

# For the sake of others

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- [ 0 : 0 0 ] Let's pray. Heavenly Father, by your spirit, you have inspired the words that we are now going to look at. And so we pray, Lord, for the illumination of the spirit.
- Please help us to be able to understand what you are saying. Please help me to be clear, to be faithful, to be understandable. And above all, that what I say, Lord, would build up the church, would build up all of us, that as we've just sung, that we might be pleasing to you, that we might honour you in the way that we approach these words, and above all, in the way we live our lives.
- We commit all this into your hands. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Last week, we looked at 1 Corinthians 13. And you might remember that I said that we often encounter this passage in isolation, usually at weddings.
- As a result, it's all too easy to simply read it as Paul's poetic tribute to the glories of love. But when we read it in its wider literary context, the passage takes on a different feel.
- We begin to realise that Paul wasn't being sentimental. This was Paul actually delivering a rebuke to the Corinthian church, to let them know that a gifted church is nothing without love.
- [ 1 : 2 9 ] But today we come to 1 Corinthians 14, another pretty famous passage in church circles. And similarly, it's possible to read this passage in isolation, or at least particular verses in this chapter in isolation.
- And as a result, it's often treated simply as a way to confirm and validate certain spiritual practices. But once again, if we were to read it in its wider literary context, the passage will begin to take on a different feel.
- So, one more time, let me remind you what the Corinthian church is like. Remember that this was a thoroughly messy church. It was a church where many were very much self-centred, as can be seen by the divisions over which leader was the best, that's chapter 1.
- Or by the way that they were willing to sue each other, that's chapter 6. Or by the way that they didn't wait to eat together, but split up according to social status, that's chapter 11.
- And that's how they approached spiritual gifts as well, in a self-centred manner. They're only interested in who is better.
- [ 2 : 4 6 ] And so there was one gift in particular that they figured made some of them especially spiritual, that elevated them above others, that made them feel particularly close to God.
- And that was the gift of tongues. That, as far as they were concerned, was the greater gift. And so Paul begins to address this pastorally, starting in chapter 12.
- He's seeking to correct them. And so he begins by reminding us that there are a ton of gifts out there, all given by the Spirit, all necessary for the functioning of the body.
- And back in chapter 12, he begins to hint that tongues are not as great as the Corinthians think they are. Do all speak in tongues?
- Do all interpret? He asks rhetorically, implying that the answer is no. And then before he goes on to address the matter more, he makes sure that we get 1 Corinthians 13 first.

- [ 3 : 56 ] He pleads with us to understand, love is the essential ingredient. It's the sphere in which our spiritual gifts operate.
- Without it, the gifts don't work as they should. And so that's why verse 1, Paul begins today by saying, follow the way of love.
- And actually, the NIV translation could go stronger. Because Paul essentially says, like in the ESV, pursue love. Go hard after love.
- Give your 100% to love. But then, verse 1 again, he also says, eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit.
- And so he's also saying, go hard after what the Spirit has given you. Don't need to choose between the two. But here's the big question. What does it mean to go hard after both?
- [ 4 : 59 ] If you want to be a loving and spiritual church at the same time, what does it look like? You see, the Corinthians were obviously having an internal debate over two gifts in particular, tongues and prophecy.
- And they had concluded that tongues was the winner because they thought that it was the thing that made them more spiritual. But Paul says, what happens when you realise love is essential?
- Well, if you truly want to pursue love and gifts, to be a loving and spiritual church, then actually, you will know prophecy is greater.
- And that's why Paul finishes verse 1 like this. Eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit, especially prophecy. Now, why might that be the case?
- What's the difference? Well, Paul is going to tell us in the first half of this chapter. And it's actually the difference between the two that helps us understand what a loving and spiritual church really looks like.
- [ 6 : 21 ] And essentially, it boils down to this. A loving and spiritual church is one that employs gifts for the sake of others.
- That's going to be the headline for today. A loving and spiritual church is one that employs gifts for the sake of others. Now, this is a long chapter and I realise that I'm not going to be able to pay close attention to every part in the time that I have, especially in the second half.
- So this is just to alert you to that fact. But this is the big thing I want you to see for today. A loving and spiritual church is one that employs gifts for the sake or for the good of others.
- But let's ask first, what are tongues? It's only mentioned in two books of the New Testament, Acts and 1 Corinthians. In Acts 2, during the day of Pentecost, we're told that the disciples of Jesus gathered together.
- They began to speak in other tongues, that is, foreign human languages that they had not learned. That is undisputed.
- [ 7 : 42 ] The question is, whether in 1 Corinthians 12 to 14, the nature of tongues here is the same as in Acts or is different to it?
- And here, good Bible-believing Christians disagree. Some take it to be the same as in Acts, while others take it to be some form of angelic speech. And I think it's fair to say that the evidence is not clear-cut at all.
- There are good arguments in both directions. And it's not something that I will personally quarrel over. But my slight inclination is to take the nature of tongues here in 1 Corinthians 12 to 14 to be referring to some form of angelic language.
- Let me briefly give you some reasons why. In 1 Corinthians 13 verse 1, Paul talks about the tongues of man and of angels.

