

CHAPTER 14

INTRODUCTION TO 1 CORINTHIANS 14

In this chapter the apostle discourses concerning the use of spiritual gifts, and prefers prophesying, or preaching, to every other gift; and directs to the order and manner of using it, and also points at the persons who should exercise it; and whereas there was much confusion and disorder in this church, in the management of the affairs of it, the chapter is concluded with a general exhortation to do everything in a decent and orderly manner. The apostle begins with an exhortation to follow after charity, which he had commended in the preceding chapter, and had preferred to gifts, and yet he would not have gifts slighted, but represents them as desirable; particularly prophesying or preaching, which he prefers above all, ([1](#) Corinthians 14:1) and especially above the gift of tongues, and for which he gives his reasons; he that speaks with tongues, speaks to God and not to men; at least not to their understanding, though he may by his gift deliver the most excellent truths, ([1](#) Corinthians 14:2) whereas he that preaches speaks to men, to their edification, exhortation, and comfort, ([1](#) Corinthians 14:3) the one edifies himself, and the other the church, ([1](#) Corinthians 14:4) wherefore since he had a sincere affection for this church, though he could wish they all had the gift of speaking with tongues, yet he rather desired they might have the gift of preaching, because that was most for edification, ([1](#) Corinthians 14:5) and exemplifies this in himself, that should he come to them speaking with divers tongues, this would be of no use to them, unless he came revealing, making known, and preaching the doctrines of the Gospel to them, ([1](#) Corinthians 14:6) and illustrates this by a simile taken from musical instruments, in which unless there is a distinction of sounds, the music will not be understood, and there can be nothing grateful and pleasant: and such is speaking with divers tongues, without an interpretation, ([1](#) Corinthians 14:7) and particularly by a simile taken from the trumpet, as used in war; which if it gives a sound that is unknown, it will be no direction to prepare for the battle, ([1](#) Corinthians 14:8) which similes are accommodated to the case in hand; showing that words easy to be understood by the hearer should be made use of by the speaker, or speaking is in vain, ([1](#) Corinthians 14:9) each

word in every language indeed has its signification, some idea or another annexed to it; but if this is not understood by the hearer as well as the speaker, they become barbarians to one another, (<4640>1 Corinthians 14:10,11) wherefore such as were eagerly desirous of spiritual gifts, should covet those that were most for edification; and if speaking with tongues were what they were most set upon, they should pray for the gift of interpretation also, (<4642>1 Corinthians 14:12,13) because, for instance, if prayer is made in an unknown tongue, the extraordinary gift indeed may be exercised, but not to the understanding, and so not to the profit of others, (<4644>1 Corinthians 14:14) hence the apostle determines for himself, that though he should make use of his spiritual gifts, both in praying and singing, it should be in such a manner as to be understood by others, as well as himself, (<4645>1 Corinthians 14:15) and it was right for everyone to do so likewise, otherwise persons not knowing what is prayed for, or thanks given for, would be so far from being able to join in the exercise, that they could not so much as say Amen at the conclusion of it, (<4646>1 Corinthians 14:16) and though thanks might be returned for a mercy received in ever so agreeable a manner, yet it could be no ways edifying to a man that did not understand the language in which it was expressed, (<4647>1 Corinthians 14:17) not that the apostle said all this, because he had not such a gift himself, for he had it to a greater degree than any in this church had arrived to, (<4648>1 Corinthians 14:18) yet after all it was more eligible to him to speak live words in a public manner, so as to be understood, than ten thousand in a language the people were ignorant of, (<4649>1 Corinthians 14:19) wherefore he exhorts the Corinthians not to act the childish part, to covet speaking with tongues, but rather the more manly one, to prophesy, or preach, to the understanding of others, (<4640>1 Corinthians 14:20) moreover, the apostle deters them from seeking to speak with divers tongues, by citing a passage out of (<2381>Isaiah 28:11) by which it appears, that speaking with divers tongues and strange languages was sometimes threatened as a punishment, and not given as a blessing, (<4642>1 Corinthians 14:21) besides, speaking with tongues was a sign of unbelief, and used for the conviction of unbelievers; whereas prophesying, or preaching, was a sign of faith, and was for the profit of believers, and therefore the most desirable, (<4642>1 Corinthians 14:22) to which he adds another reason, dissuading from the use of speaking with divers tongues in public, where they are not understood, taken from the opinion that ignorant and unbelieving persons coming into their assemblies would entertain of them, as though they were madmen, (<4643>1 Corinthians 14:23)

whereas should they preach in a language understood, on the contrary it might be of use for the conviction of such persons, who having the secrets of their hearts laid open to them, will fall down and worship God, whose word they hear; and when they depart, report that the divine presence is with such a people, (~~4142~~1 Corinthians 14:24,25) hence the apostle proceeds to direct to the proper and orderly manner of using gifts; that whereas there were different ones among them, one had one gift, and another had another, they might all be used, provided they were used in such a manner as to tend to edification, (~~4145~~1 Corinthians 14:26) so for instance, if speaking in an unknown tongue was used, it should be only by two or three at most, one after another; and there should be an interpreter to make known the meaning of what was said to the people, (~~4147~~1 Corinthians 14:27) but if there were none that had the gift of interpreting, then it was most advisable for the speaker to be silent in public, and only in private speak to God and himself, (~~4148~~1 Corinthians 14:28) and then as for those that had the gift of prophesying, or preaching, these should exercise their gift two or three at a time, one after another, and the rest should sit and judge what they delivered, whether agreeable to the word of God or not, (~~4149~~1 Corinthians 14:29) and should anything be more clearly revealed to one that sat and heard, the speaker should be silent, and give way to him, that he might have the opportunity of declaring it to the edification of the church, (~~4149~~1 Corinthians 14:30) for all that had the gift of preaching might use it one after another, by turns, for general instruction and comfort, (~~4149~~1 Corinthians 14:31) seeing spiritual gifts are subject to and at the dispose of those that are possessed of them: or the doctrines preached by the one are subject to the examination and judgment of the other, (~~4149~~1 Corinthians 14:32) for God, the donor of all gifts, is the author of order and peace, and not of confusion in all the churches, (~~4149~~1 Corinthians 14:33) and whereas the apostle had suggested, that all might prophecy, or preach, that is, that had gifts qualifying for it, he would be understood only of men, and not women, who were not permitted to speak in the church in a way of preaching; no, not even to ask questions there about what they heard, but if they wanted to be informed of any thing they did not rightly understand, they were to ask their husbands at home; this the apostle argues, partly from the law, which commands them to be in obedience to men, and partly from the indecency of such a practice, (~~4149~~1 Corinthians 14:34,35) and seeing as it should seem such a practice did obtain in the church at Corinth, the apostle warmly reproveth them for it, it being what was not to be observed in other churches, by intimating to

them, that the Gospel neither came out from them, nor did it come to them only, (~~4146~~1 Corinthians 14:36) and whoever had a gift of preaching, or a spiritual understanding of things, must allow, that what the apostle said were not the commandments of men, but of God, (~~4147~~1 Corinthians 14:37) but as for ignorant persons, who were affectedly and wilfully such, they must so remain, there was no help for it, (~~4148~~1 Corinthians 14:38) upon which the apostle repeats his exhortation he set out with, to desire in the first place the gift of prophesying, or preaching, though he would not have speaking with tongues forbidden, provided the above rules were attended to, (~~4149~~1 Corinthians 14:39) and concludes with a general exhortation to do all the above things, and everything relating to the doctrine and discipline of the church, in a becoming and orderly manner, (~~4144~~1 Corinthians 14:40).

