

Yesterday we offered (i) an outline of 1 Corinthians 14 and (ii) some expository comments on verses 1-19. Today we turn to verses 20-40.

O/H 1

In verses 1-25 Paul demonstrates that prophecy is superior to tongues – both in the effects which the two gifts had on believers (ie on the church) and the effects which the two gifts had on unbelievers. As we saw yesterday, **verses 1-19** are concerned with the effect which the two gifts had on **believers**. The apostle repeatedly applies the test of *edification* : at the outset – vv. 1-5; in the middle, v. 12; and at the end, vv. 17b-19. In **verses 20-25**, Paul demonstrates that prophecy is superior to tongues from the differing effects which these gifts had on **unbelievers**.

Verse 20. The Corinthians' fascination for the spectacular and the outwardly impressive was an evidence, Paul asserts, of their immaturity. Young children naturally prefer what is glamorous and externally attractive to what is solid and useful. 'If you must act like children', Paul says, 'well and good – indeed I would have you to be infant-like (even babe-like), *provided* that this is in malice'. He would, that is, have them to be as free from ill-will towards others as is a very young infant. But in understanding he would have them be spiritually mature.

Verse 21. Quire possibly it was the mention of their childish dullness, v. 20, which triggered in his memory the passage in Isaiah 28 from which he now quotes. For, as Isaiah points out in chapter 28, the unbelieving priests and prophets of his day ridiculed God's simple and straightforward message as something fit only for a nursery school – for those recently weaned from their mother's milk, vv. 9-10. They were deeply offended by the marked simplicity of God's message. 'Who does Isaiah think he is?', they ask, 'treating us like infants – speaking to us in baby talk!'

But in response to their rejection of His simple and *intelligible* message and warnings, God affirmed that He would soon be speaking to them through an even less acceptable and less pleasant language – in the altogether *unintelligible* words of the foreign invader – that of the Assyrians. It was not that Israel would understand the meaning of the Assyrian's words – the very fact that they were forced to hear the language of the foreigner would be God's message to them. Long since, back in the days of Moses, the Lord had warned that He would punish His people for their unbelief and disobedience by bringing against them another nation – whose language (tongue) they would not be able to understand – a cruel nation who would destroy them, Deut. 28. 47-51. The Assyrian invasion of Israel's land would in effect serve both as a judgement and as a call for their repentance. But, as Paul quoted, 'yet, for all that, they will not hear me'. That is, the 'tongue-speaking' of Isaiah 28 had no beneficial effect on the unbelieving – it left them still unbelieving.

Verse 22. 'So now also', Paul argues, 'the gift of tongues is a 'sign' to unbelievers – whereas prophecy is to believers'. Not that being 'a sign' was the only, or even the principal, function of tongues; vv. 14-17. Here Paul may well mean that, as far as unbelievers were concerned, 'tongues' acted as a 'sign' in the sense of a 'confirming evidence' – both in the days of Isaiah and in first century Corinth.

In other words, that exposure to tongues would, in practice, simply confirm unbelievers where they were and as they were – in their unbelief. That is, that tongues would never turn an unbeliever into a believer – tongues would simply confirm his unbelief. On the contrary, prophecy has the purpose, through its ministry of edification, encouragement and consolation – of confirming believers where they are and as they are – as believers. That is then, the public exercise of the gifts of tongues and prophecy would serve to confirm men as they found them – tongues confirming the unbeliever in his unbelief and prophecy the believer in his faith.

It's no easy task to explain verse 22 in a manner which does justice to both (i) the words which Paul used, and (ii) the context in which the verse is found. I acknowledge at the outset that the interpretation of verse 22 which I have suggested may not be the most obvious, and that I cannot point to an exact parallel elsewhere in scripture for the sense I have given to the word 'sign'. I need therefore to explain the line of reasoning which led me to my interpretation.

First, I note that verse 22 not only sits between verses 21 and 23 but it is directly linked to both – see the 'therefore' (lit. 'so as'), v. 22, and the 'therefore', v. 23. Clearly therefore any meaning which we ascribe to verse 22 must 'fit' into Paul's connected argument.

