

Gifts so free that they could be misused. Isn't it hard to believe that free spiritual gifts were indeed so free that they could be abused? Believers are endued with free spiritual gifts. That is, they not only were given freely from the ascended Lord in heaven but they can be used freely. Each of these spiritual gifts is empowered by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven who permanently indwells each believer. The believer is apparently granted complete and free control over the use of this gift. The intent of the Lord is that the believer voluntarily, prayerfully let the Holy Spirit guide him if and when to use it and to lead him as it is used. The gift has no strings attached, so to speak.. The believer can act in the flesh and actually use his spiritual gift from the Lord to serve his own selfish impulses, for his own personal ends, not for the Lord who gave it.

The Corinthians were behaving like fleshly men in various self serving ways. If this were not so the admonitions of 1Corinthians would not be relevant. **Here we seem to see the holy God allowing, and the Holy Spirit empowering the misuse or abusive use of a valid, spiritual gift from the Lord. How can God do this?** Does this make God a partner of sin? Why doesn't He limit the power He provides to good uses only? Install some sort of circuit breaker to cut off power to prevent selfish and damaging misuse of His power? He certainly could have done that. But He didn't. It would not be a truly freely bestowed gift, given in love to be lovingly, freely used for loving ends. It's the "robot" versus "human liberty" issue again. Isn't this just like God?

(A similar example of this facet of God's ways is seen in a greater sphere. God grants His sustaining power and order in the whole universe. He created all and upholds all with the word of His power. If He lets go all will implode and disappear [and it will after the end of time as we know it, 2Peter 3, Rev 21]. Meanwhile He faithfully provides orderly power and direction that sustains and operates it in predictable ways. Men call these ways "laws of nature." Sinful men freely use the items held together and functioning by God's power for "good" and to sin against God. God sends His only begotten Son to die on a cross for us. **The very nails used to nail Jesus to the cross were held together by His own power.** Wonderment! Awesome! Praise Him! Weep!)

The mind of God for our assembling. We learn much in these chapters (11-14) about the types of activities that were appropriate in assembly meeting. Yet no systematic outline or list is provided. Rather, by simply paying heed we learn the mind of God, almost incidentally, from remarks in these scriptures. Often what is not said is as important as what is stated.

What are some of the things that are mentioned here that we take for granted and practice when gathered

together? Orderly meetings with prophesying, praying and congregational singing. All are qualified and eligible to rise to pray, read, speak, or give out a hymn, one at a time, no human leader presiding, participants yielding to one another. Speaking in an unknown foreign language (tongue) is discouraged, not forbidden, but not to be commenced unless accompanied by an interpreter. All that is done is to be done with a loving, selfless motive, in a loving way, for the benefit and edifying (building up) of all. **Note the complete liberty!** It is taken as a matter of fact since the introduction and use of man's order is not even contemplated as something to be described and forbidden. What? No leader? No prearranged order of service? No choir? No solos? No written liturgy? No musical instruments or other artificial stimulants? No written sermons? No predetermined theme? No preselected speakers? No prearranged prayers? No prearranged hymns? Nope! Not here in 1Corinthians 14! Not in the New Testament! Only love and a few simple regulations to promote order, liberty, and edification.

Personal spirituality of every believer is vital to a congregation's successful collective, unified meeting service. There the Lord is recognized, by faith, as in the midst leading each meeting. He leads through the Holy Spirit who is there, and in each one there.

Each is personally privileged and responsible:

- # to be there.
- # to be in a self judged state, ch 11:28-32 so
 - # the Spirit in him or her is not grieved, so
 - # the Spirit in the midst is not quenched, or hindered, in His leading the meeting.
- # to be open to the prompt of the Spirit to speak,
- # to be subject to the restraint of the Spirit
 - # to not speak, or
 - # to quit speaking.
- # to listen, and weigh what is said against the scriptures, for what is edifying.
- # to appropriately uncover or cover the head.
- # to remain silent if a sister.
- # to be personally exercised as to worship, prayer, or prophesying needed so that
- # those whom the Spirit chooses to audibly contribute truly reflect in
 - # prayer,
 - # a hymn given out,
 - # reading, or
 - # speaking

what the Spirit has laid upon the hearts of each believer present there.

What were "revelations"? Revelations spoken of in verse 30 were direct from God. As discussed in chapter 13:8, revelations of prophecies and of knowledge

were interim gifts. They were apparently given locally as needed before the New Testament was completed. A revelation, verse 30, was more important than "prophesying," but was not infallible. A revelation was to be given priority, but courtesy, mutual respect and order were to prevail. Revelations, as contrasted with prophesying, should not be a problem nowadays as the need for supernatural revelations of wisdom or knowledge has been eliminated by completion and wide publication the entire New Testament. Prophesying selects, uses and applies the written word of God to speak to current needs and edification..

One by one. That a restriction against more than one prophesying at the same time was needed seems strange at first. How could anyone expect to or be expected to listen to competing speakers with any measure of comprehension? Perhaps the different **parties or sects** developing within the assembly would tend to gather around their preferred prophets, maybe even in the same room. God forbid!

(A few years ago we decided to break our Wednesday evening Bible Study into smaller groups. Our adult Sunday School has been divided for many years. These small groups are not the result of sects or divisions developing among us. They permit more personal interaction over the scriptures promoting greater mutual understanding of the passages being studied. Nevertheless we should take care that sects or followings do not come about by accident. Having the whole group meet together to review every chapter seems to be useful in maintaining unity).

Whatever is done it is to be done in humble love

with the objective of edifying others by being a channel for God's grace to them and a channel of their response and desires toward Him. The Spirit is to have liberty to awaken each of our hearts and to move audible expression of what is there in hearts of the assembly. He intercedes by taking the inexpressible in our hearts with "groanings that cannot be uttered" to the Father through the Son, the Lord in glory.

Romans 8:26 Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

Romans 8:27 And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God. {because: or, that}

God then returns the needed ministry of grace and peace through the channel He chooses to express it in that meeting. We receive it gladly, thoughtfully and thankfully. **His Pattern** What a blessed privilege and responsibility is ours. We can neglect it, squander it, misuse it, abuse it. Or we can simply faithfully observe it and use it.. We have the liberty to do what we will with the truth we have just been studying. God is faithful to bless if we do, or to intervene in discipline if we do not. Value and adhere to **His pattern** for meeting. Be alert to the temptation to add our own order and traditions, or to substitute our arrangements for His leading. It's much better to let Him lead.

By Ron Canner, December 17, 2003.