Ver. 1. *Follow after charity*, etc.] The apostle having so highly commended charity, or love, in the preceding chapter, presses here to an eager pursuit after it; that is, to an exercise of it, and after those things which make for it, and will serve to maintain and increase it: and everything he has said in praise of it before serves as an argument, or reason, to follow hard after it, with an eagerness used in hunting, and with such violence as persecutors express in pursuing and laying hold on those they seek after, to which there is an allusion in the word here used:

and desire spiritual gifts: for though he had given charity the preference to them, he did not mean that they should despise and neglect them, or treat them with indifference, and be unconcerned about them; but, on the other hand, that they should be very zealous for them, ambitious of them, and earnestly covet them; since being rightly used and kept in their proper place, they were greatly beneficial and profitable to the churches of Christ, and the glory of God:

but rather that ye may prophesy: of all the gifts of the Spirit, the apostle prefers prophesying, and recommends this to the Corinthians, as what they should be chiefly desirous of, and more desirous of than of speaking with tongues, which many among them were so very fond of: by which he means, not so much the gift of foretelling future events, though there was such a gift bestowed on some persons in those times, and, in certain cases, was very profitable to the churches; but a gift of preaching the word, or explaining the prophecies of the Old Testament, and of praying and singing of psalms, all which, as appears from some following parts of this chapter,

were included in it; and that not in an ordinary, but in an extraordinary way; a person possessed of this gift could at once, without the use of means, or help of study, preach the word, and open the more difficult parts of Scripture; he had an extraordinary gift of prayer, which he could make use of when he pleased, and at once compose and deliver out a psalm, or hymn, in the public congregation.

Ver. 2. *For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue*, etc.] Or with tongues, as some copies and the Ethiopic version read: Dr. Lightfoot thinks, that the Hebrew tongue, which was become a dead language, and understood but by few, is here meant, and that not without reason; seeing the public prayers, preaching, and singing of psalms among the Jews, were in this languages^{f284}; in imitation of whom, such ministers, who had the gift of speaking this language, read the Scriptures, preached, prayed, and sung psalms in it, which were no ways to the edification of the people, who understood it not; upon which account the apostle recommends prophesying, praying, and singing, in a language that was understood: otherwise he

speaketh not unto men; to the understanding, profit, and edification of men: but unto God: to his praise and glory, and he only knowing, who knows all languages, and every word in the tongue what is said; excepting himself, unless there should be any present capable of interpreting:

for no man understandeth him: or “heareth him”: that is, hears him, so as to understand him; he may hear a sound, but he cannot tell the meaning of it, and so it is of no use and advantage to him:

howbeit in the Spirit he speaketh mysteries; though under the influence and by the extraordinary gift of the Spirit he has, and to his own Spirit and understanding, and with great affection and devotion within himself, he speaks of the deep things of God, and the mysteries of his grace, the most glorious truths of the Gospel, yet the meaning of his voice and words not being known, he is a barbarian to them that hear him; and though what he delivers are truths of the greatest importance, they are a mere jargon to others, being unintelligible.

Ver. 3. *But he that prophesieth*, etc.] Preaches, prays, or sings, in a language understood by the common people:

speaketh unto men to edification; to the building of them up in Christ, and on their most holy faith, so that they grow up as an holy temple to the

Lord: and exhortation; to the more vigorous exercise of grace, and the more cheerful and fervent discharge of duty:

and comfort; of distressed minds, either through the temptations of Satan, or divine desertions, or inward corruptions, or outward afflictions; for all which ends and purposes the Scriptures are written, and gifts are bestowed on men to explain them; and which ends are answered when God gives a blessing to the word; but can never be expected, if delivered in a language not understood. This bears hard upon the Papists performing any part of divine worship in a language unintelligible to the common people.

Ver. 4. *He that speaketh its an unknown tongue*, etc.] Be it the Hebrew language, or any other; some copies, and the Ethiopic version, read, “with tongues”:

edifieth himself; his heart may be warmed, his affections raised, his devotion kept up, and he be in a very spiritual and comfortable frame, knowing and understanding what he himself says:

but he that prophesieth, edifieth the church: which is the great end of the Gospel ministry, which is for the edifying the body of the church: wherefore that which tends to the edification of more, even the whole church, must be preferable to that, which at most can only edify one, and that the speaker himself.

Ver. 5. *I would that ye all spake with tongues*, etc.] This the apostle says, to prevent being misunderstood; for his view was not to bring the gift of tongues into contempt, or to represent it as at all times, and on all occasions, useless and insignificant; nor would he be thought to envy them this gift, or beat them off of desiring it; for, for his own part, he could wish they all had it, was it the will of God; though he must needs say, that prophesying was most desirable by him, as being most profitable;

but rather that ye prophesied; he wished them all prophets, as Moses did all the Lord’s people; he was not against their speaking with tongues, but this was the most eligible, for which he gives this reason:

for greater is he that prophesieth, than he that speaketh with tongues; that is, he is more useful and profitable to men, and so consequently more honourable, in higher esteem, and more valued, and in greater dignity, being in a more serviceable post and office, and which is more beneficial and advantageous to mankind:

except he interpret; what he said; and then he might stand upon an equal foot, and be equally useful with him that prophesieth; but this everyone could not do that spake with tongues; for speaking with tongues, and the interpretation of tongues, were two distinct gifts; (see ^{<4120>}1 Corinthians 12:10,30) and though a man that had the gift of tongues might understand what he himself said to his own edification, yet not be able to interpret it to the understanding and edification of others; and if he could not do this, his speaking was to no purpose: hence the apostle advises such an one to pray that he might interpret, have the gift of interpretation also, in (^{<4143>}1 Corinthians 14:13).

That the church may receive edifying: which otherwise cannot be thought it should, or be expected, and then an opportunity and ordinance would be wholly lost.

Ver. 6. *Now, brethren, if I come unto you speaking with tongues*, etc.] The apostle exemplifies this matter in himself, and supposes it his own case, that should he who was the apostle of the Gentiles, and to be received by them as such, when he came to them, come with this gift of tongues, which he was capable of, as much, or more than any, (see ^{<4148>}1 Corinthians 14:18) and only make use of that,

what shall I profit you? of what use would my ministry be to you? what instruction, comfort, and edification, could you receive by it?

except I shall speak to you, either by revelation; by the revelation of Jesus Christ, whereby he received the Gospel he preached; or by the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ, and the mysteries of his grace, by which they were made known unto him at first, or by a fresh immediate revelation from heaven:

or by knowledge; the word of knowledge, one of the peculiar gifts of the Spirit, (^{<4118>}1 Corinthians 12:8).

Or by prophesying; the gift of prophecy, another of the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, mentioned in the same chapter, (^{<4120>}1 Corinthians 12:10) and already explained:

or by doctrine? the same with the word of wisdom, another gift of the same Spirit, in (^{<4118>}1 Corinthians 12:8). The apostle intimates, that by the use and exercise of these gifts, he might be profitable to them, to lead them into a clearer view of the doctrines of the Gospel, and for the further

improvement of their knowledge in the Scriptures of truth, which could never be done by bare speaking with tongues, and with tongues they understood not.

Ver. 7. *And even things without life giving sound*, etc.] He instances in things inanimate, that have neither reason, sense, nor life, in musical instruments, and these of various sorts:

whether pipe or harp; wind music, or hand music; either that which is blown with the breath, or pressed or stricken with the hand:

except they give a distinction in the sounds; or “tunes”, so as one may be discerned from another; as that this is such a musical note, and that is another:

how shall it be known what is piped or harped? what tune is played; such an use of instruments would be a mere jargon, and not music, and so yield no pleasure to the ear, or mind; and just the like must speaking in an unknown tongue be, to one that understands it not.

