

1 Corinthians 14:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

I would that ye all spake with tongues, but rather that ye prophesied: for greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying.

Analysis

I would that ye all spake with tongues, but rather that ye prophesied—Paul affirms tongues as a genuine gift (*thelō*, "I wish/desire") while maintaining prophecy's superiority (*mallon*, "more, rather"). **Greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues** uses *meizōn* (*μείζων*, "greater") to establish a hierarchy based on edification, not authenticity.

Except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying—the critical exception: tongues plus interpretation equals prophecy in effect. The purpose clause *hina hē ekklēsia oikodomēn labē* ("that the church may receive edification") reveals the governing principle: edification is the goal, and intelligibility is the means. Tongues without interpretation fail this test; with interpretation, they serve love.

Historical Context

Paul's "I wish you all" echoes his pastoral heart—he doesn't despise any legitimate gift. But in Corinth's chaotic worship, prophecy served love better than uninterpreted ecstasy. The exception clause ("except he interpret") shows Paul's flexibility.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. Why does Paul wish all spoke in tongues if prophecy is 'greater'?
2. How does interpretation transform tongues from self-serving to church-serving?
3. What modern worship elements might need the 'interpretation' test—is it edifying?

Interlinear Text

Θέλω δὲ πάντας ὑμᾶς λαλῶν γλώσσαις μᾶλλον
I would but all that ye he that speaketh with tongues rather
G2309 G1161 G3956 G5209 G2980 G1100 G3123

δὲ ἵνα προφητεύων μείζων γὰρ ὁ προφητεύων
but that is he that prophesieth greater for is he that prophesieth
G1161 G2443 G4395 G3187 G1063 G3588 G4395

ἢ ὁ λαλῶν γλώσσαις ἐκτὸς εἰ μὴ διερμηνεύῃ
than G3588 he that speaketh with tongues except G1487 G3361 he interpret
G2228 G2980 G1100 G1622 G1329

ἵνα ἢ ἐκκλησία οἰκοδομὴν λάβῃ
that G3588 the church edifying may receive
G2443 G1577 G3619 G2983

Additional Cross-References

1 Corinthians 12:10 (Parallel theme): To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues:

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;

1 Corinthians 13:1 (Parallel theme): Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

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