Now, this could be just Paul speaking in an exaggerated fashion, but he could also be speaking more literally. In 14 verse 2, tongues are said to be spoken to God and not to other people.

[ 8 : 53 ] Now, if these tongues are just human languages, then that wouldn't be true since it would also be spoken to other humans. In 14 verse 10 to 11, Paul compares tongues with the effects of speaking in human languages as if the two are not the same.

So, the former is like the latter, but the former is not the latter. And in 14 verse 14 to 15, Paul says that it is possible to speak in tongues without engaging the mind at all.

Now, I'm not sure that could be true if it was just foreign languages. And I find that reason particularly convincing. And so, all these reasons cumulatively incline me to see tongues not just as foreign languages here, but as something like angelic speech.

But like I said, I would die on this hill. And I think it doesn't matter too much for Paul's bigger point in this chapter, even if I'm wrong.

Now, what about prophecy? Well, here, I'm actually going to delay going into any detail of what that might be because I think it might be better to do it after we've covered at least some of 1 Corinthians 14.

[ 10 : 24 ] But for now, I just want you to notice that prophecy is also a verbal gift, like tongues. And I also want you to remember that prophecy in the Bible is a far bigger category than just predicting the future.

That's how we often use the word prophecy today, isn't it? We say things like, give me a prophecy about who's going to win the next election. But try to get that idea out of your head for now so that when you see the word prophecy in 1 Corinthians 14, don't just think prediction.

Think more generally for now, something like a word from God. So you got that? When you see prophecy, just remember that it's a verbal gift, like tongues, and don't reduce it to just prediction.

So, back to the issue at hand. Why does Paul ask the Corinthians to desire prophecy over tongues?

Well, in verses 1 to 25, he basically gives us three reasons. Here's reason number one. Because prophecy better edifies the church.

[ 11 : 41 ] Look at verse 4. anyone who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but the one who prophesies edifies the church.

And that's a point that Paul doesn't hesitate to make over and over and over again. Just look at verse 5 or verse 12 or verse 17 or verse 19.

That's his focus. Edification of the church. And prophecy, Paul says, achieves that goal. After all, verse 2, if you speak in a tongue, who is your audience?

It's God, not others. But, verse 3, if you prophesy, who is the primary audience, it's other people, which, in this context, is primarily other Christians.

It's church. Now, Paul isn't saying that tongues is something horrible and to be despised. In verse 5, he says, I would like every one of you to speak in tongues.

[ 12 : 57 ] Now, by this, he doesn't mean that it is a must for all of us to have this gift. That would contradict chapter 12. Rather, he's simply clarifying that he's not saying tongues is bad.

It is a gift from the Spirit after all, one that, verse 2, allows you to speak to God and verse 16, to praise God.