Second, I focus on what is known and clear – namely, the meaning of both verses 21 and 23.

The quote from Isaiah 28 which appears in verse 21 makes the point that those who were unbelievers before they encountered the 'other tongues' continued to be unbelievers after – they didn't listen to what God was saying to them. That is, the 'tongues' which they heard produced no change in them. The 'tongues' certainly didn't evoke a response of repentance and faith.

Verse 23 shows that Paul was confident that this principle would hold true in a church meeting at Corinth – an encounter with uninterpreted tongues would have no beneficial effect at all on unbelievers. Indeed, exposure to tongues would only serve to confirm the unbeliever's unbelief, expressed in his pronouncement that the whole church was raving mad.

In summary, both verse 21 and verse 23 point to the lack of any positive and beneficial effect of tongues on unbelievers – tongues left them, and would continue to leave them, unbelieving.

(That the 'tongues' of verse 22 refer, not to the 'other tongues' of the days of Isaiah, but to the then present gift of tongues is shown by the words 'are a sign' – not 'were a sign'.)

Third, when considering the link between verse 21 and verse 22, I have been careful to distinguish between the original meaning and setting of the passage which Paul is quoting (in this case Isaiah 28. 11) and the lesson which he draws from it. (Compare the principle and lesson which he drew in verses 8-11 of chapter 9 from Deut. 25. 4; note his use of the same formula, 'in the law ... it is written'.) This has freed me from imposing the contextual background of Isaiah 28 onto my understanding of 1 Cor. 14. 21-25 – in two details in particular.

- 'This people' of verse 21 were undoubtedly the northern kingdom of Israel – identified by Isaiah as 'Ephraim', Isa. 28. 1,11. But I see no ground whatever for jumping to the conclusion that therefore the 'unbelievers' of verses 22-23 were the unbelieving Jews of his day – who would, in any case, have mainly comprised descendants of the southern kingdom of Judah – not Ephraim.

I don't deny that a significant proportion of the unbelieving population of Corinth may have been Jewish, Acts 18. 1-17. But, having noted (i) Paul's triple reference to 'unbelievers' without qualification in verses 22-23, and (ii) the logical consistency of understanding the expression 'those who believe' as referring only to Jews (which it clearly doesn't) if 'unbelievers' refers only to Jews, I regard this as irrelevant.

It seems to me also that the contrast which Paul is striking between the differing effects of tongues and of prophecy on unbelievers would lose much of its point if it applied only to the case of Jewish unbelievers.

- The 'other tongues' of Isaiah 28 were undoubtedly a token and indication of God's displeasure and judgement on the northern kingdom. But I see no reason at all for assuming therefore that the tongues of the Corinthian church were meant to be in any sense a 'sign' of God's judgement – either on Israel or on unbelievers in general. Indeed, I note that neither Isaiah nor Paul speak of the Assyrian tongue in terms of a 'sign' at all.

Fourth, the link between verse 22 and verse 23 (forged by the 'therefore' of verse 23), and the negative effect which tongues are said to have on unbelievers in verse 23, compel me to dismiss any suggestion that tongues functioned as a 'sign' of the truth and genuineness of the Christian gospel – aimed at bringing men to faith. Indeed, Paul makes it crystal clear that tongues lead unbelievers, not to faith, but to mockery. And it is perhaps worth noting that the initial reaction of many of the Jews to tongue-speaking on the day of Pentecost was also, not that of faith, but that of derision – even though they had the advantage of having recognised the disciples' words as being spoken in their own languages, Acts 2. 5, 6, 13.

I offer my explanation as one way of understanding Paul's words which does full justice to both the immediate and wider contexts.

