

Tongues.

This chapter, 1 Corinthians 14, is primarily contrasting two of the spiritual gifts Paul mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12, speaking in tongues and prophecy.

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1 Corinthians 14:1.

Follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy.

The spiritual gifts spoken of are:

1 Corinthians 12:10.

To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues:

This gift of prophecy is different from the ministry gift of a prophet (Ephesians 4:11). According to verse 3, this gift of prophecy is for edification, exhortation, and comfort. There have certainly been many prophets whose prophecies didn't meet those standards.

This simple gift of prophecy that operates in the church assembly is limited to general edification, exhortation, and comfort of the body (1 Corinthians 14:3). If a person begins to give an individual prophecy of personal direction to someone, that falls into the ministry of a prophet and is different from this simple gift of prophecy.

For example, believers wouldn't allow people called to the office of a teacher to interrupt a service and just start teaching. That would be out of order. Teachers should make themselves known to the pastor, and if given the authority, then they could teach. Likewise, for people to minister direction or future events to an individual or the whole body and claim that it is a prophecy are out of order. That would be the ministry of a prophet, and prophets should be recognized by the pastor, just as teachers would have to be.

This simple gift of prophecy that Paul was describing here will never be a lengthy teaching, a rebuke, or a warning. That's the ministry of a prophet. This will just be words of encouragement from the Lord along the lines of "Children, I love you. I've received your praise. I'm present to minister to you," etc.

Failure to understand the difference between this simple gift of prophecy and the ministry of a prophet has led to some strange things being called words of prophecy in many churches. Some people actually prepare teachings during the week and deliver them as prophecies in church. Others use "prophecy" as an opportunity to rebuke someone or to vent their own prejudices or to put in their "two bits" about what the church should be doing. None of those things are the gift of prophecy that Paul was describing here.

There are different kinds of speaking in tongues, tongues of men and tongues of angels (1 Corinthians 13:1). This gift of speaking in tongues of men is a ministry gift that operates in church and differs from the personal speaking in tongues of angels that every believer who has been baptized in the Holy Spirit can do (Mark 16:17). Only some believers are given this gift of tongues of men that operates in public and equals prophecy when interpreted (verse 30).

This contrasting of the two spiritual gifts, (speaking in tongues and prophecy), was apparently done to correct some specific problems that had occurred in the Corinthian church through the abuse of the gift of speaking in tongues. Paul was stressing that unless the gifts edify the church, they should not be used in the public assembly.

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1 Corinthians 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.

The word, "for", is a conjunction connecting 1 Corinthians 14:1 and 2. Paul was giving the reason he instructed them to desire prophecy above other spiritual gifts. Speaking in tongues is us communing with God, but prophecy is God speaking through us to man. In the church, we should seek to edify others, not ourselves (see verse 12). Verse 4 says: Prophecy edifies others, while speaking in tongues only edifies the person who is speaking.

Many people question what is accomplished by speaking in tongues. There are four verses in this chapter where Paul gave us insight on this. In this verse, Paul said we are speaking mysteries. In verse 4, Paul said we edify ourselves through speaking in tongues. In verse 14, Paul says the spirit is the part of us that prays in tongues, and verse 17 says we are giving thanks unto God when we speak in tongues.

There are many times in Scripture where Paul said he was explaining the mysteries of God. Where did he get his understanding of these mysteries? Of course, it was from God, but is it possible that through speaking in tongues and gaining the interpretation, he unlocked these mysteries?

When people speak in tongues, they are speaking the wonderful mysteries of God. That's what Paul said here. He also said in 1 Corinthians 14:13 that those who pray in tongues should pray for the interpretation. Is it unreasonable to believe that Paul himself did what he preached to others? Of course he did!

Paul made it clear that his revelation of the mysteries of God came through the Spirit. Verse 14 says that, when we pray in tongues, our spirits are praying through the power of the Holy Spirit. Verse 14 says that, normally our understanding is unfruitful when we pray in tongues, but we can change that by praying for the interpretation.

If we are in a church assembly and we pray in tongues, the interpretation that we are to pray for would have to be an audible interpretation in the language of the listeners, but in our private prayer with the Lord, all we have to pray for is our understanding to become fruitful. That is to say, all we need is just revelation of the mysteries we are speaking. There doesn't have to be an audible interpretation.

The gift of interpreting the gift of tongues, is not a translation but an interpretation; it just conveys the thought of what was said into the known language. Therefore, the interpretation may be longer or shorter than the message in tongues and differ in style, yet be the proper interpretation. When the gift of tongues and the gift of interpretation of tongues operate together, that is equal to prophecy.

The way this works in practice is that as we speak in tongues and believe for the interpretation, revelation knowledge comes. This might be insight into some truth of God that we are pondering, or godly insight into some situation that we are praying over.

Examples of revelation knowledge are:

Luke 2:26.

And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

Revelation knowledge is distinctly different than knowledge acquired by learning. Simeon had not been taught by man that he would see the Lord's Christ, but it was simply made known to him by God.

John 14:26.

