

Understanding and Using the Gifts of the Holy Spirit

**Lesson 4: The Gifts of Prophecy
and the Interpretation of Tongues**

In this lesson you will learn:

1. When does God prefer the gift of prophecy to the gift of tongues?

Christian love is the guiding principle in the proper use of the gifts of the Spirit.

1 Corinthians 14

Verse 1

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



Christian love is the guiding principle in the proper use of the gifts of the Spirit.

“Charity” is an Old English word for the self-sacrificing love personified by Christ.

1 Corinthians 14

Verse 1

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



The reason Paul says he prefers prophecy will soon become clear, but first here is a simple explanation of the spiritual gift of prophecy:

1 Corinthians 14

Verse 1

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



The Spirit SPEAKS

By the spiritual gift of prophecy, the Holy Spirit speaks through you to bring a message from the LORD to a certain individual or group. This message will be in the language of the person speaking.

Having the gift of prophecy does
NOT make you a Prophet!

The GIFT of PROPHECY and the MINISTRY of a PROPHET

All Spirit-filled Christians can be used by the Holy Spirit to bring forth the **occasional** word from the Lord.

(As 1 Samuel 10:7 says, “**Do as occasion serve thee.**” This gift is not to be used presumptuously but in submission to and in the fear of the LORD.)



Here I am in Tanzania, Africa, in February 2014. At the end of my class on spiritual gifts, I spoke a word of prophesy over each student.

The GIFT of PROPHECY and the MINISTRY of a PROPHET

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The **MINISTRY** of a prophet is a position of spiritual leadership in the church, with a special anointing to keep the people in tune with God. This ministry can only be ordained by God. Hebrews 5:4 says, “No man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron.”

The gift of tongues helps the individual Christian speak to God.

Prophecy is the Holy Spirit's tool for speaking to the church.

1 Corinthians 14

Verses 2-3

- 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.
- ³ But he that prophesieth **speaketh unto men** to edification, and exhortation, and comfort.



A genuine word of prophecy will fit into one or more of these three categories:

Edification,
Exhortation,
Comfort.

1 Corinthians 14

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- ³ But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to **edification**, and **exhortation**, and **comfort**.



Ephesians 4:29

Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, **but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.**



Edification

When the troubles of life are tearing you down, words of EDIFICATION build you back up.

Exhortation

1 Thessalonians 4:1

Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, **and exhort you by the Lord Jesus**, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more.

Words of EXHORTATION strengthen our commitment to follow the Lord.



2 Corinthians 1:3-4

- 3 Blessed *be* God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort;
- 4 Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.



Comfort

Words of COMFORT soothe our pain.

Speaking in tongues edifies or builds up the person using the gift.

Words of prophecy strengthen the entire congregation.

1 Corinthians 14

Verse 4

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



In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul teaches about the most loving way to use the spiritual gifts IN A CHURCH MEETING.

IN THE CHURCH, a word of prophecy is better than speaking in tongues because everyone can understand it.

1 Corinthians 14

Verse 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.**



But if ONE MORE gift is used – the gift of the interpretation of tongues – then speaking in tongues in church is also good.

1 Corinthians 14

Verse 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.



The Spirit SPEAKS

By the gift of the interpretation of tongues, the Holy Spirit speaks through you to give the meaning of what was just spoken by the gift of tongues. This interpretation will be in the language of the person speaking.

The Holy Spirit is the interpreter, not the person. The person is the mouthpiece for the interpretation.

Let me try to explain this a different way:

1 Corinthians 14

Verse 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.



Talking to an English-Speaking Audience:



A French speaker would not be understood...

Talking to an English-Speaking Audience:



A French speaker would not be understood... unless he had an interpreter.

Talking to an English-Speaking Audience:



A French speaker with an English interpreter is as effective as an English speaker.

Talking to an English-Speaking Audience:



Speaking in Tongues



with the Interpretation of Tongues



equals Prophecy.

God wants all his children to speak in tongues.

1 Corinthians 14

Verse 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.



But in congregational meetings, a word of prophesy is better...

1 Corinthians 14

Verse 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.



... EXCEPT when the gift of the interpretation of tongues is ALSO used...

1 Corinthians 14

Verse 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.



When the gift of tongues is used together with the gift of the interpretation of tongues, there is the same result as a word of prophecy – the church is edified.

1 Corinthians 14

Verse 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.**



Which gift is best?

It depends on the situation.

1 Corinthians 14

Verse 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?



For edifying yourself:

The gift of tongues

For edifying the congregation:

The gift of prophecy

OR

The gift of tongues with
the interpretation of tongues.

