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Life in the Spirit #14

Sermon Summary #14

Interpretation of Tongues, Judging Prophetic Words, and Women! 1 Corinthians 14:26-40

We have finally come to the end of our brief series that I entitled, “Life in the Spirit.” Our aim was to examine what Paul said about spiritual gifts in the life of the church and in the lives of individual Christians as found in 1 Corinthians 12-14.

In bringing this study to a close, we’ve arrived at the final paragraph of 1 Corinthians 14, one in which Paul addresses several important and very controversial subjects. So our approach in this final message will be to address **three issues** that are found in vv. 26-40. On several occasions in this series I’ve already dipped into this paragraph and talked about things Paul says concerning both tongues and prophecy. So my focus today will be on these three difficult topics.

(1) The Gift of Interpretation of Tongues

Paul’s instruction concerning the use of tongues in the corporate gathering of the church comes in four parts. First, “let there be only two or at most three” (v. 27a). There’s no definitive way to know if this means two or three total, during the entire course of the meeting, or two or three before you pause to let someone interpret, after which there may be more. I’m inclined to think it is the former. Second, “each in turn” (v. 27b). Evidently the Corinthians had fallen into the habit of many people speaking in tongues simultaneously, such that no interpretation was possible and it was a loud and chaotic cacophony of voices that were of benefit to no one.

Third, “let someone interpret” (v. 27c). This would either be the person speaking in a tongue (recall v. 13) or someone who had the gift of interpretation who was known to the congregation. It can’t be someone who might spontaneously receive the interpretation at the very moment the person is speaking in tongues, for Paul obviously expects the person speaking in tongues to know **in advance** whether or not an interpretation was available. In fact, he says that if you aren’t assured of interpretation in advance, don’t ever start talking in the first place. Fourth, in the absence of interpretation you can still exercise your gift, but do it in the privacy of your own devotional prayer life and your own private times of worship (v. 28). Clearly, the words “in church” and the words “to himself and to God” are contrasted. Thus speaking to oneself and to God means outside the meeting of the church, undoubtedly in private.

We now need to focus on what the gift of interpretation is.

If some things that Paul has said strike you as hard to grasp, there is one issue on which there can be no dispute, and it is this: ***If tongues are used in the corporate assembly of the church there must be an accompanying interpretation.*** Why? Because without interpretation no one is built up or strengthened spiritually except the one speaking in a tongue. Look again at Paul’s emphasis on our responsibility to build up or edify one another: 14:1-3; 14:12; 14:18-19; and 14:26.

The interpretation of tongues may be the most neglected gift in the body of Christ. It is also one of the more important gifts, insofar as it alone makes possible the introduction of tongues-speech and its obvious blessings into the gathered assembly of believers. But before looking at what this gift is, let me explain what it *is not*.

What the Gift of Interpretation Is Not

This gift is not the ability to interpret revelation on a broad scale. There is no reason to believe that someone who has this gift could interpret dreams, visions, or other revelatory phenomena. Although not mentioned in the NT, there may well be a charisma of *interpretation*, broadly conceived. Joseph attributed to God his ability to interpret

dreams (Gen. 41:14-16), but so, too, would anyone who possessed any spiritual gift. Daniel was also enabled to interpret revelatory dreams (see Dan. 2 and 4 and especially 5:14-16). The gift of interpretation (1 Cor. 12:10), on the other hand, does not stand alone, but is inextricably tied up with tongues.

This gift must be distinguished from the ability to translate a foreign language. All of us have seen translators at the United Nations, for example, where highly educated people interpret speeches for the representatives of various countries. This is an impressive skill, but it is a natural, learned, human ability that requires no supernatural anointing of God. Interpretation of tongues, on the other hand, is no less a "manifestation" (1 Cor. 12:7) of the Holy Spirit than the gift of miracles or prophecy.

What the Gift of Interpretation Is

The charisma of interpretation of tongues is *the Spirit-empowered ability to translate a public utterance of tongues into the language of the congregation*. The word "translate," however, is somewhat ambiguous. There is a **spectrum** from literal translation at one end to broad summation at the other end, whenever the gift of interpretation is exercised.

Interpreting a tongues utterance might conceivably be a literal, word-for-word translation, equivalent in length to the utterance in tongues. We see this, for example, in the Oval Office of the White House, when the Russian president and ours sit in conversation and are entirely dependent on the word-for-word literal translation of their comments to the other. In such instances, a paraphrase or generalization could be disastrous.

Often what is said in tongues is enigmatic or parabolic or symbolic. This would require the interpreter to explain what was said and unpack its significance, not unlike what an art critic does when she "interprets" a painting and explains its intent or mood.

Perhaps the gift of interpretation gives expression to a looser, more fluid rendering that captures the essence or gist of the utterance but falls well short of a word-for-word rendering. Or it may simply be a paraphrase of what was said.

I see no reason to think the Holy Spirit couldn't enable someone to interpret a tongues utterance anywhere along this spectrum. Thus someone might speak in tongues at *great length* (30 seconds to a minute) while the interpretation is *brief* (5-15 seconds). It's entirely possible that one interpreter might provide a long, virtually word-for-word translation, while another provides a summarization of its basic content. In any case, the movement is always from the obscurity and unintelligibility of the tongues utterance to clarity and intelligibility of the interpretation, such that everyone in the church can say "Amen" to what was said (1 Cor. 14:16). In this way the entire body is edified.

The Content of Interpretation

Earlier we noted that tongues can be any form of prayer (1 Cor. 14:2), or perhaps worship (1 Cor. 14:16; cf. Acts 2:11; 10:46), as well as thanksgiving (1 Cor. 14:16). If the interpretation must correspond to the utterance, the interpretation will also take the form of prayers, praise, and expressions of gratitude to God. ***In other words, if the focus of tongues is God-ward, so too will be the interpretation on which it is based.***

This raises the question of whether there is any such thing as a *message* in tongues, i.e., a message directed horizontally to people rather than vertically to God. Pentecostal and charismatic believers have long assumed that when tongues are interpreted the result is the equivalent of prophecy. However, when a tongue is given in public, there is a sense in which the congregation is overhearing the passionate worship or prayers of an individual believer, much like what happens when we read the psalms: these are hymns of praise and prayer from a believer or the nation to God. ***If an interpretation is offered which is not prayer or praise or thanksgiving, we should be cautious about regarding it as a genuine interpretation.***

Judging Prophetic Words

Those of us who happily embrace the gifts of the Spirit need to honestly face the fact that too often people in prophetic ministry have been less than diligent in their study of the *written* Word of God and therefore less than competent to effectively test and analyze what purports to be the *spoken* Word of God. Some have become so enamored by the sensationalism of spontaneous revelatory words that they've neglected the Scriptures.

There is any number of factors why people have grown slack in their duty to judge prophetic words. Some have grown so accustomed to hearing God's voice that they often simply assume or take for granted that what purports to be a prophetic word is wholly from God. They're so excited about prophecy that they're afraid to acknowledge that some so-called "words" aren't genuine.

Also, it's hard to challenge someone concerning the validity of their word. ***Confrontation and disagreement are uncomfortable*** and we will often use any available excuse to avoid it. After all, we don't want to hurt their feelings or run the risk of shutting them down so that they're afraid ever again to be open to the possibility that God is speaking. This admirable, but misguided, sense of compassion only aggravates the problem.

Others are so concerned about *despising prophetic words and quenching the Holy Spirit* that they bend over backwards not to judge or critically evaluate what is said. Related to this is their *fear* that if they do judge an alleged prophetic word they might lose the blessing or benefit that God intends for them to receive through it. They don't want to appear critical, far less skeptical, of what may well be the voice of heaven. Someone once justified to me their reluctance to critically evaluate a prophetic word by saying, "I want to be able to respond as Mary, the mother of Jesus, did, when Gabriel brought news of her impending virginal conception: 'Be it done unto me according to Thy word.'" This person mistakenly believed that to respond with anything other than unquestioning faith and submission to the "word" might *disqualify* them from reaping the fruit that it was designed to produce in their lives. I understand their zeal. To a degree I actually find it commendable. But it can also be extremely dangerous. Paul's exhortation to judge all prophetic words means that it is *not* lack of faith if you first evaluate what is said.

Then there is the additional factor that I call *prophetic awe*. By that I mean the awe, indeed the virtual reverence, that some people have for those who are especially gifted in prophetic ministry. Some of you are so much in awe of certain prophets that the moment they open their mouths you put your brain in neutral, cast discernment to the wind, and never think about opening your Bible to see whether or not what they're saying is really true. The result is that all sorts of flaky, unbiblical ideas get passed off as divine revelation. Worse still, *people* end up getting hurt, used, and manipulated, and *prophecy* itself ends up being mocked by those outside the church and minimized by those inside. This must stop. Let me simply remind you that the apostle Paul was in no way offended or put off by the Bereans who "examined the Scriptures" (Acts 17:10-11) to determine whether or not what he said was true.

So how are we supposed to "judge" or "weigh" or "evaluate" prophetic words?

(1) The early church was to evaluate them in the light of the apostolic traditions (2 Thess. 2:15) bequeathed them by Paul. The reference to what they were "taught . . . by word of mouth" obviously alludes to the oral instruction received from Paul during his stay in Thessalonica. The "letter" he mentions is likely a reference either to 1 Thessalonians or 2 Thessalonians.

For us today, all prophetic words must be in ***absolute conformity with Scripture***. In the wilderness, Jesus tested Satan's "words" against what the rest of Scripture said and exposed how he was misapplying texts (Mt. 4).

(2) We also measure prophetic words by their tendency to edify or build up (1 Cor. 14:3). We must always ask: does it build up, strengthen, or tear down and create disunity and fear and doubt and self-contempt? Does the "word" have a tendency to exhort and encourage (1 Cor. 14:3)? Does the "word" have a tendency to console (1 Cor. 14:3) or does it lead to despair? If the "word" is predictive, empirical examination is in order to determine whether or not it comes to pass as prophesied.

(3) We must also apply the test of love (1 Cor. 13) by which all charismatic gifts are to be measured and subordinated. Paul doesn't appear to care much for any gift of the Spirit if it violates the dictates of love. Thus, always ask the question: "Does this prophetic utterance seem to be motivated by selfishness and a grab for power and prestige on the part of the prophet, or does it come across as selfless and designed to bless and encourage the one to whom it is addressed?"

(4) The test of community is also important. Wisdom demands that we always run the "word" by others who have skill and experience in evaluating prophetic revelation.

(5) Finally, there is the test of personal experience. When Paul was given a "word" about the danger that awaited him in Jerusalem (Acts 21:3-4 and 21:10-14), he evaluated and then responded in the light of what God had already told and shown him (20:22-23). In effect, Paul says: "Yes, we all got the same revelation and interpretation, that suffering awaits me in Jerusalem, but we differ on its application."

What all this means is that we must not assume that every idea or image or word that pops into our heads (or the head of a recognized prophet) is a revelation from God.

It also means that there is a vast difference between prophesying falsely and being a false prophet. All of us have at one time or another, some more, some less, prophesied falsely. We have spoken words we thought were from God which, in fact, were not. But that doesn't make us false prophets. It just makes us human! False prophets in the New Testament were non-Christian enemies of the gospel (cf. Matthew 7:15-23; 24:10-11,24; 2 Pt. 2:1-3; 1 John 4:1-6).

Who are the "others" in v. 29 who are to pass judgment or weigh what is said? These are probably the others "*in the congregation*" as a whole, that is to say, all other believers present. 1 Thessalonians 5:20-21, which calls for the evaluation of prophetic utterances, is directed to the entire church, not a specially gifted group.¹

What is the nature of this judgment to be passed? It isn't the determination of whether the utterance is of the Spirit or of the Devil, but whether what is said is compatible with what the Spirit has already said (in Scripture, in the apostolic tradition, etc.). If NT congregational prophecy is often a mixture of divine revelation and human interpretation and application (see Acts 21:4-6; 21:10-14,27-35), it's essential that the church evaluate and analyze what is said, rejecting what is wrong and accepting what is right (cf. 1 Thess. 5:19-22; see also 1 John 4:1-6). Only on the assumption that some of what the prophets say is their own contribution, and therefore possibly erroneous or misleading, could Paul command that their utterances be evaluated.

The take-away from this is simple. Anytime you are the recipient of a prophetic word, open your Bible and carefully assess what was said. To do so isn't a sign of unbelief or cynicism or pride, far less suspicion of the person who spoke it. It's your Christian obligation. My hope is that each of us will determine in our hearts neither to be skeptics who end up putting out the Spirit's fire nor fools who gullibly believe everything we are told.

(3) 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 and the Role of Women in the Church

¹ Some insist "the others" are the "other prophets". However, the term Paul uses for "others" (*hoi alloi*) usually means "others different from the subject," i.e., others beyond the prophets whose utterances are to be evaluated (i.e., the others who make up the larger group; i.e., the congregation as a whole). If Paul meant "the rest" of the prophets present at the meeting he would more likely have used a different term (*hoi loipoi*) which carries the meaning "the rest of the same class". It could be Paul is referring to those who have the gift of "distinguishing of spirits" (12:10). In 1 Cor. 12:10 the word translated "distinguishing" is the noun *diakrisis*. In 14:29 the word translated "pass judgment" is the related verb form *diakrino*. Supporting this view is the fact that "distinguishing of spirits" in 12:10 appears to be coupled with the gift of prophecy in much the same way "interpretation" is coupled with the gift of tongues. But then why wouldn't Paul simply have said, "and let those who distinguish between spirits pass judgment," if in fact he had such a group in mind? Also, if we take "the others" to refer either to a special group of prophets or those with the gift of discerning spirits, what is the majority of the congregation to do when prophecies are being uttered and evaluated? It seems they would be compelled to sit passively waiting for the prophecy to end and be judged before knowing whether to believe it or not. Furthermore, these first two views would require us to believe that teachers, pastors and other church leaders without either the gift of prophecy or discerning spirits must sit passively awaiting the verdict of an elite group. None of this seems plausible.

We have several indications in the NT that the prophetic gift was bestowed upon and exercised by women no less than by men. In Peter's speech on the day of Pentecost he explicitly said that characteristic of the present church age is the Spirit's impartation to both men *and women* of the prophetic gift (Acts 2:17-18).

In Acts 21:9 Luke refers to the four daughters of Philip as having the gift of prophecy. And in 1 Corinthians 11:5 Paul gave instructions regarding how women were to pray and prophesy in the church meeting. **What, then, does he mean here in 1 Corinthians 14:34 when he says, "the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak"?**

Before I answer that question, observe that v. 33b goes with v. 34, not with v. 33a. It is customary for Paul to reinforce his teaching by saying that it is common practice among all the churches (cf. 1 Cor. 4:17; 7:17; 11:16; 16:1). On the other hand, if v. 33b is linked with v. 34, we are left with the somewhat trite declaration that God is a God of peace in every church. But who would ever have questioned that?

How, then, do we reconcile 1 Corinthians 11:5 and 14:34-35? Here are the many alternatives.

(1) Some say 14:34-35 is a post-Pauline interpolation, i.e., an insertion into the text of chapter 14 by some scribe after its original composition by Paul. Thus there is no conflict with 11:5. Those of us who believe in the textual integrity of 1 Corinthians will find this singularly unappealing, as well as unnecessary.

Those who embrace this view appeal to the fact that there are a number of ancient manuscripts that place vv. 34-35 at the end of the chapter rather than between vv. 33 and 36. However, this is somewhat understandable given the seemingly intrusive nature of vv. 34-35. One can see how later scribes, convinced that these verses interrupt Paul's discussion of spiritual gifts, would move them to the end of the chapter where they might function as the beginning of a new discussion. We should note, however, that ***there are no manuscripts whatsoever that omit vv. 34-35 from Paul's argument.***

(2) A few liberal scholars argue that Paul simply changed his mind. He initially permitted women to speak in 11:5 but upon further reflection reversed himself in 14:34-35.

(3) Some say that in 11:5 Paul does not actually endorse women speaking in church. He says only that *if* they were to do so with uncovered heads it would be a disgrace. He *withholds condemnation* of the practice until chapter 14.

(4) Some suggest that 11:5 describes an informal meeting different from the public, corporate gathering of the church. Thus women may pray and prophesy in smaller, private groups but not in the public assembly. However, there is nothing in chapter 11 to suggest this. 1 Corinthians 10:14-22 concerns the Lord's Supper which always occurred in the corporate assembly, and 1 Corinthians 11:17, 18, 20 clearly indicate that Paul is describing what transpires in the corporate assembly of the local church.

(5) Others say that only *wives* are in view in 14:34-35 and that single women may therefore pray and prophesy in church. However, chapter 11 also has wives in view and it permits them to speak. Also, why would Paul prohibit the most likely older and more mature married women from speaking while allowing the younger and possibly less stable single women to speak? See Titus 2:3-5.

(6) Another view suggests that perhaps the men and women were seated on opposite sides of the room and that some of the ladies were either shouting out questions to their husbands and thus disrupting worship, or perhaps were simply carrying on conversations among themselves while the service was in progress.

But there is little evidence at all that men and women were segregated in this way in the early church. Also, there is no indication elsewhere in 1 Corinthians that the women in particular were unruly. And even if *some* were disruptive, why would Paul then impose absolute silence on *all* women? And are we to believe that there were *no unruly men* at all? I would have to think that in a place like Corinth there were at least a handful of well-educated, orthodox, courteous women as well as at least a few disruptive, rude, and outspoken men!

