

We began our study of chapters 12-14 by saying that we faced two main problems. First, that we don't know for sure the nature of the query or queries concerning spiritual gifts which the Corinthians had raised with Paul in their letter to him. And second, that we live in very different days to those of the first Christian century and therefore lack any experience of the more spectacular gifts mentioned. Both of these problems bite particularly hard on chapter 14. Working back from the contents of our chapter, we speculated in an earlier session that the church had asked Paul about (i) the relative importance and value of the gifts of tongues and prophecy, and (ii) the procedure they should follow in the exercise of these gifts in the church meetings. But we can't be sure. I propose to offer some introductory comments about the gifts of tongues and of prophecy.

First, the gift of tongues

There are three passages in the New Testament which introduce us to the subject of speaking in tongues. First, there is a section towards the end of Mark 16 which records the words of Jesus concerning 'the signs' which 'will follow those who believe'. I'm sure we're all aware that many New Testament scholars – and therefore many Bible translators – don't regard the end of Mark – from 16.9-20 as forming part of the original gospel. Views differ, even within conservative evangelical scholarship. Without wishing to be dogmatic, given that the gospel certainly couldn't have finished with what be an absurdly abrupt end at v.8, and given that the latter section by Irenaeus – a so-called Church father of the second century, I am satisfied that it should be accepted as part of inspired scripture.

The relevant part of the section reads, 'In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them', vv. 17-18. Speaking personally, I am aware of some who readily lay claim to the first experience but I haven't yet come across anybody flushed with enthusiasm to have a go at the other two! Second, there is the book of Acts – chapters 2, 10 and 19. And finally, there is our section, 1 Corinthians 12-14. I attach no great significance to the fact that we don't read of tongue-speaking in any of Paul's later letters – not least because the same could be said of the Lord's Supper, which Paul wrote about in chapter 11, which he doesn't mention in any of his later letters and which certainly wasn't meant to cease with the days of the apostles. We must remember that, by and large, the apostle wrote to deal with specific needs and abuses which he knew existed in the churches. It would therefore be precarious in the extreme to draw conclusions about any particular scriptural subject on the basis of silence in his letters.

Perhaps the first question we need to ask is, 'Are the tongues we meet in 1 Corinthians the same in nature and substance as those we read about in the book of Acts and in Mark 16?'. Certainly there were many differences. For example :

- (i) the tongues were **different in their circumstances** – in each case in the book of Acts, the circumstances were exceptional, being limited to very special occasions – namely to the day of Pentecost and to extensions of the Pentecost-event for various representative groups – whereas we know of no such special circumstances to account for the appearance of tongues at Corinth;
- (ii) the tongues were **different in both their timing and their range** – in the book of Acts, in each case speaking in tongues is portrayed as a once-for-all, unique and temporary experience, shared equally by everyone in the relevant group – whereas in Corinth, tongues was a continuing gift, possessed not by all, but only those specially gifted;
- (iii) the tongues were **different in their purpose** – in the book of Acts, in each case one key purpose was to confirm publicly the outpouring and coming of the Spirit – whereas in Corinth, the purpose was that of edification, both of the tongue speaker himself and, through interpretation, of the whole church; and
- (iv) the tongues were **different in their experience** – in the book of Acts, in each case the speaking in tongues was irresistible and overpowering (nobody had any choice about it, nor was any attempt made by those who spoke in tongues to do so) – whereas in Corinth, speaking in tongues was a spiritual gift altogether under the control of the speaker (thereby enabling Paul to write to regulate its use in the church).

But the big question is whether the differences stop there – or were the tongues also **different in their very nature**. In Acts 2, the individuals from each language group present at Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost heard the disciples 'speak in his own language' (lit. dialect), vv. 6, 8. We note carefully the two expressions used by the multitude, 'how is it that we hear, each *in our own language* in which we were born? ... we hear them speaking *in our own tongues*', Acts 2.8, 11. There can be no doubt then that the tongues on that occasion were ordinary foreign languages. And the tongues in chapter 10 were, Peter insisted, identical, 10.47; 11.5. If then the tongues spoken in Corinth were the same in nature as those spoken in the book of Acts, they too must have been ordinary human languages. But were they? Or might they have been some kind of special ecstatic utterances?

The parallel which Paul draws between tongues and ordinary languages in vv.10-11 proves nothing. Paul refers there to the various languages in the world, not to identify the gift of tongues as being the same in nature, but simply to illustrate the fact that, if a language is incomprehensible to the listener, the speaker is wasting his

breath – it is all a question of intelligibility. On the other hand, it seems to me that the parallel which Paul draws in v.s 21-23 between the effect (or, more accurately, the lack of effect) of the Assyrian language on the unbelieving men of Israel, and the effect of uninterpreted tongues on unbelievers at Corinth would carry a lot more force if the tongues of Corinth were also authentic human languages. I note also that Paul instructed the Corinthians to control and restrain their use of tongues – which doesn't sit too easily with the tongues being some kind of extreme ecstatic experience. (It is clear that, in apostolic days, the genuine tongue-speaker retained full self-control. So too did the true prophet, v. 30. Those prophets with genuine messages from God didn't prophesy in a frenzy or trance. The Holy Spirit didn't work or speak through believers in any way remotely akin to demon possession.) Again, I note that the word translated 'tongue(s)' some 20 times in chapters 12-14, occurs 30 times in other passages in the New Testament and in no place, with the only possible exception of Mark 16.17, does it – or can it – refer to ecstatic speech. Although I do not pretend that we can be absolutely certain, it seems to me therefore that the evidence points to the tongues of 1 Corinthians being the same as those in the book of Acts; namely ordinary human languages.

There is a second – and separate – question concerning **the content and purpose** of the tongues which were spoken. For what were they being used at Corinth? It seems clear that tongues were a Spirit-given ability *to address God* in a special manner. Personally, I wouldn't base too much on the words of v. 2, 'he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no-one understands him (lit. 'hears him')'. Paul is simply making the point that, if the speaking in tongues is not interpreted in the church, only God hears what is said with understanding – 'for' no-one else does. On the other hand, the meaning of v. 28 is unmistakable – 'let him speak to himself *and to God*'. More striking still, every instance cited of tongue-speaking in v.s 13-17 takes the form of words which are addressed to God – whether in prayer, blessing or thanksgiving – and never of words addressed to men.

We also note Luke's description of what happened at Pentecost; men said, 'we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful (the magnificent) works of God', Acts 2.11 – much as we find in many of David's 'praise' psalms. We recall also that the disciples were speaking in tongues *before* the crowd gathered, so the tongues were certainly not addressed initially to them. Again, in the house of Cornelius, 'they heard them speak with tongues and magnify (same root as 'magnificent', 2.11) God', Acts 10.46. Yet again, if tongues were a vehicle of revelation – by means of which God spoke to men – tongues would have duplicated the gift of prophecy which had that very function. True, Paul says that 'he who speaks in a tongue edifies himself', v. 4, which we might not normally associate with prayer and thanksgiving – but we learn from v. 17 that even hearing the giving of thanks (though necessarily addressed to God) does in fact edify the saints.

I conclude that prophecy consisted in words of revelation which *came down from God to men* (noting the clear connection made between prophecy and revelation in v.s 29-31; cf. Eph. 3. 5), and that tongues consisted in words of praise and prayer which *ascended from men to God*. This explains, in part at least, why there isn't any evidence that tongues were ever used in evangelisation. Not, we observe, that there was any great call for it as an evangelistic tool at the time. In Acts 2, Peter had no problem in communicating with Jews from all over the known world in his own language – presumably Aramaic. More importantly, of course, the majority of people (although not quite everyone, Acts 21. 37-38) spoke Greek – in its common 'koiné' form. And so at Lystra, although Paul and Barnabas were unable to understand the local dialect of Lycaonia, they had absolutely no difficulty in subsequently communicating with the people, Acts 14.11-18. I know of no evidence that the apostles preached other than in Hebrew, Aramaic or Greek – or that they felt the need for some special gift of communication. In summary, it seems to me that the gift of tongues at Corinth was a Spirit-inspired gift that enabled someone to pray and to both speak and sing praises to God in human languages unknown by the speaker.

In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul implies that there were some in the church at Corinth who were so shocked at the excesses associated with tongue speaking in public that they wished to suppress the activity completely, v. 39. Speaking in tongues may have struck them as too much like the demonic possession which was part and parcel of their old pagan religion.