A trumpet's call to battle is useless if the signal is not understood.

1 Corinthians 14

Verses 7-8

- 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?
- ⁸ For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?





1 Corinthians 14

Verses 7-8

- 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?
- 8 For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?





This is a well-known call to battle.



You cannot help someone if they cannot understand you.

1 Corinthians 14

Verse 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.



If I am trying to talk with people but I don't know the language they speak, I will be like a foreigner to them, and they will be like foreigners to me.

1 Corinthians 14

Verses 10-11

- ¹⁰ There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world, and none of them *is* without signification.
- ¹¹ Therefore if I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian [foreigner], and he that speaketh *shall be* a barbarian unto me.



When we are in church, we should try to bless EVERYONE, not just ourselves.

We should be zealous for spiritual gifts, but more zealous to bless the church.

1 Corinthians 14

Verse 12

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



Speaking in tongues is only beneficial to the congregation when it is interpreted. That is why everyone who has the gift of tongues should pray to receive the gift of the interpretation of tongues.

1 Corinthians 14

Verse 13

Wherefore let him that speaketh in an *unknown* tongue **pray** that he may interpret.



Again, speaking in tongues benefits a man's spirit, but not his mind.

And so, God gives us two ways to pray – with the spirit, and with the understanding – each one having its own special benefit:

1 Corinthians 14

Verses 14-15

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



By using the gift that best fits the situation, we will do what is best for others, and not only ourselves:

1 Corinthians 14

Verses 16-17

- 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?
- ¹⁷ For thou verily givest thanks well, but the other is not edified.



Now the wisdom behind Paul's teaching is clear:

1 Corinthians 14

Verses 18-19

- ¹⁸ I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all:
- 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 will now tie speaking in tongues to an Old Testament prophecy, but first, he asks for maturity from the reader.

1 Corinthians 14

Verse 20

Brethren, be not children in understanding:
howbeit in malice be ye children,
but in understanding be men.



Speaking in Tongues and Isaiah's Prophecy

Isaiah 28:11-12

¹¹ For with stammering [mocking] lips
and another tongue [language]
will he speak to this people.

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.

God's Word had been always given in the Hebrew language. But Isaiah prophesied that the Jews' love for sin would force God to speak to them in a foreign language:



Speaking in Tongues and Isaiah's Prophecy

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¹² To whom he said,
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This first came to pass during the Babylonian captivity. The foreign tongue of the Babylonians was a constant reminder to the Jews that they had lost their homeland because of their sins.



Speaking in Tongues and Isaiah's Prophecy

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Hundreds of years later, Paul reminded them of this prophecy.



Isaiah 28:11-12

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and another tongue
will he speak to this people.
- 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.

1 Corinthians 14

Verse 21

- 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.*



Taken within the context of Isaiah's prophecy, speaking in tongues is not a sign to people who do not KNOW God.

It is a sign to people who KNOW God but do not BELIEVE him.

PROPHECY is for God's people who know him AND believe him.

1 Corinthians 14

Verses 22

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.



The first time anyone heard speaking in tongues was on the Day of Pentecost, just a little more than 50 days after the Jews chose Barabbas over Jesus. The apostles spoke “the wonderful works of God” in the languages of Gentiles.

This was a sign AGAINST the Jews who KNEW God but did not believe him.

1 Corinthians 14

Verses 22

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.



Sadly, the ignorance and/or disobedience of the people of God in the way they use the spiritual gifts has made the Holy Spirit unwelcome in many churches.

1 Corinthians 14

Verse 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 [not in your right mind]?



In our modern dictionary, the same word used to describe speaking in tongues is used to describe the meaningless babble of crazy people!

GLOSSOLALIA

1. The gift of tongues; the ability to speak foreign languages without having consciously learned them.
2. Fabricated and nonmeaningful speech, especially such speech associated with a trance state or certain schizophrenic syndromes.

The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, 5th Edition

1 Corinthians 14

Verse 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?



The **unlearned** (ἰδιώτης *idiotes*) are the people in the congregation who have not been properly taught.

The **unbelievers** (ἄπιστος *apistos*) are those who have been taught but reject the instruction.

When things are done correctly, an entirely different effect is achieved.

1 Corinthians 14

Verses 24-25

- 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:
- 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.



God has given us rules about the proper way to use the gift of tongues inside the church. These rules are not hard to understand.

1 Corinthians 14

Verses 27-28

- 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.
- ²⁸ But if there be no interpreter, **let him keep silence in the church;** and let him speak to himself, and to God.



God is not responsible for the disorderly behavior that is widely seen in churches that believe in the spiritual gifts:

1 Corinthians 14

Verse 33

For God is not *the author of confusion*, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.



