

# A COMMENTARY ON THE APOSTLE PAUL'S FIRST LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS

According to the Homilies of St. John Chrysostom and other Fathers of the Church

by  
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## Chapter Fourteen

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## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### Peace and Order in Worship

**BACKGROUND:** The Corinthian Christians were focusing on the gift of tongues more than the other gifts from God, creating a spiritual imbalance and the danger of pursuing this gift, or a simulation of it, for its emotional effects.

**14:1. Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy.** Love for God and all of His creations is the highest gift, thus should be pursued aggressively. One who pursues something does not give up. He persists, no matter what, in striving for that which he seeks. Love is attained through obedience. If we show God our love for Him by obeying His word, even when our own will may lean in another direction, He will bless our efforts and His love will flourish in us. (Read Phil 2:5-11, which indicates that God exalted Jesus because of His obedience.)

Spread wide your love, and not only to your wives and children. Love such as that we find also in sheep and sparrows. You know how sparrows and swallows love their mates, how both will hatch their eggs, and both feed the young with a certain sweet and natural goodness, without thought of recompense. The sparrow will not say: Al feed my young, so that when I am old, they will feed me. It bestows the love of a parent, looking for no return... Spread wide your love...let it grow. To love your wives and children is not yet the Wedding Garment. Have faith in God. First love God. Extend your love to God; and seize whomsoever you can for God. You have an enemy. Seize him for God. A wife, a son, a slave. Bring them to God. Here comes a stranger. Bring him to God. An enemy; seize him for God. Bring him; bring your enemy. Bring him; he is no longer your enemy.

AUGUSTINE<sup>1</sup>

**FOOD FOR THOUGHT:** (a). What is the "Wedding Garment?" How can it be acquired? Can it be purchased? Stolen? (See Mt 22:12, Col 3:1-17, 2 Peter 1:1-11.) (b). Why is bringing family, friends and enemies to God an indicator of love?

In addition to striving always to grow in love, we should desire, pray to be given, and work toward acquiring the higher gifts, especially the gift of prophesy.

The prophet is essentially a person called by God to proclaim His message to men. Through the prophet, God makes known his secrets, warns of punishment, encourages through exhortations and promises of grace, and occasionally discloses what is going to take place in the future.<sup>2</sup>

If it is God's will that we receive the gift(s) we desire, the Holy Spirit will work in us toward that end (1 Cor 12:11). As with the whole of God's divine plan, a synergistic cooperation between God and man is required. (See this study for 1 Cor 12:31.)

**14:2-4. For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries. But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men. He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church.** The value of a spiritual gift is measured by its usefulness to the Church. 1 Cor 12:28 establishes the order of importance of the various gifts. "Speaking in tongues" (Corinthian Glossolalia) is listed last because this gift is for personal benefit. Prophecy is listed second because through this gift the Church is enlightened and strengthened.

There are two types of speaking in tongues (Glossolalia):

a. Pentecostal Glossolalia: This is the type which occurred fifty days after the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. On that day the Apostles received from the Holy Spirit the ability to speak in many different languages, in order to preach the Gospel to all who had gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the Hebrew Pentecost (referred to by Acts 2:1).

**FOOD FOR THOUGHT:** (c). Christian Pentecost (Acts 2:2-4) occurred on the day commemorating the Hebrew Pentecost of old (Lev 23:15-22; Acts 2:1). Was this a coincidence? Of what was it an indication?

b. Corinthian Glossolalia: the type the Corinthian Christians were experiencing. Corinthian Glossolalia was an activity of the Holy Spirit coming upon a person and compelling him to external expressions directed to God but not understood by others. In Pentecost Glossolalia, while speaking in several different tongues, both the speaker and the listener understood what was uttered. The Glossolalia manifested in Corinth was the utterance of words, phrases, sentences, etc., intelligible to God but not to the person uttering them. What was uttered needed to be interpreted by another who had the gift of interpretation.

When the person spoke, his soul became passive and his understanding became inactive. He was in a state of ecstasy. While the words or sounds were prayer and praise, they were not clear in meaning and gave the impression of something mysterious. The phenomenon included sighs, groanings, shoutings, cries and utterances of disconnected speech, sometimes jubilant and sometimes ecstatic.<sup>3</sup>

**14:5. I wish you all spoke with tongues, but even more that you prophesied; for he who prophesies is greater than he who speaks with tongues, unless indeed he interprets, that the Church may receive edification.** For the Corinthians to get carried away with the gift of tongues, emphasizing it more than the other gifts, was a natural danger because of their pagan background.

