

“Upon the Lampstand”

“After lighting a lamp there is not one person who conceals it with something or who puts it underneath a bed. Instead the person puts it upon a Lampstand so that those who come inside may see the light.”—Jesus of Nazareth, Gospel of Luke 8:16-17.

Question: *Since speaking in different “tongues” and “prophesying” are spoken of in the Bible as being practiced by Christians (1 Corinthians 14:22), how will a Christian determine how or if such gifts are to be practiced today?*

Answer: Christian Witnesses of Jah use the same principle of beliefs based on the best available reasons to answer this question as we would when answering any other question about the Bible, about Jah God, about Jesus of Nazareth, or about the power of the holy spirit, which power may have been evident to us individually or among others. We reject all attempts to require or to make necessary as a condition for being considered a Christian, belief in any traditions or beliefs which are not based on the best available evidence or reasons, such as beliefs whose supporting reasons are contradicted by better reasons which inform other, competing beliefs.

This does not mean, however, that all traditions from men or from women should be rejected or avoided by Christians. Indeed, fundamental to being a Christian Witness of Jah is our individual responsibility and accountability both to Jah and to Jesus of Nazareth, whom we consider “the Christ” or Messiah. We are simply committed to never allowing a person’s belief in the Christ to become dependent upon anything but on what can be shown to be the best available reasons in nature and in the Bible, the two primary sources of learning and belief for Christian Witnesses of Jah.— Romans 1:18-20; 14:1-20; Colossians 2:16-23.

According to the two sections of the New Testament (NT) referenced at the end of the last paragraph, some of the things which Christians have authority over and which we are individually accountable to “our Master” concerning include “days,” festivals,” what we ‘eat’ and what we ‘drink,’ observances of “new moons,” and even “Sabbaths,” that is, so long as we consider and practice all such things “in honor of the Lord and give thanks to God” (Romans 14:6). What, though, are Christians to do where differences in certain beliefs or in what we practice in Jah’s and in Jesus’ names involves using different “tongues” or foreign languages, as well as exercising other spiritual powers which are plainly taught or spoken about in the NT?

Christian Witnesses of Jah endeavor to do all things “in honor of the Lord” and by ‘giving thanks to God,’ as we follow the “kingly law” which requires that we ‘love our neighbors as we do ourselves’ (Romans 14:6; James 2:8). The combination of these Christian teachings will not allow any Christian Witnesses of Jah to come together in ways that permit or promote a selfish exercise of religious preference. How, though, can we determine whether to openly exercise “spiritual gifts” today, such as speaking in the

tongues of a foreign language or even “prophesying” about things concerning God and the Lord Jesus?

Since Christians accept the NT as containing good reasons for our beliefs, as well as for the beliefs and practices of the earliest Christians, we respect what is said in biblical texts such as 1 Corinthians 14:39, “So, my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and do not suppress the gift of speaking in tongues” (*The New Jerusalem Bible* [NJB]). It is not for me or for anyone else to “suppress” what may be gifts from God to others. I believe in individual accountability to God and to the Christ, for that is how we are said to be accountable to them in the Bible (Romans 2:6-11; Revelation 2:23; 20:13). Still, though we have individual accountability we can also work together by making known beliefs based on the best available reasons. In so doing, while we have freedom to determine many things, we should also be careful not to ‘put ourselves on judgment by what we approve.’—Romans 14:22.

With the above in mind, consider an extended portion of 1 Corinthians 14 with some of my comments interspersed in bold, bracketed words below the quoted texts, in order to help make the reading clearer in several respects:

1 Corinthians 14:1-9 (NJB)

¹ Make love your aim; but be eager, too, for spiritual gifts, and especially for prophesying.

[So love is the goal, or “aim,” and for “spiritual gifts” we can also be “eager.” But why? Consider:]

² Those who speak in a tongue speak to God, but not to other people, because nobody understands them; they are speaking in the Spirit and the meaning is hidden.

[Our speech, in whatever “tongue” we use, should be “for a beneficial purpose” such as for “wisdom” and for “knowledge” (compare 1 Corinthians 12:7-8).]

³ On the other hand, someone who prophesies speaks to other people, building them up and giving them encouragement and reassurance.

⁴ Those who speak in a tongue may build themselves up, but those who prophesy build up the community.

⁵ While I should like you all to speak in tongues, I would much rather you could prophesy; since those who prophesy are of greater importance than those who speak in tongues, unless they can interpret what they say so that the church is built up by it.

[Here it is clearly taught that the purpose of any “prophesying” or speech in “tongues” is so the “church” or any congregation of “two or three” or more (Matthew 18:20) “is built up by” either the one who “prophesies” or by the *interpreter* of the one who speaks in a different ‘tongue’ or language.]

⁶ Now suppose, brothers, I come to you and speak in tongues, what good shall I do you if my speaking provides no revelation or knowledge or prophecy or instruction?

⁷ It is the same with an inanimate musical instrument. If it does not make any distinction between notes, how can one recognise what is being played on flute or lyre?

