

Tongues, Prophecy and Women Speaking in Church (1 Corinthians 14:1-40)

Expository Lessons from Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians

I. Introduction and Review

- a. I like to read the sermons of great expository preachers from long ago. One of those is John Chrysostom, bishop of the church in Constantinople, who was preaching in the late 300s and early 400s. Since I found the material we are about to tackle to be unusually challenging to fully understand, I reviewed Chrysostom's expository homilies (sermons) on **1 Corinthians**, especially chapters 12-14, to see how he tackled this part of Scripture.
 - i. I was sobered to discover that Chrysostom, one of the most famous expository preachers of all time, cautioned his listeners that this part of Scripture was unusually difficult to understand!
 - ii. With that in mind, perhaps all of us can find some comfort if we happen to find parts of this chapter to be obscure. If so, we are not alone.
- b. Paul here continues the discussion begun in **1 Corinthians 12** regarding the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit, and how they were contributing to division in the church. Thus far, some of the points he has made in **1 Corinthians 12-13** include:
 - i. The church is like a human body, with many different parts (including different gifts) yet being unified as one body.
 - ii. All the various parts of the body are needed and important.
 - iii. We should not look down on others, or feel inferior and unimportant ourselves, based on whether an individual has or does not have a certain gift.
 - iv. Love is the most excellent way, which surpasses the importance of any of the miraculous gifts (specifically including tongues and prophecy).
 1. The kind of love Paul speaks about is the kind demonstrated by Jesus. It is much more than a warm feeling or attraction.
 2. It involves being willing to suffer long, to sacrifice oneself and one's comforts, perhaps even one's own life, for another.

II. The Gift of Tongues Versus the Gift of Prophecy

a. Read **1 Corinthians 14:1-19**.

- i. As we read this passage, consider the questions that naturally come to mind.

b. Things that are clear in this passage include:

- i. Paul said that the Corinthian Christians should desire to have the spiritual gifts.
- ii. For the purpose of edifying the church, the gift of prophecy was more desirable than the gift of tongues.
- iii. Someone can have the ability to speak in a tongue, yet lack the ability to interpret to others what they were saying.
 1. Speaking in a tongue and interpreting a tongue were two different gifts, which were not necessarily given to the same person. As Paul had previously stated in the same letter:
 - a. "...to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another *different kinds of tongues*, to another *the interpretation of tongues*. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills." (**1 Corinthians 12:10-11**, NKJV)
 - b. A person who had the ability to speak in a tongue (but unable to interpret what they were saying) was encouraged to pray for the ability to interpret.
 - i. It seems that people could seek and ask in prayer for gifts that they did not have.

c. **Some Big Questions:**

- i. Did Paul's reference here to "speaking in tongues" refer to speaking in other languages that could be understood by native speakers (such as in Persian, Latin or Egyptian)? Or might this spiritual gift include what is commonly referred to today as "ecstatic utterances" (uttering sounds that do not correspond to any known language)?
- ii. Is this gift of *speaking in tongues* still available today?
- iii. Did the gift of speaking in tongues pass away at some point in time, for example shortly after the last of the apostles died?

d. **A Few More Questions:**

- i. Did Jesus ever say anything about “speaking in tongues”?
 - ii. Paul said he spoke in tongues more than any of them. Did Peter have the ability to speak in tongues?
 - iii. What is the first place in the Bible where people are speaking in “tongues”?
- e. Jesus said that his disciples would speak in tongues.
- i. Read **Mark 16:15-18**.
 1. “And He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; *they will speak with new tongues*; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.’” (**Mark 16:15–18**, NKJV)
 2. The Greek word for “tongues” here in **Mark 16:17** is the same word found throughout **1 Corinthians 14** (= glossa/γλῶσσα).
 3. The word can refer to a physical tongue, the appendage used for speaking and eating that is in a person’s mouth (as in **James 3**). Or it can refer to a language, as in “if I speak in the *tongues* of men and angels,” from **1 Corinthians 13:1**.
- f. Peter spoke in tongues, on at least one occasion.
- i. Read **Acts 2:4-13**.
 1. In this passage, it is clear that the “tongues” that Peter and the other apostles spoke in were known foreign languages.
 2. (*The crowd of Jews from foreign lands said*) “And how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born? Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God.” (**Acts 2:8–11**, NKJV)
- g. The earliest Christian writers (pre-Nicene Council, before 325 AD) say very little about “speaking in tongues”.

