

1 Corinthians 14:1 – 40

<p>^{14:1} Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy.</p>	<p>seek gifts especially prophecy</p>
<p>² 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.</p>	<p>tongues to God mystify</p>
<p>³ But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation.</p>	<p>prophecy to men edify</p>
<p>⁴ One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; but one who prophesies edifies the church.</p>	<p>tongues for self prophecy for church</p>
<p>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.</p>	<p>seek tongues but prophecy even more</p>
<p>⁶ But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking in tongues, what will I profit you unless I speak to you either by way of revelation or of knowledge or of prophecy or of teaching?</p>	<p>will I benefit the church? speaking gifts</p>
<p>⁷ Yet even lifeless things, either flute or harp, in producing a sound, if they do not produce a distinction in the tones, how will it be known what is played on the flute or on the harp?</p>	<p>analogy of musical instruments</p>
<p>⁸ For if the bugle produces an indistinct sound, who will prepare himself for battle?</p>	
<p>⁹ So also you, unless you utter by the tongue speech that is clear, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air.</p>	<p>not understandable to others</p>
<p>¹⁰ There are, perhaps, a great many kinds of languages in the world, and no kind is without meaning.</p>	
<p>¹¹ If then I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be to the one who speaks a barbarian, and the one who speaks will be a barbarian to me.</p>	<p>analogy of foreign languages</p>
<p>¹² So also you, since you are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek to abound for the edification of the church.</p>	<p>seek to edify the church speaking in tongues?</p>
<p>¹³ Therefore let one who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret.</p>	<p>pray for interpretation</p>

¹⁴ For if I pray in a tongue,
my spirit prays,
but my mind is unfruitful.

¹⁵ What is the outcome then?
I will pray with the spirit
and I will pray with the mind also;
I will sing with the spirit and
I will sing with the mind also.

¹⁶ Otherwise if you bless in the spirit only,
how will the one who fills the place of the ungifted
say the 'Amen' at your giving of thanks,
since he does not know what you are saying?

¹⁷ For you are giving thanks well enough,
but the other person is not edified.

¹⁸ I thank God, I speak in tongues more than you all;

¹⁹ however, in the church I desire to speak five words with my mind
so that I may instruct others also,
rather than ten thousand words in a tongue.

²⁰ Brethren, do not be children in your thinking;
yet in evil be infants,
but in your thinking be mature.

²¹ In the Law it is written,
'By men of strange tongues
and by the lips of strangers
I will speak to this people,
and even so they will not listen to Me,' says the Lord.

²² So then tongues are for a sign,
not to those who believe but to unbelievers;
but prophecy is for a sign,
not to unbelievers but to those who believe.

²³ Therefore if the whole church assembles together
and all speak in tongues,
and ungifted men or unbelievers enter,
will they not say that you are mad?

²⁴ But if all prophesy,
and an unbeliever or an ungifted man enters,
he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all;

²⁵ the secrets of his heart are disclosed;
and so he will fall on his face and worship God,
declaring that God is certainly among you.

if I pray in tongues
my spirit prays
but my mind is unfruitful

pray with spirit and mind
sing with spirit and mind

if bless with the spirit only
others won't understand
other person not edified

I do speak in tongues
I speak with my mind
to instruct others (fruitful)

be mature in thinking
be innocent of evil

strangers' tongues
strangers' lips

tongues: sign to unbelievers
(Jewish unbelievers)
prophecy: sign to believers

extreme case: if all speak tongues
'you are mad'

extreme case: if all prophesy
called to account by God and you
(they sense your innocence)
known by God and you
(they sense your maturity)

<p>²⁶ What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.</p>	<p>each one order for edification</p>
<p>²⁷ If anyone speaks in a tongue, it should be by two or at the most three, and each in turn, and one must interpret; ²⁸ but if there is no interpreter, he must keep silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God.</p>	<p>tongues? two or three, another interprets silence</p>
<p>²⁹ Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment. ³⁰ But if a revelation is made to another who is seated, the first one must keep silent.</p>	<p>prophecy? two or three, others weigh silence</p>
<p>³¹ For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted; ³² and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets;</p>	<p>each one order for exhortation</p>
<p>³³ for God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints. ³⁴ 'The wives/women are to keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but are to subject themselves, just as the law/Law also says. ³⁵ If they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a wife / a woman to speak in church.'</p>	<p>God of peace, not confusion, to all <i>gyne</i> – no talking in service (note: sarcastic) subjection, questions at home (note: sarcastic) <i>gyne</i>– no talking in service (note: sarcastic)</p>
<p>³⁶ Was it from you that the word of God first went forth? Or has it come to you only?</p>	<p>word of God from you, to you?</p>
<p>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.</p>	<p>prophecy and spiritual gifts recognize the Lord's commandment</p>
<p>³⁸ But if anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized.</p>	<p>recognize</p>
<p>³⁹ Therefore, my brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak in tongues.</p>	<p>prophecy and tongues</p>
<p>⁴⁰ But all things must be done properly and in an orderly manner.</p>	<p>all in order</p>

Historical and Cultural Background

Tongues a Sign for Unbelievers?