⁸ If the trumpet sounds a call which is unrecognisable, who is going to get ready for the attack?

⁹ It is the same with you: if you do not use your tongue to produce speech that can be readily understood, how can anyone know what you are saying? You will be talking to the air.

[It is, in fact, just such “talking to the air” which often occurs by those who speak in tongues without an interpreter. Further, today different languages are known throughout the world, and so a person could record another’s speech in “tongues,” have it interpreted and then checked and ‘tested’ against what we have good reasons to believe is true, and so never become reliant on what a person claims or speaks in “tongues.”]

Based on the above, if a person whom you know claims to be Christian and also claims to speak in spiritual “tongues” or languages in which the spirit of God empowers him or her to speak, then that person “may be making [his or her] thanksgiving well.” But if others around those who make such claims are “not built up at all” (1 Corinthians 14:17), then you should consider ‘putting these ones to the test’ in order to make sure you and others are not being misled according to what is outlined in the Scriptures (Revelation 2:2; compare 1 Corinthians 14:29). Like Paul, I “would rather say five words with my mind, to instruct others as well, than ten thousand words in a tongue.”—1 Corinthians 14:19.

According to 1 Corinthians 14:22 it is also true that in New Testament times certain gifts of the spirit (such as speaking in different “tongues”) were “significant not for believers, but for unbelievers”! By contrast with tongues, “prophesying is not for unbelievers, but for believers” (1 Corinthians 14:22). Yet, if in the use of any spiritual gifts or teachings the unbeliever or the believers who are present are not moved to trust in Jah God or in Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, such gifts should not be used. For what else is the true purpose of such gifts if not to give forth “wisdom” and “knowledge” which leads to such faith?

Concerning tongues, the wisdom and knowledge must be confirmed by an ‘interpreter,’ this so the teaching or speech can be checked against the best available reasons (Acts 17:11; compare Acts 17:2-3). Accuracy and truth are critical. Believers and non-believers must, therefore, always be in a reasonable position to put to the test those who make special claims of any kind, including their speech in tongues or when “prophesying,” “for many false prophets are loose in the world.”—1 John 4:1.

Finally, anytime someone wishes to speak in a foreign tongue among you, or claim to have the fist of prophecy, by all means let that one speak according to what is reasonable among you, but let these words from one whom Christians consider to have had good reasons for his teachings (compare Galatians 1:11-24; 2:1-2) stay with you each time you come together “in honor of the Lord” and to “give thanks to God” (Romans 14:6), to guide you and to protect you:

1 Corinthians 14:26-33 (English Standard Version)

What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up. If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret. But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God. Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh [“judge” or “test”] what is said. If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may

learn and all be encouraged, and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets. For God is not a God of confusion but of peace.

Since Christians and others today look to the writings of the prophets and teachers of the Bible for good reasons to believe, based in large part on the witnesses, the history, and other good reasons for belief found in it, we should pursue what is most likely going to help others ‘learn and be encouraged,’ rather than make ourselves objects of interest by claiming or by trying to exercise certain spiritual powers or gifts. During apostolic times, such gifts were effective in many ways, and usable in brining the truth about the Christ to the gentile world. Today, we can do the same in many ways. Each one of us is unique and usable by God and by the Christ according to the leadings of the holy spirit in order to do good, and to give Jah and Jesus praise! Consider:

1 Corinthians 12:4-12 (NWT)

Now there are varieties of gifts, but there is the same spirit; and there are varieties of ministries, and yet there is the same Lord; and there are varieties of operations, and yet it is the same God who performs all the operations in all persons. But the manifestation of the spirit is given to each one for a beneficial purpose. For example, to one there is given through the spirit speech of wisdom, to another speech of knowledge according to the same spirit, to another faith by the same spirit, to another gifts of healings by that one spirit, to yet another operations of powerful works, to another prophesying, to another discernment of inspired utterances, to another different tongues, and to another interpretation of tongues. But all these operations the one and the same spirit performs, making a distribution to each one respectively just as it wills. For just as the body is one but has many members, and all the members of that body, although being many, are one body, so also is the Christ.

Keep things simple, as much as possible (Luke 11:34-36). Strengthen yourself through prayer and study on what is sure and reliable, not on what is speculative, questionable, suspect (Luke 18:1; 1 Timothy 1:4-5). “Fully” accomplish *your* ministry, to your family and then to others (2 Timothy 4:5). Give glory and praise to Jah God, because of his works (Revelation 4:11) and because he is “righteous and true” (Revelation 15:3). Honor his Son with “two or three” or more (Matthew 18:20; John 5:23), for his life and teachings are recorded for us in good detail through the writings of three eyewitnesses (Matthew, Mark and John) and through the review of the same by Luke in his Gospel account.

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***This article was revised on the date indicated for minor grammatical changes and also for descriptive adjustments to several substantive comments for the sake of clarity, in part by further expressing the author’s intent.**