

Clarity in the Wind-Powered Church

Lesson 7

1 Corinthians 14:6–25



Big Idea

If you have ever been to a foreign country with a language different than the one you speak, you know how confusing and disorienting it can feel. Often you don't have context or any frame of reference for what the people around you are saying. There is no way to know if they are speaking to you or about you, and it's very hard to know how or when to respond.

For those new to the Church, just entering a church building can feel like entering a foreign country. There is a distinct culture and language; it can be confusing and hard to fit in. This confusion existed in the early Church and can still exist in the Church today. The importance of clarity in church gatherings is vital, not just for unbelievers or new believers, but also for those who have been Christians for a long time. Clarity is a principle that cannot be overlooked.¹



Background

The Corinthian church was struggling with disorderly and chaotic worship gatherings. Many people felt that some spiritual gifts were better than others—especially speaking in tongues. Perhaps that was because they were using this gift in a way that was showy and made them feel more important and essential. However, no one was interpreting what was being said, so confusion prevailed.² Paul dedicated the majority of 1 Corinthians 14 to the significance of orderly worship and the importance of clarity. He pointed out that it was better to want the gifts that brought clarity and understanding, such as prophecy or teaching, so that order could be maintained and spiritual growth could happen.³

¹ 1 Corinthians 14:1–25

² *Life Application Study Bible: New Living Translation*. Tyndale House Publishers, 2004. 1950

³ 1 Corinthians 14:1–5

What is speaking in tongues?

- “Since the Greek word for ‘tongues’ means ‘languages’ or ‘dialects,’ some understand it to refer to the ability to speak in unlearned human languages, as the apostles did on the day of Pentecost (**Acts 2:4, 6, 11; 1 Corinthians 14:9–10**). Others believe that in [1 Corinthians] 12–14 the term ‘tongues’ refers to both earthly and heavenly languages, including ecstatic languages of praise and prayer (**13:1; 14:2, 10**).”¹
- Some believers, and even whole denominations, have claimed that the gift of speaking in tongues has ceased to exist.² However, there is no definitive biblical evidence that it has ceased.³ The Christian and Missionary Alliance, and other denominations, believe that all spiritual gifts are still given and used today.⁴
- Speaking in tongues is not the biblically required evidence of being filled with Holy Spirit, as has been taught by some. Holy Spirit decides to whom He wants to give certain gifts. “Though there is a record of people receiving spiritual gifts when they were filled with the Holy Spirit (**Acts 2:4; 10:44–48; 19:6**), there are other instances of people being filled with the Holy Spirit where there is no mention of spiritual gifts (**Acts 4:8, 31; 8:15–17; 9:17–18; 13:9, 52**). Though some may speak in tongues when they are filled with the Holy Spirit, others do not.”⁵ There are other evidences of the Spirit-filled life, including the fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control⁶—as well as all of the Spirit-given spiritual gifts.



Read 1 Corinthians 14:6–25

⁶ *Dear brothers and sisters, if I should come to you speaking in an unknown language, how would that help you? But if I bring you a revelation or some special knowledge or prophecy or teaching, that will be helpful.* ⁷ *Even lifeless instruments like the flute or the harp must play the notes clearly, or no one will recognize the melody.* ⁸ *And if the bugler doesn’t sound a clear call, how will the soldiers know they are being called to battle?*

¹ *NIV Study Bible: New International Version*. Zondervan, 1985. 1750

² MacArthur, John. *First Corinthians*. Moody Press, 1984. 306, 376

³ *Now you have every spiritual gift you need as you eagerly wait for the return of our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 1:7*

⁴ “Spiritual Gifts.” The Christian and Missionary Alliance, www.cmalliance.org/about/beliefs/perspectives/spiritual-gifts.

⁵ “Spiritual Gifts.” The Christian and Missionary Alliance, www.cmalliance.org/about/beliefs/perspectives/spiritual-gifts.

⁶ **Galatians 5:22–23**

⁹ *It's the same for you. If you speak to people in words they don't understand, how will they know what you are saying? You might as well be talking into empty space.*

¹⁰ *There are many different languages in the world, and every language has meaning.* ¹¹ *But if I don't understand a language, I will be a foreigner to someone who speaks it, and the one who speaks it will be a foreigner to me.* ¹² *And the same is true for you. Since you are so eager to have the special abilities the Spirit gives, seek those that will strengthen the whole church.*

¹³ *So anyone who speaks in tongues should pray also for the ability to interpret what has been said.* ¹⁴ *For if I pray in tongues, my spirit is praying, but I don't understand what I am saying.*