But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.

The Holy Spirit is sent to teach us ALL things and bring ALL things to our remembrance that Jesus has spoken to us. There is no revelation knowledge apart from the enlightening power of the Holy Spirit.

One of the ministries of the Holy Spirit is to bring back to our remembrance all things that Jesus has spoken unto us. This is the best note-taking system available. Everything that Jesus speaks will be brought back to us, while anything that was from the flesh will not.

This ministry of the Holy Spirit is available to all believers who have received the Holy Spirit, but it is not operable in all Spirit-filled believers. It must be appropriated by faith. With a promise

like this, there is no reason for believers to ever confess that they just can't remember the Word of God or the truths it teaches.

Two of the great differences between the Old Testament saints and the New Testament saints are the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the quickened understanding that the Holy Spirit gives.

Four times in his dialogue that Jesus gave to His disciples the night before His crucifixion, He called the Holy Spirit the Comforter. This is a descriptive title depicting the ministry of the Holy Spirit. He is a Comforter just like Jesus.

John 15:26.

But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me:

John 16:13.

Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.

What a wonderful promise! The Holy Spirit will show us things to come. If we will listen and receive this ministry of the Holy Spirit, this will change our lives. We can avoid many problems and take advantage of opportunities that we would otherwise miss.

Jesus had just revealed a whole new way of relating to God in John 16:8-11. The Holy Spirit wouldn't be convicting people of individual sins but of the singular sin of not believing on Jesus. That's the root of everything. And then the Holy Spirit would reveal to us that we are the righteousness of God in Christ and that Satan has already been judged.

Then Jesus said He wanted to tell them more, but they couldn't receive it yet. Here, He spoke about how the Holy Spirit will lead them into all of these new things. So, receiving these revelations from the Lord that they were unable to receive at that time was dependent on them receiving this ministry of the Holy Spirit.

If we don't receive this positive ministry of the Holy Spirit that Jesus revealed in John 16:8-11, our further revelation from the Holy Spirit will be blocked. What a powerful truth. This elevates the necessity of understanding and receiving this positive ministry of the Holy Spirit to an essential ingredient of revelation knowledge.

A guide doesn't do everything for us but rather leads us. The Holy Spirit will lead us into all truth, but we have to follow. We have to go to the effort of studying, trusting that the Holy Spirit is leading us.

This was the fourth time Jesus emphasized the Holy Spirit as being the one to reveal the truths of God to the believer. In this instance, Jesus said the Holy Spirit would guide us into all truth. During this same night, Jesus said, "Thy word is truth". Therefore, the Holy Spirit is specifically given to give revelation knowledge of God's Word.

Jesus had spoken of the ministry of the Holy Spirit many times before, but here He revealed that the Holy Spirit will show us things to come. Foreknowledge is one of the distinct characteristics of God alone. Therefore, this is another witness to the Holy Spirit being part of the Godhead.

Part of the Holy Spirit's ministry is to make this foreknowledge available to the believer. This does not automatically operate, but it can be appropriated by every Spirit-filled believer through faith. This is one of the most miraculous and beneficial ministries of the Holy Spirit and also one of the least used.

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John 16:7-11.

7 Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.

8 And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment:

9 Of sin, because they believe not on me;

10 Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more;

11 Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.

John 16:7.

Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.

What an amazing statement! What could be better than having Jesus physically present with us? The answer is having the Holy Spirit indwell us. When Jesus was in His physical body, He was limited to being in one place at one time. Therefore, He wasn't completely available to every believer all the time. But through the Holy Spirit, He now indwells each one of us and will never leave us nor forsake us.

Also, Jesus' physical body was natural. It wasn't sinful, but it was plain. The disciples constantly missed who Jesus really was on the inside, because they were so dominated by their senses. But now that we have the indwelling Holy Spirit, whose primary purpose is to reveal the true Jesus to us, we can know Jesus in a more intimate way and with more understanding than His first disciples knew Him. What a deal!

We know Jesus made it to heaven and the throne because He sent back the Holy Spirit. He said He would do that after He was back with the Father.

Notice the terminology that Jesus used to describe the Holy Spirit. Jesus called Him the Comforter.

The Greek word translated, "expedient", is "SUMPHERO," and it means "to be an advantage, profitable" (Vine's Expository Dictionary).

How could any situation be more advantageous or profitable than having Jesus physically with you?

When Jesus walked on this earth in His physical body, He was subject to many physical limitations. For instance, He could not always be with every one of His disciples all the time. Through the ministry of the Holy Spirit He could. Instead of Satan getting rid of Jesus, 120 "little Christs" came out of the Upper Room on the Day of Pentecost.

Jesus had taught His disciples as no teacher ever had, but they had very little understanding because they had not been born again yet. However, when the Holy Spirit came, He would lead them into all truth (John 14:26 and 16:13) and even show them things to come.

The list of advantages of having the Holy Spirit in us, as compared to having Jesus with us in His physical body, goes on and on. The advantages can all be summed up in the fact that Jesus' power is now complete and no longer confined to one physical body.