At the other extreme there were those at Corinth – and they appear to have been in the majority – who were fascinated by tongue-speaking, saw it as a convincing proof of the indwelling Spirit, and therefore coveted it as the gift of gifts. Paul was carefully balanced in the way he tackled the subject. On the one hand, he was sympathetic to tongue-speaking – making it clear that he valued it as a true manifestation of the Spirit and, indeed, rejoiced that he wasn't behind any of the Corinthians in his private exercise of the gift, v. 18. On the other hand, he was discriminating and judicious – clearly relegating tongues to a position of lower importance for the church than the gift of prophecy.

Second, the gift of prophecy

The prophets of the New Testament shared with the apostles the privilege and responsibility of being channels of direct divine 'revelation'; cf. v. 30; Eph.2.20; 3.3-5. The very words of their prophecies were inspired and authoritative.

Some have argued that the prophecies in New Testament days carried less authority than the messages of the Old Testament prophets. The first, and main, argument is based on Paul's words in v. 29, "Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge (discern)". On the basis of these words, it is argued : (i) that the Old Testament prophets spoke the very words of God, often prefixed with a very clear, 'Thus says the Lord'; (ii) that to disobey their message was, therefore, to disobey God; (iii) that one cannot imagine the people of Israel (or indeed any group within the nation) having the right to challenge, evaluate and question the content of the Old Testament prophet's message – God's word judged the people not vice versa; and (iv) by way of contrast, the words of the New Testament prophets were to be judged and evaluated – and could therefore be challenged and rejected. A second argument is drawn from v.s 30-31 and runs : (i) circumstances were envisaged in which, in the church, one prophet was to stop speaking to give the opportunity to another prophet to speak; (ii) the first prophet's message would therefore be lost and not heard by the church; (iii) individual prophetic messages in New Testament days could not therefore have been of far-reaching importance. On the strength of such arguments, some have concluded that prophecies in New Testament days lacked the full authority which came from being God's very words – as was true of prophecies in the Old Testament.

Although these arguments seem plausible enough, I accept neither the arguments nor the conclusion based on them.

Taking the first argument, I understand the words 'let the others judge (discern)' as meaning 'let the others test and pronounce on the validity of the message heard'. That is, an assessment was to be made as to whether or not the message had come from God. The need for discernment arose from the possibility that there might be one or more false prophets – 'inspired' by deceiving spirits – in the church; see 1Tim. 4.1; 1 John 4.1. Once those gifted and qualified to make the judgement had validated the prophetic message, judging it to be of divine origin, the prophecy in its entirety would have been binding on the minds, consciences and conduct of the believers. I can see no evidence that the evaluation of prophecies implied the presence of both true and false elements in any given prophecy; the purpose of the evaluation was to assure the church that the prophecy was in fact a message from God. This was not dissimilar to the testing of prophets in Old Testament days.

In the Old Testament those who claimed to have the prophetic gift were also to be evaluated by the people of Israel to determine whether they and their prophecies were legitimate. The book of Deuteronomy laid down important principles for distinguishing between acceptable and unacceptable prophets and their prophecies, 13.1–13; 18.20–22. The false prophet who spoke presumptuously was to be distinguished from the one who spoke by the Spirit of the Lord – and was to be rejected. We know that Paul was keenly aware of the teachings of Deuteronomy; see, for example, 1 Cor. 5. 13; 9. 9; 10. 20. He taught that, as evaluation was needed in Old Testament days to determine genuine prophets from false prophets, the same evaluation was needed in the New Testament churches.

If this interpretation is correct, individual saints wouldn't have been in the position to decide for themselves whether or not they were prepared to accept and act on any particular message (or part of a message). Believers in the New Testament churches were no more free to pick and choose which of the accredited prophetic messages they accepted, believed and practised than I am free to pick and choose which of the sections of the Bible I accept, believe and practise.

