

Text: 1 Cor 14.1-5**Summarizing 1 Cor 12-14 so far****1 Corinthians 12: Emphasis on unity of spirit and clarity of understanding**

- **The context:** In the mystery religions of the ancient world, ecstatic practices resembling the gift of tongues *confused* the Corinthians
- **The issue:** Some Christians in Corinth equated tongues-speaking as the mark of true spirituality, skewing their focus from serving others to exalting self
- **Biblical gifts:**
 - Comprise a variety of equally valued gifts from the Triune God
 - Given for the benefit of the church as a whole: “the common good” (7), “just as He wills” (11)
 - Differing in nature according to the times:
 1. At-will miracle supernatural gifts in apostolic times
 2. Day-to-day ordinary gifts in all times and all places
- **The importance of the Body** for contextualizing the use of gifts
- **The Ranking of Gifts** (1 Cor 12.27-31a)

1 Corinthians 13: Partial digression

- **Spiritual Fruit: superior to Spiritual Gifts** (12.31b-13.13)
 - **A pause for definitions**

1 Corinthians 14: Priority of intelligibility in the church

“Paul had intimated in chapter 12 that the Corinthians were perverting the purpose of gifts from a unifying influence on the church to one fostering fragmentation and discord (esp. 12:21–25). ... The focal problem in the matter of the use and abuse of gifts seemed to be the Corinthian fascination with tongues, a gift which apparently lent itself most readily to perversion from something intended “for the common good” (12:7) to something employed for personal enhancement (14:4).”¹

¹ David K. Lowery, “1 Corinthians,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 537.

Picking up the thread, chiasmically:

Compare 12.31 and 14.1

But earnestly desire the greater gifts.

And I show you a still more excellent way. [*i.e.*, ch. 13, fruit of love]

Pursue love

yet desire earnestly spiritual *gifts*,
(but especially that you may prophesy.)

Understanding the word “spiritual” (14.1)

1 Cor 12.1 ¶ Now concerning **spiritual gifts**, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware.

1 Cor 14.1 ¶ Pursue love, yet desire earnestly **spiritual gifts**, but especially that you may prophesy.

1 Cor 14.37 ¶ If anyone thinks he is a prophet or **spiritual**, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord’s commandment.

Spiritual:

The word *gifts* in italics in 12.1 and 14.1 (supplied by translators)

Clearly means “spiritual persons” in 14.37

Could mean “spiritual persons” in 12.1

One commentator translates, “the things of the Spirit” for 14.1

Yet:

Word is usually translated “and” (sometimes “but” as in the next clause)

But especially that:

“*but rather, or rather, or simply rather*, introduces an expr. or thought that supplements and thereby corrects what has preceded”²

“that” = a purpose statement

² Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

Putting it all together:

1. The fruit of the spirit is the first priority of the Christian, especially within a church body
2. The things of the Spirit are not off limits, but it is better to seek them so that you may prophesy

Understanding God's priorities

1 Cor 14.2-3 For one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God; for no one understands, but in *his* spirit he speaks mysteries. ³ But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation.

Context: Where is this speaking done? **in church**

Tongue:

We have defined biblical tongues as human languages.

In their culture, they may have known in paganism "ecstatic utterances"

Problem:

What is the problem with this use of a tongue in the assembly?

No one understands whether it is a language or ecstatic utterance

What does speaking in mysteries mean?

No one understands [Note: spirit could be Spirit, although article isn't present]

Contrast:

What happens when someone prophesies?

He is understood and provides spiritual benefit

Nature of prophecy here:

What specific benefits are the result of prophecy in v. 3?

1. **Edification**
2. **Exhortation**
3. **Encouragement**

Since “revelation” or “foretelling the future” are not listed, what aspect of the gift of prophecy does Paul have in mind?

Day-to-day ministry gift (not At-will miracle)

Summing up:

1 Cor 14.4 One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; but one who prophesies edifies the church.

The tongues speaker edifies **himself**

The prophet edifies **the church**

Note: What is necessary for a tongues speaker to edify anyone?

Intelligible speech, he must understand what he is saying himself

Paul’s desires for the Corinthians

1 Cor 14.5 Now I wish that you all spoke in tongues, but *even* more that you would prophesy; and greater is one who prophesies than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may receive edifying.

When Paul wishes they all spoke in tongues, he is not dismissing tongues. There was a real gift of tongues in that day.

Does Paul mean this as a divine wish for *every* Corinthian believer? Compare 1 Cor 12.29 and 1 Cor 7.7. Is this a universal expectation?

No, he is wishing they were walking spiritually so they could exercise gifts in the right way

But rather:

“but rather, or rather, or simply rather, introduces an expr. or thought that supplements and thereby corrects what has preceded”³

What is Paul saying about the value of prophecy vs. the value of a tongue?

Prophecy is more important than tongues

³ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

Look back to 1 Cor 12.28

What rank is prophecy? **second**

What rank is tongues? **last**

Paul goes even further here, he ranks the speaker, not just the gift. Which one is greater?

The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues

What exception would make the tongues speaker equal to the prophet?

If he interprets what he said in the tongue

The opening paragraph of 1 Cor 14 establishes Paul's preference for believers. They should earnestly seek to benefit other Christians by their spiritual gifts. Tongues speaking, as the Corinthians were doing it, could benefit only themselves (if they were truly speaking something they understood and were not just babbling).

Paul wanted them to benefit others, so the obvious contrast with tongues is speech that always benefits others in the church: prophecy.