- i. John Chrysostom (347-407 AD) bishop of Constantinople, in his *Homilies on 1 Corinthians*, did expository preaching through the entire book. Of course, when he gets **1 Corinthians 12-14**, he has to deal with this subject directly. He starts by admitting that in his day, this passage regarding speaking in tongues and the miraculous gifts was a bit obscure to most Christians.
- ii. From Chrysostom's *Homily No. 29 on 1 Corinthians* (preaching through **1 Corinthians 12:1-11**), writing c. 400 AD:
 1. "Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant. You know that when you were Gentiles, you were led away unto those dumb idols, howsoever you might be led.' (**1 Corinthians 12:1-2**)
 2. "This whole place is very obscure: but the obscurity is produced by our ignorance of the facts referred to and by their cessation, being such as then used to occur but now no longer take place. And why do they not happen now? Why look now, the cause too of the obscurity has produced us again another question: namely, why did they then happen, and now do so no more?
 3. "This however let us defer to another time, but for the present let us state what things were occurring then. Well: what did happen then? Whoever was baptized he straightway spake with tongues and not with tongues only, but many also prophesied, and some also performed many other wonderful works. For since on their coming over from idols, without any clear knowledge or training in the ancient Scriptures, they at once on their baptism received the Spirit, yet the Spirit they saw not, for It is invisible; therefore God's grace bestowed some sensible proof of that energy.
 4. "And one straightway spoke in the Persian, another in the Roman, another in the Indian, another in some other such tongue: and this made manifest to them that were without that it is the Spirit in the very person speaking. Wherefore also he so calls it, saying, 'But to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given to profit all;' (**1 Corinthians 12:7**) calling the gifts 'a manifestation of the Spirit.'
 5. "For as the Apostles themselves had received this sign first, so also the faithful went on receiving it, I mean, the gift of tongues; yet not this only but also many others: inasmuch as many used even to raise the dead and to cast out devils and to perform many other such wonders: and they had gifts too,

some less, and some more. But more abundant than all was the gift of tongues among them: and this became to them a cause of division; not from its own nature but from the perverseness of them that had received it: in that on the one hand the possessors of the greater gifts were lifted up against them that had the lesser: and these again were grieved, and envied the owners of the greater. And Paul himself as he proceeds intimates this.”

- a. Take-aways from this passage from John Chrysostom include:
 - i. Christians around the year 400 AD were struggling to understand this part of **1 Corinthians**.
 - ii. Chrysostom explains that these gifts were present in the church in the beginning, but had ceased sometime prior to his day.
 - iii. He explains that the gift of tongues Paul refers to in **1 Corinthians 12-14** is the very same gift that was given to the apostles on the Day of Pentecost, in **Acts 2**. He said it was the miraculous ability to speak in the languages of other nations (without ever having studied the language).
 - iv. However, he does not explain in this passage *when or why* these gifts ceased.
- iii. From John Chrysostom’s *Homily No. 35 on 1 Corinthians* (on **1 Corinthians 14:1-19**):
 1. (After quoting **1 Corinthians 14:1-3** he continues) “...At this point he makes a comparison between the gifts, and lowers that of the tongues, showing it to be neither altogether useless, nor very profitable by itself. For in fact they were greatly puffed up on account of this, because the gift was considered to be a great one.
 2. “And [*at the*] time of *building the tower* the one tongue was divided into many; so then the many tongues frequently met in one man, and the same person used to discourse both in the Persian, and the Roman, and the Indian, and many other tongues, the Spirit sounding within him: and the gift was called

the gift of tongues because he could all at once speak several different languages.

3. “See accordingly how he both depresses and elevates it. Thus, by saying, ‘He who speaks with tongues, speaks not to men, but to God, for no man understands,’ he depressed it, implying that the profit of it was not great; but by adding, ‘but in the Spirit he speaks mysteries’ (**1 Corinthians 14:2**) he again elevated it, that it might not seem to be superfluous and useless and given in vain. ‘But he who prophesies speaks to men edification, and exhortation, and comfort.’ (**1 Corinthians 14:3**) See, by what he signifies the choice nature of this gift? i.e., by the common benefit? and how every where he gives the higher honor to that which tends to the profit of the many?”

a. Take-aways from this passage include:

- i. What happened at Pentecost in **Acts 2** (with the apostles receiving the gift of tongues) is the reverse of what happened at “the tower”. That, of course, is a reference to the story of the Tower of Babel in **Genesis 11**.
- ii. Note that **Genesis 10-11** is the first place that this word for “tongue” the Greek “glossa”, is found in the Bible (in the LXX).
 1. Read **Genesis 11:1-9**.
 2. The same Greek word (glossa/tongue) is used here in **Genesis 11:7** in the LXX as is found in the Greek New Testament in **Acts 2** and **1 Corinthians 12-14**.

b. Something to consider:

- i. Early Christian writer Irenaeus wrote about the idea of there being a “recapitulation” in God’s plan to redeem mankind. He completes the circle and goes back to the beginning in many ways.
- ii. For example, sin is introduced to the world through the disobedience of a virgin woman (= Eve), while salvation is brought about by the faithfulness of another virgin woman (= Mary).
- iii. Christ is the new Adam, who restarts the human race, as Paul explained in **Romans 5**.

iv. *Perhaps* (and Irenaeus does not mention this that I am aware of) we can see something similar in the story of the Tower of Babel, in **Genesis 11**.

1. We know from **1 Peter 3:19-21** that the water of the Flood of Noah (**Genesis 6-9**) foreshadowed baptism.

a. In both cases, as Peter points out, a righteous few are saved through water.

b. "...who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which *a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism* (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ," (**1 Peter 3:20-21**, NKJV)

c. Also note that this water worked with wood (consider in light of **Wisdom of Solomon 10:4, 14:5-5** and **Sirach 38:5**), and wickedness was destroyed through it.

2. At Babel, the story of which appears right after the Flood, the "tongues" were confused and divided into many nations who could not understand one another.

3. The miraculous sign given at Pentecost, which occurs right before the first universal call to baptism (**Acts 2:38-39**), is the reverse of what happened at Babel. Many nations are brought together to become one, and they all are able to understand what is spoken!

a. "Then Peter said to them, *'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized*

in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. *For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.*" (Acts 2:38-39, NKJV)

4. The above is just a thought for you to consider. Perhaps the Lord is bringing it right back to the beginning, reversing the damage done long ago?

iv. Further in the same homily, Chrysostom continues:

1. "Wherefore 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 it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also; I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also." (1 Corinthians 14:13-15)
2. "Here he shows that it is in their power to obtain the gift. For, 'let him pray,' says he, i.e., 'let him contribute his own part,' since if you ask diligently, you will surely receive. Ask accordingly not to have the gift of tongue only, but also of interpretation, that you may become useful unto all, and not shut up thy gift in thyself alone. 'For if I pray in a tongue,' says he, 'my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful.'
3. "See how by degrees bringing his argument to a point, he signifies that not to others only is such an one useless, but also to himself; if at least 'his understanding is unfruitful?' For if a man should speak only in the Persian, or any other foreign tongue, and not understand what he says, then of course to himself also will he be a barbarian, not to another only, from not knowing the meaning of the sound.
4. "For there were of old many who had also a gift of prayer, together with a tongue; and they prayed, and the tongue spoke, praying either in the Persian or Latin language, but their understanding knew not what was spoken.
5. "Wherefore also he said, 'I'll pray in a tongue, my spirit prays,' i.e., the gift which is given me and which moves my tongue, 'but my understanding is unfruitful.'"

- a. Something to consider: Chrysostom addressed what it meant to “pray in a tongue”. It was praying in another language (like Latin) which the speaker did not understand, unless he also had the gift of interpretation, which he could ask for.
- h. Did the gift of tongues (and other gifts) cease to exist at some point in time? If so, when did that happen?
 - i. I was taught in the past (in the Churches of Christ) that the miraculous gifts were given (only) at the laying on of the apostles’ hands. Therefore, after the apostles died, and the generation of people they had laid hands on likewise died, those gifts ceased to be present.
 - 1. Note that for the most part, the Churches of Christ took a very dim view of the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit (and of almost everything related to the Holy Spirit other than inspiring the Scriptures) since the early 20th century. This was largely in reaction to Pentecostalism and religion based on subjective personal experiences that were becoming popular in the U.S. at that time. (For more on this history see *The Holy Spirit (Pt. 1 of 3): The Nature of the Holy Spirit*, found at www.walking-by-faith.org)
 - ii. The following passage was provided as ‘proof’ that the gifts had disappeared with the second generation (an argument that I did not find to be convincing):
 - 1. “Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; *whether there are tongues, they will cease*; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But *when that which is perfect has come*, then that which is in part will be done away.” (**1 Corinthians 13:8-10**, NKJV)
 - 2. **Question:** What does “that which is *perfect*” refer to?
 - a. Note that the word “*perfect*” here means “*complete*”, (rather than “*flawless*”). For example, when someone is speaking in a “*perfect tense*”, they are referring to an action that has already been completed.
 - b. In the Churches of Christ, I was taught that this reference to “that which is *perfect*” referred to the completion of the New Testament, or the canonization of the New Testament Scriptures.