In v.21 – 22, Paul quotes Isaiah 28:11, ‘By men of strange tongues and by the lips of strangers I will speak to this people, and even so they will not listen to Me.’ The drunken, stammering rulers of Jerusalem (Isa.28:1, 3, 14) scoffed at the prophet Isaiah and his message. But they will be overrun by the Assyrians, who will speak in a foreign tongue. Hence, Paul sees a symmetry between the ‘foreign tongue’ as a sign to Jewish unbelievers back then and ‘tongues’ as a sign to (probably Jewish) unbelievers in his day, in an attempt to persuade them. Luke portrays the gift of tongues being deployed in the context of Jewish unbelief (Acts 2:1 – 13; 10:44 – 48; 19:1 – 10). Also, Paul probably understood tongues and Pentecost as the reversal, in some sense, of Babel (Gen.11:1 – 9), where multiple ‘tongues’ was the God’s response to a human endeavor to build a self-contained community.

Men and Women: A Biblical Overview

How can Paul silence women in the service (14:34 – 35) when he had just encouraged them to pray and prophesy (11:2 – 16)? 1 Cor.11:2 – 16 is related to 14:34 – 40, both thematically and literarily. Note that there is a virtual identity between Paul’s earlier concluding statement, ‘we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God’ (1 Cor.11:16), and this one, ‘let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord’s commandment’ (1 Cor.14:37). Yet they seem to say two very different things. How do we reconcile them? To understand Paul’s overall vision of community, worship, gender, and speech, we must interpret both texts simultaneously, and also explore the practices of Jesus in the Gospels as the origination point.

- The Greek terms for ‘man’ (*aner*) and ‘woman’ (*gyne*) also do double duty for ‘husband’ and ‘wife.’ We have to determine from the context which is intended. The Greek term for ‘human’ regardless of gender was *anthropos*. Note that Paul seemed to explicitly authorize both ‘wives’ and ‘women’ generally to pray and prophesy in 1 Cor.11:2 – 16.
- Women speaking in public: By the time of Jesus and Paul, Jewish synagogues did not permit a woman to speak.¹ Spatially, men and women occupied different sections of the synagogue. This reflects the influence on Jewish custom of the Greek cultural prejudice against women. It was not originally part of the Jewish vision of life with God and service to God.
 - God intended men and women from creation to *speak authoritatively and pass down the word of God*. He entrusted both Adam and Eve to repeat to all their descendants the commands to be fruitful and multiply (Gen.1:28), to eat from the tree of life, and to not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Gen.2:16 – 17).
 - In the Israelite home, women had authority, as shown for example by the admonition, ‘do not forsake your *mother’s* teaching’ (Prov.1:8).
 - In the larger public community of Israel, women also had authority. After the Exodus, Miriam and other women led Israel in worship (Ex.15:20 – 21). During the period of the Judges, Deborah led Israel in worship in a song that memorialized Deborah’s own role as both prophetic judge and military leader, and the role of the woman Jael for her heroic act of courage (Jdg.5:1 – 31). Isaiah’s wife and Huldah the interpreter of Torah were prophetesses in Israel (Isa.8:3; 2 Ki.22:14), which means their counsel was sought publicly, even by male prophets and kings. Women were the authors of some Scripture: in addition to the previous examples, Hannah in 1 Sam.2; probably Ruth and Naomi for the book of Ruth; King Lemuel’s mother in Proverbs 31; and Esther for the book of Esther.
 - Israel looked forward to God’s fresh outpouring of the Spirit on both men and women in the messianic age (Joel 2:28 – 29), affirming the notion that such was God’s original vision for men and women from creation, since the messianic age would affirm the original creation.
 - At Pentecost, Simon Peter quoted Joel’s prophecy (Acts 2:17 – 18), which became Luke’s thesis statement for the book of Acts. Both men and women (Priscilla the teacher in Acts 18:24 – 28; the four prophetess-daughters of Philip in 21:9) speak by the Spirit. Elizabeth and Mary at the start of Luke’s Gospel were anticipations of this.
 - We must also look at the four Gospels to see Jesus’ practices of ministry, for Jesus would have designed his ministry around his understanding of the Old Testament. Women were the first witnesses to, and announcers of, his incarnation (Lk.1:26 – 56). More importantly, Jesus welcomed women into his circle of disciples (e.g. Lk.8:1 – 4; 10:38 – 42) as they responded to his

