36 Or was it from you that the word of God came? Or are you the only ones it has reached? 37 If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord. 38 If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized. 39 So, my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. 40 But all things should be done decently and in order.  
 We now come to the concluding thoughts for the discussion at hand. In a way this conclusion deals with the discussion in this chapter concerning order and disorder, and the purpose for congregating together which is to build one another up. In another sense, we can almost see how it is a conclusion about the spiritual discussions throughout the letter. We have seen their claim of ultra spirituality. Paul has argued against what they mean by spiritual by showing a different way.  
 As such, the conclusion begins with two questions. The first is whether it was from them the Word of God came? That is, did the proclamation of the Gospel and the knowledge of the God of the Scripture originate with the Corinthians? The answer is, no. They received it. Paul is well aware of this as the one from whom they received it.  
 The next question, which everyone would have to say “no” to is whether this knowledge has only reached them? The answer, again, should be no. The Gospel and the knowledge of God had been proclaimed to many and as such there were others.  
 The next question is why even ask these questions? The answer could lie in that Paul is criticizing the prophets, those speaking in tongues, the women, or the leadership of the Church which seems to be creating local beliefs apart from the rest of the Church when it comes to spirituality and morality. Really it could be all of them with no real specific group in mind. As such, these question should remind them that they are not alone, nor are they the originators of the faith, nor are they the only ones who have the faith.   
 In verse 37 there is the further criticism. Assuming that someone believes they are a prophet, or a person of the Spirit, the litmus test is whether or not they will affirm what Paul is proclaiming to them in the letter. The letter has dealt with everything from schisms, morality, spirituality, and Church order. Paul has utilized both the Old Testament and the teachings of Jesus throughout the letter to emphasize his points. Not to mention the fact that he is also specifically called by God as an apostle to teach on these things.  
 As such, to claim to be a prophet or spiritual is not enough. We must also see whether or not the prophet or spiritual person is in line with the truth of God.  
 Thus the statement in verse 38. If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized. This is a pretty significant statement on two fronts. The first is that it is anyone who recognizes this. It is not limited to anyone in particular, to the prophet or the person claiming to be spiritual, but to everyone who would be hearing the letter. Anyone who does not recognize this as the truth is not recognized.  
 What does it mean that they are not recognized? In some sense it is that they are not to be recognized as prophets because they do not align with the Spirit of God who has spoken through the prophets and apostles. Thus, they are not to be recognized by the congregation. However, there is a sense in which it goes further. In the Old Testament to be recognized was whether or not one was recognized by God. In this context it may refer to this kind of recognition as well.  
 Verses 39-40 put an end to the whole discussion. In light of everything that has been said, especially in chapter 14 but also everything prior to this as well, Paul encourages them to desire to prophecy. Why is this? Because as he has stated at the beginning of the chapter to prophecy is to have an impact on the whole congregation. The whole purpose of congregating together is not to uplift ourselves, or be seen for ourselves, but for us to glorify God by building up one another. Prophecy does this for the whole congregation.  
 We should also notice that all because we desire to this it does not necessarily mean that the Lord will grant our request. Paul does not give us a statement like, “Desire to prophecy because if you do desire it then God will surely provide you with this gift.” There is no definite, because for Paul God provides the Spirit based upon His own reasons. But, we are still personal people and as such as persons we can still have personal desires. If we should be desiring anything for and from the Church then it should be for those gifts which can uplift the whole congregation.  
 He also says something rather interesting. Do not forbid speaking in tongues. This is a reminder that throughout the chapter Paul has placed a dichotomy between prophecy and speaking in tongues arguing that the one is more beneficial for the congregation. He has also argued that should there be no one to interpret a tongue then it should not be spoken by the individual in public worship.  
 Because of these kinds of criticisms some could read the chapter thinking Paul was against speaking in tongues at all. This is not the case. He has never said that speaking in tongues was a bad thing. Instead, he has only ever argued from the perspective of building up the community when you gather. As such, he is not against speaking in tongues. He is not saying that people should not, in their personal devotion, be told not to speak in tongues. He is not saying that it is absolutely forbidden even in the gatherings, but that there are requirements for the gatherings since the purpose is building up the congregation, and without an interpreter it becomes impossible for others to be built up.  
 Thus the final verse concludes the whole. All things should be done decently and in order. Order and decency are not meant to be a chokehold on us, or on the Spirit. Instead we are to remember that order is a reflection of God’s own character. As such when we gather we are to reflect God by being orderly in our times of gathering.  
  
Main Point: The main point of these verses are to conclude the thoughts concerning chapter 14, and technically before as well. When we gather together the purpose is to primarily build up the congregation in the truth, not to be entertained, nor to cater to our own personal desires. Instead, our gifts when we gather are to be for each other rather than ourselves, and as such our gathering should be of such a time as to reflect God’s holy character decently, orderly, and in Truth.  
  
1). Decently, Orderly, and in Truth: When it comes to our modern era it can be easy for us to be so far removed from the past that we can begin to think little of it. There is a tendency in our pride to believe that because we have ascended so greatly above those in the past technologically, or through our learning, that we far outpace them in comparison. We can see modernity and think, “Ahhhh yes! Look how far we’ve come from our archaic past!”  
