



Be Wise About Using Spiritual Gifts

1 Corinthians 14

Warren W. Wiersbe, The Bible Exposition Commentary, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 612–613.



1 Corinthians 14:1–5 (NKJV)

1 Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy.

2 For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries.

3 But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men.

4 He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church.

5 I wish you all spoke with tongues, but even more that you prophesied; for he who prophesies is greater than he who speaks with tongues, unless indeed he interprets, that the church may receive edification.



1 Corinthians 14:26 (NKJV)

How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.



- Paul had discussed the gift of the Spirit, the gifts of the Spirit, and the graces of the Spirit, and now he concluded this section by explaining the government of the Spirit in the church's public worship services.
- Apparently, there was a tendency for some of the Corinthians to lose control of themselves as they exercised their gifts, and Paul had to remind them of the fundamental principles that ought to govern the public meetings of the church.
- There are three principles: edification, understanding and order.



1 Corinthians 14:1 (NKJV)

Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy.

- Pursue - διώκω [dioko /dee·o·ko/] v. It is to run swiftly in order to catch a person or thing, to run after or reach a goal. It is to seek after eagerly, earnestly endeavor to acquire.
- Desire - ζηλεύω, ζηλόω [zeloo /dzay·lo·o/] v. It is to burn with zeal with a good sense, to be zealous in the pursuit of good.



Edification (1 Cor. 14:1–5, 26b)

- This was one of Paul's favorite words, borrowed, of course, from architecture. To edify means "to build up". This concept is not alien to the "body" image of the church; even today, we speak about "bodybuilding exercises."
- There is an overlapping of images here; for the body of Christ is also the temple of the living God.
- Paul's choice of the word "edify" was a wise one.



- The Corinthians' mistake was to emphasize their own personal edification to the neglect of the church.
- They wanted to build themselves up, but they did not want to build up other fellow believers.
- This attitude, of course, not only hurt the other Christians, but it also hurt the believers who were practicing it.
- If we are all members of the same body, the way we relate to the other members must ultimately affect us personally.



1 Corinthians 12:21 (NKJV)

And the eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you”; nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.”

- If one member of the body is weak or infected, it will affect the other members.
- Paul detected that the church was neglecting prophecy and giving a wrong emphasis to tongues. We must not think of a New Testament prophet as a person who foretold the future, for even the Old Testament prophets did more than that.



- Prophets received God's message immediately, through the Holy Spirit, and communicated that message to the church, usually in a tongue, but not always.
- Prophecy was not the same as our modern-day "preaching" because today's preachers study the Bible and prepare their messages.
- Paul explained the supreme value of prophecy over tongues by contrasting the two gifts.



Prophecy Speaks To Men, Tongues To God

1 Corinthians 14:1–3 (NKJV)

1 Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy.

2 For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries.

3 But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men.



- "If you are zealous for spiritual gifts, at least desire the best gifts", was Paul's counsel.
- Prophecy was best because it built up the church. It gives the listeners encouragement and comfort, which are some things that everybody needs.



- Unfortunately in some of our translations, our translators inserted “unknown” in 1 Corinthians 14:2 because the New Testament knows nothing of an “unknown tongue.”
- From the very beginning of the church, tongues were known languages, recognized by the listeners (Acts 2:4, 6, 8, 11).

Acts 2:4 (NKJV)

And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.



Acts 2:6 (NKJV)

And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together,

Acts 2:8 (NKJV)

And how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born?

Acts 2:11 (NKJV)

Cretans and Arabs—we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God.”



The tongue would be unknown to the speaker and the listeners, but it was not unknown in the world.

1 Corinthians 14:10–11 (NKJV)

10 There are, it may be, so many kinds of languages in the world, and none of them is without significance.

11 Therefore, if I do not know the meaning of the language, I shall be a foreigner to him who speaks, and he who speaks will be a foreigner to me.



1 Corinthians 14:21 (NKJV)

In the law it is written: “With men of other tongues and other lips I will speak to this people; And yet, for all that, they will not hear Me,” says the Lord.

- It is also unfortunate that people believe that tongues were used to preach the Gospel to the lost.
- Quite the contrary was true: Paul was afraid that the church's excessive tongues would convince the lost that Christians were crazy!



- At Pentecost, the believers praised "the wonderful works of God," but Peter preached the Gospel in the Aramaic language his listeners could all understand.

1 Corinthians 14:23 (NKJV)

Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those who are uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say that you are out of your mind?

- The believer who speaks in a tongue speaks to God in praise and worship, but the believer who prophesies shares the Word with the church and helps those who listen.



- This leads to the second contrast. Prophecy edifies the church, but tongues edify only the speaker (Vv. 4–5).
- Paul did not deny tongues' value to the speaker, but he did place a greater value on building up the church.

1 Corinthians 14:4–5 (NKJV)

4 He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church.

5 I wish you all spoke with tongues, but even more that you prophesied; for he who prophesies is greater than he who speaks with tongues, unless indeed he interprets, that the church may receive edification.



“For he who prophesies is greater than he who speaks with tongues.”

- Unless the tongues are interpreted the message can do the church no good.

1 Corinthians 12:10 (NKJV)

to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.

1 Corinthians 12:30 (NKJV)

Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?



Paul pointed out that an interpreter must be present before the gift of tongues may be exercised.

1 Corinthians 14:28 (NKJV)

But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God.

- Keep in mind that the Corinthian church members did not sit in the services with Bibles on their laps. The New Testament was being written, and the Old Testament scrolls were expensive and not available to most believers.



- God spoke to His people directly through the prophets, and the message was sometimes given in a tongue.
- The three gifts of knowledge, prophecy, and tongues worked together to convey truth to the people.

1 Corinthians 13:1–2 (NKJV)

1 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.

2 And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.



**The Three Gifts Of
Knowledge, Prophecy
And Tongues Worked
Together To Convey Truth
To The People.**



1 Corinthians 13:8–11 (NKJV)

8 Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away.

9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part.

10 But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.

11 When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.



Paul emphasized the importance of doctrinal teaching in the church. Our worship must be based on truth, or it may become superstitious emotionalism.

- Christians need to know what they believe and why they believe it. The prophet shared the truth with the church and thereby edified the assembly.
- The person speaking in tongues (unless there is an interpreter) is enjoying his worship of God, but he is not edifying the church but him or herself.



- We must communicate biblical truth to the people so that the church can be build up.
- Sometimes the music has not been edifying, and at other times, the music powerfully communicated the Word of God. Whenever all of us as ministers have aimed at edification and not entertainment, God has blessed, and the people have been helped.
- A ministry that does not build up will tear down, no matter how "spiritual" it may seem.
- When we explain and apply the Word of God to individual lives, we have a ministry of edification.



Be Wise About ... Using Spiritual Gifts

There Are Three Principles:
Edification, Understanding & Order.

