

CHAPTER 14

In this chapter the apostle directs them about the use of their spiritual gifts, preferring those that are best and fitted to do the greatest good.

- I.** He begins with advising them of all spiritual gifts to prefer prophesying, and shows that this is much better than speaking with tongues (v. 1-5).
- II.** He goes on to show them how unprofitable the speaking of foreign languages is, and useless to the church; it is like piping in one tone, like sounding a trumpet without any certain note, like talking gibberish; whereas gifts should be used for the good of the church (v. 6-14).
- III.** He advises that worship should be celebrated so that the most ignorant might understand, and join in prayer and praise, and presses the advice by his own example (v. 15-20).
- IV.** He informs them that tongues were a sign for unbelievers rather than those that believe; and represents the advantage of prophecy above speaking with tongues, from the different suggestions they would give to the mind of an unbeliever coming into their assemblies (v. 21-25).
- V.** He blames them for the disorder and confusion they had brought into the assembly, by their vanity and ostentation of their gifts; and directs them in using the gifts both of tongues and prophecy (v. 26-33).
- VI.** He forbids women speaking in the church; and closes this subject by requiring them to perform every thing in the public worship with order and decency (v. 34 to the end).

1 CORINTHIANS 14:1-5

ON SPIRITUAL GIFTS

The apostle, in the foregoing chapter, had himself preferred, and advised the Corinthians to prefer, Christian charity to all spiritual gifts. Here he

teaches them, among spiritual gifts, which they should prefer, and by what rules they should make comparison. He begins the chapter,

I. With an exhortation to charity (v. 1): *Follow after charity*, pursue it. The original, *diokete*, when spoken of a thing, signifies a singular concern to obtain it; and is commonly taken in a good and laudable sense. It is an exhortation to obtain charity, to get this excellent disposition of mind upon any terms, whatever pains or prayers it may cost: as if he had said, “In whatever you fail, see you do not miss of this; the principal of all graces is worth your getting at any rate.”

II. He directs them which spiritual gift to prefer, from a principle of charity: “*Desire spiritual gifts, but rather that you may prophesy*, or chiefly that you may prophesy.” While they were in close pursuit of charity, and made this Christian disposition their chief scope, they might be zealous of spiritual gifts, be ambitious of them in some measure, but especially of prophesying, that is, of interpreting scripture. This preference would most plainly discover that they were indeed upon such pursuit, that they had a due value for Christian charity, and were intent upon it. Note, Gifts are fit objects of our desire and pursuit, in subordination to grace and charity. That should be sought first and with the greatest earnestness which is most worth.

III. He assigns the reasons of this preference. And it is remarkable here that he only compares prophesying with speaking with tongues. It seems, this was the gift on which the Corinthians principally valued themselves. This was more ostentatious than the plain interpretation of scripture, more fit to gratify pride, but less fit to pursue the purposes of Christian charity; it would not equally edify nor do good to the souls of men. For,

1. He that spoke with tongues must wholly speak between God and himself; for, whatever mysteries might be communicated in his language, none of his own countrymen could understand them, because they did not understand the language, v. 2. Note, What cannot be understood can never edify. No advantage can be reaped from the most excellent discourses, if delivered in unintelligible language, such as the audience can neither speak nor understand: but he that prophesies speaks to the advantage of his hearers; they may profit by his gift. Interpretation of scripture will be for their edification; they may be exhorted and comforted by it, v. 3. And

indeed these two must go together. Duty is the proper way to comfort; and those that would be comforted must bear being exhorted.

2. He that speaks with tongues may edify himself, v. 4. He may understand and be affected with what he speaks; and so every minister should; and he that is most edified himself is in the disposition and fitness to do good to others by what he speaks; but he that speaks with tongues, or language unknown, can only edify himself; others can reap no benefit from his speech. Whereas the end of speaking in the church is to edify the church (v. 4), to which prophesying, or interpreting scripture by inspiration or otherwise, is immediately adapted. Note, That is the best and most eligible gift which best answers the purposes of charity and does most good; not that which can edify ourselves only, but that which will edify the church. Such is prophesying, or preaching, and interpreting scripture, compared with speaking in an unknown tongue.