Ver. 8. *For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound*, etc.] That is not plain and manifest, so as that it cannot be known on what account it is given:

who shall prepare himself to the battle? the allusion is to the custom of many nations, Jews and others, who, when about to engage in war, made use of musical instruments, particularly the trumpet, to gather the soldiers together, prepare them for the battle, give them notice of it, and animate them to it ^{f285}; the sound of the trumpet was the alarm of war; (see ^{<4015>}Jeremiah 4:5,19,21 ^{<8925>}Job 39:25). And particularly the allusion may be to the two silver trumpets, ordered by God to Moses for the Jews, which were to be made of a whole piece, and to be used for the calling of the assembly, and for the journeying of the camps, and to blow an alarm with when they went to war against the enemy, (^{<0401>}Numbers 10:1,2,9) and were a lively emblem of the Gospel, whose use is to gather souls to Christ, to direct saints in their journeying, and to prepare and animate them for battle, with their spiritual enemies; and of which use it is, when it gives a certain and even sound, as it does when clearly and rightly blown; and that is, the sound of love, grace, and mercy, to the sons of men, through a bleeding Saviour; salvation alone by a crucified Jesus, peace and pardon by his blood, justification by his righteousness, and atonement by his sacrifice; when it is blown aright, it blows a blast on all the goodness of man, it magnifies the grace of God, exalts the person of Christ, debases the

creature, shows its impurity, imperfection, and inability; and expresses the nature, use, and necessity of efficacious grace; and puts believers on doing good works for necessary uses, but not for life, righteousness, and salvation; and so its sound is equal, even, and certain: and when it is so, it is a means of gathering souls to Christ, the standard bearer and ensign of the people; and of engaging them to enlist themselves as volunteers in his service; and of animating them to fight under his banner the battles of the Lord of hosts: but if this trumpet gives an uncertain sound, as it does when grace and works are blended together in the business of salvation; and faith or works put in the room of, or joined with the righteousness of Christ in justification; when particular election and general redemption, or the salvability of all men, are put together; the covenant of grace represented as conditional, and preparations for grace, and offers of grace, and days of grace talked of, that may be past and lost; then who can prepare himself for the battle? persons must be thrown into, and left in the utmost uncertainty and confusion: when this is the case, they know not what side to take on, but halt between two opinions; they know not what that faith is they are to fight and earnestly contend for; they are not able to discern an enemy from a friend; they have no heart to fight and endure hardness, as good soldiers of Christ; nor can they promise themselves, or be assured of victory, which the certain sound of the Gospel gives them.

Ver. 9. *So likewise you, unless ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood,* etc.] This is an accommodation of the foregoing similes to the case in hand: for as unless there is a distinction of notes and tunes, it cannot be music, nor it cannot be known what is piped or harped; and unless the trumpet gives a certain sound, none can know when to prepare himself for the battle; so unless in the public ministry and service a language is spoken, and words made use of, which are understood without difficulty:

how shall it be known what is spoken? the subject matter of the discourse, prayer, or psalm, will be all lost, and therefore cannot be for edification, exhortation, or comfort:

for ye shall speak into the air; into which such words are resolved, and the use and benefit of them, as to others, cease with the breath, by which they are delivered: any part of divine service performed in such a way is all in vain, and to no purpose; it is all lost labour, it is beating the air, and talking to the wind. This condemns the practice of the Papists, performing divine

service in a language not understood by the common people; and exposes the folly of those, who are fond of a florid style, of bombast words, great swelling words of vanity in their public discourses: this is only speaking into the air, with regard to the vulgar, whose edification should be consulted: and as the end of the Gospel ministry is public usefulness and edification, plainness of speech, words easy to be understood, should be used; such as are apt and fit to convey the true idea of things to people in common; these are the acceptable words, which the wise preacher, who is desirous of doing good to the souls of men, will seek out, and studiously make use of.

Ver. 10. *There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices,* etc.] **ançl** , “tongues”, or “languages”, as the Syriac version renders it; that is, as many as there are nations in the world; there may be seventy of them, as the Jews say there were at the confusion of languages at Babel; there may be more or less:

and none of them is without signification: every language, and every word in a language, has a meaning in it, an idea annexed to it, which it conveys to him that understands it, and that cannot be done without a voice ordinarily speaking.

Ver. 11. *Therefore if I know not the meaning of the voice,* etc.] The force and power of a language, the signification of it, the ideas its words convey, but only hear the sound of it:

I shall be to him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh shall be a barbarian unto me: like one of those rude and uncultivated people that inhabit deserts and wild places, who can neither understand the language of others, nor be understood by others; and indeed may be meant of any sort of people, that do not understand one another’s language: the word **rb**, “bar”, and **arb**, “bara”, in the Chaldee, Syriac, and Arabic languages, not only signifies a field, a wood, or desert place, but also without, or any thing extraneous; and being doubled, signifies one that lives without, in another land; a stranger, and that speaks a strange language; so all other nations of the world were barbarians to the Hebrews, and particularly the Egyptians; see the Targum on (~~EBD~~ Psalm 114:1) and so were all other nations to the Greeks, (see ~~EBD~~ Romans 1:14) and also to the Romans: and the sense is, that where the signification of a language and the sense of words are not known, the speaker is like a man that lives in a strange country to him that

hears him; and the hearer is like to one that lives in a strange country to him that speaks, since they cannot understand one another. The word sometimes is used for men, *αφωνοι η ανκοοι*,^{f286}, “that can neither speak nor hear”, men dumb and deaf; and when words cannot be understood, the case is all one as with such persons.

Ver. 12. *Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts*, etc.] Gr. “of spirits”; that is, “of the gifts of the Spirit”, as the Syriac version renders it; and we rightly, “spiritual gifts”; the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, for which the apostle does not blame them; these being what he had before exhorted them to covet earnestly, and zealously affect and desire: but then he further advises,

seek that ye may excel, to the edifying of the church: above all, be desirous of such gifts, and of excelling in them, and abounding in the exercise of them, which may be most profitable and edifying to the members of the church; and what these were, and in what manner to be used, he had before signified: the Alexandrian copy reads, seek that ye may prophesy.

Ver. 13. *Wherefore let him that speaketh in an unknown tongue*, etc.] The Hebrew, or any other, the gift of speaking with which is bestowed upon him:

pray that he may interpret; that he may have also the gift of interpretation of tongues; for as has been before hinted, these two gifts were distinct; and a man might have the one, and not the other; a man might speak in an unknown tongue, so as to understand himself, what he said, and be edified, and yet not be capable of translating it at once into the common language of the people; and if he could not do this, he would not excel in his gift to the edification of the church; whereas if he could interpret he would, and therefore, above all things, he should pray to the Father of lights, the giver of every good and perfect gift, that he might be furnished with this also.

Ver. 14. *For if I pray in an unknown tongue*, etc.] In the Hebrew tongue, which the greatest part of the Jewish doctors insisted^{f287} upon should be only used in prayer; which notion might be borrowed from them, and now greatly prevailed in the church at Corinth; and the custom was used by such as had the gift of speaking that language, even though the body and bulk of the people understood it not:

my spirit prayeth; I pray with my breath vocally; or else with affection and devotion, understanding what I say myself, and so am edified; or rather with the gift of the Spirit bestowed on me:

but my understanding is unfruitful; that is, what I say with understanding to myself is unprofitable to others, not being understood by them.

Ver. 15. *What is it then?* etc.] A Talmudic way of speaking, and answers to *whm*, often used when a difficulty arises in any case, then the question is, “what is it then?” what is to be done? what is most prudent, advisable, and eligible? what is proper to be determined and resolved on in such a case? the same with *τι ουν λεκτεον*, “what then is to be said?” used by Philo the Jew^{f288}: as here, shall I not pray with the Spirit at all, because my understanding, or that which I understand, is of no use to others, being not understood by them? shall I entirely neglect, lay aside, and make no use of the extraordinary gift of the Spirit, bestowed upon me on this account? no:

I will pray with the Spirit; meaning not with the human breath, or spirit only, vocally, with an articulate voice, and distinct sounds, so as to be understood; nor with his own spirit, or in a spiritual way, with a spirit of devotion and fervency, with his whole heart and soul engaged in such service, though this is necessary to it; nor with the common and ordinary assistance of the Spirit of God, though without this prayer cannot be performed aright, with faith and fervency, freedom and boldness; but with the extraordinary gift of the Spirit, so as to pray in an extraordinary manner, with divers tongues, in an unknown language; this, as the apostle was capable of, he determined to use at proper times, and on proper occasions: but then he also resolves,

and I will pray with the understanding also; not merely so as to understand himself, or with an understanding enlightened by the Spirit of God; with a spiritual experimental understanding of things, so as to know the object of prayer, the way of access to him, the need of the Spirit’s influence, his own wants and necessities, and that he shall have the petitions he asks in faith, according to the will of God, all which is very requisite in prayer; but so as to be understood by others: his sense is, that though on some occasions he might choose to make use of his extraordinary gift, yet he would also pray in a language, in which he might be understood by the people; that so they might be able to join with him, and receive some fruit and advantage thereby; and that their souls might be refreshed, as well as his:

I will sing with the Spirit; meaning also not with the spirit, or breath, singing vocally only; nor with his own Spirit, with his heart engaged in the work, with grace in it, in the lively exercise of faith, hope, and love, with much spiritual light, knowledge, experience, and judgment, which are very necessary to the due discharge of this duty; nor merely with the ordinary aid of the Spirit of God, which yet is greatly needful to excite attention, assist meditation, enlighten the understanding, raise the affections, strengthen faith, and make a comfortable application of what is sung; but as before, with the extraordinary gift of the Spirit, by which the apostle was capable of delivering out a psalm, or hymn, extempore, and that in an unknown tongue: but then he also determines,

I will sing with the understanding also; not to his own understanding, or by or with the understanding of what is sung, though that is absolutely needful; but to the understanding of others, and in a language also which may be understood by others, and in which they could join with him in that service: perhaps the apostle may have some respect to the title of some of David's psalms, **ל יקצם**, “Maschil”, which signifies “causing to understand”.

Ver. 16. *Else when thou shall bless with the spirit*, etc.] Which must be understood of giving thanks to God, not in a private way, in the family and at meals, but in a public manner before the whole congregation, for mercies temporal and spiritual, especially the latter; and that not with the breath, or voice only; nor with the affections of the heart, with the soul, and all that is within it, though that is what should be; nor with the common assistance of the Spirit, and under the influence of his grace, which excites to true gratitude; but with the extraordinary gift of the Spirit, pronouncing the blessing, or expressing the thanksgiving with divers tongues, or in an unknown language: when this part of divine service, which by the way is distinct from singing, is performed in this manner,

how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned; **ιδιωτου**, “idiot”. The word **j wydh**, “idiot”, is often used by the Jewish writers, and signifies a plebeian, one of the common people; and is sometimes indeed distinguished from a wise man, or a learned man; but frequently signifies a private person, whether learned or unlearned, that is not in so high a post as others; hence we read ^{f289} **twj wydh μυννυδ**, “of private judges”, which were not of the great sanhedrim, and of private men, as distinguished from kings ^{f290};

“there are three kings, and four *twj wydh*, “private men”, (the Jews say,) that have no part in the world to come; the three kings are Jeroboam, Ahab, and Manasseh; the four private persons are Balsam, Doeg, Ahithophel, and Gehazi:”

here a private man is distinguished from the public minister that blesses, or gives thanks in the name of the people; and not to be understood of a single person, whose place and office it was to say “Amen”, at the minister’s giving of thanks, and who stood in some particular place for that purpose; but of the whole body of the people, who, in distinction from the minister, were in the condition of private men, and all joined, as will be seen hereafter, in saying “Amen”; now the apostle’s question is, that if thou who art a public minister, givest blessing and praise, or returnest thanks to God in an unknown tongue, how shall the common people, or anyone that is in a private capacity,

say Amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest? It was usual to say “Amen” at blessing, or giving of thanks privately at meals, by those that were present, concerning which are the following rules ^{f291};

“he that breaks the bread, might not break it until the “Amen” was finished out of the mouth of those that answered; Rab Chasdai says out of the mouth of the major part of those that answer:”

and elsewhere ^{f292} it is said,

“they answer “Amen” after an Israelite has blessed, but they do not answer “Amen” after a Cuthite (a Samaritan, or any Gentile, or Christian) hath blessed, unless the whole blessing is heard:”

but of this kind of blessing the apostle speaks not, but of blessing in public: upon which all the people, and not a single person only, as with one united voice, said Amen; (see ¹³⁶⁶ 1 Chronicles 16:36 ¹⁶⁸⁶ Nehemiah 8:6) to this practice the apostle refers; concerning which the rule ^{f293} is;

“that the congregation may not answer “Amen”, until the blessing is finished out of the mouth of the priests; and the priests may not begin the other blessing, until the “Amen” is finished out of the mouth of the congregation.”

There were different sorts of “Amen”, or rather different pronunciations of it; of which the Jews say ^{f294},

“they may not answer with a fatherless “Amen”; nor with a sudden or violent “Amen”; (pronounced quick and in haste;) nor with an “Amen” cut off, or asunder (the last letter of it not pronounced): says Ben Azzai, whoever answers with a fatherless “Amen”, his children shall be fatherless; with a quick “Amen”, his days will be short; with an “Amen” cut off, his days shall be cut off; and whoever prolongs “Amen”, his days and years shall be prolonged.”

Now, **hmwty ʿma**, “a fatherless Amen”, was when a person answered, and he did not know what he answered ^{f295} to; and such an “Amen”, in the case here, must a private man answer with, at the giving of thanks in an unknown tongue; and to answer “Amen” to what was said in a language not understood, was not allowed of; so the woman suspected of adultery was to be sworn and examined by the priest in a language she understood; and was to say “Amen, Amen”, to what was said, in a language known to her ^{f296}; for if she did not understand it, how could she say “Amen?” which is the apostle’s reasoning here: but was this an affair of such importance, to be instanced in and argued upon in this manner? with the Jews it was, who say ^{f297},

“that greater is he that answers “Amen”, than he that blesses:”

and indeed they bestow very extravagant encomiums on those who say it in a proper manner;

“there is nothing greater (they say ^{f298}) in the sight of the blessed God, than the “Amen” the Israelite answers with; says R. Joden, whoever answers “Amen” in this world, is worthy to answer “Amen” in the world to come;”

again ^{f299},

“says R. Joshua ben Levi, whoever answers “Amen”, his name shall be great and blessed for ever and ever; says R. Simeon ben Lakish, whoever answers “Amen” with all his strength, the gates of paradise will be opened for him, according to (²³¹⁰Isaiah 26:2).”

Moreover, it was a practice of the primitive Christians at the Lord's supper, at the close of it, to say with a loud voice "Amen"; the account Justin Martyr gives of it is this ^{f300}; that

"when the minister had finished the prayers, and the thanksgiving, all the people present, with a joyful acclamation, said "Amen"; which word, he observes, in the Hebrew tongue, signifies "so be it":"

and this custom might obtain in the Corinthian church at this time, to which the apostle is thought by some learned men to refer.

Ver. 17. *For thou verily givest thanks well*, etc.] In very proper words, and pertinent expressions, with great affection and devotion, suitable to the service;

but the other is not edified; the rest of the people, who do not understand the language in which thanks are given; "thy friend", as the Syriac version reads it; or thy next neighbour, he that stands by thee, receives no manner of profit by it, because he does not understand what is said.

Ver. 18. *I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than you all*.] This the apostle says, to observe to them that he did not despise speaking with tongues: nor did he endeavour to beat them off, and dissuade them from desiring them, or envied their having them, because he was destitute of them himself; for he had this gift in a very eminent manner, and oftentimes made use of it, and was frequently under a necessity of so doing; he could speak with more tongues than any of those that had them, and spoke them oftener than they did; having occasion for them through his travelling into different countries, and preaching the Gospel to people of divers languages; and this he mentions also not in a boasting manner, but in great humility, giving thanks to God, and acknowledging him to be the author of this gift.

Ver. 19. *Yet in the church I had rather speak five words*, etc.] Referring not to the five books of Moses, as Jerom suggests, and much less, as the Papists say, to the five words, "for this is my body"; by the muttering of which they suppose the bread in the Lord's supper to be transubstantiated into the body of Christ; but meaning a very few words, which he chose to speak in the church before the congregation, when and where saints were met together for public worship, for their edification and comfort, and the glory of God; for though at other times, and to other people, he might

think fit to make use of his gift in speaking with divers tongues, yet at such a time and place he thought it much more eligible to say ever so few words

with understanding: so as to be understood by others, as well as himself:

that by my voice I might teach others also; the doctrines of the Gospel, the mysteries of grace, the duty of men towards God and men, and one another:

than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue; than to deliver ever so long an oration in a language not understood by them, which could be of no use unto them; for though they might hear his voice, the sound of his words, yet thereby he could not teach and instruct them to their profit, unless they understood the language which he spoke; and therefore five words understood were more likely to be of use than ten thousand spoken in a strange language.

