

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 (μεῖζων, "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	G3588	is he that prophesieth	
G1161	G2443	G4395	G3187	G1063		G4395	
ἢ	ὁ	λαλῶν	γλώσσαις	ἐκτὸς	εἰ	μὴ	διερμηνεύη
than	G3588	he that speaketh	with tongues	except	G1487	G3361	he interpret
G2228		G2980	G1100	G1622			G1329
ἵνα	ἡ	ἐκκλησία	οἰκοδομῇ	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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