3. Indeed, no gift is to be despised, but the best gifts are to be preferred. *I could wish*, says the apostle, *that you all spoke with tongues, but rather that you prophesied*, v. 5. Every gift of God is a favour from God, and may be improved for his glory, and as such is to be valued and thankfully received; but then those are to be most valued that are most useful. *Greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, unless he interpret, that the church may receive edifying*, v. 5. Benevolence makes a man truly great. *It is more blessed to give than to receive*. And it is true magnanimity to study and seek to be useful to others, rather than to raise their admiration and draw their esteem. Such a man has a large soul, copious and diffused in proportion to his benevolence and bent of mind for public good. Greater is he who interprets scripture to edify the church than he who speaks tongues to recommend himself. And what other end he who spoke with tongues could have, unless he interpreted what he spoke, is not easy to say, Note, That makes most for the honour of a minister which is most for the church's edification, not that which shows his gifts to most advantage. He acts in a narrow sphere, while he aims at himself; but his spirit and character increase in proportion to his usefulness, I mean his own intention and endeavours to be useful.

1 CORINTHIANS 14:6-14

ON SPIRITUAL GIFTS

In this paragraph he goes on to show how vain a thing the ostentation of speaking unknown and unintelligible language must be. It was altogether unedifying and unprofitable (v. 6): *If I come to you speaking with tongues, what will it profit you, unless I speak to you by revelation, or by knowledge, or by prophesying, or by doctrine?* It would signify nothing to utter any of these in an unknown tongue. An apostle, with all his furniture, could not edify, unless he spoke to the capacity of his hearers. New revelations, the most clear explications of old ones, the most instructive discourses in themselves, would be unprofitable in a language not understood. Nay, interpretations of scripture made in an unknown tongue would need to be interpreted over again, before they could be of any use.

I. He illustrates this by several allusions.

1. To a pipe and a harp playing always in one tone. Of what use can this be to those who are dancing? If there be no distinction of sounds, how should they order their steps or motions? Unintelligible language is like piping or harping without distinction of sounds: it gives no more direction how a man should order his conversation than a pipe with but one stop or a harp with but one string can direct a dancer how he should order his steps, v. 7.

2. To a trumpet giving an *uncertain sound*, *adelon phonen*, a sound not manifest; either not the proper sound for the purpose, or not distinct enough to be discerned from every other sound. If, instead of sounding on onset, it sounded a retreat, or sounded one knew not what, who would prepare for the battle? To talk in an unknown language in a Christian assembly is altogether as vain and to no purpose as for a trumpet to give no certain sound in the field or day of battle. The army in one case, and the congregation in the other, must be all in suspense, and at a perfect nonplus. To speak words that have no significancy to those who hear them is to leave them ignorant of what is spoken; it is speaking to the air, v. 9. Words without a meaning can convey no notion nor instruction to the mind; and words not understood have no meaning with those who do not understand them: to talk to them in such language is to waste our breath.

3. He compares the speaking in an unknown tongue to the gibberish of barbarians. There are, as he says (v. 10), many kinds of voices in the world, none of which is without its proper signification. This is true of the several languages spoken by different nations. All of them have their proper signification. Without this they would be *phonai aphonoi* — a voice, and no voice. For that is no language, nor can it answer the end of speaking, which has no meaning. But whatever proper signification the words of any language may have in themselves, and to those who understand them, they are perfect gibberish to men of another language, who understand them not. In this case, speaker and hearers are barbarians to each other (v. 11), they talk and hear only sounds without sense; for this is to be a barbarian. For thus says the polite Ovid, when banished into Pontus,

*Barbarus hic ego sum, quia non intelligor ulli,
I am a barbarian here, none understand me.*

To speak in the church in an unknown tongue is to talk gibberish; it is to play the barbarian; it is to confound the audience, instead of instructing them; and for this reason is utterly vain and unprofitable.

