SMITH FOR CHRIST

TEACHING THE WORD · WATCHING THE TIMES



VERSE-BY-VERSE STUDY

1 Corinthians

Chapter Fourteen

Tongues, Prophecy, and a Church That Builds One Another Up — Decently and in Order

NASB 1995 | VERSE BY VERSE | TWO VOICES

A single chapter, read through two teachers — **John MacArthur** and **David Guzik**.

THE PASSAGE

1 Corinthians 14:1–40

Forty verses

THE METHOD

Verse by Verse

Color-coded by teacher

WHAT'S INSIDE

Contents

1 Corinthians 14 — Love puts the gifts to work for the whole church

—	**How to Read This Study** · *the two voices & their colors*	3
—	**Before the Chapter** · *from the gifts, to love, to the meeting*	3
I	**Pursue Love, Desire Prophecy** · *1 Corinthians 14:1–5*	4
II	**Five Words with the Mind** · *1 Corinthians 14:6–19*	5
III	**A Sign, and a Heart Laid Bare** · *1 Corinthians 14:20–25*	6
IV	**When You Assemble** · *1 Corinthians 14:26–33*	7
V	**Silence, Authority, and Order** · *1 Corinthians 14:34–40*	8
†	**At a Glance** · *the two voices side by side*	10
†	**Key Facts & Questions for the Table** · *discussion*	10



"Let all things be done for edification." — 1 Corinthians 14:26

SECTION I · THE CHAPTER

1 Corinthians 14

Gifts Given for the Body, Not for Display

† How to Read This Study

This study walks 1 Corinthians 14 movement by movement. At each stop you will hear the same two teachers, and each one is marked in his own color — a highlighter for the ear as much as the eye. The Scripture blocks quote the key phrases of each movement with ellipses; read the full chapter in your own Bible alongside. **MacArthur** presses the text for its plain meaning, the sufficiency of Scripture, and the holiness of worship; **Guzik** walks the history, the Greek, and the pastoral application. On this chapter the two men stand in different places on whether tongues and prophecy continue today, and the study lets each one speak for himself. Where they agree — love, edification, clarity, order — the agreement is the point Paul is making.

JOHN MACARTHUR · 1 Corinthians DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

† Before the Chapter

Chapters 12 through 14 are one argument. In chapter 12 Paul taught that every gift comes from the same Spirit and is given for the common good, and that the body needs every member. In chapter 13 he paused to show the more excellent way: without love, the most spectacular gift is only noise. Chapter 14 brings that love into the room where the church gathers. The Corinthians prized the gift of tongues because it looked and sounded spiritual, and their meetings had become a contest of display. Paul does not answer with a list of rules first. He answers with a question that governs every rule that follows: does it build up the church?

That single test — edification — runs through the whole chapter. Prophecy is preferred because others can understand it. Tongues must be interpreted because the church cannot say "Amen" to what it cannot understand. Speakers take turns because God is a God of peace. **MacArthur** reads the chapter as Paul correcting a church that had confused emotional experience with the work of the Spirit; **Guzik** reads it as Paul pastoring a church that had real gifts but was using them selfishly. Between them they leave one question on the table: when we gather, are we there to be seen, or to serve?

I
MOVEMENT

1 CORINTHIANS 14:1-5

Pursue Love, Desire Prophecy

One gift speaks to God, the other speaks to people — and the church needs to understand

> *"Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy. For one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God; for no one understands… But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation. One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; but one who prophesies edifies the church."*
>
> 1 CORINTHIANS 14:1-4

JOHN MACARTHUR · 1 Corinthians

MacArthur begins where Paul begins: *pursue love.* The verb is a hunter's word, and it carries chapter 13 straight into chapter 14. Love is not one option among the gifts; it is the atmosphere in which every gift must operate. The Corinthians had reversed the order, chasing the gift that drew attention to the speaker. Paul redirects them to the gift that serves the hearer. Prophecy, in MacArthur's reading, was the proclamation of God's revealed truth, given in the foundational era of the church before the New Testament was complete; its purpose was to build up, to urge on, and to comfort.