In verse 18, he thanks God that he personally possesses this gift. But, in the bigger picture, verse 5, he says that prophecy is greater.

Now, why is that the case? Because, verse 3, when you do so, you get to strengthen people. And, by the way, the root word translated strengthening here is the same word for building up that we saw earlier in 8, verse 1, and 10, verse 23.

when you prophesy, you get to encourage others. You get to comfort others. And that, Paul says, makes it greater.

[ 14 : 11 ] Because, it is the edification of the church that matters. now, that turns our thinking on its head, doesn't it?

You see, we naturally think that the gift that is directed to God has to be the greater gift. I mean, come on, you get to utter mysteries by the spirit in verse 3.

And that sounds so much more spiritual, more supernatural, more spectacular. But no, God says, when you strengthen, when you encourage, when you comfort others by your words, that's what he's after.

You know, these things sound more ordinary, but that's what he prefers. Because, above all, these are expressions of love.

This gift, expressed in this way, is oriented. to the other. It's not self-seeking, it's not envious, it's kind, it edifies others.

[ 15 : 24 ] And that was especially important for the church at Corinth to hear. They were always tearing each other down, wounding each other by their words.

And Paul says, what's the point if your physical tongues can speak the language of angels? if those same tongues are not being used to minister to others?

As Paul's fellow apostle James says in James 3, verse 10, out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. They should not be. And that's why prophecy is greater.

It better edifies the church. Reason number two. Because prophecy is understandable and meaningful.

Now, why does prophecy better edify the church? Well, one big reason is because it's meant to be intelligible. That's Paul's basic point in verses 6 to 19.

[ 16 : 33 ] If nobody has a clue what you're saying, how can they be built up? And that's what verse 6 is getting at. Now, brothers and sisters, if I come to you and speak in tongues, what good will I be to you unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or word of instruction?

In other words, brothers and sisters, if I come speaking in a language you don't understand, how can I benefit you unless I also bring a word that you understand?

Paul then illustrates this in three ways. The first comes from the world of music, verse 7. If your pipe or harp can't make clear, distinct sounds, how can you even figure out what tune it's playing?

Never mind enjoy that tune. How can you gain any benefit from it? Or, verse 8, what if the military trumpet sounds more like a toddler blowing a recorder?

How can the troops answer the call of their commander if they can't even understand what the trumpet is signalling? Or, finally, verse 9, unless you speak intelligible words with your tongue, how will anyone know what you are saying?

[ 18 : 04 ] Just imagine you're in Thailand, and you want to know where the toilet is, and so you start speaking to the shopkeeper in English. But he just smiles and nods at you and says some unpronounceable Thai words in return.

Your English is totally unintelligible to him. And so your words are totally useless. They are not achieving anything, not least that all-important goal of locating the toilet.

And that, Paul says, is what the gift of tongues is like when it comes to building up the church. it doesn't achieve anything.

Unless, of course, it's interpreted. Then suddenly you can become understandable. And when you achieve understanding, edification becomes possible.

And that's why Paul says we should pray for interpretation in verse 13. And that's why in verse 5, if a tongue is interpreted, the gift is now on the same level as prophecy.

[ 19 : 24 ] When I preach to a Mandarin speaking audience, which I sometimes do, how can I edify them? I mean, I'm a banana. And the answer is, I can't, unless I am understood.

That's why my wife Chin Yin translates. Otherwise, if you are a Mandarin speaker in the audience with no English, it is actually a miserable and alienating experience listening to me.

It's the opposite of being edified. And so, verse 12, be eager for the gifts that build up the church.

Yes, you can pray, sing, or praise God in tongues all you like, but if even your own mind has no understanding of the sounds that are coming from your lips, how much more does around you?

That's the point of verses 14 to 17. And so, that's why verse 19, Paul says, five intelligible words that others find meaningful is better than 10,000 words of an unintelligible tongue.

[ 20 : 46 ] Or, if you want to put it mathematically, five understandable words, whether in prophecy or teaching, is 2,000 times better than uninterpreted tongues.

