

1Cor. 14:1 Follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy.

After looking at the Greek, I think the CJB has the best translation:

Pursue love! However, keep on eagerly seeking the things of the Spirit; and especially seek to be able to prophesy.

Consistent with the previous chapter, Paul continues to emphasize the importance of love characterizing our lives and to single out the gifts of tongues and prophecy. It would seem that the Corinthian church placed a far greater value on the gift of tongues than they did the gift of prophecy. They did not understand the importance of exhibiting unconditional love toward one another and evidently considered supernatural giftings of the Spirit to be more valuable. They didn't understand that denying self and exhibiting agape love was a far greater work of the Spirit in the believer's life. Without it, the "gifts" were of no spiritual benefit to them in light of heavenly reward.

Paul makes specific note that the gift to be most desired is that of prophesy. Obviously, all the gifts have an important function and are for the edification of the body of believers, but one who possesses the gift of prophecy is best equipped in sharing the truth of God's word with the power and authority that can result in changed lives—the salvation of the lost and the choice to pursue love, deny self and serve others—to equip them through the teaching of the truth.

1Cor. 14:2 For he that speaketh in an *unknown* tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth *him*; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries.

This verse makes me think that the Corinthians were probably abusing the gift of tongues by "showing off" their ability in public without regard to interpretation (because Paul brings up this qualifier to its proper use in verse 5). This was benefiting no one. The only One who can understand him is God; he is speaking to God. The gift of tongues is a supernatural working of the Holy Spirit through the believer's spirit to glorify God.

I decided to search a few commentaries and found a thought-provoking explanation by David Guzik on this verse.

"He who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God: With the gift of tongues, the speaker is addressing God, not men. Disregard of this verse leads to one of the most significant misunderstandings regarding the gift of tongues, believing tongues is a supernatural way to communicate 'man to man' instead of 'man to God.'

If we misunderstand this, we misunderstand Acts 2 and think the disciples were preaching to the crowd in tongues on the day of Pentecost. Instead, they were speaking to God and the multi-national crowd overheard their praises to God. Acts 2:11 says, *we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God.* Later, Acts 10:46 describes the hearing of the gift of tongues: *they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God."*

1Cor. 14:3 But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort.

On the other hand, one who is speaking through the gift of prophecy speaks directly to the spiritual benefit of his/her audience. *Edification* is a reference to strengthening the church by clearly presenting the truths of God's word. It always makes the church stronger, not weaker. *Exhortation* is a reference to urging the church to pray and live according to God's truth. *Comfort* is a reference to providing encouragement to those who are struggling with the trials of life and/or struggles with the flesh. This type of comfort imparts strength to the brother or sister who feels his/her strength depleting.

1Cor. 14:4 He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church.

This verse is a bit harder for me to understand. Unless the one speaking in tongues has the gift of interpretation, how does he edify himself? If he is abusing the gift by not operating in love, how does it even benefit him spiritually? I would assume that one who uses this gift in private as part of his/her time of fellowship with the Lord is benefiting from the supernatural energy of the Holy Spirit flowing through him and allowing him to praise God with expression far beyond our current capabilities in this body of flesh.

Paul Van Noy: "Because we are talking to God, it is a form of prayer. Prayer always works to our benefit."

1Cor. 14:5 I would that ye all spake with tongues, but rather that ye prophesied: for greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying.

"would" = prefer, wish, desire

Since the gifts of tongues is a means of giving God the highest praise and worship, I can understand why Paul would wish that every believer possess this gift. Even so, he is very clear that it is more important that the gift of prophecy be possessed since it is the gift that ministers directly to man. The only way the gift of tongues is beneficial to others is when interpretation is provided. Paul's whole presentation in this letter regarding spiritual gifts is that they are more for the benefit of the church—the body of Christ—than the individual believer. He states this truth very clearly in verse 12 below.

1Cor. 14:12 Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual *gifts*, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church.

It is the reason that Paul gave for his desire to come and spend time with the Roman church.

Rom. 1:11 For I long to see you, **that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift**, to the end ye may be established;

Rom. 1:12 That is, **that I may be comforted together with you** by the mutual faith both of you and me.

Paul expected to strengthen the body of believers through his gifts and expected strengthening for himself through their ministry to him through their giftings.

1Cor. 14:6 Now, brethren, if I come unto you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you, except I shall speak to you either by revelation, or by knowledge, or by prophesying, or by doctrine?

Simply put, Paul is saying that if he came to minister to them speaking in tongues, it would provide them with no edification whatsoever unless he also interpreted the message in language they could understand.

- “revelation” – The Greek for this word references disclosure from a root that states “to take off the cover.” This is teaching God’s truth through the revelation of the Spirit so as to provide understanding in what was not previously understood. I think this refers specifically to teachings like those of Paul regarding the “mysteries” and the teachings of John in Revelation.
- “knowledge” – This is reference to providing a “clear perception of truth” (from Webster – the Greek references “knowing, science,” from a root that states “perceived, resolved, understand.”) This puts me in mind of ensuring that there is no misunderstanding of God’s declared truth.
- “prophesying” – The Greek references “prediction” from a root that includes “inspired speaker.” This would be speaking through the supernatural inspiration of the Spirit. It is a specific message from the heart of God with specific intent for the heart(s) of the listener(s).
- “doctrine” – This references instruction or teaching in general regarding the teachings of God as expressed in the scripture and taught and exemplified by His Son Jesus.

These are all examples of ministry that edify the church, whether in the lives of individuals or in groups. Speaking in tongues is communication to God about God—even with interpretation (v2). As I was looking through some commentaries for help, I found some comments from Chuck Smith at www.blueletterbible.org that I want to share. He is the founding pastor of the Calvary Chapel movement and is one who embraces the operations of the gifts in the church today. He makes good sense to me.

“The interpretation, because it does bring to the people the understanding of your worship and praise to God, then does edify them. As you, by the Spirit, are declaring the glory, the power, the greatness of God, when they can understand your words of praise and adulation in glorifying God, they are edified by your praises. Now, if you have been in Pentecostal services or circles, I am sure that as you saw the particular phenomena of tongues, that as you recall those instances you see that there is an inconsistency here. For in the observation over the years of Pentecostal services where there were the public utterances in tongues, they called them messages in tongues. And the interpretation so often was after this manner. “My little children, hearken unto Me, for I would call unto you today to praise Me. My little children, hearken unto my voice.” And so often the interpretation, or I would say at this point, the supposed interpretation is addressed to the people as God would be speaking to them. It would appear in the first person. “For I the Lord declared unto thee that today I am going to bless you,” and all, and it comes out as a message from God to man.

I have observed this over and over and over again in Pentecostal-type services. Does that mean that the tongues are not genuine? No. It means that the interpretation wasn't genuine. What I feel oftentimes happens in these meetings where you have this kind of a happening is that you do have the gift of tongues exercised, followed by a gift of prophecy exercised, and not the interpretation of the tongues. I think that this is a common error in Pentecostal churches today, and you will find it almost universally within them. Tongues followed by prophecy, rather than by a true interpretation of what was uttered in the unknown tongue.

So tongues with interpretation is not an equivalent or equal to prophecy, or the same thing as prophecy. For prophecy is when God speaks to the church to edify, to exhort, to comfort; where tongues is addressed to God, divine mysteries, the secrets, the beauty, the glory as my spirit worships Him."

1Cor. 14:7 And even things without life giving sound, whether pipe or harp, except they give a distinction in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped?

1Cor. 14:8 For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?

Paul goes on to give an object lesson to illustrate the truth he is teaching. The example utilizes instruments that are lifeless, but the application is valid. Musical instruments can only communicate an intended message through playing notes that are distinct and certain; the melody played conveys the intended message. Trumpets in particular were used to summon a gathering of the people, to sound a warning, to prepare for battle, etc.

1Cor. 14:9 So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the air.

This same truth applies to the gift of tongues. Unless you speak in a language understood by the people, they will not understand your message. You might as well be speaking to the air.

1Cor. 14:10 There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world, and none of them is without signification.

The truth is that there are many different languages in this world. Each one of them is distinct and clear regarding the words and sounds uttered. Every person who speaks a given language can communicate his/her thoughts and ideas to others that speak that same language.

1Cor. 14:11 Therefore if I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh *shall be* a barbarian unto me.

Paul's conclusion—If I talk to someone who speaks another language in my native language, I will sound like a babbling foreigner to him, and he will sound like a babbling foreigner to me. Application—If I speak in tongues without

interpretation to him, I will be just like a foreigner speaking in another language that he can't understand.

1Cor. 14:12 Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church.

Interestingly, when I first focused on this verse, one of the first thoughts I had was that Paul was recognizing that a distinctive of the Corinthian church was their earnest desire to possess spiritual gifts; and that seems to be in contrast to what he encountered in the church as a whole. Seems to describe the church today, doesn't it?

Because of their zealousness, he encourages them to covet the gifts that excel in edifying the church as a whole. Although all gifts are given for the edification of the church, some are obviously more beneficial than others. Again, the emphasis is made on the benefit to the whole as opposed to the individual.

I liked this quote from David Guzik that applies here:

"If tongues are directed to God, how can a legitimate interpretation be edifying to others? The same way our reading of Psalms can edify. The prayer, or praise, or plea of another unto God can identify powerfully with our own heart before God, and we can agree with what another says to God."

1Cor. 14:13 Wherefore let him that speaketh in an *unknown* tongue pray that he may interpret.

1Cor. 14:14 For if I pray in an *unknown* tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful.

As has been noted all along, the Corinthians highly prized the gift of tongues, but Paul continues to hammer home the truth that it is tongues with interpretation that is the most beneficial to the church as a whole. In fact, he urges those who speak with tongues to seek the gift of interpretation. That way they are not dependent upon others for the best use of their gift. Use of tongues with interpretation is more edifying to both the individual and the church as whole.

1Cor. 14:15 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.

Paul is careful never to negate the value of praying and singing in the spirit, but he is always careful to note that it is better to pray and sing with understanding. Without interpretation you can be blessed in your spirit; with interpretation you can be blessed in mind and spirit.

1Cor. 14:16 Else when thou shalt bless with the spirit, how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say Amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest?

1Cor. 14:17 For thou verily givest thanks well, but the other is not edified.

“bless” = to speak well of, i.e. (religiously) to bless (thank or invoke a benediction upon, prosper):—bless, praise.

I think the NLT expresses these thoughts well.

For if you praise God only in the spirit, how can those who don't understand you praise God along with you? How can they join you in giving thanks when they don't understand what you are saying? You will be giving thanks very nicely, no doubt, but it doesn't help the other people present.

1Cor. 14:18 I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all:

1Cor. 14:19 Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue.

Paul declares that he possesses the gift of tongues and utilizes that gift more than others. Verse 19 seems to indicate that he practiced this gift more in private than public gatherings. Why? Because he recognized the truth that using the language of the people would get his message across more clearly and effectively.

1Cor. 14:20 Brethren, be not children in understanding; howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men.

I thought this was an interesting verse to find in the middle of this discourse. It would seem that the apostle is urging the believers not to let the use of this gift cause problems in the church. He is asking them to think like adults regarding the larger issue rather than focusing in like children on selfish interests.

The root word for *malice* makes reference to injurious, which I think is the intent here. Paul wants the believers to be concerned about what promotes healing and unity in the body of believers instead of focusing on issues that only injure the fellowship of believers. When the body is injured, its effectiveness is hindered.

1Cor. 14:21 In the law it is written, With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that will they not hear me, saith the Lord.

The “law” is usually a reference to the first five books of the bible, the books of Moses. If that is the case here, then this passage in Deuteronomy must be the reference. (I used a word search for *tongue* or *tongues*.)

Deut. 28:49 The LORD shall bring a nation against thee from far, from the end of the earth, *as swift* as the eagle flieth; **a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand;**

Deut. 28:50 A nation of fierce countenance, which shall not regard the person of the old, nor shew favour to the young:

Deut. 28:51 And he shall eat the fruit of thy cattle, and the fruit of thy land, until thou be destroyed: which *also* shall not leave thee *either* corn, wine, or oil, *or* the increase of thy kine, or flocks of thy sheep, until he have destroyed thee.

Deut. 28:62 And ye shall be left few in number, whereas ye were as the stars of heaven for multitude; **because thou wouldst not obey the voice of the LORD thy God.**

The commentaries I checked reference this quote as coming from the prophet Isaiah in this verse, and frankly it is the section of scripture that first came to my mind.

Is. 28:11 For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people.

Is. 28:12 To whom he said, This *is* the rest *wherewith* ye may cause the weary to rest; and this *is* the refreshing; yet they would not hear.

In context in both instances, the reference is to foreign language and the application is to judgment. God is referencing the fact that if His people choose to ignore His prophets, then judgment becomes necessary to get their attention. This judgment always comes from foreign nations. The intention of that judgment is to get His unbelieving people to recognize that their judgment is from God and that they need to repent of their sin and turn back to Him in faith and obedience. This leads right into the next verse--"tongues are for a sign...to them that believe not."

1Cor. 14:22 Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not: but prophesying *serveth* not for them that believe not, but for them which believe.

I believe the point Paul is making in this verse is that tongues should not be an issue among believers. It can be used as a means of getting the attention or connecting with the heart of the unbeliever. Believers do not need a miraculous proof of the message of truth. Prophecy is the gift that most edifies the church; the heart of the unbeliever is not ready to receive instruction from God's word. The readiness of the heart to receive is a key factor in understanding the truth of God's word as presented in prophecy.

Matt. 13:15 For this people's heart is waxed gross, and *their* ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with *their* eyes, and hear with *their* ears, and should understand with *their* heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.

Mark 8:17 And when Jesus knew *it*, he saith unto them, Why reason ye, because ye have no bread? perceive ye not yet, neither understand? have ye your heart yet hardened?

1Cor. 14:23 If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in *those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad?*

Paul is painting a word picture. If the church is gathered together for meeting, and its members are speaking in tongues without constraint, it will sound like a madhouse to those who come in that are unlearned or not yet saved. This would not encourage them to stick around and learn more. It would make them want to turn around and run.

1Cor. 14:24 But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or *one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all:*

1Cor. 14:25 And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on *his* face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth. On the other hand, if prophecy is being given (truth is being presented) in a way that can be understood, an unbeliever or unlearned person can come in and possibly fall under conviction from the truth and respond with faith and repentance to God. When he leaves that meeting, he will be encouraged to go out and bring others in to learn the truth that he learned.

1Cor. 14:26 How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying.

Again, the focus of this section of scripture is regarding the church assembling together. It sounds like Paul is encouraging the people to come prepared to share in some way. The governing principle for participation, however, is to do so in such a way as to be edifying to the whole assembly.

1Cor. 14:27 If any man speak in an *unknown* tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and *that* by course; and let one interpret.

1Cor. 14:28 But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God.

Paul, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, now establishes some practical guidelines for the church to follow. No more than three people should speak in tongues during a given assembly; they should speak in turn, and they should not speak unless an interpreter is present. This indicates to me that those possessing the gift of interpretation are known by others in the body. If there is no known interpreter present, those possessing the gift of tongues are to remain silent. They may speak in their hearts to edify self or to privately commune with God.

1Cor. 14:29 Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge.

Similarly, no more than three prophets should speak at a given assembly. Those listening to the prophets are to listen with discernment to the messages that are delivered. This seems to imply that a prophet's message could be applied differently to individuals as well as corporately to the assembly. Discernment should always be used to ensure that the message is in accordance with God's word.

Acts 17:11 These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.

1Cor. 14:30 If *any thing* be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace.

It would seem that this verse is making reference to revelation concerning a prophetic message that is being delivered. The speaker is to yield the floor to the prophet receiving revelation concerning that message.

1Cor. 14:31 For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted.