¹ Adam Clarke, *Clarke’s Commentary*, Volume 6, I Corinthians 14:34. See also www.godrules.net/library/clarke/clarke.htm

call to give financially, learn his word, and participate in his ministry. As a rabbi, Jesus' practice of traveling with female disciples was considered scandalous. Finally, women were the first witnesses to, and announcers of, his resurrection (Lk.24:1 – 11; Jn.20:11 – 18; Mt.28:1 – 10). It is reasonable to think Jesus encouraged his women disciples to pray and prophecy publicly, and this was handed down to 'the churches of God' as 'the Lord's commandment.'

- There were women leaders in the early New Testament church: Junia who was probably 'an apostle' along with her husband or brother or colleague Andronicus (Rom.16:7); Phoebe, who was identified as a deacon, who would have read Paul's letter to the Romans aloud among the house churches and then answered any questions on his behalf (Rom.16:1); Philip's daughters who were identified as prophetesses (Acts 21:9); Priscilla who was almost certainly a teacher along with her husband Aquila (Acts 18:18 – 26, Rom.16:3); Lydia, Chloe and Nympha (Acts 16:13 – 15, 40; 1 Cor.1:11, Col.4:15) who were house church leaders; and Tryphaena, Tryphosa, Euodia, and Syntyche who are all identified as 'workers in the Lord' (Rom.16:12; Phil.4:2).

Paul Often Sarcastically Refuted the Corinthians

Was Paul quoting the Corinthians sarcastically in 14:34 – 35 and then refuting them? This fits with a pattern Paul employs in 1 Corinthians, where he quotes from the Corinthians but reverses or qualifies the quote:

- 'You are already filled, you have already become rich, you have become kings' without us; and indeed, I wish that you had become kings so that we also might reign with you. (1 Cor.4:8)
- 'All things are lawful for me,' but not all things are profitable. 'All things are lawful for me,' but I will not be mastered by anything. 'Food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food, but God will do away with both of them.' Yet the body is not for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body. (1 Cor.6:12 – 13)
- Now concerning the things about which you wrote, 'It is good for a man not to touch a woman.' (1 Cor.7:1)
- We know that 'we all have knowledge.' Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies. (1 Cor.8:1)

This also connects with Paul's vision of Christ reversing Greek 'wisdom' throughout the letter (1 Cor.1:18 – 25; 3:18 – 20). Greek culture did put women into the category of property, without many rights, especially if she were childless. Paul was certainly critiquing this Greek view.²

Moreover, the pronouns in 14:36 – 39 could be read in the masculine, rebuking the *men*: 'Was it from you [*brothers*] that the word of God first went forth? Or has it come to you only? 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. But if anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized.'

How Paul Quoted the Old Testament in 1 Corinthians

Whenever Paul in 1 Corinthians appeals to the Old Testament, he does so by citing a specific text. He never omits the text. For example:

- For it is written, 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will set aside.' (1:19)
- As it is written, 'Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.' (1:31)
- As it is written, 'Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love him.' (2:9)
- For it is written, 'He is the One who catches the wise in their craftiness'; and again, 'The Lord knows the reasonings of the wise, that they are useless.' (3:19 – 20)
- For it is written in the Law of Moses, 'You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing.' (9:9)
- As it is written, 'The people sat down to eat and drink, and stood up to play.' (10:7)

² Katharine C. Bushnell, (1889), who quotes 18th century lexicographer Johann Friedrich Schleusner and early 20th century Pauline scholar Sir William Ramsay in support also; Jessie Penn-Lewis, (1919); Helen Barrett Montgomery (1924); J. A. Anderson, (1933); Joyce Harper, (1974); Walter C. Kaiser, (1976); Guy B. Dunning, (1977); N. M. Flanagan and E. Hunter Snyder, (1981); Laurence R. Iannacone (1982); David W. Odell-Scott, (1983, 1987, 1989); Chris U. Manus, (1984); Charles H. Talbert, (1984, 1987); Gilbert Bilezikian, (1985); Gordon D. Fee, (1987); Robert W. Allison, (1988); Linda McKinnish Bridges, (1989, 1990). See also the sociological reasoning put forward in support of this position by Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1986), p.108.