Furthermore, Paul addresses unruly and disruptive situations in the letter (11:33-34; 14:27,29,31) not by imposing silence but by establishing guidelines that bring order. Let's also not forget that the guidelines which Paul sets out

are such that are found in all the churches (14:33b), not just Corinth but Thessalonica and Philippi and Ephesus and Colossae. It seems unlikely that the problem of noisy and disruptive women was occurring in all of them.

(7) Others have argued that vv. 34-35 are a *Corinthian slogan* which Paul quotes, only to refute it in vv. 36-38. Blomberg cites seven reasons why this is unlikely:

“Unlike all the other widely acknowledged slogans in 1 Corinthians, these verses (1) are not concise or proverbial in form; (2) do not reflect the libertine wing of the church; (3) require the assumption that there was a significant Judaizing element in the church, which little else in the letter supports; (4) are not qualified by Paul but rejected outright; and (5) as best as we can tell represent an explanation that was never proposed in the history of the church until the twentieth century. In addition, (6) this view requires taking the Greek conjunction “*e*” (‘or,’ left untranslated in the NIV) at the beginning of verse 36 as a complete repudiation of what has gone before, even though no other use of “*e*” in Paul functions in that way. Finally, (7) it assumes that ‘the only people’ in verse 36, a masculine plural adjective (*monous*), refers just to men rather than to both men and women, even though no other plural reference to the Corinthians ever singles out the men in this way without explicitly saying so” (280).

(8) A very unlikely view is that Paul is either prohibiting women from speaking in tongues or from prophesying in the public meeting. But we have already seen that women frequently prophesy and there is nothing whatsoever in the context that would indicate Paul had speaking in tongues in mind when he comes to vv. 34 and following.

(9) The view most popular among conservative scholars understands Paul to be prohibiting women from participating in the passing of judgment upon or the evaluation of the prophets (14:29). In other words, Paul is not imposing absolute silence on all women. Rather he is calling for silence only in one regard, namely, the public evaluation of prophetic utterances.

We should note that Paul has already imposed silence twice before in this very paragraph, and in neither case is the silence absolute. First, in v. 28, he tells those who speak in tongues to remain “silent” if there is no interpreter. But surely they could speak in other ways during worship. Second, in v. 30, he tells those who were prophesying to remain “silent” if someone else were to receive a revelation. Again, no one believes that these two demands for “silence” mean that such people could never open their mouths again during worship!

In other words, there are always **contextual limitations** on the command “to be silent” (*sigao*). The restriction on speech may be *temporal* or *topical*. In the case of the former, someone is to be silent *while* someone else is speaking (Acts 12:17; 15:12,13; 1 Cor. 14:30). In the case of the latter, the one who is silent does not speak in a certain manner or on a certain topic, but he/she can speak in other ways and on other issues. Compare 1 Tim. 2:12 with Titus 2:3-5. Thus, on this view, Paul would be restricting speech designed to critique prophetic utterances, but would not prohibit other forms of verbal participation.

Additional support for this view is found in the structure of the paragraph. When Paul gives advice on tongues he first restricts the number who can speak (“it should be by two or at the most three”) and then gives instruction designed to ensure that the congregation will be edified (“each in turn” / “let one interpret” / “but if there is no interpreter” / “let him keep silent in the church” / “and let him speak to himself and to God”).

Then Paul turns to the issue of prophecy and does the same thing. He first restricts the number who can prophesy (“and let two or three prophets speak”) and then ensures that the congregation will be edified by insisting that the others should pass judgment.

In vv. 30-35 Paul addresses in more depth the issues raised in v. 29. In vv. 30-33a he takes up v. 29a (“let two or three prophets speak”). In vv. 33b-35 he takes up v. 29b (“and let the others weigh what is said”).

If this outline is correct, Paul would be forbidding women to speak in church only in regard to the judgment or evaluation of prophetic utterances. Evidently he believed that this entailed an exercise of authority restricted to men only (see 1 Tim. 2:12:15).

If one should ask why Paul would allow women to prophesy but not to evaluate the prophecies of others, the answer is in the nature of prophecy itself. Prophecy, unlike teaching, does not entail the exercise of an authoritative position within the local church. The prophet was but an instrument through whom revelation is reported to the congregation. People who prophesied did not officially (or authoritatively) interpret or apply Scripture to life. Non-apostolic prophets did not proclaim the theological and ethical standards by which the church was guided, nor are they portrayed as exercising governmental authority in the church.