Greek paganism...included demonstrations, frenzies and orgies all intricately interwoven into their religious practices. In post Homeric times the cult of the Dionysiac orgies made...(its) entrance into the Greek world. According to this, music, the whirling dance, intoxication and utterances had the power to make men divine; to produce a condition in which the normal state was left behind and the inspired person perceived what was external to himself and the senses.<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand, he who is able to interpret an episode of Corinthian tongues is equal to a prophet, for through the interpretation, the entire Church is edified.

**14:6-11. But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you unless I speak to you either by revelation, by knowledge, by prophesying, or by teaching? Even things without life, whether flute or harp, when they make a sound, unless they make a distinction in the sounds, how will it be known what is piped or played? For if the trumpet makes an uncertain sound, who will prepare for battle? So likewise you, unless you utter by the tongue words easy to understand, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air. There are, it may be, so many kinds of languages in the world, and none of them is without significance. Therefore, if I do not know the meaning of the language, I shall be a foreigner to him who speaks, and he who speaks will be a foreigner to me.** In order for sounds and languages to be effective as a

means of communication, they must have clear and consistent meanings. In order for speaking in tongues (Corinthian Glossolalia) to have value to the Church, it must be accompanied by the gift of interpretation.

For excellent indeed and necessary is the gift, but it is so when there is someone to explain what is spoken. Since the finger too is a necessary thing, but when you separate it from the other members, it will not be equally useful; and the trumpet is necessary, but when it sounds at random, it is rather an annoyance. Yea, neither shall any art come to light without matter subject to it; nor is matter put into shape, if no form be assigned to it. Suppose then the voice to be as the subject-matter, if it can take no shape and form it is of no use.

CHRYSOSTOM<sup>5</sup>

**14:12. Even so you, since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, let it be for the edification of the church that you seek to excel.** The gifts that should be sought after are the ones that benefit the Church (all of God's people). To put the Church ahead of oneself in this manner is to practice the love that Paul calls God's greatest gift.

**14:13-17. Therefore, let him who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret. For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful. What is the result then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding. Otherwise, if you bless with the spirit, how will he who occupies the place of the uninformed say "Amen" at your giving of thanks, since he does not understand what you say? For you indeed give thanks well, but the other is not edified.** He who has the gift of tongues should seek the gift of interpretation also, so that he can understand what is spoken in tongues and can teach others with the fruit of his gift. Paul gave these instructions to the people of Corinth at a time when the gift of speaking in tongues and many other wonderful supernatural manifestations of the Holy Spirit were abundantly in evidence in the Church. This was necessary at the time so that the Gospel would be accepted as being from God. Workers were few, conditions were poor, and there was much work to be done—so God stepped in to help.

Contemporary Pentecostal and Charismatic groups repeat the Corinthian mistake of putting undue focus on the gift of speaking in tongues, thereby creating imbalance in the spiritual lives of their followers. These groups refer to the phenomenon of Glossolalia as being evidence of having been Aborn again,@ defined as having received the Holy Spirit and been spiritually awakened.

The Greek Orthodox Church does not preclude the use of Glossolalia, but regards it as one of the minor gifts of the Holy Spirit. If Glossolalia has fallen out of use, it is because it served its purpose in New Testament times and is no longer necessary. However, even when used, it is a private and personal gift, a lower form of prayer. The Orthodox Church differs with those Pentecostal and Charismatic groups which regard Glossolalia as a prerequisite to being a Christian and to having received the Holy Spirit.<sup>6</sup>

Orthodox theology holds that through the Sacraments of Baptism and Chrismation we are "born again" (Jn 3:3) "of water and the spirit" (Jn 3:5). From that point on, gradual spiritual growth should take place through the combined influences of the home and the Church. If this does not happen, or if at some point it ceases or is abandoned, there may come about, sooner or later, a falling away from the spiritual life. If such a person, at any point, comes to regret the absence of God in his/her life, repents, and seeks reconciliation with God through the Sacrament of Confession, this too may be called a spiritual rebirth. Sincere repentance, which includes the desire for change, returns the penitent to the sin-free state of the newly-baptized.

**14:18-20. I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all; yet in the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that I may teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue. Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature.** Paul had the gift of tongues but knew that it was better for the Church if he spoke five words he could understand and explain to others than if he spoke ten thousand words in an indiscernible language. The Corinthians were condoning immorality on one hand (1 Cor 5) and immaturely flaunting a lower spiritual gift on the other, like children. He warns that we are to be infant-like only when it comes to malice (of which they are incapable) but mature in our understanding of spiritual matters.