- In the Law it is written, ‘By men of strange tongues and by the lips of strangers I will speak to this people, and even so they will not listen to Me,’ says the Lord. (14:21)
- It is written, ‘The first man, Adam, became a living soul.’ (15:45)
- Then will come about the saying that is written, ‘Death is swallowed up in victory. O Death, where is your victory? O Death, where is your sting?’ (15:54 – 55)

When citing the Law in 14:34 – 35, he does not use his standard formula. Why not? He is more likely rebuking an anti-woman rabbinic saying or Greek Corinthian presumption. Furthermore, Paul normally quotes from the Old Testament in a stylistic manner to make his points, but, as Gordon Fee notes, he never quotes from the Law to draw a direct lesson about Christian ethics and behavior. He insists that we are free from the Mosaic/Sinaitic Law. Moreover, Paul wants his readers in Corinth to ‘learn to not go beyond what is written’ with regards to the Old Testament (4:6). His manner of argumentation using the Old Testament throughout 1 Corinthians strongly suggests that he is intercepting a Corinthian tendency to allegorize the Old Testament to achieve anti-Christian principles.

Finally, there is no reference in ‘the Law’ to women being silent in the assembly of Israel. In fact, this claim contradicts the fact that women did speak in Israel and to Israel (Miriam in Ex.15; Hannah in 1 Sam.2; Deborah in Judg.4 – 5; Esther). A woman was the human source of some Scripture (Miriam in Ex.15; Deborah in Judg.4 – 5; arguably Ruth and Naomi; Hannah in 1 Sam.2; King Lemuel’s mother in Proverbs 31). The prophets envisioned women speaking by the Holy Spirit (Joel 2:28 – 29, quoted in Acts 2).

Scribal Gloss Theory, Possibility #1

³³ for God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.	peace in all the churches
³⁶ Was it from you that the word of God first went forth? Or has it come to you only?	word of God come from you?
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.	recognize the Lord’s commandment
³⁸ But if anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized.	recognize
³⁹ Therefore, my brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak in tongues.	words of God
⁴⁰ But all things must be done properly and in an orderly manner.	proper order among you

Scribal Gloss Theory, Possibility #2

³⁶ Was it from you that the word of God first went forth? Or has it come to you only?	word of God you among all the churches?
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.	if anyone...recognize the Lord’s commandment
³⁸ But if anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized.	if anyone...recognize
³⁹ Therefore, my brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak in tongues.	words from God
⁴⁰ But all things must be done properly and in an orderly manner.	all in order