Ver. 20. *Brethren, be not children in understanding*, etc.] There are some things in children in which it is reproachful for believers to be like them; as nonproficiency in knowledge, want of capacity to receive, bear, and digest strong meat; levity, fickleness, and inconstancy, unskilfulness in the word, deficiency of knowledge, want of understanding, not of things natural, but spiritual and evangelical; which is the more aggravated, since their understandings were opened and enlightened; an understanding was given them; the Spirit of God, as a spirit of understanding, was bestowed on them; they had the Scriptures, which are able to make wise unto salvation, and the man of God perfect; and also the ministers of the Gospel to explain divine truths to them; and many had been a long time in the school of Christ, and might have been teachers of others; and yet; after all, were children in understanding, and needed to be taught the first principles of the oracles of God. The apostle here has chiefly reference to the gift of speaking with tongues, these Corinthians were so desirous of; which when they had it, was only to talk like children; and for them to prefer it to other gifts, which were more useful and beneficial, discovered their judgment to be but the judgment of children; and if they desired this, and made use of it for ostentation, it showed a childish vanity, from which the apostle here dissuades:

howbeit in malice be ye children: in other things it is commendable to imitate children, and be like them; as in innocence and harmlessness of conversation; to be meek, modest, and humble, free from pride and vain

glory; to be without guile and hypocrisy, without rancour and bitterness, envying and malice, but tender hearted, and ready to forgive. This the apostle recommends:

but in understanding be men; or “perfect”, of ripe and full age, who have their senses exercised to discern between good and evil, **rbg** “a man”, says Aben Ezra ^{f301}, in our language, signifies **t [d a l m]**, “one full of knowledge”, as in (^{4201b}Exodus 10:11). It is not perfection of justification that is here meant, for babes in Christ are as perfect in this sense as grown men; nor a perfection of sanctification, for there is no such thing as this in any in this life; there is a perfection of sanctification in Christ, and of parts in everyone that is a new creature; and as that denotes sincerity and uprightness, it is in all that have known the grace of God in truth; but then these are each of them as true of new born babes, young converts, as of older Christians, and strong men: but of knowledge and understanding in divine things; which though it is imperfect in the best, yet in some it is in greater perfection than in others; who may, in a comparative sense, be said to be perfect, or men of full age, who are arrived to a considerable ripeness and maturity of spiritual knowledge; and this is what believers should be pressing after, and desirous of, and make use of all proper methods, such as reading, hearing, and praying, to attain unto.

Ver. 21. *In the law it is written*, etc.] In (^{2381b}Isaiah 28:11) for the word law is not be confined to the five books of Moses, but includes all the writings of the Old Testament; and this entirely agrees with the sense of the Jews. Says R. Azarias ^{f302}

“is it not to be found with our wise men, of blessed memory, in many places, that the word **hrwt**, “law”, comprehends the prophets, and the holy writings?”

And he gives an instance out of the Talmud, and which indeed is very pertinent to the purpose, and is rightly produced, and will support the apostle in calling the prophecy of Isaiah the law, since it is so called in the following passage ^{f303}. R. Chijah bar Aba says, that

“R. Jochanan said, from whence is the resurrection of the dead to be proved, **hrwth ^m**, “out of the law?” from what is said in (^{2518b}Isaiah 52:8) “thy watchmen shall lift up the voice, with the voice together shall they sing”. It is not said “they sing”, but “they

shall sing”: from hence the resurrection of the dead is to be proved out of the law.”

And out of the same book the apostle cites the following words;

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: the words, “men of”, are a supplement of our translators, and which does not seem very necessary: nor is any made in other versions. The words, as they are in our translation of the prophet, are read thus, “with stammering lips, and another tongue, will he speak to this people”. Some difference there is between the two passages, which are of no great moment; the words “lips” and “tongue” are inverted by the apostle; nor was it at all material to observe the strict order of them in the citation: and he has also rendered “stammering lips” by “other tongues”, and that very rightly; for the word **g[l]**, used by Isaiah, does not signify stammering, but derision or mocking; so persons that are spoken to in a language they understand not, look upon themselves to be mocked and derided: and the apostle is to be justified by the Chaldee paraphrase, which renders the words, **l l mm ywnçb**, “with change of speech”: that is, with another and different language. Moreover, it is to be observed, that the prophet delivers the passage in the third person, and the apostle cites it in the first: the reason of this is, because he adds these words to it, “saith the Lord”: partly for the sake of the authority of the words, and partly to engage the attention of the Corinthians to them; and certain it is, that Isaiah’s meaning is, that the Lord would speak in such a manner to the Jews: the other phrase, “for all that will they not hear me”, are taken out of (~~28:12~~ Isaiah 28:12). Some think that this prophecy refers to God’s speaking, by the apostles on the day of Pentecost, with divers tongues, to the Jews; when, though there were three thousand converted at that time, yet these were but comparatively few; the body of the people remained incredulous, and hearkened not to the apostles, though their ministry was attended with such signs and wonders: but rather the sense seems to be this, that whereas the Lord had spoken in the plainest manner to the people of the Jews, by the prophets, as he would afterwards by the apostles, and had repeated his words so often, that even a child might be thought to be capable of receiving them; yet such was their stupidity and obstinacy, that they slighted and disregarded them; wherefore he threatens them he would take another method with them, and speak to them in his providences, by people of different and strange languages, as by the

Chaldeans, Medes, and Persians, in the seventy years' captivity, and by the Romans, and other nations since, among whom they now are; and yet all this has had no effect upon them to listen to the doctrine of the prophets and apostles. Hence the Corinthians had no reason to be so desirous of speaking with divers tongues, since these have been threatened and used by God in a way of punishment to a people, and not a blessing.

Ver. 22. *Wherefore tongues are for a sign*, etc.] Of wrath and punishment inflicted on a rebellious and unbelieving people, and not of grace and kindness, as prophesying, or speaking to them by the prophets, was; and so this is an inference from what is said in the preceding verse, and shows, that there was no reason why believers should be so very desirous of them. But if these words refer to all that is said before on this subject, the word "sign" may be taken for a miracle; and so a new argument is formed against an over fondness for divers tongues, and the use of them in public worship, showing the preferableness of prophecy to them; for speaking with divers tongues was used in a miraculous way,

not to them that believe; who have no need of miracles to raise their attention to what is said, and that it may gain credit with them, or to confirm their faith in it:

but to them that believe not; to prepare them to listen to what might be suggested to them, when they see the persons speaking were endued with miraculous powers, and to engage their assent to it, and belief of it; and so with such persons, and for such purposes, was the gift of speaking with divers tongues used by the apostles, (⁴⁰⁰Acts 2:4-11) but inasmuch as the Corinthian church consisted of believers, there was no need of such a sign or miracle among them; wherefore, if they desired such gifts, and to make use of them, they should choose to do it, not in the church, but among unbelievers:

but prophesying serveth not for them that believe not; that is, not for them only; for prophesying or explaining the prophetic writings, or preaching the word, may be, and often is, the means of converting unbelievers; yet this is not the only use, nor does it serve for, or administer comfort to unbelievers as such; but is profitable to, and serves

for them which believe: it is for their edification, exhortation, and comfort, (⁴⁰⁰1 Corinthians 14:4) it is the means of building them up on their most holy faith; of quickening and stirring them up to the exercise of grace, and

performance of duty; of comforting them under various distresses, inward and outward; and of establishing, strengthening, and settling them, and therefore much more eligible to be used in a church of Christ, than speaking with tongues.