MacArthur reads the tongue-speaking in Corinth with a skeptical eye. Genuine tongues at Pentecost were real human languages, understood by the hearers. Much of what Corinth practiced, he argues, had been shaped by the ecstatic utterances of the pagan temples the believers had come out of. When Paul says the speaker *edifies himself,* MacArthur hears a rebuke, not a commendation: a gift meant to serve others was being used to feed the self. Paul's wish that all spoke in tongues is a gracious concession; his real preference is plain — the one who prophesies is greater, because the church receives something.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik also puts love first. It is right to desire spiritual gifts, but the desire must never become an obsession, and love must remain the goal. Prophecy is emphasized because it serves the whole church. Guzik notes that Paul did not use the ordinary Greek word for preaching here; prophecy is something given in the moment by the Spirit, and its fruit is that people are built up, encouraged, and comforted.

The key distinction for Guzik is direction. Tongues are speech directed to God; prophecy is speech directed to people. He warns that missing this leads people to treat tongues as a message from one person to another. He does not read Paul as sarcastic when he says the tongue-speaker edifies himself; private edification is a real good, and Paul says elsewhere that he speaks in tongues more than all of them. But this chapter is about the gathered church, and in the gathering what matters most is what helps everyone else.

II
MOVEMENT

1 CORINTHIANS 14:6-19

Five Words with the Mind

A bugle must sound clearly, and worship must engage the understanding

> *"For if the bugle produces an indistinct sound, who will prepare himself for battle? So also you, unless you utter by the tongue speech that is clear, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air… So also you, since you are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek to abound for the edification of the church… I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also… however, in the church I desire to speak five words with my mind so that I may instruct others also, rather than ten thousand words in a tongue."*
>
> 1 CORINTHIANS 14:8-19 (SELECTED)

JOHN MACARTHUR · 1 Corinthians

Paul piles up illustrations, and MacArthur follows each one to the same point: sound without meaning helps no one. A flute or harp played without distinct notes is no tune. A bugle that gives an uncertain call leaves the army sitting. A foreign language you cannot understand makes the speaker a stranger to you. God made language to carry meaning, and He gave His revelation in words that could be understood. Speech in the church that no one understands is, in Paul's words, *speaking into the air*.

MacArthur gives great weight to verse 15. Paul will pray and sing with the spirit, but also with the mind. Christian worship never bypasses the understanding. The Spirit works through the truth, engaging the mind and then the affections, not by switching the mind off. The conclusion of verse 19 is the sharpest line in the chapter for MacArthur: five words that teach are worth more than ten thousand that do not. A church that is serious about God will be serious about clear, understandable instruction from His word.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik notes that Paul starts with his own ministry: if he came to Corinth speaking only in tongues, he would do them no good unless he brought revelation, knowledge, prophecy, or teaching they could understand. The instruments and the bugle make the point concrete. Guzik ties the gift of language itself to the image of God — we are made to communicate meaning, as God does — and he says that unintelligible speech in a meeting amounts to speaking into the air.

The practical counsel is that a tongue-speaker should pray for the ability to interpret, so that the church can benefit. When Paul says his spirit prays but his understanding is unfruitful, Guzik sees tongues as a form of prayer that goes past the intellect. He adds a careful word: the Spirit does not force strange behavior on anyone, and people should not credit or blame the Spirit for what they add themselves. In the meeting, others need to understand in order to say "Amen," and so Paul would rather speak five clear words than ten thousand that no one can follow.

III
MOVEMENT

1 CORINTHIANS 14:20-25

A Sign, and a Heart Laid Bare

Grow up in your thinking; what the outsider hears will either confuse him or convict him

> *"Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking be mature. In the Law it is written, 'By men of strange tongues and by the lips of strangers I will speak to this people, and even so they will not listen to Me,' says the Lord. So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers... But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an ungifted man enters, he is convicted by all... the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so he will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you."*
>
> 1 CORINTHIANS 14:20-25 (SELECTED)

JOHN MACARTHUR · 1 Corinthians

Paul calls the Corinthians to grow up. Their fascination with tongues was childish, the kind of enthusiasm that prefers the spectacular to the substantial. MacArthur then gives close attention to the quotation from Isaiah 28. Through Isaiah God warned Israel that because they would not listen to plain words, He would speak to them through the strange tongues of foreign invaders — the Assyrians — and that would be a sign of judgment.