Just imagine you're a Corinthian hearing this. You thought your tongues were so amazing, but Paul now tells you, well, not really. For it can't edify, because unless there's interpretation, it is not understandable or meaningful.

Reason number three, why prophecy is better, because it can bring conviction to even outsiders. Because it can bring conviction to even outsiders.

In verses 20 to 25, Paul now shows how prophecy and tongues affect even non-Christians. In verse 21, he now quotes from Isaiah 28.

Isaiah is alluding to a time when God's people have come under judgment for refusing to obey him. As a result, they will be invaded by the Assyrians, a foreign nation.

[ 22 : 18 ] And so the very fact that God's people would hear in their very streets, a foreign language they didn't understand, as the foreign troops moved in, was a sign that they were under judgment.

In other words, hearing unintelligible words was a negative sign. And so Paul concludes that if hearing words that you don't understand, that you find meaningless, function as a negative sign in the Old Testament, then why would you pretty much do the same thing and speak in uninterpreted tongues in church?

It's not appropriate unless you are an unbeliever who should hear it as a negative sign. After all, without Christ, they are under judgment.

And that's why he says, verse 22, tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers, but for unbelievers. It's a negative, not a positive sign.

Prophecy, however, is for believers because it can build up the church, not just spiritually, but even numerically. You see, if an unbeliever visits a church, but simply hears uninterpreted tongues, they'll be confused and even wonder if we are crazy, verse 23.

[ 23 : 58 ] But, verses 24 and 25, if they hear prophecy, that is a word that is understandable and filled with the meaning God intended it to have, guess what?

They could be convicted of sin and possibly even converted. So you can see how much greater prophecy is than tongues.

It is a gift that is always for the sake of the other, for the good of the other, and even able to impact the outsider.

And I want you to see that that is the underlying principle throughout this comparison of prophecy and tongues. A loving and spiritual church is one that employs gifts for the sake of others, for the good of others.

that is what is driving Paul's logic throughout. If we want to be a loving and spiritual church, we will pray for what edifies others.

[ 25 : 15 ] We won't seek gifts or personal spiritual experiences that only benefit oneself. And so that means we won't speak in tongues in church without interpretation.

but it also means more broadly that we shouldn't employ any other gifts for purely self-seeking purposes.

And so a musical performance on stage that's only to showcase the ability of the singer or the musicians is a no-go or a social concerns project which only ends up with people giving away poor quality items they don't want simply because they want to declutter is a no-go either.

No. A loving and spiritual church is one that employs gifts for the sake of others, for the good of others.

And based on what we've seen so far, let me just draw out two more specific implications for us today. first of all, look to prophesy in this way.

[ 26 : 32 ] Look to prophesy in this way. So far, I have deliberately delayed mentioning what prophecy is exactly. And that's because I wanted to take a more inductive approach to defining prophecy.

That is, I wanted us to look at some of the details of 1 Corinthians 14 first, and let that guide us on what the shape of prophecy should look like, rather than come to the text with a predetermined idea of what prophecy is.

But let me now just give you a quick whole Bible sketch of prophecy before homing in on what prophesying we're talking about more specifically in 1 Corinthians 14.

In the Old Testament, prophecy is authoritative and infallible. They were the very words of God. So for example, in Deuteronomy 18 verse 18 and Jeremiah 1 verse 9, we're told that God had put his very words in the mouth of prophets like Moses and Jeremiah.

To listen to Moses or Jeremiah is the same as listening to God. To not listen to them is equivalent to not listening to God.

[ 27 : 59 ] And if you claim to speak God's words when you were really speaking only your own words, the consequences were severe.

And that's why the Old Testament prophets frequently started their messages by saying, thus says the Lord. And we might call this big P prophecy.

So what is the equivalent of Old Testament big P prophecy in the New? What constitutes the very words of God? And who speaks them?