Verses 23-25. 'This would account', Paul continues, 'for the very different impressions made on unbelievers when they are confronted by tongues and prophecy in church meetings'. On the one hand, tongues proved a big turn-off for unbelievers, serving only to confirm their unbelief – their response was undisguised ridicule, v. 23. Confronted with the whole church assembled together and speaking in tongues, unbelieving visitors will say, 'you are out of your mind' – using the word from which we get our word 'maniacs'. Looking around the full room, they will say, 'these Christians may be all *here* but they're certainly not all *there*'.

On the other hand, how different the response to genuine prophesying. Each of the speakers will convict the conscience of the visitor, revealing to him what only God could know about him. The searchlight of the prophetic word will expose the hidden secrets of his heart, making him feel that he has been put on trial. The combination of God's truth and God's presence will be such that he will crumble in repentance – falling on his face, not to enthuse about the amazing prophets and their wonderful messages, but to worship God and publicly declare that God really is among the believers. 'Your meeting place', Paul is saying in effect, 'may have none of the trappings and ornate appearance of the local Greek temple, but there in that ordinary room the unbeliever will discover that he has in fact entered a very real temple – where he is overpowered by the felt presence of the living God' – for the church is indeed 'the temple of God', 3.16.

In verses 26-35, Paul lays down practical directions to govern the use of the gifts in the meetings of the church.

Verse 26. The section opens with Paul's statement of what took place when the church at Corinth met together. Everyone brought a spiritual contribution to the meeting. On the face of it this may seem highly desirable and right but Paul isn't, I suggest, commending them for it. For not only were the Corinthians over-ambitious for the possession of attractive and spectacular gifts, but this same spirit of self-glory had crept into the exercise of those gifts which they did possess. They were all clamouring for an opportunity to hear their own voices, determined to take part orally – and that every time they met. Indeed, it seems that to some extent they were quite prepared to take part all at once if necessary – the women as well as the men. Sounding again his watchword 'edification', v. 26b, Paul sets out in verses 27-35 to regulate the exercise of spiritual gifts in the church meetings.

Verses 27-35. As I see it, the structure of the passage is simple. It was King Solomon who once said that there is a time to be silent and a time to speak, Eccles 3.7. And, if I am right, the key to the section from verse 27 to verse 35 is to be found in the repetition of the words '*speak*' and '*let him/them be silent*'. Paul lays down the rules both (a) about *who* should speak and *who* should be silent, and (b) about *when* they should speak and *when* they should be silent.

Paul repeats these key words as he deals with each of the three cases of (i) the tongue-speakers, (ii) the prophets and (iii) the womenfolk. For the word 'speak', note the expressions 'if anyone *speaks* in a tongue', v. 27, 'let two or three prophets *speak*', v. 29, 'they are not permitted (allowed) to *speak*', v. 34. In each of the three cases, although some translations obscure this, Paul issues exactly the same command, '*let ... be silent*', vv. 28, 30, 34.

The more detailed structure is as follows.

O/H 2

Verses 27-28 give instructions relative to the tongue-speakers

- (i) only two or three are to 'speak' – thereby safeguarding against those with the gift of tongues being allowed to dominate the meeting;
- (ii) they are to speak in turn – that is, one at a time;
- (iii) one is to interpret – using the auxiliary gift to the gift of tongues (cf. 12. 10);
- (iv) there are circumstances requiring the tongue-speaker to 'be silent' – namely, if there is no interpreter present – heralded by Paul's 'But if', v. 28.

Although there might be *as many as three who spoke in tongues*, there was to be *only one interpreter*, v. 27. Apart from any other considerations, permitting only one interpreter served to prevent more than one person speaking in tongues at the same time.

But it is important to note also the clear implication that *anyone* with the gift of interpretation would be able to interpret, not just for one for tongue-speaker, but for *all* tongue-speakers. The ability to 'interpret' was a specific spiritual gift and amounted to the Spirit-given ability to 'translate' spoken tongues – see the note on 'the interpretation of tongues', 12.10, in the first article in this series. There was therefore no question of an interpreter failing to understand any particular tongue-utterance. His Spirit-given ability was no more temporary than were the abilities of the prophet or the tongue speaker. He could interpret *any* tongue at *any* time – that was his gift.