For MacArthur this explains what tongues were for. They were a sign to unbelieving Israel that God was now speaking to the nations and that judgment was coming on the nation that had rejected its Messiah. That judgment fell in A.D. 70, and with its purpose fulfilled, he holds, the sign ceased. In a church meeting, uninterpreted tongues would only make an outsider think the believers were mad. But clear prophetic truth exposes the heart, convicts of sin, and brings a man to his knees, confessing that God is truly present. The word of God, plainly spoken, is still what the Spirit uses to do that work.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik agrees that the Isaiah quotation points to tongues as a sign of judgment on those who would not hear. He is honest that verse 22 is hard: it says tongues are a sign for unbelievers and prophecy for believers, yet verses 23–25 show unbelievers put off by tongues and won by prophecy. He sets out the ways interpreters have handled it — the judgment-sign reading, the suggestion by J. B. Phillips that a copyist reversed the words, and the principle of reading the difficult verse in light of the clearer ones that follow.

Whatever the solution, the picture in verses 24–25 is unmistakable. When an outsider walks in and hears God's word spoken clearly, he is convicted, the secrets of his heart are exposed, and he falls down and worships. Guzik sees this as what every church should long for: not a meeting that impresses people, but one in which they meet God and know it.

IV
MOVEMENT

1 CORINTHIANS 14:26-33

When You Assemble

Everyone brings something, one speaks at a time, and the others weigh what is said

> *"What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. If anyone speaks in a tongue, it should be by two or at the most three, and each in turn, and one must interpret; but if there is no interpreter, he must keep silent in the church… Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment… and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets; for God is not a God of confusion but of peace."*
>
> 1 CORINTHIANS 14:26-33 (SELECTED)

JOHN MACARTHUR · 1 Corinthians

MacArthur reads verse 26 as a description of the chaos Paul was correcting. Everyone came with something to contribute and everyone wanted to be heard, all at once. Paul does not crush participation; he channels it with one governing rule — *let all things be done for edification* — and a set of plain limits. Two or three tongue-speakers at most, one at a time, and only with an interpreter. Two or three prophets, with the rest of the church evaluating what was said.

The phrase *the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets* answers the claim that the Spirit had overpowered someone. MacArthur stresses that the Holy Spirit never produces loss of self-control; that was the mark of pagan frenzy, not of God. Paul anchors everything in the character of God Himself: He is not a God of confusion but of peace. A disorderly meeting misrepresents Him. Worship that honors God will be reverent, ordered, and centered on truth that the whole church can test and receive.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik pictures the setting as small house churches where each person could contribute, and he notes that this kind of participation is harder in a large service. But the heart of verse 26 does not change with the size of the room: we come to give and to build others up, not to be entertained. He encourages believers to aim to bless at least one person every time the church gathers.

On the limits, Guzik says they govern the public meeting, not private prayer, and he rejects using a "prayer language" label to sidestep Paul's rules. Prophecy must be weighed against Scripture and confirmed by the leaders of the church, and he cites Tertullian's description of a church that examined prophetic words carefully after the service. The prophet remains in control of his gift, which Guzik sees as a clear difference between the Holy Spirit and a demonic spirit. God may do unusual things, but He does not author confusion.

V
MOVEMENT

1 CORINTHIANS 14:34-40

Silence, Authority, and Order

A hard instruction, a claim of apostolic authority, and the chapter's summary

> *"The women are to keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but are to subject themselves, just as the Law also says… If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment… Therefore, my brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak in tongues. But all things must be done properly and in an orderly manner."*
>
> 1 CORINTHIANS 14:34-40 (SELECTED)

JOHN MACARTHUR · 1 Corinthians

MacArthur takes verses 34–35 at face value as part of God's design for order in the church's worship. He reads the silence as applying to the authoritative speaking ministry of the gathered church — preaching, teaching, and judging prophecy — which God has assigned to qualified men, in keeping with the order of creation that Paul also teaches in 1 Timothy 2. He does not treat this as a statement of lesser worth; men and women are equal before God, but they serve in different roles, and the church honors God by keeping the order He set.