¹⁵ *Well then, what shall I do? I will pray in the spirit, and I will also pray in words I understand. I will sing in the spirit, and I will also sing in words I understand.* ¹⁶ *For if you praise God only in the spirit, how can those who don't understand you praise God along with you? How can they join you in giving thanks when they don't understand what you are saying?* ¹⁷ *You will be giving thanks very well, but it won't strengthen the people who hear you.*

¹⁸ *I thank God that I speak in tongues more than any of you.* ¹⁹ *But in a church meeting I would rather speak five understandable words to help others than ten thousand words in an unknown language.*

²⁰ *Dear brothers and sisters, don't be childish in your understanding of these things. Be innocent as babies when it comes to evil, but be mature in understanding matters of this kind.* ²¹ *It is written in the Scriptures:*

*"I will speak to my own people
through strange languages
and through the lips of foreigners.
But even then, they will not listen to me,"
says the Lord.*

²² *So you see that speaking in tongues is a sign, not for believers, but for unbelievers. Prophecy, however, is for the benefit of believers, not unbelievers.* ²³ *Even so, if unbelievers or people who don't understand these things come into your church meeting and hear everyone speaking in an unknown language, they will think you are crazy.* ²⁴ *But if all of you are prophesying, and unbelievers or people who don't understand these things come into your meeting, they will be convicted of sin and judged by what you say.* ²⁵ *As they listen, their secret thoughts will be exposed, and they will fall to their knees and worship God, declaring, "God is truly here among you."*



Dig In

1. How would you describe the point Paul was trying to make about speaking in unknown languages? What metaphors or pictures did Paul use to explain his point? (**1 Corinthians 14:6–9**)
 - a. Languages are full of meaning and are critical for communicating and understanding. How did Paul drive home his point in **14:10–11**?
 - b. The way that we use language can be both helpful and unhelpful in our corporate worship. For example: hearing songs in another language, the use of story and parable, catchy slogans so you remember the main point, “churchy” words that people outside the church don’t understand, how we explain communion, etc. How have you experienced and noticed both the helpful and unhelpful ways that our use of language can impact worship?
2. Paul reminded the Corinthian church that the purpose of spiritual gifts was, and remains, to strengthen the whole Church (**14:12**). How could the gift of tongues be used to accomplish that goal? (**14:13**)

3. What do you learn about the gift of tongues in **14:14–17**?

a. How can this teaching on clarity influence unity in a church?

b. The Corinthians were struggling with confusion and disunity in worship related to speaking in tongues. However, this principle can apply beyond speaking in tongues. What are some other ways you have seen clarity and unity compromised in worship services today?

c. Read **Romans 15:5–6**.

⁵ May God, who gives this patience and encouragement, help you live in complete harmony with each other, as is fitting for followers of Christ Jesus. ⁶ Then all of you can join together with one voice, giving praise and glory to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

i. When have you experienced this type of unified worship?

- ii. From your perspective, what are the benefits of collective, unified worship?

4. Paul was not saying that the gift of tongues shouldn't be hoped for or shouldn't be used. In light of Paul's teaching throughout this passage, especially in **verses 18–19**, what is the heart behind his words?

5. It's extremely important to be believers that are innocent when it comes to evil and mature when it comes to understanding spiritual truths, including the gifts of Holy Spirit and how they work in a church gathering (**14:20–21**). As you read the following Scripture, underline why it's important to be mature in these matters.

a. **Ephesians 4:14–15**

¹⁴ Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won't be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth. ¹⁵ Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church.

- b. Take time on your own, and as a group, to list the ways that maturity and clarity can work together to strengthen churches in light of **Ephesians 4:14–15**.

6. One scholar explains **1 Corinthians 14:22–25** this way: “The way the Corinthians were speaking in tongues was helping no one because believers did not understand what was said, and unbelievers thought that the people speaking in tongues were crazy. Speaking in tongues was supposed to be a sign to unbelievers (as it was in Acts 2). After speaking in tongues, believers were supposed to explain [interpret] what was said and give the credit to God. The unsaved people would then be convinced of a spiritual reality and motivated to look further into the Christian faith.”¹

(a.) What are some ways that a church service can “scare” people away?

(b.) What are some ways that a church service can draw people to Christ?

c. What was the potential end result of clarity for unbelievers in **14:24–25**?

) **Clarity in the Wind-Powered Church**

) This lesson may have given you some further information about tongues and clarified what Paul was speaking about in this part of his letter to the Corinthians, yet you may still be left with questions.

1. How has your perspective on the gift of tongues been influenced by this study? What questions still arise in you, if any?

¹ *Life Application Study Bible: New Living Translation*. Tyndale House Publishers, 2004. 1951