The answer has to be the apostles. They are the ones whom Jesus says the Holy Spirit will guide and help them to remember all that Jesus taught them.

That's what John 14, 25-26 says. They are the ones carried along by the Spirit to write down the scriptures. That's 2 Peter 1, 21.

[ 29 : 03 ] And so because we have the full revelation of the Bible, we no longer have big P prophets or big A apostles today.

And that's why in places like 2 Peter 3 1-2, for instance, we're told instead to recall and look to the apostolic writings.

That is, the Bible. Once the apostles are gone, we don't have to rely on new prophets or new apostles. Because it is in here that we find the very words of God.

But what about prophecy in 1 Corinthians 14? Is that big P prophecy too? In which case, then this passage becomes a historical case study since we no longer have this gift today.

Well, no. Because the Bible conceives of another strand of prophesying alongside big P prophecy. Now, you could call this small P prophecy.

[ 30 : 13 ] Unlike big P prophecy, it is not authoritative. Look down at verse 29 and notice that such prophecies can be weighed and evaluated by humans.

Similarly, in 1 Thessalonians 5 verse 21 to 22, we're told to test prophecy and hold to what is good. Now, you could never do that with big P prophecy because that is from the mouth of God himself.

But clearly, the prophesying of 1 Corinthians 14 is not on the same authoritative level. It's a different category of prophesying. So, what is this kind of prophesying?

Well, I want you to notice a couple more things from 1 Corinthians 14. Notice that Paul has to encourage the Corinthian Christians to eagerly prophesy.

That means they didn't seem to have been attracted at all to this gift. Now, they had no such problem with tongues and we know that the Corinthians love what looks more spiritual, what looks great.

[ 31 : 32 ] And so, what does that tell us? It tells us that actually, this kind of prophesying was actually pretty ordinary looking, especially if compared with tongues.

It didn't look at all like uttering the mysteries of the Spirit. And notice, what is the effect of this kind of prophesying?

Well, we've seen it already. in verse 3, it edifies, strengthens, encourages, comforts. It simply looks to speak the truth in love.

And this fits with the picture we find in Acts chapter 15 verse 32 where we are told that Judas and Silas, who themselves were prophets, said much to encourage and strengthen the believers.

In verses 24 to 25, back here in 1 Corinthians 14, it can bring about conviction of sin. Indeed, it reveals the secrets of our hearts. And that's exactly what the Word of God is described as doing in Hebrews chapter 4 verses 12 and 13.

[ 32 : 56 ] And so that tells us that prophesying is scripture based. It is not something totally separate from it. And in 14 verse 6, it is lumped together with revelation, knowledge, and teaching.

Now, when we think of the word revelation, we often think in terms of, wow, God is going to say something that he has never ever said before. more. But the word reveal and revelation in the New Testament doesn't always mean this.

In places like Philippians 3 verse 15, for example, it simply means that God will give us insight into what he has already said or correction to bring us back to his way.

And so prophecy is linked more with insight, correction, and instruction. So when we build up a picture of what prophecy looks like from the pages of the New Testament itself, rather than just bringing a preconceived idea to the text, New Testament prophesying looks like this.

It is basically taking the word of God, and drawing from it some insight or correction that is especially fitting or apt for the situation at hand.

[ 34 : 29 ] They are words that are intelligible and edifying. They are not super cryptic. They can be understood. And it is based on God's teaching.

Although it is not exactly the same as mere teaching because Paul seems to distinguish between the two. But rather it goes one step further in thinking of how that teaching is worked out in specific situations today.

And it is other-centered. They are not about showing how great the one prophesying is. Now, that sounds quite broad, doesn't it?

Well, yes, exactly. I realise that because of the Christian environment that we've been in over the past few decades, with so many people claiming to be prophets passing through our shores, to think of prophecy in this way is quite unfamiliar.

But I am convinced, based on looking at this area more closely in recent years, that this is more faithful to scripture. and I've tried to show you from the pages of the Bible itself.