Prophecy is meant to instruct and comfort all in the assembly. For the message to be effective, however, it must be delivered in an orderly manner. In context, it would seem that “ye may all” is a reference to those with the gift of prophecy.

1Cor. 14:32 And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.

1Cor. 14:33 For God is not *the author* of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.

These verses along with verse 28 declare an important truth. One who possesses a spiritual gift also possesses the ability to control the use of that gift. Scripture is full of the truth that God is a God of order, not confusion or chaos. Peace is a hallmark of the surrendered Christian life and should be evident in all assemblies of believers. It is important to remember that we are ambassadors of Christ.

2Cor. 5:20 Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech *you* by us: we pray *you* in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.

1Cor. 14:34 Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but *they are commanded* to be under obedience, as also saith the law.

1Cor. 14:35 And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.

These are scriptures that are greatly ignored in many churches today. I know the arguments given in defense of ignoring this truth, but I personally don’t agree with them. In context, application is to the church assembly, so I do believe that there are other areas in the church ministry in which women may serve as teachers. The Greek for the word *law* is a reference to the books of Moses. Part of the curse on Eve was that she was to submit to her husband. When the Lord established the tabernacle, all those designated for service were men. Yes, God used women judges when willing men were lacking, much to the shame of the men of their day. He also used some as prophetesses among the people, and all the references to their ministry seemed to be primarily to individuals, not the assembly of the people or the body of believers. When God established the guidelines for church leadership through Paul, it was for godly **men** who were the husbands of godly women and who managed godly homes.

1Tim. 3:1 This *is* a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work.

1Tim. 3:2 A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach;

1Tim. 3:3 Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous;

1Tim. 3:4 One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity;

1Tim. 3:5 (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)

1Tim. 3:8 Likewise *must* the deacons *be* grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre;

1Tim. 3:9 Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.

1Tim. 3:10 And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being *found* blameless.

1Tim. 3:11 Even so *must their wives be* grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things.

1Tim. 3:12 Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well.

In no way, however, does this prohibit the ministry of women among women. Neither does it prohibit, under the authority of the husband or male in authority, a woman from providing counsel or instruction to a man outside the setting of the church congregation--a biblical example being Priscilla and Aquila's instruction of Appolos.

Acts 18:24 And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus.

Acts 18:25 This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John.

Acts 18:26 And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto *them*, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.

The Greek for the word *husband* is more general in its reference, "a man (properly as an individual male):—fellow, husband, man, sir." This clarification takes care of any questions arising regarding the single female. The reference would be to male spiritual authority as established by God. In chapter 11 we have already established that women could pray and prophesy in a public setting. It was also established that they were to do so under God's established line of authority.

Point is made that it is natural for a woman to have questions regarding what is being taught in the church assembly, but she is to seek instruction from her God-established spiritual authority.

Again, I emphasize, the context of this instruction is regarding the joint assembly of believers in the church.

Personally, I do not think there is biblical justification for the current fad of husband and wife preaching teams and women preachers/pastors in the church--especially in light of 1Timothy 3.

1Cor. 14:36 What? came the word of God out from you? or came it unto you only?

It would seem that Paul is being a bit sarcastic with his questioning here. The Corinthian believers were acting as I believe many churches are acting today. They were establishing their own methods of "doing church" according to their own culture and desires without regard as to how God would have them function. The implication seems to be that there was an established form of function in other churches that were being totally disregarded by the Corinthians.

1Cor. 14:37 If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.

1Cor. 14:38 But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant.

Paul seems to be declaring that any true prophet or spiritually mature person will recognize that Paul's teaching is from the Lord. If they choose to ignore that truth or do not understand it as truth, they aren't truly prophets nor are they spiritually mature. They deserve no recognition as such.

1Cor. 14:39 Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues.

1Cor. 14:40 Let all things be done decently and in order.

The conclusion of this section—earnestly desire to prophesy, but don't prohibit speaking in tongues. Prophecy is the preferred gift, the gift that has the power to edify everyone to whom it is presented as a stand-alone. In whatever process the church functions, it is to be done decently and in order.