Tongue-speakers were required to remain silent in the church only if there was *no* interpreter present, v. 28. The rule was very simple: no interpreter – no tongues. In that circumstance, the man with the gift of tongues was to keep quiet during the meeting and to 'speak to himself and to God'. It is possible to understand this expression in one of two different ways – either (a) let him do it privately and inwardly, making no sound during the meeting, or (b) let him do it when the meeting is over – at home. Although I regard the words 'let him keep silent in church' as consistent with either interpretation, I suspect that the injunction 'let him speak' favours the second interpretation. (There is no suggestion in the context that 'speaking' was ever other than audible.)

Clearly therefore, if more than one interpreter was at the meeting (as they often would have been – hence Paul's requirement that only one should publicly interpret), they would *each* understand exactly the same meaning from the spoken tongue. When one interpreter provided the church with the interpretation of the tongue, all others with the gift of interpretation would have known whether what he said was accurate or not. There was then certainly no scope for fraud in the New Testament days!

Such a procedure was a million miles away from somebody popping up to 'claim the interpretation' and relating whatever words or pictures had come into his or her fertile mind. Frankly, if somebody wants me to believe that their church is experiencing and practising the New Testament *gift of tongues* today, they will need to convince

me that they are also experiencing and practising the New Testament *gift of the interpretation of tongues*. That is, that they have publicly recognised men who can interpret every case of tongues which they hear and who are therefore able to provide the necessary safeguards and, if asked, to provide independent interpretations for verification. Short of this, I feel entitled to view present-day claims with scepticism and continue to regard today's experiences as something very different to what was happening in the first century church.

Verses 29-33 give instructions relative to the prophets

- (i) only two or three are to 'speak' – thereby safeguarding against those with the gift of prophecy being allowed to dominate the meeting;
- (ii) in this case there is no need to specify 'each in turn', because the man's prophetic words are addressed to other saints and are spoken for the benefit of the whole church. Even the Corinthians should see that it would be nonsense for several prophets to be speaking at the same time;
- (iii) others are to judge (discern, weigh) the message – using the auxiliary gift to the gift of prophecy (cf. 12. 10);
- (iv) there are circumstances requiring the prophet to 'be silent' – namely, if a revelation is received by another prophet – heralded by Paul's 'But if', v. 30.

Paul's words are 'Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge', v. 29. Three questions arise :

(i) **What does Paul mean by 'judge'?** We considered this yesterday.

(ii) **Who are 'the others'?** I can see only three possibilities :

(a) *Other believers in general*. That is, in practice, all other believers in the church in Corinth. Support for this view has been sought from 1Thess. 5.20-21, where, in addressing the whole Thessalonian church, the apostle says, 'Do not despise prophecies. Test all things; hold fast what is good'. If Paul intended these three expressions to be linked together, it appears that he required the whole church to test (examine) the prophecies and then to hold fast only to that which was good in them. Personally, I have doubts that Paul intended the expressions to be linked together in this way. I think it far more likely that the last two clauses should be linked rather with verse 22. That is, that Paul required the church to 'hold fast what is good' and to 'abstain from every form of evil' – and that 'test all things' meant just that (namely, to examine and prove 'all things') and not the prophecies of verse 20. In the context of the passage in 1 Corinthians 14, I would question most seriously whether the generality of believers at Corinth would have possessed the spiritual faculties to test and evaluate the prophecies given.

(b) *The other prophets*. Support for this view has been sought in the word translated 'others'. It has been observed that this word can mean 'others of the same kind', in contrast to a different Greek word meaning 'others of a different kind'. Certainly there are occasions in the New Testament where the two words occur together and where they appear to carry this distinction; e.g. Gal.1.6-7. It has to be said, however, that in the majority of passages where the words occur there is no discernible difference of meaning between them and that they function as synonyms. It is not immediately obvious why those with the gift of prophecy would be especially equipped to form a judgement about the prophecies of others – any more than those with the gift of tongues would have been expected to interpret the tongues spoken by others.

