paul emphasizes the edification issue for the local assembly. The purpose of the local church is not just for communication and neither is it just a social gathering. The local church is a classroom for the communication of sound doctrine which results in godly edification. And if that isn’t taking place, then there is no need for us to gather ourselves together.

In this section (verses 6-12) Paul will illustrate this truth by using the analogies of a trumpet or pipe calling men to war.

In verses 13-25, Paul does a couple of things: 1) he instructs those who speak foreign languages as to how to conduct themselves, and 2) he argues for those who were faking to stop, both of these for the purpose of exposing the satanic counterfeit.

Once the bilingual people stopped using their learned languages and the fakers stopped faking it, this would expose the counterfeit as the only one which was speaking in tongues within the local assembly.

1 Corinthians 14:18 I thank my God, **I speak with tongues more than ye all:**

By the way, Paul spoke with tongues more than they all because he spoke more than one language by nature; he spoke Hebrew; he spoke Greek; and he spoke Latin. But he also had the gift of tongues and he could speak other languages by that gift. If you follow his journeys, he goes into other areas where different languages are spoken; so when Paul says I speak with tongues more than ye all, he covers the whole gamut here; the only thing he didn't do was fake it or have the counterfeit.

Paul says verse 18 to introduce his instructions for those with the legitimate gift of tongues. Notice, the verse ends with a colon, not a period.

1 Corinthians 14:18 I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all:

¹⁹ **Yet 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.

The first thing Paul says is that tongues are not designed to function in the local assembly. The purpose of “rather speaking five words with understanding” is the teaching; sound doctrine, and edification.

What he is plainly declaring there is that the legitimate use of the gift of tongues has nothing to do with a local church and now he's coming along in verse 20 and says you guys need to be men in your understanding of this.

1 Corinthians 14:20 Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men.