Ver. 23. *If therefore the whole church*, etc.] The whole congregation of believers incorporated together in a Gospel church state, consisting of its officers and private members; the church at Corinth is particularly designed:

be come together in one place; to worship God, to pray unto him, sing his praise, preach and hear the word, as were usually done. Hence may be observed the custom of the primitive churches to meet together, in some certain place, for divine worship; nor did the members of them in common forsake the assembling of themselves together on that account, though it was the evil practice of some of them; the whole church, all the members of it, met together: and it may be seen from hence, that the church, and the place where it met, are two different things:

and all speak with tongues; divers tongues, languages not understood; meaning, not that all that came together spoke with tongues; but that as many as did speak, should they speak with such, and without an interpreter.

And there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers; either private Christians, who, though they have learned Christ, and understand the doctrines of the Gospel, yet are ignorant of languages; or rather the same persons with unbelievers, Heathens that have no knowledge of Christ, nor faith in him, and who also understood no other language but the Greek: if any such persons should come into the place where the church was met together, and should hear him or them that spoke, speak in a language they understood not, and which they were very well assured was equally unknown to the whole congregation, and so could be of no service to them:

will they not say ye are mad? act like men in a frenzy, that have not the use of their reason; since speaking in a strange language to a congregation that know not one word of what is said, is speaking to the air, and to no profit at all to them that hear; and who but a madman would do this? The apostle here argues from the scandal and contempt that would be poured upon them by such a practice; and the rather he mentions this, because it seems

as if their governing view was the glory and applause of men, in which, he suggests, they would be sadly disappointed.

Ver. 24. *But if all prophecy*, etc.] That is, all that speak publicly in the church, not together, but in their order, one after another, as is hereafter directed:

and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned; an unbeliever that has only the knowledge of his mother tongue, in which prophesying or preaching is used:

he is convinced of all, he is judged of all; of all the prophets or preachers; they all reprove him, and detect his secret, as the Arabic version renders the words; and to the same purport the Ethiopic. This must be understood of such persons whom the Spirit of God, under, and by the ministry of the word, powerfully works upon; whose hearts he opens to receive the word, and to whom he effectually applies it; whom he convinces of sin, righteousness, and judgment, shows the evil of their hearts and ways, reproves their errors, convicts them of their mistakes, and informs their judgments, and condemns all their principles and practices which are not agreeably to the word of God.

Ver. 25. *And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest*, etc.] Not to the prophets, or preachers, or to the rest of the congregation, but to himself; the word preached being in the hands, and under the influence, direction, and application of the Spirit of God, a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart; showing the plague and naughtiness of it, discovering the lusts that are in it, detecting the errors of the mind, and filling the conscience with a sense of guilt, and a consciousness of deserved punishment; so that the person looks upon himself as particularly spoken to, and as if the person speaking had knowledge of all that was within him, and adapted his discourse on purpose to him, and delivered it for his sake alone; concluding, that there is, and must be, something more than human in it:

and so falling down on his face: either publicly before the whole congregation; or when retired, as one ashamed of his sins and errors, and not able to look either God, or good men, in the face; and being in an adoration posture; or however, being truly humbled before God under a sense of his iniquities,

he will worship God; pray unto him, and earnestly entreat he would be merciful to him a sinner, and blot out all his transgressions, and forgive him all his sins; and will ever after acknowledge him to be the true God, embrace his Gospel, submit to his ordinances, and attend his service:

and report: or “declare”, freely and openly to the church, to all men, to the world, and to his company from whence he came, and to whom he belonged,

that God is in you of a truth: that the Spirit of God, who is truly God, and searches the deep things of God, and reveals them, and the deep things of men, and makes them manifest, is in the prophets and preachers, otherwise they would never be able to make manifest the secrets of the heart as they do; and that the presence of God is in the church, and the power of God goes along with the ministration of the word: hereby, now many valuable ends are answered, a sinner is converted, God is worshipped and glorified, credit is brought to religion, the church of Christ is spoken well of, and prophets or preachers are honoured; wherefore prophesying, seeing it is both for the edification of believers, and conversion of sinners, ought to be desired, and made use of before speaking with tongues.

Ver. 26. *How is it then, brethren?* etc.] Or “what is it brethren?” The Arabic renders it, “what is the sense of my words?” The meaning of what he had said, the drift of his whole discourse; or rather the sense is, what is to be done in the case he was about to propose?

when ye come together; as a church into one place, to worship God;

everyone of you hath a psalm; not that everyone had this, or any other gift here mentioned, but that there were some among them that had one or other of these several gifts: some of them had a gift of composing and singing a psalm extempore; they delighted in psalmody, and were forward to promote it, and fond of spending the time wholly in it.

Hath a doctrine; others of them had a gift of deducing doctrines out of the word of God, which is profitable for that purpose, in an extraordinary manner, without study, and were capable of teaching them, and instructing men in them in a very edifying way:

hath a tongue others had the gift of speaking with divers tongues; or had knowledge and skill in the Hebrew tongue, could not only pray and sing in that language, and read the sacred text, but could deliver a sermon in it.

Hath a revelation; others had a peculiar insight into the types and figures of the Mosaic dispensation, a clear view of the prophetic writings, and a large discovery of the mysteries of the Gospel, by the Spirit, as a spirit of wisdom and revelation.

Hath an interpretation; others had a gift of interpreting languages, particularly the Hebrew language, when anything was delivered therein by another. Now the apostle answers to the question, what is to be done in such a case, where there is such a variety of gifts, and everyone is desirous of exercising his peculiar gift?

let all things be done to edifying; intimating, that each of these things might be done; every gift might be made use of: he that had a psalm might sing it; and he that had a doctrine might deliver it; he that had a tongue might speak with it; and he that had a revelation might declare it; and he that had an interpretation might make use of it; provided that care was taken that each was done in such a manner, as might be for the edifying of the church that was met together; otherwise, if it was only for ostentation sake to make a show of their gifts and talents, and to nourish their own pride and vanity, no good end would be answered; it had better be let alone: but if edification could be promoted, each gift might be employed; for which the apostle gives the following directions.

Ver. 27. *If any man speak in an unknown tongue*, etc.] He begins with the gift of tongues, with speaking in an unknown tongue, as the Hebrew language, because this they were desirous of: and the rule for this he would have observed is,

let it be by two, or at most by three, and that by course. The Arabic version reads it, “let him speak to two, or at most three, and separately”; as if it respected the number of persons he was to speak to at a time, and that in a separate and private manner: but the apostle’s sense is, that two such persons as had the gift of speaking in an unknown tongue, or three at most, should be only employed at one opportunity, lest too much time should be taken up this way, and prevent a more useful and edifying exercise; and that these should speak not together, which would be a mere jargon and confusion, and make them look like madmen, and render them entirely useless indeed; but in course, one after another, that so an interpreter might be able to take their sense, and render what they said, and express it in a language the people understood: for it follows,

let one interpret what the two or three had said. This practice seems to be borrowed from the Jews, who had such an officer in the synagogue as a “Methurgeman”, or “an interpreter”. The rise of which office, and the rules to be observed in the performance of it, are as follow, delivered by Maimonides^{f304}:

“from the times of Ezra it has been customary that an interpreter should interpret to the people what the reader reads in the law, so that they may understand the nature of things; and the reader reads one verse only, and is silent until the interpreter has interpreted it; then he returns and reads a second verse: a reader may not raise his voice above the interpreter, nor the interpreter raise his voice above the reader. The interpreter may not interpret until the verse is finished out of the mouth of the reader, and the reader may not read a verse until the interpretation is finished out of the mouth of the interpreter; and the interpreter might not lean neither upon a pillar, nor a beam, but must stand in trembling, and in fear; and he may not interpret by writing, but by mouth: and the reader may not help the interpreter; and they may not say the interpretation written in the law; and a little one may interpret by the means of a grown person, but it is no honour to a grown person to interpret by the means of a little one; and two may not interpret as one, but one reads *µgrtm dj aw*, “and one interprets”^{f305}.”