 Yet, I think that this is a silly way to look at things. While it is true we have come farther when it comes to technology, it is not true that they are less reasonable or have less to say. Indeed, truth is true regardless of where it originates. The person living under a rock can say true statements as the most technologically inspired person.  
 So to ignore the writings of, let’s say, Paul because of the time he lived in, or the supposed influences he was influenced by, is altogether questionable. Even with our influences we can still be speaking the truth. Again truth statements are true regardless of their origins.   
 I say all of this because I do believe that there are those who would ignore the writings of the Scriptures simply based on their incorrect view of truth. They could reject all of the Scripture simply because it is two thousand years old and written by people who were not as advanced or knowledgeable as we are. Thus, we believe that because our culture is somehow better, or because we have achieved more for the human race that we are more capable of speaking about the truth than the Scriptures.  
 This is one of the reasons we have seen a rise in people rejecting the Scriptures. We have seen an increase in denominations and congregations who rely less on the Scriptures and more on the world around us. They rely more on the scientist, more on the sociologist, more on the psychologist, and more on the culture in general to inform them of how the world is and what it means to live in it.  
 Not only do you have this rejection of the Scriptures on the one side, but you also have what is the New Apostolic movement on the other. Those who believe that they are the new apostles of the age. Those who do believe some of what the Scriptures say enough to give themselves credence. Enough for them to say that they have some authority on important spiritual matters. Enough for them to go directly, then, against the Scriptures themselves.  
 We could only criticize these, but the truth is we also have many who do believe in the Scriptures and do not subscribe to the New Apostolic movement and yet who do the exact same thing. I can think of many who have abandoned the Church and the community because they feel they are spiritually superior to the congregation. They know more, and they live a far greater Christian life than others around them, therefore the congregation is no longer needed.  
 All of these things show something, and that is a lack of understanding of truth, as well as a lack of understanding of when Paul says here, “If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord. If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized.”  
 I Corinthians thus far has dealt with all the issues of our modern culture. It has dealt with everything from relationships, to roles, to what we would call spirituality, and even sexuality. To reject the truth claims of the letter is, according to the apostle, a rejection of God Himself. Why? Because even though Paul is mere mortal, He is still inspired by the Holy Spirit to write the truth. They are truth statements about who we are, and who God is, and what our responsibility is in light of the many other truth claims in this world.  
 Thus there is a warning to all of us at the end of this chapter. Whether it be to the prophet, or the one who believes they are spiritually superior, or the individual who believes they no longer need the Church at all. For the prophet, if they encourage a lifestyle separate from what is written in the Scriptures they are to be rejected. For the spiritually superior, if they claim that following Jesus means going against what is written, they are to be rejected. For those who go it alone, that itself is a rejection of what Paul has been saying in these chapters in which the congregation is necessary precisely because each has their own gifts and each can practice these gifts when congregating and each can learn from teachers and preachers and prophets amongst the congregation. So if the person going it alone is claiming to be superior, or a prophet, then your responsibility is to encourage the Church into greater faithfulness, not flee from it completely.  
 This all comes full circle to everything we have been talking about in this chapter. The purpose for congregating together is to glorify God by seeking to bless one another with the various gifts we have been given. To practice building each other up in the faith. Because building up is the goal, certain gifts such as teaching and prophecy are emphasized in the congregation because they effect everyone equally. However, every prophecy, every teaching, must be sifted to see if it is aligned with the truth. If the prophets, if the teachers, if even the encouragement or advice we give to one another, does not align with the Scriptures it should be rejected, and if the prophet, teacher, or advisor continues to be faithless they should be rejected.  
 In order to know the truth we need to know the Scriptures and seek to practice what it teaches. Sometimes we forget the personal responsibility each of us has which is to know the Scriptures and to learn from them. Sometimes we forget the great blessing we have from being able to read the Scriptures and have others around us who can help us understand them better when we don’t understand. Indeed, we have 2000 years of Church history to help us understand should we need advice or encouragement or understanding.  
 Yet how can we properly sift what we hear and what is being taught if we do not know the Scriptures? We could say the Spirit will guide us, but the Scriptures warn of false spirits who can misguide us. How can we know the difference between the true Spirit of God and the false spirits if we do know the truth? This is the warning John gives.  
 “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. 2 By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, 3 and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already. 4 Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. 5 They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. 6 We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.” I John 4:1-6  
 When it comes to this, discern the spirits by knowing the truth, and we can know the truth as we learn and know from Word of truth. Ultimately we can be sure of something, we are to be a responsible people. We are to be responsible when it comes to our gifts and our ministries. We are to be responsible by seeking to emulate God’s Holy character in our lives and in our congregations. Paul emphasizes here the need for order and decency, but throughout the chapter he has also focused on such things as love, knowledge, and building up one another in the truth.  
 In all these things we find a reflection of our God. Our God is a God of order, of decency, of love, of knowledge, and giving us the truth. We can do no less to glorify God than by seeking to be more like the God of the Scriptures. We can do no less when we seek, in our ministries and personal lives, to emulate the great God of all in character and deed.  
 Be encouraged, then, by everything we have seen from these chapters. Likewise, take them as a warning. We are to be a responsible people with both our personal and congregational devotion. Let us seek to encourage one another to remain attached to the truth, encouraging one another to not give up what has been passed down. To honor God in decency, order, and in truth.