It is very important to note that we should not act solely on an interpretation of our speaking in tongues. It is very possible for us to have thoughts as we speak in tongues that are not revelation from God, but rather are our own thoughts or even thoughts from the devil. The way to discern whether or not our interpretation is from God is to check it with Scripture. God will never say anything contrary to His Word. This requires more than a casual knowledge of God's Word (see note 2 at Matthew 4:3). An immature Christian who is not knowledgeable of God's Word should submit any so-called "revelation" to a mature Christian for evaluation.

When done correctly, speaking in tongues and receiving the interpretation can be of great value. This is one of the keys that opens up the door to revelation knowledge.

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1 Corinthians 14:3.

But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort.

This verse makes it very clear that there is a difference between the ministry of a prophet and the simple gift of prophecy that Paul was speaking of here. This gift of prophecy is always edifying, exhorting, and comforting. The ministry of a prophet is not. Any utterance of rebuke in a church assembly is the ministry of a prophet and differs from this simple gift of prophecy.

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1 Corinthians 14:4.

He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church.

This is the second of four benefits of speaking in tongues that Paul mentioned in this chapter.

When we pray in tongues, we edify ourselves. The word "edify" means "the act of building or the promotion of spiritual growth". Speaking in tongues builds us up and promotes spiritual growth.

Acts 9:31.

Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.

The churches in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria were built up, encouraged, or made bold during this rest from persecution.

Jude 1:20.

But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost,

We should let the Holy Spirit control us. We do this by praying in the Holy Spirit. This includes, but is not limited to, praying in tongues. As we pray in tongues we build up ourselves on our most holy faith. It takes faith, our most holy faith, to pray in tongues. That's one of the great arguments for this manifestation of the Holy Spirit.

The Lord promised us that He would comfort us in all our tribulation (2Corinthians 1:4), and that is specifically what the gift of speaking in tongues does for us. Later in this chapter, in 1Corinthians 14:21, Paul quoted from Isa 28:11-12 and specifically applied those verses to speaking in tongues. Therefore, in Isa 28:11-12, the Lord said that speaking in tongues was refreshing and the "rest" wherewith you may cause the weary to rest.

Speaking in tongues is a powerful force for promoting spiritual growth and giving us refreshing and rest in trying situations.

In 1 Corinthians 14:4, Paul was contrasting the gift of speaking in tongues and the gift of prophecy that operate in the church assembly. In the church, prophecy is better than speaking in tongues, (unless there is an interpretation - see verse 5), because it benefits the whole group, not just one individual. That is certainly true and understandable, but Paul was not discrediting at all the personal benefit of speaking in tongues. On the contrary, he said that those who speak in tongues edify themselves.

The ability to edify ourselves is priceless. Too many Christians are dependent on others to get built up spiritually. If there were no other benefit to be derived from speaking in tongues, this would be reason enough to pursue this gift. Those who believe that these spiritual gifts are not for us today are depriving themselves and others of edification.

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1 Corinthians 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.

Paul certainly was not against speaking in tongues, as this statement proves. In verse 39, he gave a direct command not to forbid speaking in tongues. The body of Christ would do well to observe Paul's instructions.

Some people have tried to take Paul's statement here and teach that the gift of speaking in tongues is not for everyone. Their reasoning is that if Paul had to wish they all spoke in tongues, then God must have kept some from operating in this gift. There could be a couple of good reasons as to why this is not what Paul was saying.

First, Paul, in context, was speaking about the gift of speaking in tongues that operates in the church, which is not for everyone. If this verse is referring to the public ministry gift, then not all will operate in this gift, just as not all will operate in the gift of faith. However, that doesn't mean that God wills for some believers not to speak in tongues in their personal lives, any more than it means not all believers have faith, since not everyone has the gift of faith.

Second, if Paul was speaking of the personal gift of speaking in tongues that operates in private prayer with the Lord, then those who did not have that gift were responsible, not the Lord. It is the Lord's will for those who receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit (see Acts 2:4) to speak in tongues (see Mark 16:17), but that doesn't happen automatically. People have to believe. This would simply mean that some had not exercised their faith in that area yet.

Apparently, there had been severe misuses of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the Corinthian church. This was why Paul was writing these instructions about the proper use of the gifts. From Paul's contrast of the gift of tongues with the gift of prophecy, it is obvious that some of the Corinthians had been swelled up with spiritual pride, because they spoke in tongues in the church services. Paul "popped their bubble" by stating that those who edify the church are greater than those who edify themselves.

Paul didn't say this so that those who were operating in prophecy could have the upper hand in this argument. He was simply stating that everything that happens in a church service should be done for the purpose of edifying the church and not for selfish recognition (verse 25).

Paul clearly stated that in the church, prophecy is definitely superior to speaking in tongues, because it benefits everyone. However, in this verse, he stated that tongues, if interpreted, are equal to prophecy because they too edify the whole church. So, when the gift of tongues and the gift of the interpretation of tongues work together, that becomes a word from God to the church, or prophecy.