- c. I am aware of one early Christian writing that commented on this, with a different understanding.
 - i. From a work entitled *The Disputation of Archelaus and Manes*, written c. 320 AD:
 - 1. “[Upon the coming of] my Lord Jesus Christ, who is the truly perfect one, ... where there are prophecies or the books of prophets, they will fail. Where there are the tongues of the whole race, they will cease. For men will no longer need to feel anxiety or to care about those things that are necessary for life. Where there is knowledge—regardless of what teachers possess it, it also will be destroyed. For none of these things will be able to survive the coming of that mighty King.”
 - a. (Source: *Disputation of Archelaus and Manes*, section 37; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 6, p. 211)
 - 2. The point: perfection will come at the second coming of Christ. (Perfection is not a reference to the canonization of the Scriptures.)
 - ii. Irenaeus, bishop of the church in Lyons, writing c. 180 AD, made a similar point that he understood the passage in **1 Corinthians 13:8-12** to be referring to what will happen at the resurrection of the dead, on the Last Day.
 - 1. “‘For now,’ he says, ‘we know in part, and we prophesy in part’ (**1 Corinthians 13:9**) ‘but then face to face.’ (**1 Corinthians 13:12**) And this it is which has been said also by Peter: ‘Whom having not seen, you love; in whom now also, not seeing, you believe; and believing, you shall rejoice with joy unspeakable’. (**1 Peter 1:8**) For our face shall see the face of the Lord and shall rejoice with joy unspeakable,—that is to say, when it shall behold its own Delight.”

- a. (Source: Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, book 5, chapter 7; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, p. 533)
 - iii. Some early Christian writers stated that the miraculous gifts persisted beyond the time of the second generation of disciples. The following quotes supporting that conclusion are taken from *Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*, edited by David Bercot, in an article on 'Gifts of the Spirit':
 - 1. From Justin Martyr, writing c. 160 AD:
 - a. "The prophetic gifts remain with us, even to the present time. And hence you should understand that [the gifts] formerly among your nation have been transferred to us.
 - i. (Primary Source: Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, chapter 82; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, p. 240)
 - b. "It was necessary that such gifts would cease from you [Jews] and ... would again, as had been predicted, become gifts which, from the grace of His Spirit's power, He would impart to those who believe in Him, according as He deems each man worthy of it... Now, it is possible to see among us women and men who possess gifts of the Spirit of God."
 - i. (Primary Source: Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, chapters 87-88; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, p. 243)
 - 2. From Irenaeus, writing c. 180 AD:
 - a. "For this reason, the apostle declares, 'We speak wisdom among those who are perfect,' calling those persons 'perfect' (**1 Corinthians 2:6**) who have received the Spirit of God, and who through the Spirit of God do speak in all languages, as he himself also used to speak. In like manner, we also hear many brethren in the church who possess prophetic gifts, and who through the Spirit speak all kinds of languages, and bring to light for the general benefit the hidden things of men."

- i. (Primary Source: Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, book 5, chapter 6; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, p. 531)
- 3. From Origen, writing c. 248 AD:
 - a. “The Jews no longer have prophets or miracles. Yet, traces of those things are still found among Christians to a considerable extent. Some of these miracles are more remarkable than any that existed among the Jews. I have witnessed these myself.”
 - i. (Primary Source: Origen, *Against Celsus*, book 2, chapter 8; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 4, p. 433)
 - b. “The Holy Spirit gave signs of His presence at the beginning of Christ’s ministry. And after His ascension, He gave still more. But since that time, these signs have diminished, although there are still traces of His presence in a few who have had their souls purified by the Gospel, and their actions regulated by its influence.”
 - i. (Primary Source: Origen, *Against Celsus*, book 7, chapter 8; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 4, p. 614)
- iv. So the historical accounts indicate that the gifts continued after the time of the second generation of disciples (who had received the gift through the laying on of the apostles’ hands). However, they were diminished and not a focus in the second and third centuries. By the fourth century, Chrysostom sees no evidence of them continuing in his day. The church he is preaching to apparently is unaware of them as well.
 - 1. Recall that Balaam prophesied, as well as the wicked high priest Caiaphas. And Jesus warned that there would be many wicked people who would perform miracles in His name, of whom He said, “*I never knew you*” (**Matthew 7:23**).
 - 2. According to Jesus, manifesting these signs is no guarantee that one has God’s favor, nor even that they are saved!