But to evaluate or criticize or judge prophetic utterances is another matter. In this activity one could hardly avoid explicit theological and ethical instruction of other believers. If we assume that in 1 Timothy 2 Paul prohibits women from teaching or exercising authority over men, it is understandable why he would allow women to prophesy in 1 Cor. 11:5 but forbid them from judging the prophetic utterances of others (especially men) in 14:34.

This view also explains Paul's appeal to "the Law" (i.e., the OT) in v. 34. The OT does not teach that women are to remain silent at all times in worship (cf. Ex. 15:20-21; 2 Sam. 6:15,19; Ps. 148:12). But it does endorse male headship in the home and in worship, consistent with Paul's teaching here and elsewhere.

All that being said, I must tell you that I no longer embrace that interpretation. Further study has led me to another view that I now find more persuasive.

(10) When Paul tells women to "keep silent" he is not prohibiting them from making a verbal contribution to the meeting, whether in the form of worship or praying or prophesying or reading Scripture or sharing a testimony or similar activities. **I think Paul is prohibiting women from engaging in a public interrogation of another woman's husband.** Why do I say this? There are two reasons.

The first is found in v. 35. There Paul says that their speaking was motivated by a desire to "learn". The "speaking" that Paul silences was their asking of questions in an attempt to gain knowledge and insight. If they want to learn, and it is perfectly right and good that they should, they must wait and ask their husbands at home. Note well: Paul does *not* say, "if they have something to *contribute* they should *tell* their husbands later at home," but rather, "if they wish to *learn* something they should *ask* their husbands later at home."

But why would it be inappropriate for women, in the church meeting, to ask questions in their pursuit of knowledge? The answer is found in the second key to understanding this passage. It is the word translated "shameful" in v. 35 or "improper" (NASB).

Why would it be "shameful" or "improper" for women to publicly interrogate or ask probing questions of men other than their husbands in the public assembly of the church? Christopher Forbes says that "there existed in the Graeco-Roman world in [the first century] . . . a strong prejudice against women speaking in public, and especially against their speaking to other women's husbands. In a society with strictly defined gender and social roles, and a strong view of the rights of the man over his wife, such behaviour was treated as totally inappropriate" (274-75).

Therefore, women are free to pray and prophesy within the assembly. But when issues arise that they don't understand, they must refrain from making probing inquiry. Why? For one thing, there is a limited time in any one meeting and Paul does not want any one or any group to dominate the gathering (which seems to be at least part of the reason for his instruction in vv. 27-31 where he puts limits on how many can speak in tongues and prophesy). But more important, "to ask questions of the husbands of other women (especially as this might lead to extended discussions) would be grossly improper, and as such is not to be permitted" (276).

One could reasonably argue that, if this view is correct, Paul's prohibition in v. 34 on women speaking is no longer applicable. For all will acknowledge, at least in western society, that today there is no shame or impropriety in a woman asking a question in public of another woman's husband.

To be perfectly candid, no interpretation is without its problems. If nothing else, this should be a caution to all of us against being overly dogmatic on this controversial and often divisive subject.

This does not mean that there are no guidelines governing the role of women in church. There are two areas where I believe the NT is clear. First, Paul says in 1 Timothy 3 and in Titus 1 that only men should serve as

Elders. Second, in 1 Timothy 2:11-12 he says that he does not permit a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man. My conclusion is that (1) only men should serve as Elders and that (2) only men should bear responsibility for the primary pastoral and teaching role in the local church. Aside from these two matters, women are empowered by God and released to serve and minister in every other capacity in the life of the local church.

So let's briefly sum up in five statements what we've seen in these three chapters.

(1) Spiritual gifts are the great equalizer in the body of Christ. Every believer, both male and female, both young and old, is gifted to minister, not just pastors and elders or so-called clergy. "To each" is given the manifestation of the Holy Spirit.

(2) Spiritual gifts are designed primarily for the building up of the body. They are by their very nature "other-oriented" expressions of the Holy Spirit in us. They are not intended to be an excuse for you to turn inwardly and engage in navel gazing, but are designed to move you outside of yourself to serve others.

(3) Spiritual gifts exercised without love are useless. Worse than useless, they are irritating and annoying and offensive. Gifts one day will come to an end. Love lasts forever.

(4) Tongues and prophecy are the focus of Paul's instruction in chapter 14 not because they are more important or more spiritual than other gifts, but because they are more susceptible to abuse. The answer to abuse, however, is never disuse, but proper use in accordance with the guidelines Paul provides.

(5) And finally, I'll sum it up in the words of Paul himself in vv. 39-40 – "So, my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. But all things should be done decently and in order."