(c) *Those with the gift of 'discerning of spirits'*, 12.10. (The verb 'judge' in 1 Cor. 14.29 is one and the same as translated 'discerning' in 12.10.) The gift of discernment appears to have been a companion gift to that of prophecy. Certainly those with the specific gift of 'judging/discerning' would be best placed to make an assessment of the validity (or otherwise) of the prophetic message delivered. For this reason, together with the resulting balanced structure of 1 Cor. 14. 27-31 as set out above, I favour this interpretation.

(iii) **Why should more than one be required to judge?** That is, if one person with the gift of interpretation was sufficient to interpret for any number of tongue-speakers, vv. 27-28, why is it necessary to have a prophetic message tested by more than one person with the gift of discernment? I suspect that this proved necessary because of the different nature of the gifts of tongues and of prophecy. Unlike in the case of tongues, it was held that the prophetic message came direct from God for the benefit of the saints. That is, that it came with divine authority and would therefore have an immediate effect on the doctrine and conduct of the believers. It is hardly surprising that, because of the seriousness of this, it was necessary to build in the extra safeguard of collective discernment – the local church couldn't afford to get it wrong! (We must bear in mind that during the early days of the church the saints didn't possess an authoritative set of New Testament writings to enable them to crosscheck any supposed prophetic declarations.) The church could rest assured that the prophecy they had heard had in fact come from God because it was endorsed collectively by those with the gift of discernment. By way of contrast, for more than one individual to publicly interpret a case of tongue-speaking would have been both unnecessary and disruptive.

Verses 30-33 advance three considerations why one speaker was to stop and defer to another. First, the prophet *should* stop – to make way for another prophet – because everyone with a prophetic gift must be given the opportunity to exercise his gift – although not of course at the same meeting – that the church may benefit from the gifts of all, v. 31. Second, the prophet *could* stop – he was unable to argue, as would have the false prophets and priestesses of the pagan cults, that he was altogether carried away in some spiritual ecstasy and so ceased to have any will of his own. On the contrary, the Christian prophet remained in complete control of himself, v. 32. Third, consistent with the character of God, meetings of the church should be free from ‘confusion’ (i.e. from disturbance, commotion) – and confusion would certainly have reigned at Corinth if there had been more than one prophet speaking at the same time. For my part, I fail to reconcile the behaviour of those who writhe on the floor, laughing and making animal noises uncontrollably – while claiming that these actions are evidence of being ‘filled with the Spirit’ – with Paul’s clear statements in this section.

Verses 34-35 give instructions relative to the womenfolk

- (i) none are to ‘speak’ – there are therefore no issues about ‘two or three’ or about ‘each in turn’;
- (ii) in the churches they are to ‘be silent’.

Given that the same command, ‘let ... be silent’ (lit.) is found in verse 34 as it is in both verse 28 (the tongue-speaker) and verse 30 (the prophet), it seems reasonable to assume that it carries the same meaning as there – namely ‘to refrain from saying anything’. In the context, the prohibition clearly includes both speaking in tongues and prophesying. As far as tongue-speaking in the church was concerned, I note that Paul has been speaking throughout in terms of menfolk only – see the gender specific ‘himself’ in verses 4 and 28. As far as prophesying is concerned, Paul here appears to strike a deliberate contrast between the prophets and the women – ‘let ... prophets speak’, v. 29, and ‘let ... women keep silent’, vv. 34.

We note in passing that there is some uncertainty about whether the expression ‘as in all the churches of the saints’ should be connected with the end of verse 33 or the beginning of verse 34. The Greek will permit either. At first reading ‘As in all the churches ... let the women be silent in the churches’ may sound somewhat tautological. But the opening phrase may well have been inserted by the apostle because he was about to make it clear that the *requirement* about the silence of the womenfolk applied not only to the church at Corinth but to Christian ‘churches’ generally. (The reference to ‘churches’ in verse 34 stands in marked contrast to the earlier references to ‘church’ as describing the saints at Corinth only; e.g. vv 5, 12, 23.)