An interpreter might not interpret according to his own sense, nor according to the form of the words, or its literal sense; nor might he add of his own, but was obliged to go according to the Targum of Onkelos^{f306}, which they say was the same that was delivered on Mount Sinai. The place they stood in was just before the reader; for so it is said^{f307},

“the interpreters stand before the wise man on the sabbath days, and hear from his mouth, and cause the multitude to hear.”

And elsewhere it is said^{f308},

“the interpreter stands before the wise man, the preacher, and the wise man (or doctor) whispers to him in the Hebrew language, and he interprets to the multitude in a language they hear,”

or understand. And sometimes these sat at his side, and only reported what the doctor whispered privately. So

“it is said ^{f309}, that when the son of R. Judah bar Ilai died, he went into the house of Midrash, or the school, and R. Chaniah ben Akabia went in and sat by his side, and he whispered to him, and he to the interpreter, and the interpreter caused the multitude to hear.”

And they never put any man into this office until he was fifty years of age ^{f310}. Several of the Jewish Rabbins were interpreters, as R. Chananiah before mentioned, and R. Chutzphit, and others ^{f311}.

Ver. 28. *But if there be no interpreter*, etc.] None that has the gift of interpretation of divers tongues, and he that speaks with them has not that, which was sometimes the case:

let him keep silence in the church; let him not make use of his gift publicly before the whole congregation, since without an interpreter it will be entirely useless:

and let him speak to himself, and to God; he may make use of his gift to his own edification, and to the glory of God, by speaking with a low voice, or in his heart, which he himself may be conscious of, and God the searcher of hearts, and that knows all languages, fully understands; and so may be edified himself, and God may be glorified by him; whereas, if he was to use it openly and publicly, it would not only be unprofitable, but an hinderance to others: or he might retire to his own house, and there exercise it by himself, and in the presence of God, when it might be of some use and advantage to himself, but would be highly improper to bring it into the church, or public congregation; for instead of assisting, it would but dampen their devotion, and therefore it was very reasonable he should be silent there.

Ver. 29. *Let the prophets speak, two or three*, etc.] The apostle having finished the rules for speaking with an unknown tongue, proceeds to lay down some for the gift of prophesying; and observes, that where there are a number of prophets, as very likely there were in the church at Corinth, two or three of them might prophesy, or explain the prophecies of the Old Testament, or preach the Gospel at one opportunity or meeting: he does not use that restrictive clause, “at most”, as before, because if there was any necessity or occasion for it, more might be employed, so that care was taken not to burden the people, and send them away loathing; and this they were to do, as before, in course, one after another, otherwise it would be all confusion, nor could they be heard to edification. Though some have

thought that they might speak together at one and the same time, in different parts of the church:

and let the other judge: the other prophets that sit and hear, and all such as have a spirit of discerning, whether what the prophets say comes from their own spirits, or from a lying spirit, from the spirit of antichrist, or whether from the Spirit of God; and even the body of the people, private members of the church, and hearers, might judge of the doctrine for themselves, according to the word of God, the standard of faith and practice; and were not to believe every spirit, but try them, whether they were of God, and their doctrines by his word, whether they were true or false; for the spiritual man is in a measure capable of judging all things of a spiritual kind, through that spiritual experience he has of the word of God, and divine things, and by the assistance of the Spirit of God.

Ver. 30. *If anything be revealed to another that sitteth by*, etc.] To another prophet that sits, and hears, and tries, and judges what he hears; if he has a clearer revelation made to him of what the other is speaking of, and has a more distinct knowledge of it, and is capable of removing any difficulty that attends it, and of expressing it more plainly, and of proving it more largely, and of setting it in an easier light to the understandings of men:

let the first hold his peace; be that was speaking, upon such an intimation being made to him, let him stop, and give way to him that has the revelation, that the church may receive the benefit of it: hence it may be observed, that the custom of the primitive churches was to hear the word sitting, and the prophet or preacher stood, or sat, as he thought fit; (see Gill on “~~400~~ Matthew 5:1”), and that sometimes a revelation was made, and light conveyed to these prophets in a very sudden and extraordinary manner, when it was proper that it should be at once communicated for the good of the whole society: but this is to be understood only of those prophets or preachers, not of the common people; for it must not be thought that any that rose up, and pretended to a revelation, might be indulged to deliver it, and the speaker give way to him, which might be attended with much confusion, and many bad consequences; but only such who were known to have gifts, and who at certain times had peculiar revelations made unto them.

Ver. 31. *For ye may all prophesy one by one*, etc.] Not every member of the church, but everyone that had the gift of prophecy; so that they were

not confined to two or three prophets at a meeting, but as many as would, or as had anything to deliver, and as time would allow; only care must be taken that confusion be avoided, and order preserved by exercising in turns one after another. This was agreeably to the custom of the Jewish synagogue, in which more might read and speak, though but one at a time; for

“it is forbidden to read in the book of the law, except one only, that all may hearken, and be silent, that so they may hear the words from his mouth, as if they had heard them that very moment from Mount Sinai.”

So here,

that all may learn; more of the doctrine of Christ, and of the mind and will of God, and attain to a greater knowledge in the mysteries of the Gospel, and in the duties of religion, even prophets and teachers as well as private members and common hearers; for there are none who know ever so much, but are capable of being further taught and instructed, and that sometimes by such whose gifts are interior to them:

and all may be comforted; or exhorted, or receive exhortation. The word used signifies both; and prophecy is useful both for exhortation and comfort, and that both to preachers and people.

Ver. 32. *And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.*] Meaning either that the doctrines which the prophets deliver, the explanations they give of passages of Scriptures, the revelations they declare, are subject to the examination, judgment, and censure of other prophets; who have a right to try and judge them, either according to a more clear revelation they may have, or rather according to the sure word of prophecy, the Scriptures of truth; and indeed they are subject to the trial and judgment of the whole church, and therefore ought not to be stiff in their own sentiments, and obstinately persist in them, but cheerfully and readily submit them to be examined, and approved or disapproved by others; and particularly when one that sits by signifies he has something revealed to him, which will better explain, or give further light into what the speaker is upon, he ought to submit and give way to him; and thereby truth may be made manifest and established, instruction, edification, and comfort promoted, and peace and order preserved: or else the sense is, that the spiritual gifts of the prophets, and the inspirations and instincts by

which they are acted, and the affections which are excited in them, are subject to themselves, so that they can use, or not use those gifts; though they have the word of the Lord they can forbear speaking, as Jeremy did, for a while, and as the case of Jonah shows; or they can refrain themselves and be silent, and wait till they have proper opportunity of speaking, being not like the prophets of false gods, who are acted by an evil spirit, and observe no order or decorum, but with a sort of fury and madness deliver involuntarily what is suggested to them: but such is not the case of true prophets that are influenced and directed by the Spirit of God, who will give way to one another; one will be silent while the other speaks, and by turns prophesy one after another; and where there is not such a subjection, it is a sign that the Spirit of God is not in them, for the reason that follows.

Ver. 33. *For God is not the author of confusion*, etc.] Or disorder, or “tumult”, as the Syriac renders it; wherefore he does not inspire and excite his prophets to deliver themselves in a disorderly and tumultuous manner, so as to break in one upon another; but when one speaks, the other is silent, or when one has anything revealed to him, and he signifies it in a proper manner, the other stops and gives way to him, and when he has done another succeeds, and so the rest in order, till the whole opportunity is filled up in an orderly and edifying manner; and whatever is contrary to, or breaks in upon such a method, God is not the author of: for he is the author

of peace, harmony, unity, and concord among his prophets and teachers, and so of order, for the former cannot be without the latter; where there is no order in the ministry, there can be no peace among the ministers, nor comfort in the churches; but God is the God of peace, he calls for, requires, disposes, and approves of peace and order among all his people:

as in all churches of the saints. The Vulgate Latin reads, “as I teach in all”, etc. and so read some copies, and may refer to all that is said before; and the sense be, that all the rules he had prescribed concerning speaking with tongues, and prophesying, were not new ones, but such as he had directed to be observed in all churches he was concerned with, and which consisted of holy and good men; or God is the author, not of confusion, but of peace in all the churches; he orders and disposes peace among them, and they attend to it: peace and order, and not confusion and tumult, prevail in all churches that deserve to be called churches of the saints, and therefore were in this to be imitated by the church at Corinth.