III. Being Children vs. Being Mature

- a. Read **1 Corinthians 14:20**.

- b. We are called to be *like children regarding malice*, yet mature (like adults) in our spiritual understanding.
 - i. This may shed light on something Jesus taught:
 - 1. “Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and *become as little children*, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.” (**Matthew 18:3**, NKJV)
 - ii. This may explain in what sense Jesus wants us to become like children. He is not looking for a lack of understanding or child-like foolishness, but rather innocence and a child-like attitude toward wickedness.

IV. When You Come Together

- a. Read **1 Corinthians 14:21-33**.
- b. The gift of tongues are a fulfillment of a prophecy from **Isaiah 28:11-12**.
 - i. Note that Paul refers to this as being “in the law”. Sometimes the expression “in the law” refers to the **Five Books of the Law of Moses (Genesis-Deuteronomy)**.
 - ii. However, at other times this phrase can be used (as we see here, in referring to one of the books of the prophets) to refer to anything in the entire Old Testament Scriptures, of which the Law of Moses is the most prominent part.
- c. Those with the gift of prophecy could convict sinners by speaking of secret things that were in their hearts.
- d. Based on what Paul writes here, it seems that the church meetings in Corinth were to some extent rather ‘unplanned’ or ‘unscripted’. Multiple prophets would speak, but only one at a time. Someone would speak. Then, the Holy Spirit would reveal things to a different speaker, at which time the prior speaker was instructed to stop speaking.
 - i. **Questions:** Is this a pattern churches should follow today when we meet? Should our gatherings be conducted with no planned or assigned speakers? Should they be more spontaneous, so that whoever is so moved speaks? *What do you think?*
 - 1. Justin Martyr, writing c. 160 AD, explained to the Romans in his First Apology what the Christians did when they came together on Sundays.
 - a. “And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the

memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president [*literally, the one presiding over the assembly*] verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things.

- b. “Then we all rise together and pray, and, as we before said, when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the president in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings, according to his ability, and the people assent, saying Amen; and there is a distribution to each, and a participation of that over which thanks have been given, and to those who are absent a portion is sent by the deacons....”
 - i. (Source: Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, chapter 67; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, p. 186)
 - ii. Note that at this time in Rome, when the church gathered on Sundays the presiding brother (one person) typically gave an exhortation based on the Scriptures that had just been read to the group. (This is in contrast to what we see in Corinth in **1 Corinthians 14**.)
2. We have multiple examples of homilies or sermons given in the early church, many of which were prepared messages featuring expository or topical preaching (for example, from Origen, Melito of Sardis, or John Chrysostom).
3. **For Consideration:** If we are in churches that no longer have the miraculous gifts (such as prophecy, or the ability to read the minds of those visiting the church) as was evident in Corinth, it may not be appropriate for us to follow the same format. If the Spirit is not directly intervening and inspiring people with messages from God, we may be asking for trouble by having random members popping up with spontaneous thoughts and messages. Just a thought!
4. Also, for consideration, a statement by early Christian Victorinus (d. c. 304 AD), a bishop of the church in Syria. In his *Commentary on Revelation*, it seems to me that he is saying the role of the New Testament “prophets” referred to in **1 Corinthians 11-14** and **Ephesians 4** was to come after the apostles and to provide an accurate and inspired interpretation of what the apostles had already taught.