II. Having thus established his point, in the two next verses he applies,

1. By advising them to be chiefly desirous of those gifts that were most for the church's edification, v. 12. "Forasmuch as you are zealous of spiritual gifts, this way it will become commendable zeal, be zealous to edify the church, to promote Christian knowledge and practice, and covet those gifts most that will do the best service to men's souls." This is the great rule he gives, which,

2. He applies to the matter in hand, that, if they did speak a foreign language, they should beg of God the gift of interpreting it, v. 13. That these were different gifts, see ^{<420>}1 Corinthians 12:10. Those might speak and understand a foreign language who could not readily translate it into their own: and yet was this necessary to the church's edification; for the church must understand, that it might be edified, which yet it could not do till the foreign language was translated into its own. Let him therefore pray for the gift of interpreting what he speaks in an unknown tongue; or rather covet and ask of God the gift of interpreting than of speaking in a language that needs interpretation, this being most for the church's benefit, and therefore among the gifts that excel; *vide* v. 12. Some understand it,

“Let him pray so as to interpret what he utters in prayer in a language unintelligible without it.” The sum is that they should perform all religious exercises in their assemblies so that all might join in them and profit by them.

3. He enforces this advice with a proper reason, that, if *he prayed in an unknown tongue, his spirit might pray*, that is, a spiritual gift might be exercised in prayer, or his own mind might be devoutly engaged, *but his understanding would be unfruitful* (v. 14), that is, the sense and meaning of his words would be unfruitful, he would not be understood, nor therefore would others join with him in his devotions. Note, It should be the concern of such as pray in public to pray intelligibly, not in a foreign language, nor in a language that, if it be not foreign, is above the level of his audience. Language that is most obvious and easy to be understood is the most proper for public devotion and other religious exercises.

~~445~~ 1 CORINTHIANS 14:15-20

ON SPIRITUAL GIFTS

The apostle here sums up the argument hitherto, and,

I. Directs them how they should sing and pray in public (v. 15): *What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also. I will sing with the spirit*, etc. He does not forbid their praying or singing under a divine *afflatus*, or when they were inspired for this purpose, or had such a spiritual gift communicated to them; but he would have them perform both so as to be understood by others, that others might join with them. Note, Public worship should be performed so as to be understood.

II. He enforces the argument with several reasons.

1. That otherwise the unlearned could not say Amen to their prayers or thanksgivings, could not join in the worship, for they did not understand it, v. 16. He who fills up or occupies the place of the unlearned, that is, as the ancients interpret it, the body of the people, who, in most Christian assemblies, are illiterate; how should they say *Amen* to prayers in an unknown tongue? How should they declare their consent and

concurrence? This is saying *Amen*, So be it. *God grant the thing we have requested*; or, We join in the confession that has been made of sin, and in the acknowledgment that has been made of divine mercies and favours. This is the import of saying *Amen*. All should say *Amen* inwardly; and it is not improper to testify this inward concurrence in public prayers and devotions, by an audible *Amen*. The ancient Christians said *Amen* aloud. *Vide* Just. Mart. *apol. 2. prop fin.* Now, how should the people say *Amen* to what they did not understand? Note, There can be no concurrence in those prayers that are not understood. The intention of public devotions is therefore entirely destroyed if they are performed in an unknown tongue. He who performs may pray well, and give thanks well, but not in that time and place, because others are not, cannot be, edified (v. 17) by what they understand not.

2. He alleges his own example, to make the greater impression, concerning which observe,

(1.) That he did not come behind any of them in this spiritual gift: "*I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than you all* (v. 18); not only more than any single person among you, but more than all together." It was not envy at their better furniture that made Paul depreciate what they so highly valued and so much vaunted of; he surpassed them all in this very gift of tongues, and did not vilify their gift because he had it not. This spirit of envy is too common in the world. But the apostle took care to guard against this misconstruction of his purpose, by letting them know there was more ground for them to envy him upon this head than for him to envy them. Note, When we beat down men's unreasonable value for themselves, or any of their possessions or attainments, we should let them see, if possible, that this does not proceed from an envious and grudging spirit. We miss our aim if they can fairly give our conduct this invidious turn. Paul could not be justly censured, nor suspected for any such principle in this whole argument. He spoke more language than they all. Yet,

(2.) He had rather *speak five words with understanding*, that is, so as to be understood, and instruct and edify others, *than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue*, v. 19. He was so far from valuing himself upon talking languages, or making ostentation of his talents of this kind, that he had rather speak five intelligible words, to benefit others, than make a thousand, ten thousand fine discourses, that would do no one else any

good, because they did not understand them. Note, A truly Christian minister will value himself much more upon doing the least spiritual good to men's souls than upon procuring the greatest applause and commendation to himself. This is true grandeur and nobleness of spirit; it is acting up to his character; it is approving himself the servant of Christ, and not a vassal to his own pride and vanity.

