

prophet **and loss**

1 Corinthians 14

These days there are all sorts of “prophets” around, with all sorts of messages. Books like “The Celestine Prophecy” and “Conversations with God” are instant best sellers. But what is genuine prophecy all about? And why does Paul say the Corinthians should “eagerly desire the gift of prophecy” (14:1) and “be eager to prophesy” (14:39)? They’re complex questions, so let’s try to piece some answers together from 1 Corinthians 14.

Read the whole of 1 Corinthians 14. As you go, make a note of any issues or questions that come to your mind.

NOTES AND QUESTIONS:

Gifts of Love

1. According to verse 1 to 5, prophecy is a greater gift than speaking in tongues. Why?

2. What is the problem with “tongues”?

3. “Edify” means “build up” or “strengthen.” What does “speaking in tongues” do, and what does “prophecy” do?

So What is Prophecy?

4. One way to understand what prophecy IS, is to look at what prophecy DOES. Note the effects of prophecy in each of these verses:

- v 3

- v 4

- v24

- v 31



5. Read verses 6 to 17. What is Paul saying about the importance of “meaning”?

6. What problem has the use of “tongues” caused in Corinth? (v11-12)

Think about it...

How would it feel to be part of a church where everyone was a “foreigner” to you, and you to them? Are there ways this can happen in church, even without “tongues”?

There are two sections in this passage that speak about concern for outsiders (v6-17 and v23-25.) What point are they making?

One of our **mpc core values** (see <http://www.mpc.org.au/vision/vision.html> for the full list) says this: “We value **church activity which is welcoming and understandable** to everyone.” Can you see why this is important? How do you think we’re going at achieving this goal?

Hosing Down an “Out of Control” Church

At the end of this chapter, Paul summarises by saying “everything must be done in a fitting and orderly way.” It’s a favourite verse for many “traditional” churches... and one which we always need to keep in mind. But things in Corinth had been far from orderly. Everyone seemed to be “speaking in tongues” at once, nobody could understand anybody else, “prophets” were speaking over the top of one another... and nobody spared a thought for the encouragement of anybody else.

Paul sets out some ground rules in **verses 26 to 39**. Read them through.

7. What limits does Paul place on tongue-speakers and prophets?

What is the overall goal? (v26b)

8. Returning to the subject of prophecy, notice that prophets are “under control” in three ways.

Prophets are “under control”	
of themselves	verse 32
of the church	verse ____
of the Apostles	verse ____

What about the silent women?

Verse 34 looks contentious... “Women should remain silent in the (lit) gatherings. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission as the law says. If they want to enquire about something they should ask their husbands at home.” Note, though, that Paul has already said that women **can** prophecy and pray in church if they follow the social conventions of the time to show proper respect for their husbands. There’s a similar idea here. The context is “the church weighing carefully the words of the prophets.” Everyone who is gathered presumably questions the prophet about his or her words of prophecy, and weighs up their value. Women, however, shouldn’t publicly do this to their husbands, but do it at home instead. There’s a useful article by Paul Barnett at www.anglicanmediasydney.asn.au/pwb/shamefulspeaking.htm

Be Eager for Orderly Prophecy

“Prophecy” means speaking Spirit-given words of encouragement to build up the church. It’s a great gift to pray for! It’s not “authoritative” or bossy; it humbly sits beneath the teaching of the apostles as written in scripture (v37-38). It’s not “out of control” or “mysterious” - rather, it’s a gift the Spirit gives from time to time in a way that’s understandable, clear, convicting, strengthening and comforting. Why not pray that God will give you words like that for others in our church family? And pray that those who preach and teach publicly will be given the gift of prophecy too, so they’ll be clearly understood and all the more encouraging to our church family! **We should all be eager for that!**