In the last section of 1 Corinthians 14, Paul addresses problems among the elders of the church:

First, the men with the ministry of a prophet were speaking over each other.

1 Corinthians 14

- ²⁹ Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge.
- ³⁰ If *any thing* be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace.
- ³¹ For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted.
- ³² And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.



Some churches try to blame the confusion on the Holy Spirit. But as Paul wrote, these men were in full control. We are led by the Spirit, but we are never controlled by the true Spirit of God.

1 Corinthians 14

- ²⁹ Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge.
- ³⁰ If *any thing* be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace.
- ³¹ For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted.
- ³² **And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.**



The second problem came from the wives of the prophets (“your women”) who wanted their own place in the spotlight, bringing in confusion with their interruptions.

1 Corinthians 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.
- 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.
- ³⁶ What? came the word of God out from you? or came it unto you only?

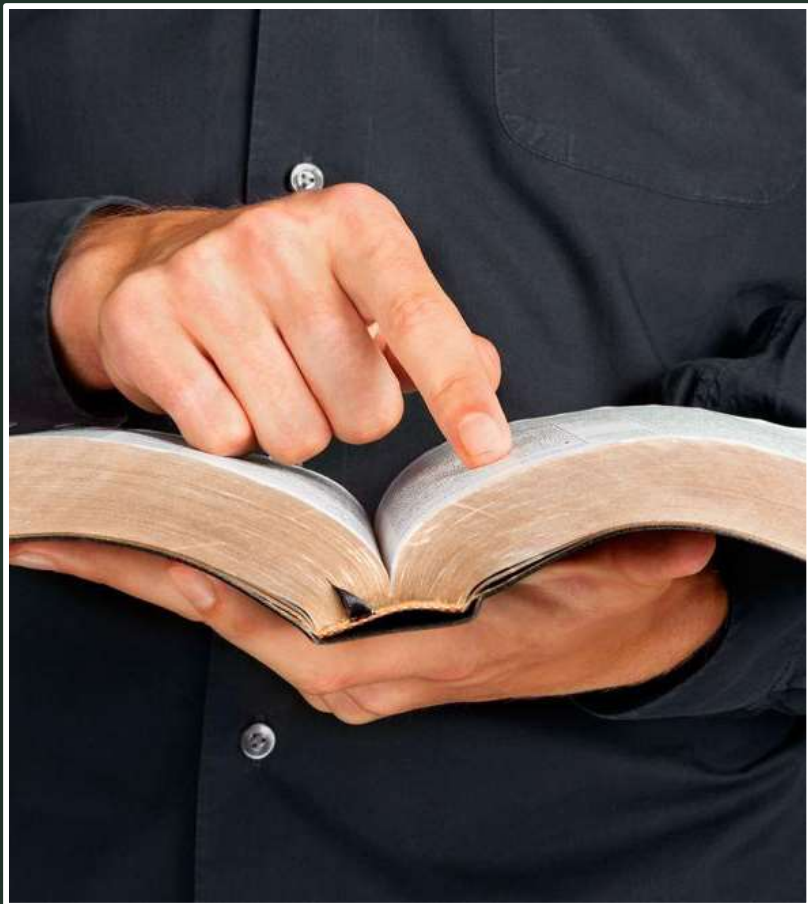


Yes, it is shameful for women to speak out-of-turn in church. But no one should think it is wrong for a woman to pray or read from the Scriptures for the assembly.

1 Corinthians 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.
- 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.**
- ³⁶ What? came the word of God out from you? or came it unto you only?





In closing, Paul says that no Christian should doubt the truth of his instruction to the church:



1 Corinthians 14

Verses 37-38

- 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.
- ³⁸ But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant.



What is the Holy Spirit's final word of instruction on this subject?



1 Corinthians 14:40

Let all things be done decently and in order.



The gift of prophecy works much like
the gift of tongues.

The words are born...



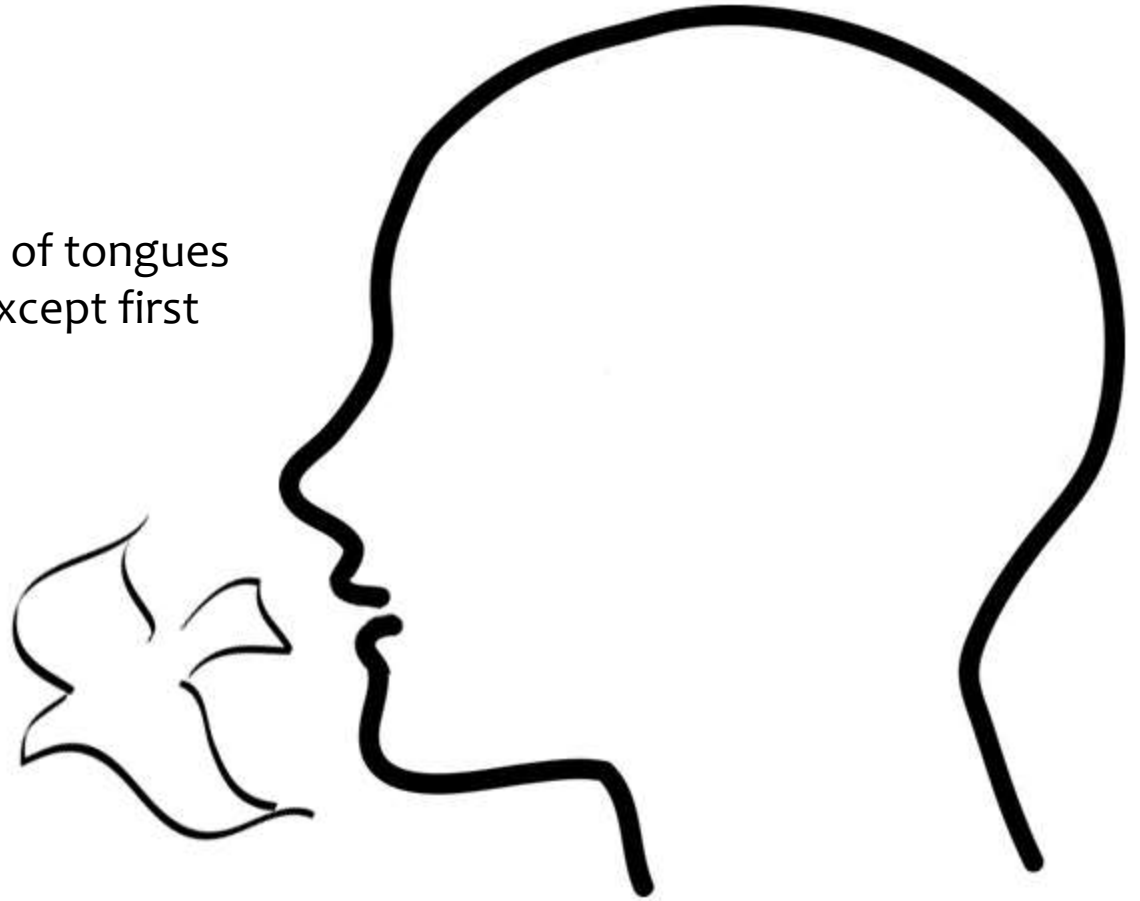
The gift of prophecy works much like
the gift of tongues.

The words are born **as you speak.**

The DIFFERENCE is that
these words are spoken in
a language you know.



The gift of the interpretation of tongues works much like prophecy, except first you speak in tongues.



There is no example of the gift of the interpretation of tongues in the Bible, but we can use this passage to show that it is like.

Mark 5:41

And he took the damsel by the hand, and said unto her, Talitha cumi; which is, being interpreted, Damsel, I say unto thee, arise.



When Jesus spoke these words, he did not also give the interpretation. The meaning of these strange words was later revealed to Mark.

Mark 5:41

And he took the damsel by the hand, and said unto her,
Talitha cumi;
which is, being interpreted,
Damsel, I say unto thee, arise.



If this was an example of speaking in tongues with the interpretation of tongues (which it is NOT), Jesus would have said both the unknown words AND their meaning. This is what you hear when a Christian uses the gift of tongues and the interpretation of tongues together.

Mark 5:41 (edited for teaching)

And he took the damsel by the hand, and said unto her,

Talitha cumi;

Damsel, I say unto thee, arise.



Here, the meaning of the strange words spoken by Jesus is given to us by Mark.

Mark 5:41

And he took the damsel by the hand, and said unto her,

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which is, being interpreted,

Damsel, I say unto thee, arise.



Questions to help you understand the lesson:

1. According to 1 Corinthians 14:1, what is the most important rule in the use of the spiritual gifts?
2. To speak in tongues is to speak to _____;
to speak by prophecy is to speak to _____.
3. When are tongues and prophecy equal in value to the church?
4. According to 1 Corinthians 14:13, how do you receive the gift of the interpretation of tongues?
5. Is God responsible for confusion in the church?

Each question is worth 20 points.

In our next lesson, we will look further into the gift of prophecy and “speaking in the name of the Lord.”



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