3. He adds a plain intimation that the fondness then discovered for this gift was but too plain an indication of the immaturity of their judgment: *Brethren, be not children in understanding; in malice be you children, but in understanding be men*, v. 20. Children are apt to be struck with novelty and strange appearances. They are taken with an outward show, without enquiring into the true nature and worth of things. Do not you act like them, and prefer noise and show to worth and substance; show a greater ripeness of judgment, and act a more manly part; be like children in nothing but an innocent and inoffensive disposition. A double rebuke is couched in this passage, both of their pride upon account of their gifts, and their arrogance and haughtiness towards each other, and the contests and quarrels proceeding from them. Note, Christians should be harmless and inoffensive as children, void of all guile and malice; but should have wisdom and knowledge that are ripe and mature. They should not be unskilful in the word of righteousness (^{3813} Hebrews 5:13), though they should be unskilful in all the arts of mischief.

^{412} 1 CORINTHIANS 14:21-25

ON SPIRITUAL GIFTS

In this passage the apostle pursues the argument, and reasons from other topics; as,

I. Tongues, as the Corinthians used them, were rather a token of judgment from God than mercy to any people (v. 21): *In the law* (that is, the Old Testament) *it is written, With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak to this people; and yet for all this they will not hear me, saith the Lord*, ^{2381} Isaiah 28:11. Compare ^{6386} Deuteronomy 28:46, 49. To both these passages, it is thought, the apostle refers. Both are delivered by way of threatening, and one is supposed to interpret the other. The meaning in this view is that it is an evidence that a people are abandoned of God when he

gives them up to this sort of instruction, to the discipline of those who speak in another language. And surely the apostle's discourse implies, "You should not be fond of the tokens of divine displeasure. God can have no gracious regards to those who are left merely to this sort of instruction, and taught in language which they cannot understand. They can never be benefited by such teaching as this; and, when they are left to it, it is a sad sign that God gives them over as past cure." And should Christians covet to be in such a state, or to bring the churches into it? Yet thus did the Corinthian preachers in effect, who would always deliver their inspirations in an unknown tongue.

II. Tongues were rather a sign to unbelievers than to believers, v. 22. They were a spiritual gift, intended for the conviction and conversion of infidels, that they might be brought into the Christian church; but converts were to be built up in Christianity by profitable instructions in their own language. The gift of tongues was necessary to spread Christianity, and gather churches; it was proper and intended to convince unbelievers of that doctrine which Christians had already embraced; but prophesying, and interpreting scripture in their own language, were most for the edification of such as did already believe: so that speaking with tongues in Christians assemblies was altogether out of time and place; neither one nor the other was proper for it. Note, That gifts may be rightly used, it is proper to know the ends which they are intended to serve. To go about the conversion of infidels, as the apostles did, had been a vain undertaking without the gift of tongues, and the discovery of this gift; but, in an assembly of Christians already converted to the Christian faith, to make use and ostentation of this gift would be perfectly impertinent, because it would be of no advantage to the assembly; not for conviction of truth, because they had already embraced it; not for their edification, because they did not understand, and could not get benefit without understanding, what they heard.

III. The credit and reputation of their assemblies among unbelievers required them to prefer prophesying before speaking with tongues. For,

1. If, when they were all assembled for Christian worship, their ministers, or all employed in public worship, should talk unintelligible language, and infidels should drop in, they would conclude them to be mad, to be no better than a parcel of wild fanatics. Who in their right senses could carry on religious worship in such a manner? Or what sort of religion is that

which leaves out sense and understanding? Would not this make Christianity ridiculous to a heathen, to hear the ministers of it pray, or preach, or perform any other religious exercise, in a language that neither he nor the assembly understood? Note, The Christian religion is a sober and reasonable thing in itself, and should not, by the ministers of it, be made to look wild or senseless. Those disgrace their religion, and vilify their own character, who do any thing that has this aspect. But, on the other hand,

