

1 Corinthians 14:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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

Analysis

He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself (ἐαυτὸν οἰκοδομεῖ, heauton oikodomei)—Paul concedes tongues have personal devotional value. **But he that prophesieth edifieth the church** (ἐκκλησίαν οἰκοδομεῖ, ekklēsian oikodomei)—the contrast is between self-edification and corporate edification.

Paul doesn't denigrate private edification (see v. 18, he practices it himself), but in gathered worship, the church's needs trump personal blessing. The repetition of oikodomeo ("build, edify") hammers home the principle: worship's purpose is mutual upbuilding. Love seeks the other's benefit (13:5, "seeketh not her own"), so corporate worship must prioritize corporate edification.

Historical Context

The Corinthian obsession with tongues likely stemmed from viewing them as evidence of superior spirituality. Paul reframes the issue: in church gatherings, the question isn't "what blesses me?" but "what builds the body?"

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How should the distinction between self-edification and church edification guide worship practices?
2. Why doesn't Paul forbid tongues entirely if prophecy is superior for corporate worship?
3. In what ways might we pursue gifts that showcase us rather than serve others?

Interlinear Text

ὁ	λαλῶν	γλῶσση	ἑαυτὸν	οἰκοδομεῖ	ὁ	δὲ
G3588	He that speaketh	in an unknown tongue	himself	edifieth	G3588	but
	G2980	G1100	G1438	G3618		G1161
προφητεύων	ἐκκλησίαν	οἰκοδομεῖ				
he that prophesieth	the church	edifieth				
G4395	G1577	G3618				

Additional Cross-References

1 Corinthians 14:22 (Parallel theme): 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.

1 Corinthians 14:26 (Parallel theme): How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying.

Mark 16:17 (Parallel theme): And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues;