

Chapters 12-14 deal with manifestations of the Spirit. Most call them spiritual gifts. Manifestations were given to everyone in the church of Corinth, and they were visible. In chapter 13 Paul describes something greater than manifestations of the spirit, it is charity (Greek: *agape*) within the church. If the Corinthian church had to have a manifestation, the one they should desire is to prophesy. Chapter 14 shows us that prophecy is the best gift, and it is better than tongues.

## Prophecy is the Best Gift | 1 Corinthians 14:1-20

Verse 1—

**Follow after charity.** We saw last week that the word **charity** is from the Latin *caritas*. It carried the meaning of love within the church. The KJV translators used **charity** to distinguish it from the general use of *agape*. The contentions and divisions in this Corinth church prompted Paul to show them the way of **charity**, and he repeats the charge in 16:14: “*Let all your things be done with charity.*” However, spiritual manifestations were being given at the time of this writing (AD 55-59), but as the church matured, these *gifts* were no longer necessary. They have since passed away because we have the *perfect completed word of God*. As the church followed after **charity**, and used the manifestations, they were to **desire spiritual things, but rather that ye may prophesy**. Of all the *gifts* **prophecy** was the one to be desired, and as we will see, it was to be preferred over tongues. Paul preferred the Corinthians **prophecy** over the use of tongues because prophecy is clear (vs. 3) and it is to be used to **edify the church**.

Verse 2—

**For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue.** We have seen previously that tongues is a supernatural ability to speak in a human language that is unknown to the speaker. Some take this to mean *ecstatic utterances*, but the burden of proof is on those who believe that to prove their claim, since tongues (Gr: *glossa*), on the Day of Pentecost, clearly were intelligible human languages (See Acts 2:6,8 Gr: *dialektos*). Remember the rule of first use, and the rule of interpretation that states, always interpret the less clear, by the clear.

**Speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him.** Men are not the focus of the gift of tongues. Speaking in other tongues was not to be used for edification, exhortation, or even evangelism (it is not a private prayer language). The first-time tongues were given their focus was praise to the *wonderful works of God* (Acts 2:11). **Howbeit** (be that as it may) **in the spirit he speaketh** (No article: literally, **in spirit**) **mysteries**; When the people heard the tongues speakers, they were not being instructed in Christian doctrine, nor were they having the gospel explained to them. **Mysteries** are hidden things. The point is that unbelievers who heard the praises and wonderful works of God were hearing for the first time the mysteries of a God which had never been revealed to them. Tongues were for the praise of God.

Verse 3—

**But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men...** On the contrary, prophecy was for a different purpose. It was directed to **men** for their **edification, and exhortation, and comfort**. To edify is to build up; exhort is to come alongside for encouragement; comfort is to come alongside to console—comfort here could also mean to persuade.

Verse 4—

**Edifieth himself.** It must have been encouraging to the one who spoke in an unknown tongue to be able to communicate the glory of God to someone who otherwise would not have understood. Personal edification is not wrong, but the goal is always to edify the church; Prophecy (not Tongues) **edifieth the church**.

Verse 5—

**I would that ye all spake with tongues.** It would be wonderful for everyone to speak the praises and wonderful works of God, but Paul’s desire was that **ye prophesied: for greater is he that prophesieth**. Again, prophecy built up the church, as did interpretation of tongues. Tongues without any interpretation were worthless to the church.

Verse 6—

Speaking in tongues were of no **profit** to the church. Today, the thing that profits the church is *charity, or agape (love)*. Yet, Paul says **except I shall speak to you either by revelation, or by knowledge, or by prophesying, or by doctrine**. Those are the things that would build up the church. Imagine for the church today, if we could just excel in **doctrine**, how beneficial that would be!

Verses 7-8—

Remember what is happening in this church: There is great division. They are obviously abusing the spiritual manifestations, in particular tongues. Speaking in an unintelligible language is not useful—Just as a musical instrument needs to be played so the sound is distinguishable and helpful.

Verses 9-10—

**Words easy to be understood.** This is the speech he wants the church to strive for. But unintelligible words are just spoken into the air.

Verse 11—

**If I know not the meaning...speaketh a barbarian.** The word barbarian simply means someone who did not understand Greek.

Verses 12-13—

Those in the church wanted to use the *spirituals* that were given to them, but he reiterates they need to be used for **the edifying of the church**. **Pray that he might interpret.** If the person who spoke in an unknown tongue in the Corinthian church could interpret, then the problem would be solved.

Verses 14-15—

Since praying or singing (in church or in private) in uninterpreted tongues did not engage the mind, it would have been better for them to pray or sing in a language everyone could understand so that manifestation could be used to its full extent.

Verses 16-17—

**The room of the unlearned**, literally: The place of the ignorant (idiotes). If an unbeliever does not understand a word of what is being said, he is not built up or edified.

Verses 18-19—

**I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all.** Paul didn't have an aversion to tongues. But he also did not have some private prayer language. If so, it would go against everything he instructed in verses 20-22. He undoubtedly spoke with tongues and interpreted whenever he entered a city where a different language was spoken. He was able to proclaim the wonderful works of God. But since tongues were not for edifying the church, he would **rather speak five words with my understanding...than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue**. It was better to just praise God in the language everyone in the church understood.

Verse 20-

**Be not children in understanding.** The manifestations of the spirit were not for a mature church. Paul tells them to only be immature or children when it comes to malice. The idea is to be innocent. Discover the more *excellent way* Paul spoke of in 12:31. A shallow understanding of theology is possibly one of the greatest problems in the church today. We are to grow spiritually and in our **understanding be men** (The word *men* is not in the Greek. The word is *teleios* which means perfect, or more literally, *of full age*).