Just as in Corinth during Paul's time there was a danger of being carried away by the idea of the gift of tongues, this danger exists for us. Zeal for evidence of God working in one's life can cause conscious or subconscious imitation of someone heard speaking in tongues. A study done by researchers at Carleton University in Ottawa, Ontario, results of which were published in the Journal of Abnormal Psychology, reports that it is easy to mimic those who profess to speak in tongues and that while "it is impossible to test whether any of the religious glossolalics were actually divinely inspired...their research suggests that speaking in tongues can be taught by one religious person to another and is not always evidence of holy presence."<sup>7</sup>

**14:21. In the law it is written: With men of other tongues and other lips I will speak to this people; and yet, for all that, they will not hear Me, says the Lord.** Paul quotes the prophecy of Isaiah 28:11-12, which refers to the fact that God uses all means to reach all people, including giving His workers (Acts 2) the ability to speak in the tongues of the people they are trying to reach, but still, many do not heed the call. A contemporary facet of this gift may be the amazing ability some have to learn languages easily, which can be used very powerfully to teach God's word. This also points to the necessity for the Divine Liturgy to be brought to people in their own language.

**14:22. Therefore, tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophesying is not for unbelievers but for those who believe.** The gift of tongues (Corinthian Glossolalia) is a tool useful for reaching unbelievers, through astonishment with the power of God. A non-believer who prides himself on being too rational to believe in a supreme Creator could have his complacency shattered by an experience of being seized by a manifestation of a force beyond himself—a phenomenon he must then either explain away or deal with. True believers are beyond the need for this gift and are benefited more by prophecy.

**14:23-25. Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those who are uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say that you are out of your mind? But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is judged by all. And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you.** When actually witnessing someone speaking in tongues, onlookers may think they observe madness, as when some thought the Apostles were drunk on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:13). But when witnessing God's prophets teaching, counseling and comforting His people, those who look on may recognize truth and be brought to repentance. Prophecy then is more valuable, both for edification and as a sign of God's presence.

**14:26-32. How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for**

**edification. If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be two or at the most three, each in turn, and let one interpret. But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God. Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge. But if anything is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged. And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.** All gifts should be used for the building-up of the Church in a peaceful manner, not for the aggrandizement of individuals. The gift of tongues is at most very rare today because there is no longer a need for it (1 Cor 13:8), but if someone has this gift, s/he should exercise it in private, unless an interpreter is present. Prophecies that are offered must be judged as to whether they are from God or demonic (1 Cor 12:10, 1 Jn 4:1). Those present are to judge, using the criteria of Scripture and the writings of the Fathers of the Church, which clarify its true meaning. There should be truth and order in the Church, not chaos.

The very early Church, in the time of the Apostles, had as yet not established a definite structure of worship, which was evolving as Christ=s message was being more fully understood. This, remember, was after Jesus had ascended, leaving His followers in the hands of the Holy Spirit, Who came to them at Pentecost. The New Testament, which we have to guide us, was of course not yet in existence. The gifts which the Holy Spirit provided at that unique time filled the void until a definite form of worship evolved from those experiences and was etched in the hearts and minds of believers, to be passed on to succeeding generations through practice as well as in writing.

*John Chrysostom*, author of the Divine Liturgy most often celebrated during the Church year, lamented the loss of the supernatural atmosphere in the very early Church, evidence that by his time these gifts had waned:

For in truth the Church was a heaven then, the Spirit governing all things, and moving each one of the rulers and making him inspired. But now we retain only the symbols of those gifts. For now also we speak two or three, and in turn, and when one is silent, another begins. But these are only signs and memorials of those things. Wherefore when we begin to speak, the people respond "with thy Spirit," indicating that of old they thus used to speak, not of their own wisdom, but moved by the Spirit. But not so now.<sup>8</sup>

**14:33. For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.** Worship should be peaceful and orderly:

For the Church is no barber's or perfumer's shop, nor any other merchant's warehouse in the marketplace, but a place of angels, a place of archangels, a palace of God, Heaven itself. As therefore if one had parted the heaven and had brought you in, though you would see your father or your brother, you would not venture to speak; so neither here ought one to utter any other sounds but those which are spiritual. For, in truth, the things in this place are also a heaven.

CHRYSOSTOM<sup>9</sup>

**14:34. Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says.** This verse is another call to proper respect in church, which is not a place for idle chatter, apparently a problem among the women in Corinth:

For if to them that have the gifts it is not permitted to speak inconsiderately, nor when they will, and this, though they be moved by the Spirit, much less to those women who prate idly and to no purpose.

CHRYSOSTOM<sup>10</sup>

That women are “to be submissive” is another reference to the God-given hierarchal inter-dependence of woman upon man, man upon Christ, and Christ upon God (see text and this study of 1 Cor 11:3).

**14:35. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church.** If the women are talking in church to ask questions, they should ask them of their husbands at home. It is part of God's divine plan that the husband be the spiritual head of the home (Eph 5:22-24) and give his family proper spiritual instruction. However, if the husband does not fulfill this duty, these roles must be reversed:

Men must often assume the place of women, and women the place of men, when sin ruptures the normal conditions of human life. No less a *Apurist* than *John Chrysostom* orders men to follow their wives when they are wiser and better: *AI would commit you to your own wives, that they may instruct you. It is true, according to Paul's law, you ought to be teachers. But since the order is reversed by sin...let us even take this way....For the war against the devil and his powers is common to them (women) and the men, and in no respect does the delicacy of their nature become an impediment in such conflicts, for not by bodily constitution, but by mental choice, are these struggles decided. Wherefore in many cases women have actually been more forward in the contest than men and have set up more brilliant trophies.”*<sup>11</sup>

Thus it seems that, given circumstances in the world and in the Church today, even the *Apurist* *Chrysostom* would approve of (spirit-filled, well-informed) women teaching in the Church.

**14:36-40. Or did the word of God come originally from you? Or was it you only that it reached? If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord. But if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant. Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues. Let all things be done decently and in order.** Paul summarizes his message and reminds the Corinthians, with irony, of his authority to approach them on these matters. It was he who first brought them the word of God, as he did to other communities (and to us through his writings)—all of whom are expected to live by the same truths.

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT COMMENTS

(a). **What is the "Wedding Garment?" How can it be acquired? Can it be purchased? Stolen? (See Mt 22:12, Col 3:1-17, 2 Peter 1:1-11.)** The Wedding Garment (Mt 22:1-14) is the "putting on" of Christ through Baptism (Gal 3:27), followed by a life of attempting to become Christ-like (Jn 14:21) to show love and faith. Thus it cannot be purchased, nor can anyone steal it from another. Each of us can acquire it only through love and obedience; or we can give it away—through sin.

This garment is seen in the heart, not on the body...

AUGUSTINE<sup>12</sup>

(b). **Why is bringing family, friends and enemies to God an indicator of love?** If we truly love someone, we want the best for them. The "best" is, of course, eternal life with God in His Kingdom.

(c). **Christian Pentecost (Acts 2:2-4) occurred on the day commemorating the Hebrew Pentecost of old (Lev 23:15-22; Acts 2:1). Was this a coincidence? Of what was it an indication?** It was not a coincidence that Christian Pentecost occurred on the day commemorating the Hebrew Pentecost of old. The truths of the New Testament were always prefigured by events of the Old. In this case, the Hebrew

Pentecost prefigured (pointed to) the Christian Pentecost:

Hebrew Passover

God's people saved by the blood of the perfect lamb  
(Ex 12): physical liberation (see this study for 1 Cor 5:7-8).

Hebrew Pentecost: 50 days after Hebrew Passover

(Lev 23:5, 15-16; Deut: 9-10).  
Also called Feast of Weeks or Feast of Harvest (Ex 34:22; 23:16).

Celebrated gifts from God:

- Ten Commandments God gave to Moses (Ex 20):  
(Law of God written in stone).
- the end of the seven week harvesting period:  
grain God gave to Israelites from the "promised" land.

Christian Passover (Gr: Pascha/Easter in West)

Christ as the new Passover:

God's people saved by Blood of the perfect Lamb of God, Christ,  
the last living sacrifice (John 1:29): spiritual liberation.

Christian Pentecost: fifty days after the Resurrection of Christ,  
on the day the Jews celebrated Hebrew Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4).

Celebrated gifts from God:

- gift of tongues/descent of the Holy Spirit:  
power to teach the Gospel  
(Law of God written in heart of believer).
- harvest: 3000 souls brought to believe in Christ as Savior (Acts 2:41).

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<sup>1</sup> Toal, Vol. 4, p. 225.

<sup>2</sup> George Barrois, "Women and the Priestly Office," *Women and the Priesthood*, ed. Thomas Hopko, p. 48.

<sup>3</sup> George Nicozisin, *Speaking in Tongues, An Orthodox Perspective*, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*, p. 3. Note: Dionysius was the so-called Greek God of wine and fertility.

<sup>5</sup> Schaff, Homily XXV, p. 210.

<sup>6</sup> Nicozisin, p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Jeff Meer, "Speaking in Tongues: Inspiration or Imitation." *Psychology Today*, Vol. 95, No. 1, p. 16.

<sup>8</sup> Schaff, Homily XXXVI, p. 219.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid*, p. 220.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid*, p. 222.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas Hopko, "On the Male Character of Christian Priesthood," *Women and the Priesthood*, p. 113, quoting Chrysostom's Homilies 7 & 8 on Matthew.

<sup>12</sup> Toal, Vol. 4, p. 219.