Paul then claims divine authority for everything he has written: it is *the Lord's commandment*. MacArthur presses this hard. The test of a truly spiritual person is not the experience he claims but whether he submits to the written word. Anyone who sets his own revelations above Scripture shows that he is not speaking for God. Paul closes the chapter with balance — seek to prophesy, do not forbid tongues — and with the rule that summarizes it all: everything decent and in order.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik begins with chapter 11, where Paul already assumed women would pray and prophesy in public. The silence in chapter 14 must therefore mean something narrower than total silence. He offers two readings: either women are not to take part in judging prophecy, a task he assigns to the church's male leadership, or women were disrupting the meeting with talk and questions. He notes that the verb Paul uses has the broad sense of talking or chattering, and he connects the instruction to ask husbands at home with seating customs of the day, when women and men often sat apart.

On Paul's authority, Guzik says true spirituality submits to God's revealed word and does not go beyond it. On the closing verses, he holds both halves together: desire prophecy, and do not forbid tongues, which he especially values in private devotion. But order is not the enemy of life. Guzik warns against a gloomy order that kills joy, and equally against the excess that brings genuine gifts into disrepute. Order exists to serve life.

SECTION II · STUDY HELPS

At a Glance

Two voices, one chapter

The same chapter, read two ways. MacArthur reads tongues as real languages, a sign of judgment that has ceased, and presses clear teaching of the word as what builds the church today; Guzik reads the gifts as continuing and pastors their use with love, clarity, and order. On the main line of Paul's argument they stand together: love first, the church built up, the mind engaged, and God honored by peace rather than confusion.

THE MOMENT	MACARTHUR · conviction	GUZIK · detail & heart
Love and prophecy (14:1–5)	Pursue love; prophecy served others, while Corinth's tongues served the self.	Tongues speak to God, prophecy speaks to people; this chapter is about the gathered church.
Clear sound (14:6–19)	Worship engages the mind; five words that teach outweigh ten thousand that do not.	Pray to interpret; language bears God's image; do not blame the Spirit for what we add.
The sign (14:20–25)	Tongues were a sign of judgment on unbelieving Israel and ceased with their purpose.	Verse 22 is hard; read it by the clearer verses; prophecy lays the heart bare.
The meeting (14:26–33)	Limits correct chaos; the Spirit never removes self-control; God is a God of peace.	Come to give, not to be entertained; weigh prophecy by Scripture and leadership.
Silence and order (14:34–40)	Authoritative speaking belongs to qualified men; Paul writes the Lord's commandment.	A narrower silence — judging prophecy or disruption; order exists to serve life.

1 CORINTHIANS 14 · A COMPARATIVE READING

† Key Facts to Carry

- **One argument.** Chapters 12, 13, and 14 belong together: the gifts, the love that governs them, and their use in the meeting. GUZIK
- **The test.** Edification — building up the church — is the measure applied to every gift in the chapter (14:3, 5, 12, 17, 26). MACARTHUR
- **Isaiah 28.** Foreign speech was God's sign of judgment on a people who would not listen to plain words. MACARTHUR
- **Two or three.** In the meeting: two or three tongues, one at a time, with an interpreter; two or three prophets, with the others weighing what is said. GUZIK
- **Self-control.** "The spirits of prophets are subject to prophets" — the Holy Spirit does not overpower a person. GUZIK

14:37. Paul's instructions are the Lord's commandment, and true spirituality submits to them.

MACARTHUR

† Questions for the Table

1 **Paul says to pursue love, then desire the gifts. When you come to church, what are you pursuing?**

Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts.

1 CORINTHIANS 14:1

2 **What would change in how you worship if you sang and prayed with your mind fully engaged?**

I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also.

1 CORINTHIANS 14:15

3 **Paul calls the church to grow up in its thinking. Where are you still childish about spiritual things?**

Do not be children in your thinking.

1 CORINTHIANS 14:20

4 **If an outsider walked into your church, would he leave confused or convicted?**

He will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you.

1 CORINTHIANS 14:25

5 **Who is one person you could build up the next time the church gathers?**

Let all things be done for edification.

1 CORINTHIANS 14:26

Corinth had gifts in abundance and still had a meeting that confused the outsider and served the speaker. Paul does not take the gifts away; he puts love back in charge of them. Whatever is spoken must be understood, whatever is understood must build up, and whatever builds up will reflect a God of peace. Let all things be done properly and in an orderly manner.

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