2. If, instead of speaking with tongues, those who minister plainly interpret scripture, or preach, in language intelligible and proper, the great truths and rules of the gospel, a heathen or unlearned person, coming in, will probably be convinced, and become a convert to Christianity (v. 24, 25); his conscience will be touched, the secrets of his heart will be revealed to him, he will be condemned by the truth he hears, and so will be brought to confess his guilt, to pay his homage to God, and own that he is indeed among you, present in the assembly. Note, Scripture-truth, plainly and duly taught, has a marvellous aptness to awaken the conscience, and touch the heart. And is not this much more for the honour of our religion than that infidels should conclude the ministers of it a set of madmen, and their religious exercises only fits of frenzy? This last would at once cast contempt on them and their religion too. Instead of procuring applause for them, it would render them ridiculous, and involve their profession in the same censure: whereas prophesying would certainly edify the church, much better keep up their credit, and might probably convince and convert infidels who might occasionally hear them. Note, Religious exercises in Christian assemblies should be such as are fit to edify the faithful, and convince, affect, and convert unbelievers. The ministry was not instituted to make ostentation of gifts and parts, but to save souls.

1 CORINTHIANS 14:26-33

ON SPIRITUAL GIFTS

In this passage the apostle reproveth them for their disorder, and endeavours to correct and regulate their conduct for the future.

I. He blames them for the confusion they introduced into the assembly, by ostentation of their gifts (v. 26): *When you come together every one hath a*

psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, etc.; that is, “You are apt to confound the several parts of worship; and, while one has a psalm to utter by inspiration, another has a doctrine, or revelation;” or else, “You are apt to be confused in the same branch of worship, many of you having psalms or doctrines to propose at the same time, without staying for one another. Is not this perfect uproar? Can this be edifying? And yet all religious exercises in public assemblies should have this view, *Let all things be done to edifying.*”

II. He corrects their faults, and lays down some regulations for their future conduct.

1. As to speaking in an unknown tongue, he orders that no more than two or three should do it at one meeting, and this not altogether, but successively, one after another. And even this was not to be done unless there were some one to interpret (v. 27, 28), some other interpreter besides himself, who spoke; for to speak in an unknown tongue what he himself was afterwards to interpret could only be for ostentation. But, if another were present who could interpret, two miraculous gifts might be exercised at once, and thereby the church edified, and the faith of the hearers confirmed at the same time. But, if there were none to interpret, he was to be silent in the church, and only exercise his gift between God and himself (v. 28), that is (as I think) in private, at home; for all who are present at public worship should join in it, and not be at their private devotions in public assemblies. Solitary devotions are out of time and place when the church has met for social worship.

2. As to prophesying he orders,

(1.) That two or three only should speak at one meeting (v. 20), and this successively, not all at once; and that the other should examine and judge what he delivered, that is, discern and determine concerning it, whether it were of divine inspiration or not. There might be false prophets, mere pretenders to divine inspiration; and the true prophets were to judge of these, and discern and discover who was divinely inspired, and by such inspiration interpreted scripture, and taught the church, and who was not — what was of divine inspiration and what was not. This seems to be the meaning of this rule. For where a prophet was known to be such, and under the divine *afflatus*, he could not be judged; for this were to subject

even the Holy Spirit to the judgment of men. He who was indeed inspired, and known to be so, was above all human judgment.

(2.) He orders that, if any assistant prophet had a revelation, while another was prophesying, the other should hold his peace, be silent (v. 30), before the inspired assistant uttered his revelation. Indeed, it is by many understood that the former speaker should immediately hold his peace. But this seems unnatural, and not so well to agree with the context. For why must one that was speaking by inspiration be immediately silent upon another man's being inspired, and suppress what was dictated to him by the same Spirit? Indeed, he who had the new revelation might claim liberty of speech in his turn, upon producing his vouchers; but why must liberty of speech be taken from him who was speaking before, and his mouth stopped, when he was delivering the dictates of the same Spirit, and could produce the same vouchers? Would the Spirit of God move one to speak, and, before he had delivered what he had to say, move another to interrupt him, and put him to silence? This seems to me an unnatural thought. Nor is it more agreeable to the context, and the reason annexed (v. 31): *That all might prophesy, one by one, or one after another*, which could not be where any one was interrupted and silenced before he had done prophesying; but might easily be if he who was afterwards inspired forbore to deliver his new revelation till the former prophet had finished what he had to say. And, to confirm this sense, the apostle quickly adds, *The spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets* (v. 33); that is, the spiritual gifts they have leave them still possessed of their reason, and capable of using their own judgment in the exercise of them. Divine inspirations are not, like the diabolical possessions of heathen priests, violent and ungovernable, and prompting them to act as if they were beside themselves; but are sober and calm, and capable of regular conduct. The man inspired by the Spirit of God may still act the man, and observe the rules of natural order and decency in delivering his revelations. His spiritual gift is thus far subject to his pleasure, and to be managed by his discretion.