Taking the second argument, the enforced silence of one prophet in v.s 30-31 didn't mean necessarily that his message would be lost to the church. Paul was concerned with order in the church meeting. This included ensuring that, with the inevitable constraint of time, the meeting was neither dominated by one particular gift (hence 'two or three', vv. 27, 29) nor by one speaker. There would, of course, be subsequent opportunities for the first prophet to speak again. (Indeed, the immediate context looks beyond the one meeting of the church for Paul envisages 'all' prophesying 'one by one', v. 31 – clearly referring to the opportunity over time for all those suitably gifted to contribute to the instruction and encouragement of the church.) I suspect that there were many occasions when Paul himself was unable within the confines of one session to communicate everything which God had revealed to him – even if he spoke all night, Acts 20. 7, 11. Apart from which, I don't accept that the Holy Spirit was incapable of speaking through a second mouthpiece without robbing the church of that which was for their edification

Many of the prophecies current in the New Testament churches no doubt lacked something of the long-term value and nation-wide significance of the prophecies of the writing prophets of the Old Testament (ranging from Isaiah to Malachi) – which latter were usually addressed to the kingdoms of Judah or Israel rather than to local or individual circumstances. Nevertheless, I see no evidence that, in nature, they were any less authoritative or Spirit-given.

The prophets' special function was to provide edification, encouragement and consolation to the saints through the revelations they had received. The evidence is that by far the majority of these revelations were temporary and local in application. Those of permanent value were, we must assume, put in written form and preserved as part of the New Testament canon.

One element of prophetic ministry in the New Testament was the ability to predict future events; cf. Acts 11.27–28; 21.10–11; 1 Tim. 1.18; Rev. 1.3. The same combination of proclamation and prediction was found in Old Testament prophecy. We have no way of knowing the proportion of New Testament prophecy which foretold happenings in the future as opposed to communicating doctrinal and ethical standards for the present.

Those who sought to promote edification, encouragement and consolation without receiving direct revelations from God were required to base their messages on the inspired words of others and would have been exercising, not the gift of prophecy, but such gifts as those of exhortation, Rom. 12. 8, or teaching, 1 Cor. 12. 28.

OUTLINE OF 1 CORINTHIANS 14 – O/H 1

V.s 1-25. Paul demonstrates that prophecy is superior to tongues – both in the effects which the two gifts had on believers (ie on the church) and the effects which the two gifts had on unbelievers.

- **V.s 1-19** are concerned with the effect which the two gifts had on **believers**. The apostle repeatedly applies the test of edification : *at the outset* – vv. 1-5 (with the word occurring four times in vv. 3-5); *in the middle*, v. 12; *and at the end*, vv. 17b-19. The intervening sections, stretching from v. 6 to v. 11 and from v. 13 to v. 17a are concerned with intelligibility. Vv. 6-11 provide several illustrations to show the necessity of *ordinary everyday sounds* being intelligible, while vv. 13-17 show the importance of *all speech in the church* being intelligible and apply this yardstick directly to the gift of tongues.
- **Vv. 20-25** are concerned with the effect which the two gifts had on **unbelievers**. The apostle draws attention to the very opposite impressions made on unbelievers when they hear tongues and prophecy in the church.

Vv. 26-35. Paul provides practical directions to govern the use of the gifts in the church.

- **Vv. 27-28** provide instructions relative to the *tongue-speakers*.
- **Vv. 29-33a** provide instructions relative to the *prophets*.
- **Vv. 33b-35** provide instructions relative to the *womenfolk*.

Vv. 36-40. Paul brings the long section about spiritual gifts to a blunt and forceful, albeit affectionate, conclusion.

COMMENTS ON VV. 1-19

In vv. 1-19, Paul demonstrates that prophecy is superior to tongues from the differing effects which these gifts had on believers, vv. 1-19. Throughout the section, edification is Paul's litmus test.

V. 1. There was nothing wrong, Paul says, with the Corinthian church's 'zeal' (eager desire) for spiritual gifts; cf. v. 12. The problem was that they had transformed what was a legitimate desire into their main aim and pursuit – whereas the 'more excellent way' to be pursued by the Christian is that of love, 12.31. But in earnestly desiring spiritual gifts, they should set their sights first and foremost on prophecy – rather than on the gift of tongues. That is, they should distinguish between one spiritual gift and another, basing their assessment of a gift's value on its usefulness in terms of building up the church, and should then eagerly desire those which are 'the best' (the greater) gifts, 12.31. The expression 'but rather that you may prophesy' (lit.) occurs again word for word in v. 5.

Vv. 2-5 justify the priority given to prophecy. In terms of the edification (building up) of the church, the prophet and the gift of prophecy are 'greater' than the tongue-speaker and the gift of tongues – tongues, that is, without interpretation. Even though the tongue speaker *said that which was good* (speaking mysteries in his spirit), v. 2, and *did that which was good* (he edified himself), v. 4, the church received no benefit at all from his tongue-speaking – unless the tongue was interpreted. If the tongue was interpreted, the church was edified, v. 5, just as it was by prophecy, v. 4.