Questions

1. Leader: Decide in advance whether your group is familiar enough with prophecy and tongues already, and are wanting to implement them in a way that honors Paul's vision here, or whether your group is unfamiliar with prophecy and tongues, and will need to discuss them in a more preliminary sense.
2. State: Prophecy is the ability to speak forth on God's behalf, because God desires to be understood. It does not always mean to *foretell* the future, although it could (Acts 21). More often, it means to *forthtell*, i.e. to tell forth the truth about a situation or a point, as v.3 indicates. Tongues is the ability to speak in another language, even though you don't know the language, because God desires to speak people's heart language. They are two examples on a spectrum of special speaking that Christ enables and empowers. The conviction about speaking comes from the idea from Genesis that God brings life into being by speaking. And that Jesus is the Word of God (Jn.1:1). So if you follow Jesus and are empowered by his Spirit from within us, there will be a certain amount of special speaking you can do.
3. Ask: How many of you have had experiences of either prophecy or tongues?
 - a. Maybe if you'd like to cultivate these experiences, we can talk in person. I do have some experience in both.
 - b. And I do think that these experiences are still happening today. The view that the Spirit is not giving these gifts out today is called the 'cessationist' position.
 - c. And Paul says that he wants us to cultivate these experiences, or 'gifts.'
4. State: In this section, Paul takes for granted that these things are happening already. What he's doing is bringing some order and emphasis. This section is part of the larger section 11:2 – 14:40 where Paul is talking about the Christian corporate body in worship, and what that means for our individual bodies. Read v.1 – 32 first, including the first point in the background notes. We'll tackle v.33 – 40 later.
5. Ask: From what we read in v.1 – 32, what might it *feel like personally* to speak in tongues as Paul describes it?
 - a. Emotions
 - b. But Paul also says that the mind is unfruitful, in v.14 – 19.
 - c. What is Paul talking about when he refers to 'my spirit'? In contrast to 'my mind'? In general, Paul uses a number of terms when describing us as both spiritual beings and physical beings. 'My spirit' seems to be like how we would speak of 'my heart': kind of the center of our being, and the place of spiritual contact with God.
 - d. Illus: When I was in Israel on a business trip with Intel, I took the weekend to travel to Jerusalem. I was there in Dec 1998, during a window of time when Saddam Hussein stopped firing scud missiles into Israel. After walking around for a full day by myself and taking in all the history and current events, I got into a conversation with some Christians who invited me to a prayer meeting. There were about 25 – 30 people. The people there were praying in English, Russian, Hebrew, and Arabic. I felt like it was a powerful demonstration of unity in Jesus. So that was the first time that I prayed in tongue. It was just under my breath, and not loud. I didn't understand it. But I felt like there was something inadequate about my normal words because I wanted to thank and praise God for bringing about a community of people in Christ who were trying to honor him.
6. Ask: From what we read in v.1 – 32, what might it feel like personally to prophecy? Is that even a valid question?
 - a. There doesn't seem to be a specific emotion connected with it.
 - b. It's focused on other people, not yourself. In v.3, prophecy does three things: edify, exhort, console. The words 'edify' or 'edification' occurs seven times: in v.3, 4 (twice), 5, 12, 17, 26.
 - c. In a general sense, not necessarily related to prophecy or spiritual life, when have you taught someone, encouraged someone, or comforted someone? How did that feel for you?
 - d. Edification comes from the construction trade. Edification is a big emphasis of Paul in chapter 14, because the word occurs seven times in v.1 – 26. An edifice is a building. Edification means 'to build.' The word can be also used for building a foundation, or repairing and strengthening a building that already exists. So prophecy is something stabilizes others – it stabilizes our life in Christ and trust in God. This is where prophecy is most similar to teaching and the two gifts overlap with one another. In that sense, a prophetic word reminds of God's truth when we are weak, or when our foundation feels unstable.
 - e. Exhortation is encouragement to do something. Maybe because you're afraid of something. It is the type of motivation that is highly relevant and brings conviction. It is someone taking the word of Jesus and wielding it like a sword, so that the sword goes in – *all the way in*. Prophecy is

therefore challenging. In this sense, prophecy is a forthtelling. It is a revealing of the mind of God, the decree of God, the call of God, and the invitation of God. Prophecy can involve foretelling the future, as when Agabus the prophet foretold that there would be a famine in the Mediterranean world (Acts 11:27 – 30), but fundamentally, it is for the purpose of moving people into action, in that case to send relief funds to Jerusalem. In this sense, people who are about social justice have been called prophetic because they challenge the culture.

- f. Consolation is helping people connect with God in grief. Consolation is reminding people of God's goodness, presence, and promises when the situation seems bleak. Once when I was at a student retreat, a guy named Jordan Seng (now a pastor of Blue Water Mission, and author of the very readable book *Miracle Work*) came with us to pray for people. I remember listening while he prayed for a particular student who was quite discouraged. He said, 'God sees you when you write in your journal, you know, the journal with the blue flowers on it?' Her eyes got really big. Whatever she was dealing with, she was consoled by the fact that the Lord knew her and her situation.
- g. Putting together edification, exhortation, and consolation, we can see that prophecy is very personal and practical in how it touches us. It can be a question or a statement, a phrase or a full sermon, verbally communicated or in a written letter. It is simply allowing God to speak through you.
- h. Illus: There was one occasion where I was praying with a friend about this her family. While we were praying, I saw a red capital letter A in my mind. I thought, 'That's weird.' But I shared it with her. She said, 'You mean like the book *The Scarlet Letter*?' That's the story where two people back in Puritan New England commit adultery and the woman winds up having to sew a big red capital letter A on her clothes. But the man – who is a minister who has been hiding his sin unconfessed – has a scarlet letter A burning through his skin. Both of us were puzzled that I saw a reference to a book. But a few days later, her father confessed to having had an affair over 20 years ago. It seemed like God was preparing my friend for this news, and to help her understand what her father was feeling inside. It was edifying in the sense that she was reminded that God knew about the situation and cared about her by bracing her for the news. It was an exhortation to have compassion on her dad. It was consolation for the sadness caused by the sin.
- i. Illus: Over the summer, some friends of mine met almost weekly to walk around the neighborhood to pray for people. They'd use their lunch break on Fridays. First, they'd pray for Jesus to show them something about people to meet. Some article of clothing, a hair style, anything. Then they'd go out for a walk to see if they'd encounter a person who matches the description. Most of the time, they would. I joined them.
- j. Illus: Me and a friend, 'your image.'