III. The apostle gives the reasons of these regulations. As,

1. That they would be for the church's benefit, their instruction and consolation. It is that *all may learn, and all may be comforted or exhorted*, that the prophets were to speak in the orderly manner the apostle advises. Note, The instruction, edification, and comfort of the church, is that for

which God instituted the ministry. And surely ministers should, as much as possible, fit their ministrations to these purposes.

2. He tells them, *God is not the God of confusion, but of peace and good order*, v. 33. Therefore divine inspiration should by no means throw Christian assemblies into confusion, and break through all rules of common decency, which yet would be unavoidable if several inspired men should all at once utter what was suggested to them by the Spirit of God, and not wait to take their turns. Note, The honour of God requires that things should be managed in Christian assemblies so as not to transgress the rules of natural decency. If they are managed in a tumultuous and confused manner, what a notion must this give of the God who is worshipped, to considerate observers! Does it look as if he were the God of peace and order, and an enemy to confusion? Things should be managed so in divine worship that no unlovely nor dishonourable notion of God should be formed in the minds of observers.

3. He adds that things were thus orderly managed in all the other churches: *As in all the churches of the saints* (v. 33); they kept to these rules in the exercise of their spiritual gifts, which was a manifest proof that the church of Corinth might observe the same regulations. And it would be perfectly scandalous for them, who exceeded most churches in spiritual gifts, to be more disorderly than any in the exercise of them. Note, Though other churches are not to be our rule, yet the regard they pay to the rules of natural decency and order should restrain us from breaking these rules. Thus far they may be proposed as examples, and it is a shame not to follow them.

1 CORINTHIANS 14:34-35

ON SPIRITUAL GIFTS

Here the apostle,

1. Enjoins silence on their women in public assemblies, and to such a degree that they must not ask questions for their own information in the church, but ask their husbands at home. *They are to learn in silence with all subjection; but, says the apostle, I suffer them not to teach,* ⁵²¹1 Timothy 2:11, 12. There is indeed an intimation (⁵¹⁵1 Corinthians 11:5) as

if the women sometimes did pray and prophecy in their assemblies, which the apostle, in that passage, does not simply condemn, but the manner of performance, that is, praying or prophesying with the head uncovered, which, in that age and country, was throwing off the distinction of sexes, and setting themselves on a level with the men. But here he seems to forbid all public performances of theirs. They are not permitted to speak (v. 34) in the church, neither in praying nor prophesying. The connection seems plainly to include the latter, in the limited sense in which it is taken in this chapter, namely, for preaching, or interpreting scripture by inspiration. And, indeed, for a woman to prophesy in this sense were to teach, which does not so well befit her state of subjection. A teacher of others has in that respect a superiority over them, which is not allowed the woman over the man, nor must she therefore be allowed to teach in a congregation: *I suffer them not to teach*. But praying, and uttering hymns inspired, were not teaching. And seeing there were women who had spiritual gifts of this sort in that age of the church (see ~~420~~ Acts 22:9), and might be under this impulse in the assembly, must they altogether suppress it? Or why should they have this gift, if it must never be publicly exercised? For these reasons, some think that these general prohibitions are only to be understood in common cases; but that upon extraordinary occasions, when women were under a divine *afflatus*, and known to be so, they might have liberty of speech. They were not ordinarily to teach, nor so much as to debate and ask questions in the church, but learn in silence there; and, if difficulties occurred, *ask their own husbands at home*. Note, As it is the woman's duty to learn in subjection, it is the man's duty to keep up his superiority, by being able to instruct her; if it be her duty to ask her husband at home, it is his concern and duty to endeavour at least to be able to answer her enquiries; if it be a shame for her to speak in the church, where she should be silent, it is a shame for him to be silent when he should speak, and not be able to give an answer, when she asks him at home.