V. 2. If the speaking in tongues wasn't interpreted, only God heard what *was* said with understanding – no-one else did. 'In the spirit (i.e. probably 'in his own spirit', but just possibly 'in the Spirit') he speaks mysteries' – that is, employs spiritual ideas and words beyond his understanding; cf. 2.7; 4.1.

V. 3. 'But' if tongue-speaking is not properly for the benefit of men, prophesying certainly is. The one who speaks in tongues '*speaks mysteries*', but the one who prophesies '*speaks edification etc*', lit. Tongues without interpretation edifies only the speaker and not any of the hearers. But prophecy (i) edifies (builds up), (ii) encourages and stimulates, and (iii) speaks comfortably in times of sorrow or fear. The meanings of the words 'exhortation' and 'comfort' can be distinguished much as the words of a football coach who spurs on his team before and during a match can be distinguished from the words of a close friend who draws alongside to whisper soothing words when someone is feeling hurt. In a general sense, therefore, prophecy could be said to *build up*, to *stir up*, and to *cheer up*. I note in passing that the effect of public participation in the church was generally positive in emphasis – beware of those whose so-called 'teaching' is mainly destructive and negative. It is apparent that the gift of 'prophecy' here refers to the gift of communicating the revelation and truth of God directly to men – that is, more of 'forth-telling' than 'foretelling'.

V. 4. I take it that 'he who speaks in a tongue edifies himself' because the gift of tongues intensified his prayer and praise, blessing him with an intimate sense of the presence of God.

V. 5. It isn't, Paul makes it clear, that he is in any way opposed to the use of tongues. Far from it. But he wants the Corinthians to know that, unless tongues are interpreted, prophecy is far more useful to the church. As in v. 13, Paul envisages that in some cases the tongue-speaker will be able to provide his own interpretation. That is, in some cases the one man could have both gifts – much as Paul himself appears to have possessed the gifts of apostleship, prophesying, teaching, healing and tongue-speaking. Presumably, the man would have spoken in a tongue first and then interpreted what he had just said. The prophet was 'greater' than the tongue-speaker in terms of his usefulness to the church – if the tongue-speaker was able to interpret what he said, the difference in usefulness would have ceased to exist.

Vv. 6-11 provide two sets of illustrations. First, the apostle calls on *the world of inanimate musical instruments* – whether used for peaceful or warlike purposes, vv. 7-8 – and second, he calls on *the world of human languages*, vv. 9-11. The emphasis throughout is on clarity and intelligibility.

V. 6. Paul begins with a reference to his own planned visit to them. When he wrote, this visit was programmed to follow immediately after his then-present stay in Macedonia, 16.5. (Although he later felt constrained to change his plans and defer his visit, 2 Cor. 1.16, 17, 23-2.1.) The acute spiritual needs of the church at Corinth only served to underscore his point – what possible help would he be to them with their many problems if all he had to offer them was the gift of uninterpreted tongues? Clearly he would only be of use to them if he brought other spiritual gifts – gifts of revelation, knowledge, prophecy or teaching. It is possible that Paul's short list comprises two sets of two gifts each – with 'revelation' being communicated through 'prophecy', v. 30, and 'knowledge' communicated through 'teaching', 12. 8, 29.

Vv. 7-11. Note the repeated references to 'sound(s)' – occurring five times in this section, although translated 'language(s)' in vv. 10 and 11. Paul makes the point that unclear and unintelligible sounds achieve nothing. In each illustration, he focuses attention on the hearer. If the musician doesn't make distinct sounds on his instruments – whether wind or string instruments, with appropriate distinctions in pitch, tone, rhythm and so on – the hearer won't recognise any tune, v. 7. If the bugler doesn't make distinct sounds on his trumpet, the hearer won't recognise any military command, v. 8.

If two parties talking together don't share a common language, neither party will recognise what the other is saying, vv. 9-11. If a person wishes to be understood, he or she must use 'the tongue' (the physical organ) to speak 'clear and distinct' words, v. 9. No language is without meaning, v. 10 – literally, 'no sound is soundless'; 'no voice is voiceless' – but it won't have any meaning to the hearer unless he or she understands the language being spoken. And that, Paul was saying, was all that tongue-speaking without interpretation would be to the hearer – mere sounds.