[ 35 : 44 ] And so that means many things can be counted as prophesying. My preaching can have a prophetic edge if it so happens that one day, under the Spirit's guidance, I apply a passage in an unusually relevant way for our specific congregation.

It can happen in Bible studies when, as you guys discuss things, someone applies or says something that brings great encouragement to the whole group.

It can even happen in conversations right after this service where two people might discuss the sermon, might discuss the Word of God, and one person is struggling to think about how that sermon applies, but the other person helps her along such that the person now says, wow, I never really thought of how that passage works out in my life in that way before, but you really helped me to see that.

Now, you probably don't think of that as prophesying, but that fits with 1 Corinthians 14. And if that is prophesying, then no surprise, sometimes people might weigh or evaluate what is said and say, oh, that's an interesting way to think about how God's Word is working out in our situation, but maybe there's an even better way to think about things, you know, I'm not so sure about that.

It's not binding. And does this way of thinking about prophecy discount prediction? It doesn't have to. Someone might have unusual foresight to see something that will happen further down the line, that emerges out of a deep understanding of scripture.

[ 37 : 36 ] But notice that predictive prophecy doesn't really happen with much frequency at all in the New Testament. And it certainly means that when people come and say, hey, God tells me that you're going to get a Ferrari next week, well, that is not actually prophesying in the New Testament sense at all.

But, if prophecy is simply as I describe it, broadly speaking, then we should all look to prophesy. May all who have God's spirit, that is Christians, prophesy, bringing words that edify, strengthen, encourage, comfort, and convict one another frequently.

And that is the kind of prophetic ministry I 100% will encourage in our church. because we want the gifts that will build up the church.

More briefly, here's the second implication. Seek understanding and to be understandable. Notice the emphasis that Paul places on understanding to be edified.

if one has no understanding, one cannot be built up. And so the challenge here is, are we seeking to understand what God is saying?

[ 39 : 06 ] Are we praying and working hard to grasp the meaning? Are we coming each week to hear God's word with precisely that aim in mind? Are we taking advantage of some of the resources that have been made available to us, whether that's a Bible overview class or the church library, to gain understanding?

1 Corinthians 14 suggests that Christian growth does not bypass the mind. In fact, it's the opposite. We need to engage our minds to be built up.

But that also means that those of us who teach and lead should work hard to be understandable. That is certainly one of my chief aims week after week in the pulpit.

And if I'm not understandable at all, then please tell me so that I can improve. But in all our communication, we should seek to be intelligible.



For those of us who are long timers here, it means that we should also try to be as mindful as possible, not to fall into insider language, so as not to alienate those around us who are newer.

[ 40 : 23 ] So, if you're a long-timer here and you use an acronym such as EYM, think if there is anyone around you who doesn't know what that means and explain it, EYM, English Youth Ministry.

Or if you refer to our brother Nicholas, don't assume that everyone here knows who that is simply because our brother Nicholas has been here for 40 plus years. You see, when we put effort into being mindful even of simple things like that, it edifies because it shows and communicates to the newcomers in our midst that we care for them and that we want to include them.

We don't want to leave them out even unintentionally. And so let's be a loving and spiritual church that is always looking out for the sake of others, for the good of others.

And there is one more way we can do that, and that is to exercise those gifts in an orderly way. Exercise those gifts in an orderly way.

That's the basic point of verses 26 to 40, which I'm going to cover much more briefly. Paul has made clear that edification is the goal, but how can he ensure that edification be maintained whenever the church is gathered together?

[ 41 : 44 ] Well, in verses 26 to 28, he gives a procedure of sorts. He says, only one tongue speaker may speak at a time, and of course, an interpreter must be present.

Two or three may speak in turn, otherwise the tongue speaker should remain silent. Similarly, in verses 29 to 31, only one should prophesy at one time.

again, at most, it seems that only two or three should speak. And those who speak, according to verse 37, are only those who acknowledge apostolic authority in the first place.

In other words, they must be willing to submit to the authority of scripture. And then this prophecy needs to be vague and not automatically accepted.