2. We have here the reason of this injunction: It is God's law and commandment that they should be under obedience (v. 34); they are placed in subordination to the man, and it is a shame for them to do any thing that looks like an affectation of changing ranks, which speaking in public seemed to imply, at least in that age, and among that people, as would public teaching much more: so that the apostle concludes it was a shame for women to speak in the church, in the assembly. Shame is the

mind's uneasy reflection on having done an indecent thing. And what more indecent than for a woman to quit her rank, renounce the subordination of her sex, or do what in common account had such aspect and appearance? Note, Our spirit and conduct should be suitable to our rank. The natural distinctions God has made, we should observe. Those he has placed in subjection to others should not set themselves on a level, nor affect or assume superiority. The woman was made subject to the man, and she should keep her station and be content with it. For this reason women must be silent in the churches, not set up for teachers; for this is setting up for superiority over the man.

1 CORINTHIANS 14:36-40

ON SPIRITUAL GIFTS

In these verses the apostle closes his argument,

1. With a just rebuke of the Corinthians for their extravagant pride and self-conceit: they so managed with their spiritual gifts as no church did like them; they behaved in a manner by themselves, and would not easily endure control nor regulation. Now, says the apostle, to beat down this arrogant humour, “*Came the gospel out from you? Or came it to you only?* v. 36. Did Christianity come out of Corinth? was its original among you? Or, if not, is it now limited and confined to you? are you the only church favoured with divine revelations, that you will depart from the decent usages of all other churches, and, to make ostentation of your spiritual gifts, bring confusion into Christian assemblies? How intolerably assuming is this behaviour! Pray bethink yourselves.” When it was needful or proper the apostle could rebuke with all authority; and surely his rebukes, if ever, were proper here. Note, Those must be reprov'd and humbled whose spiritual pride and self-conceit throw Christian churches and assemblies into confusion, though such men will hardly bear even the rebukes of an apostle.

2. He lets them know that what he said to them was the command of God; nor durst any true prophet, any one really inspired, deny it (v. 37): “*If any man think himself a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge, etc., nay, let him be tried by this very rule. If he will not own what I deliver on this head to be the will of Christ, he himself never had the Spirit of Christ. The*

Spirit of Christ can never contradict itself; if it speak in me, and in them, it must speak the same things in both. If their revelations contradict mine, they do not come from the same Spirit; either I or they must be false prophets. *By this therefore you may know them.* If they say that my directions in this matter are no divine commandments, you may depend upon it they are not divinely inspired. But if any continue after all, through prejudice or obstinacy, uncertain or ignorant whether they or I speak by the Spirit of God, they must be left under the power of this ignorance. If their pretences to inspiration can stand in competition with the apostolical character and powers which I have, I have lost all my authority and influence; and the persons who allow of this competition against me are out of the reach of conviction, and must be left to themselves.” Note, It is just with God to leave those to the blindness of their own minds who wilfully shut out the light. Those who would be ignorant in so plain a case were justly left under the power of their mistake.

3. He sums up all in two general advices: —

(1.) That though they should not despise the gift of tongues, nor altogether disuse it, under the regulations mentioned, yet they should prefer prophesying. This is indeed the scope of the whole argument. It was to be preferred to the other, because it was the more useful gift.

(2.) He charges them to let all things be done decently and in order (v. 40), that is, that they should avoid every thing that was manifestly indecent and disorderly. Not that they should hence take occasion to bring into the Christian church and worship any thing that a vain mind might think ornamental to it, or that would help to set it off. Such indecencies and disorders as he had remarked upon were especially to be shunned. They must do nothing that was manifestly childish (v. 20), or that would give occasion to say they were mad (v. 23), nor must they act so as to breed confusion, v. 33. This would be utterly indecent; it would make a tumult and mob of a Christian assembly. But they were to do things in order; they were to speak one after another, and not all at once; take their turns, and not interrupt one another. To do otherwise was to destroy the end of a Christians ministry, and all assemblies for Christian worship. Note, Manifest indecencies and disorders are to be carefully kept out of all Christian churches, and every part of divine worship. They should have nothing in them that is childish, absurd, ridiculous, wild, or tumultuous; but all parts of divine worship should be carried on in a manly, grave,

rational, composed, and orderly manner. God is not to be dishonoured, nor his worship disgraced, by our unbecoming and disorderly performance of it and attendance at it.