Paul's point is simple – tongues without interpretation in the church are of no more value or meaning than are indistinct and tuneless noises made by a musical instrument or the words of a foreigner. And how keenly would those who over-rated the gift of tongues have felt his scathing description – 'you will be speaking into the air', v. 9 – 'you will be wasting your breath!'

V. 12. The application of vv. 7-11 – eagerly desire to abound and overflow to the building up of the church.

Vv. 13-17 show the importance of all prayer and praise in the church being intelligible.

V. 13. Given that the goal is to excel to the edifying of the church, v. 12, let the tongue-speaker pray for the gift of interpretation. Clearly, the Spirit's sovereignty in giving, 12. 4, 8, doesn't cancel either a person's opportunity or responsibility to pray.

V. 14. For without the gift of interpretation, Paul explains, his spirit would pray 'in a tongue' – he would be conscious that he was addressing God in fervent prayer – but his consciousness would go no farther than that – he wouldn't know what he was saying and so he would be altogether unable to interpret it for the benefit of others. Hence, his mind, his thinking faculty, would be barren – would bear no fruit for the edification of others. Paul clearly implies that speaking in tongues was a means of communication with God on a spiritual plane, distinct from the exercise of the mind – distinct, that is, from a person's understanding and intellect.

V. 15. But if the tongue-speaker has successfully sought the gift of interpretation, he will then be able to pray – or indeed sing – with both his spirit and his understanding.

Vv.16-17. Because otherwise, Paul says, 'the uninformed' (the uninstructed, uninitiated man – who lacks any specialist knowledge of tongues and their interpretation) won't understand one syllable of what is being said, and he won't therefore be able to join in with the expected response of the assembled company. He will be unable to add '*the amen*' (lit.) to the giving of thanks – no matter how 'well' (how beautifully, excellently) the thanks are given, v. 17. From the days of Moses, and throughout the Old Testament period, God's people had

associated themselves with somebody's audible public prayer in this manner; e.g. Neh. 5.13. The synagogue at Corinth would certainly have continued the custom, as apparently did the Christian church there. About a 100 years later, Justin Martyr reported that on the Lord's day, when thanks had been given for the bread and wine at the Lord's supper, 'all the people present express their assent by saying "Amen"'. 'This word "Amen" answers', Justin continued, 'in the Hebrew language to "so be it"' (First Apology, chapter 65). About 200 years later again, Jerome wrote to the effect that in the church at Rome 'the Amen' resounded 'loudly, like spiritual thunder' (Preface to the second book of his commentary on Galatians). I have to say that, in my experience, the 'Amen' of today usually sounds more like the rumbling of someone's stomach than that of thunder!

V.s 18-19. Having mentioned the giving of thanks in v.s 16-17, Paul assures the Corinthians that *he* is thankful to God that he speaks in tongues more than any of them – that tongues are very much part and parcel of his own Christian experience, v. 18.

If, therefore, he has played down the use of tongues, he is saying, this isn't because he is afraid of the exercise of tongues as something unfamiliar to him – nor because he despises the gift – nor because he envies them the gift as lacking it himself. Far from it. This is no case of 'sour grapes'! But, though Paul might easily have made great use of this spiritual gift in which he so excelled, he makes it plain that, in the meetings of the church, he would far rather speak a few *intelligible* words than pour out a great torrent ('myriads' lit.) of *unintelligible* words which no-one would understand, v.19.

[Based substantially on the notes which have been published in Precious Seed during 2002 and 2003.]

OUTLINE OF 1 CORINTHIANS 14

Paul demonstrates that prophecy is superior to tongues, vv.1-25 :

- the different effects of the two gifts on *believers*, vv.1-19. Paul applies the tests of edification and intelligibility.
- the different effects of the two gifts on *unbelievers*, vv.20-25.

Paul provides practical directions to govern the use of gifts in the church, vv.26-35 :

- instructions relative to *tongue-speakers*, vv.27-28
- instructions relative to *prophets*, vv.29-33a
- instructions relative to *women*, vv.33b-35.
(Each section refers to 'speak' and 'be silent'.)

Paul brings the long section about spiritual gifts to a blunt and forceful, albeit affectionate, conclusion, vv.36-40.