- a. “For the apostles, by powers, by signs, by portents, and by mighty works, have overcome unbelief. After them there is now given to the same completed Churches the comfort of having the prophetic Scriptures subsequently interpreted, for I said that after the apostles there would be interpreting prophets.
- b. “For the apostle says: ‘And he placed in the Church indeed, first, apostles; secondly, prophets; thirdly, teachers,’ and the rest (**1 Corinthians 12:28**). And in another place he says: ‘Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the others judge.’ (**1 Corinthians 14:29**) And he says: ‘Every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered, dishonors her head.’ (**1 Corinthians 11:5**)
- c. “And when he says, ‘Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the others judge,’ (**1 Corinthians 14:29**) he is not speaking in respect of the Catholic [= *universal church*] prophecy of things unheard and unknown, but of things both announced and known. But let them judge whether or not the interpretation is consistent with the testimonies of the prophetic utterance.”
 - i. (Source: Victorinus, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, chapter 10; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 7, p. 353)
 - ii. Therefore, according to Victorinus, the prophets in the early church would not be handing down new doctrine, but rather would be giving divinely inspired interpretations of what the apostles had previously handed down.

V. Women to Keep Silent in Church

- a. Read **1 Corinthians 14:34-39**.
 - i. There is some question regarding the phrase in the last part of verse 33, “as in all the churches of the saints”. Does it apply to what precedes it, or to what follows?
 - 1. Since the ancient Greek manuscripts did not have punctuation marks to indicate where one sentence ends and the next one begins, the translators have to use their best judgment.
 - 2. Compare how the translators of the NKJV handled this, versus the translators of the ESV:

- a. “For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints. 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.” (1 Corinthians 14:33–34, NKJV)
 - b. “For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says.” (1 Corinthians 14:33–34, ESV)
- b. Women were not to speak in the church (addressing the group).
- i. If someone who did not attend our church today asked you the question, “Who *spoke* today, at church?” You would not respond, “Everyone spoke”. While it is true that no one was absolutely silent, and everyone participated in singing or said ‘amen’ to a prayer, in context, you would understand the question to mean, “Who *addressed the group?*”
 1. I would understand Paul’s directive in this passage in the same sense.
 - ii. In this case, Paul says that the women are not even permitted *to ask questions* publicly at the church gatherings.
- c. As also “the law” also says.
- i. **Question:** When Paul makes that statement, what Old Testament passage is he referring to?
 - ii. I assume this reference to “the law” is referring back to what the Lord said to Eve in **Genesis 3:16**.
 1. “To the woman He said, ‘Multiplying, I will greatly multiply your pain and your groaning, and in pain you shall bring forth children. *Your recourse will be to your husband, and he shall rule over you.*’” (Genesis 3:16, LXX, OSB)
 - iii. Note that this instruction is not based on the prevailing culture and customs of ancient Corinth or the Roman Empire. Rather, it goes back to the creation of the first man and woman.
 1. Recall that the gospel was spreading rapidly across many different cultures in Europe, Asia and North Africa. (Consider all the nations represented in **Acts 2:8-12** at Pentecost.)

2. The rationale for this instruction from Paul goes back to the Fall of Mankind. It is rooted in the account of Adam and Eve, from which all humans are descended.
 3. Therefore, this directive is universal, applying to all Christians in all ages, since it is independent of time and local culture.
- iv. Paul's instructions here are similar to what he said in **1 Timothy 3:11-14**.
1. "Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression." (**1 Timothy 2:11-14**, NKJV)
 2. Here Paul also refers back to the account of the Fall of Adam and Eve in **Genesis 3**.
- d. Early Christian writer Tertullian, writing c. 207 AD, commented on this statement by Paul regarding women:
- i. "When he mentions the fact that 'it is written in the law,' how that the Creator would speak with other tongues and other lips, while confirming indeed the gift of tongues by such a mention, he yet cannot be thought to have affirmed that the gift was that of another god by his reference to the Creator's prediction.
 - ii. "In precisely the same manner, when enjoining on women silence in the church, that they speak not for the mere sake of learning (although that even they have the right of prophesying, he has already shown when he covers the woman that prophesies with a veil), he goes to the law for his sanction that woman should be under obedience."
 1. (Source: Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, book 5, chapter 8; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 3, p. 446)
- e. Let us realize three things related to this teaching by Paul on the role of women in the church.
- i. This teaching that women are not to speak in the church is certainly 'out of season' and unpopular in modern egalitarian culture.
 1. However, many other teachings of the gospel are unpopular today as well! We cannot pick and choose, nor attempt to bend clear Biblical teachings to fit into modern culture.

- ii. Churches serious about following this teaching may vary regarding application (for example how it might apply in less formal gatherings of portions of the church in someone's home during the week).
- iii. This teaching puts a greater burden on the husbands (to listen more carefully to what is being preached at church, to know the Scriptures well, and to be prepared to answer questions and teach their wives and children).