And so order must be maintained. Now, this does not mean that God is not working. On the contrary, it showcases the character of God clearly.

[ 42 : 50 ] For, verse 33, God is not a God of disorder, but of peace. If you think confusion is good in a church, well, God says, how well do you really know me?

Because that is not who I am. And again, God challenges our idea of how he works. Over the past few decades, it has sometimes been assumed that if there is no spontaneity, God cannot be working.

And so spontaneity is taken as the sign of spirituality. And it's understandable why that kind of thinking came about, because people were reacting against a dry kind of formalism, a dead kind of ritualism.

But of course, we know that just because something is ordered or planned doesn't necessarily mean that it has to be dull or half-hearted. Imagine that you wanted to throw someone a surprise birthday party.

A lot of planning has to go into that, doesn't it? But that doesn't mean that therefore, that your lack of spontaneity indicated a lack of authenticity or a lack of heart on your part.

[ 44 : 09 ] It actually shows the opposite, that you care enough to order things, to plan things in a proper way. For God is a God of order.

He ordered creation out of chaos after all. And although sin has reintroduced chaos into this world, one of the consequences of Jesus' finished work on the cross is that creation order will one day be restored.

One day the world will be as it should be. For God is a God of order. And this order extends to verses 34 and 35 as well, which I better explain since it looks quite controversial on first reading.

Are women meant to be quiet at all times? Was it wrong of our sister Ivy to bring us our Bible reading? Well, remember 1 Corinthians 11 verse 5 earlier?

There, Paul had no problem with women praying or prophesying. So he can't mean that women are just too shot up. Instead, let's think of their immediate context again.

[ 45 : 23 ] Notice, Paul has been talking about who should be silent. It's not just the women. earlier, it is the tongue speaker who have no interpretation.

They should be silent. And then, it's anyone who wants to prophesy but hasn't been given an opportunity. Well, they should be silent as well.

And so, Paul isn't singling out women. Instead, he's just saying that different people are to be silent at different times. in the gathering.

And so, when are the women to be silent? Well, we've just been told that these prophecies are to be weighed. And that is the specific occasion when the women are not to interrupt.

For remember the principle of 1 Corinthians 11? You are to honour your head. And it's quite likely here that the weighing or evaluating of prophecies in a formal church meeting is done by the male elders.

[ 46 : 37 ] And so, the women are to keep their counsel at this stage to honour the leaders. Perhaps also, if they were involved in the cross-examination of a prophecy, they might end up questioning their own husband or someone else's husband in a public way that might be embarrassing for all involved.

So, better instead to do it in less public settings. But the point, verse 40, is that everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.

By all means, verse 39, be eager to prophesy. Or, if you have the gift of tongues, then don't be afraid to use it appropriately.

But remember, it is to be exercised in line with the big principle of this chapter. It is to be used with love for the sake of others, for the good of others.

It's to be used to edify others. And that's what a church that is both loving and spiritual will look like. So, my brothers and sisters, are you eager to be more spiritual, to use the gifts that God has given you?

[ 48 : 02 ] Then, pursue love and try to excel in those that build up the church. And when that happens, we will be fit for purpose, ready to serve God before an unbelieving will.

let's pray. Let's pray. Father, we come before you today.

We recognise that in this passage, there are perhaps things that we have not considered before, things that might be new or unfamiliar to us, possibly might even challenge some of our previous understandings.

But Father, I pray that your word would indeed speak clearly, would convict us, and will help us to bring our practices more in line with what your word says.

And above all, Father, please help us to remember, as you showed us last week, that without love, we gain nothing, we are nothing. So even in the exercise of any and every gift that we have, help us to use them in ways that are patient, that are kind, that are not boastful, that is not proud, that does not dishonour others, that is not self-seeking, that always seeks the good of the other.

[ 49 : 36 ] So we just want to commit again our church into your hands, help us to keep speaking the truth in love, that we might build up your church. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.