It seems that there were some at Corinth who, in several contexts, regarded themselves as a law to themselves, obliging the apostle to refer to the rules followed by the churches of God universally; compare ‘as God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk. And so ordain I in all churches’, 7.17; ‘if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God’, 11.16. The point to note here is that the requirement for the womenfolk to be silent wasn’t restricted to the church at Corinth – it applied throughout ‘the churches’.

The word ‘law’ was sometimes used in a sense wide enough to embrace all sections of the Old Testament; cf. John 10. 34; 15. 25; ‘In the law it is written, With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people’, 1 Cor. 14.21. In all likelihood, by ‘the law’, v. 34, Paul is here referring to the opening chapters of Genesis. It is clear from the allusions which he makes to these chapters in broadly similar contexts (1 Cor. 11. 7-12 and 1 Tim. 2.11-15) that the apostle saw the principle of the woman’s subjection to the man as flowing directly out of both the creation and the fall narratives, Gen. 2.7, 18, 21-23; 3. 1-16.

At the beginning of chapter 11, Paul seems to envisage that there were situations where the sisters could exercise their speaking abilities. I take Paul to be speaking there of settings outside of the local church context – and among other sisters. (There is a handout which surveys briefly the main attempts to explain the seeming contradiction between Paul’s instructions in 11. 2-16 and in 14. 34-35.) But here the focus is unquestionably on the corporate meetings of the church. And in that setting the women are forbidden to speak – indeed forbidden even to ask questions with a view to receiving instruction. For them to speak would be a ‘disgrace’.

Why the reference to asking questions at home? Possibly, Paul can imagine some of the ladies at Corinth objecting, ‘You must be joking, Paul. Never allowed to speak indeed! What if we want to learn something? – Surely you’re not against that! We know that in the synagogue they don’t hold with their women showing any interest in the word of God, but we don’t agree with that here.’

By way of background, Rabbi Eliezer, a contemporary of Paul, taught that a woman should devote herself exclusively to domestic duties and must not ask questions about the Torah (the law of God) at all.

‘Neither do I agree with it’, Paul would respond, ‘but you aren’t permitted to ask questions publicly in the church. Yet, far from discouraging you taking an interest in the word of God, I tell you to ask your questions at home –

to ask your own menfolk there'. The word rendered 'husbands' in the NKJV can, and in my view should, be translated 'menfolk' here. The same word has been correctly translated 'man' – and not 'husband' – on each of the 15 other occasions where it has occurred since chapter 11 verse 3.

With verses 36-40, Paul brings the long section about spiritual gifts to a blunt, but affectionate, conclusion.

Verse 36. Surely, the apostle implies, it would be the height of arrogance for the Corinthians to claim exclusive rights over the word of God – as if it had originated with them or as if they had been its only recipients.

Verse 37. 'Let anyone who regards himself as a prophet or spiritual', Paul is saying, 'acknowledge that my words carry the authority of none less than the Lord Himself'. The point Paul is making is that nobody – no matter how gifted he or she may be – is outside of apostolic authority. Nobody – no matter how gifted he or she may be – is above scripture.

Verse 38. 'And, if anyone cannot recognise a commandment of the Lord when he sees it', Paul is saying, 'frankly there is no point in me wasting my breath in further trying to persuade him'.

Verse 39. With an eye possibly on some in the church who might have wanted to impose a complete ban on the public use of tongues, Paul will not forbid it. That is, Paul's answer to *misuse* and *abuse* is not *disuse* but right and proper *use*. Nevertheless, it is clear that tongues, even when interpreted, are not quite on a par with prophecy – and, though permitted, are not to be as earnestly sought.

Verse 40. Finally, as a summary of the yardstick to be applied to all matters of church practice and procedure, Paul signs off with the words, 'let all things be done *decently and in order*' – with which we can compare his words, 'let all things be done *for edification*', v. 26, and 'let all that you do be done *with love*', 16. 14. It is perhaps worth noting that in this chapter, which does more than any other to regulate proceedings in a New Testament church, there is no reference to anyone there being 'led by the Spirit'. Indeed, although the Spirit was unquestionably the source of all the spiritual gifts (as Paul made clear in chapter 12) and although that which was 'revealed' to the prophets no doubt came from Him, no direct reference is made to the Spirit in the chapter at all.

So much then for my understanding of 1 Corinthians 14. The chapter was written, as it had to be, against the background of the circumstances which prevailed in the church *of the first century*. We form part of the church *of the twenty-first century* and face a very different set of circumstances – possessing, if I am right, neither of the two spiritual gifts which have dominated the whole of the chapter. Of what possible relevance and value then, we may ask, is the chapter to us today? A very fair question – and not dissimilar, I suppose, to that raised by chapters 8-10 in which Paul discussed the propriety of eating food offered to idols – which is hardly a burning issue for most of us today. And yet it isn't difficult to extract from our chapter, as it is from chapters 8-10, many underlying principles and lessons – many *important* principles and lessons – for ourselves today. Let us, in conclusion, suggest just a few :

- (i) the importance of *using* my gift (or gifts) for the edification of the church and not for self-exaltation – which underlies the teaching of most of the chapter;
- (ii) the importance of *speaking* clearly and intelligibly on all occasions, having regard to the capacity of the hearers to understand what is being said – especially vv. 6-12;
- (iii) the importance of *concentrating* on the words in our hymns and worship songs – of giving attention to what we are singing – v. 15;
- (iv) the importance of *speaking up* clearly when praying or praising publicly, so others can say 'the Amen' – which they certainly should! – v. 16;
- (v) the importance of *making every effort* to be at the church meetings – so that, as far as practicable, the whole church comes together, v.23;
- (vi) the importance of *promoting* an atmosphere which encourages an experience of the known presence of God when we meet together – v. 25;
- (vii) the importance of *coming* to meetings of the church in an attitude of contribution – though not necessarily of taking part audibly – but not coming only to receive – still less to be entertained – v. 26;
- (viii) the importance of being ready to defer to others with similar ability to our own – not wanting to dominate – v. 30;
- (ix) the importance of *acknowledging* that the equal status of the ladies to the men, in terms of their Christian blessings and standing, in no way removes the need for their submission to the men and for their refraining from speaking in meetings of the church – vv. 34-35;
- (x) the importance of *realising* that nobody – no matter how gifted he or she may be – is above scripture. All are bound by the authority of Christ through His apostles – v. 37; and
- (xi) the importance of *doing* all things decently and in an orderly manner – v. 40.

[Based substantially on the notes which have been published in Precious Seed during 2002 and 2003.]

STRUCTURE OF 1 CORINTHIANS 14. 27-35

Instructions relative to the tongue-speakers, vv. 27-28

- (i) only two or three are to 'speak' – thereby safeguarding against those with the gift of tongues being allowed to dominate the meeting;
- (ii) they are to speak in turn – that is, one at a time;
- (iii) one is to interpret – using the auxiliary gift to the gift of tongues (cf. 12. 10);
- (iv) there are circumstances requiring the tongue-speaker to 'be silent' – namely, if there is no interpreter present – heralded by Paul's 'But if', v. 28.

Instructions relative to the prophets, vv. 29-33

- (i) only two or three are to 'speak' – thereby safeguarding against those with the gift of prophecy being allowed to dominate the meeting;
- (ii) in this case there is no need to specify 'each in turn', because the man's prophetic words are addressed to other saints and are spoken for the benefit of the whole church;
- (iii) others are to judge (discern, weigh) the message – using the auxiliary gift to the gift of prophecy (cf. 12. 10);
- (iv) there are circumstances requiring the prophet to 'be silent' – namely, if a revelation is received by another prophet – heralded by Paul's 'But if', v. 30.

Instructions relative to the womenfolk, vv.34-35

- (i) none are to 'speak' – there are therefore no issues about 'two or three' or about 'each in turn';
- (ii) in the churches they are to 'be silent'.