Ver. 34. *Let your women keep silence in the churches*, etc.] This is a restriction of, and an exception to one of the above rules, that all might prophesy; in which he would be understood of men only, and not of women; and is directed against a practice which seems to have prevailed in this church at Corinth, allowing women to preach and teach in it; and this being a disorderly practice, and what was not used in other churches, the apostle forbids and condemns, and not without reason:

for it is not permitted unto them to speak; that is, in public assemblies, in the church of God, they might not speak with tongues, nor prophesy, or preach, or teach the word. All speaking is not prohibited; they might speak their experiences to the church, or give an account of the work of God upon their souls; they might speak to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs; or speak as an evidence in any case at a church meeting; but not in such sort, as carried in it direction, instruction, government, and authority. It was not allowed by God that they should speak in any authoritative manner in the church; nor was it suffered in the churches of Christ; nor was it admitted of in the Jewish synagogue; there, we are told ^{f312}, the men came to teach, and the women [wmçl, “to hear”]; and one of their canons runs thus ^{f313};

“a woman may not read (that is, in the law), *rwboxb*, “in the congregation”, or church, because of the honour of the congregation;”

for they thought it a dishonourable thing to a public assembly for a woman to read, though they even allowed a child to do it that was capable of it.

But they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. In (⁻⁰⁰⁸¹⁶Genesis 3:16), “thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee”. By this the apostle would signify, that the reason why women are not to speak in the church, or to preach and teach publicly, or be concerned in the ministerial function, is, because this is an act of power, and authority; of rule and government, and so contrary to that subjection which God in his law requires of women unto men. The extraordinary instances of Deborah, Huldah, and Anna, must not be drawn into a rule or example in such cases.

Ver. 35. *And if they will learn anything*, etc.] If they are desirous of learning anything in relation to doctrine, duty, or discipline, and of improving their knowledge of divine things, which is very commendable in

them; if any difficulty arises in their minds whilst hearing the word, which they want to have removed, or any question to ask for information sake,

let them ask their husbands at home; privately, when retired from the public assembly; for though men might ask one another concerning this, and the other point, in the church, as was usual in the synagogue worship, to which this church at Corinth in many things conformed; yet women were not allowed this freedom, and even in things which belonged to women to do; as for instance, making the cake of the first of their dough, which was to be an heave offering to the Lord, the men were to teach the women at home how, and when to separate it from the rest ^{ƒ314}. So the apostle directs women, when they wanted to be informed about any point, to apply to their husbands at their own houses, if they were such as were capable of instructing them; if not, they might apply to other men that were Christian men, and men of knowledge, especially to the prophets, pastors, and teachers of the church, at their habitations:

for it is a shame for women to speak in the church; it is a shame to themselves, as being contrary to the natural modesty and bashfulness of the sex, and a shame to the church, to the non-members of it, and especially to the elders, and more experienced part of it, to be taught and directed by a woman; it is a disgrace to herself and sex, as betraying uncommon pride and vanity, and an unnatural boldness and confidence; and a disgrace to the church to be under such a ministry and conduct.

Ver. 36. *What? came the word of God out from you?* etc.] That you must give laws to other churches, and introduce new customs and practices never known or used before? No; the word of the Lord came out of Zion, and the law or doctrine of the Lord, the word of the Gospel, the doctrine of the grace of God, came out of Jerusalem. The apostles that first preached it were Jews, and they preached it first in their own land, and planted churches there, before it came to the Gentiles; and therefore the apostle suggests it would be right to consider what was the practice of the churches in Judea, the first Gospel churches, concerning women's speaking in the church, and to conform thereunto; when they would be able to observe, that these first churches from whence the word of God came to them, disallowed of any such practice, but in this point agreed with the old synagogue:

or came it unto you only? no, it came to many other nations, and people, and towns, and cities besides them; and many churches were formed

among the Gentiles, who had no such custom, did not permit their women to speak in the church; and therefore why should they be singular and different from all others? other churches had the word of God, had gifts, and prophesying as well as they, and yet had introduced no such custom; and therefore it became them to pay a deference to the judgment and practice of others, especially since these were under, and acted according to the direction of the apostle, which they ought to have been subject to.

Ver. 37. *If any man think himself to be a prophet*, etc.] Or “seems to be a prophet”, and is really one; for the apostle does not so much design to strike at the pride, vanity, and appearances of false prophets, as to observe, that those that are really prophets, have the gift of prophesy, either of foretelling future events, or a peculiar gift of preaching the Gospel, and explaining the Scriptures, will allow what he had said to be right:

or spiritual; not merely one that has the Spirit of God, is regenerated and sanctified by him, in opposition to a natural and carnal man; or one that has a larger knowledge of spiritual things, in distinction from a babe in Christ; but one that is endued with spiritual gifts, with the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, with a discerning of spirits; as there were such among them no doubt, as well as prophets, and who were distinct from them, having the word of wisdom and knowledge:

let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord; if he is a true prophet, and really a spiritual man, he will clearly see, and therefore ought to own, that the rules here prescribed concerning speaking with tongues and prophesying, and concerning the intolerableness, unlawfulness, and indecency of women’s speaking in public assemblies, are perfectly agreeable to the commands of Christ, and are to be esteemed as such, being delivered under the influence and direction of his Spirit; and which the prophet and spiritual man must discern and allow, if they have the Spirit of God; for whatever was commanded by the apostles under divine inspiration, was all one as if immediately commanded by Christ himself.

Ver. 38. *But if any man be ignorant*, etc.] Of “these” words, as the Arabic version adds, and does not know and own them to be the commandments of Christ; though he may profess himself to be a prophet, or a spiritual man, he is a very ignorant one, and has not the Spirit of God he pretends to: and if he will not be convinced, but goes on to doubt, and call in question the truth of these things, and obstinately persist in his ignorance,

let him be ignorant: let him be treated and despised as an ignorant man; and let his ignorance be no hinderance to any in receiving these rules and directions as the commandments of Christ; for no regard is to be had, or pity shown, to a man of affected ignorance, and wilful obstinacy; such a man is not to be known and owned, but shunned and rejected.

Ver. 39. *Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy,* etc.] The apostle now draws to a conclusion, and reassumes the exhortation he gave in the beginning of the chapter, pressing the members of this church to desire the gift of prophecy, that being the most eligible and preferable to others, particularly to speaking with tongues, since it was the most useful and edifying, as he abundantly proves:

and forbid not to speak with tongues; such as have that gift, and are desirous of exercising it, provided they observe the rules prescribed, and have an interpreter; this he adds to promote love, and prevent dissension and discord.

Ver. 40. *Let all things be done decently and in order.*] Which may refer not only to what is said in this chapter, but in the foregoing part of the epistle; go not to law before the unbelievers; let not a believing yokefellow depart from an unbelieving one; let not him that has knowledge sit in an idol's temple, and eat meat there; let not a man pray with his head covered, and a woman with hers uncovered; come not to the house of God to eat and drink intemperately, thereby reflecting dishonour and scandal on the ordinance of the Lord's supper; let not any speak in an unknown tongue in the church, without an interpreter, as if he was a madman, nor suffer women to teach in public; all which are very unbecoming, and contrary to the rules of decency: do not encourage animosities, factions, and parties; despise not the faithful ministers of the word, but honour and obey them in the Lord; neglect not the discipline of the church, lay on censures, and pass the sentence of excommunication on such as deserve them; keep the ordinances as they have been delivered, particularly that of the Lord's supper; observe the rules prescribed for prophesying and speaking with tongues, and so all these things will be done according to the order of the Gospel: and the words may be considered as a general rule for the decent and orderly management of all things relating to the worship of God, and discipline of his house; that in all things a good decorum, and strict order, be observed, that nothing be done contrary to the rules of decency, and the laws and commandments of Christ.