

“Now Concerning...” (Q&A from 1 Corinthians)



Here's some of the many questions that were asked and addressed during [our preaching series through 1 Corinthians at PCBC English in 2023](#). Answers below are from:

- **Ps Albert Tang**, Senior Pastor, still building on Christ's foundation after 30-plus years in gospel ministry
- **Ps William HC**, English Pastor, wishes he had the gift of Cantonese in some church meetings
- **Eva Chiu**, Theological Training Committee veteran, resident she-ologian and kids worksheet instigator

If you have any comments or questions, you're welcome to contact one of the pastors or leaders. We pray these "prophecies" are a blessing as we continue to proclaim the gospel of first importance together!

*"Be on your stand, stand firm in the faith, be courageous, be strong.
Do everything in love." (1 Cor 16:14)*

List of Questions:

Q: Why did Paul talk so much?

Q: Had many of the Corinthians been out of Corinth?

Q: If we don't like someone can we still love them (1 Cor 13)?

Q: What's the difference between the fruits of the Spirit and spiritual gifts?

Q: Does PCBC hold to a particular view on the gifts of the Holy Spirit?

Q: When do we get the spiritual gifts?

Q: Do we need to practice or train in the spiritual gifts?

Q: Since spiritual gifts are talked about more than other topics in 1 Corinthians, does that mean they are more important?

Q: Have the miraculous gifts (e.g. tongues, healings, prophecy) ceased?

Q: What is the difference between a “word of wisdom” and a “word of knowledge” in 1 Cor 12:8?

Q: What exactly is prophecy in 1 Corinthians then?

Q: What different ways can we practice prophecy as a church (1 Cor 14:1)? How can we learn supernatural aspects?

Q: What are tongues - human languages or angelic languages?

Q: What does 1st Corinthians 14:20 mean?

Q: Do I need to be able to speak in “tongues” to be saved?

Q: So when should we desire and practise tongues then?

Q: What does 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 mean for women in PCBC?

Q: Through your study of 1 Corinthians, what is one thing you’ve learned or are still learning?

[Q: Why did Paul talk so much?](#)

Ps Albert: I think when it comes to who's the longest-winded person among us, that would be me, right? Because the older you get, the longer you talk. So I think Paul was getting older. For example, in 1 Corinthians 15:50–58, there's nine verses, but he just keeps repeating himself: incorruptible, corruptible, corruptible, incorruptible, we will die, we will not die. I think that's a sign of old age! Yet also, I believe that Paul believed what he had to say was very, very important. That's why he repeats and repeats himself. That's my impression.

Eva: Paul, in this instance, had to write a lot, because there were a lot of issues to address. He wasn't always like this: you can see in other letters to other churches, he doesn't always talk so much (e.g. Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians) Maybe he wasn't that old in those ones - I don't know! But he wasn't trying to waste anyone's time. He was addressing issues that needed addressing.

Ps William: Remember too that this is a love letter that started and ended with grace and love (1 Cor 1:3–4, 16:22–24). This is someone with a pastor's heart. And sometimes when you pastor a church, and there's lots of issues, you write a long letter. Some of you may know this, but there's actually a 2 Corinthians in the Bible. And Paul must have written a letter in between these two. There were at least four letters that Paul writes to them (1 Cor 5:9, 2 Cor 2:4). And so they got a lot of love, this Corinthian church: not just because they had lots of issues (they did) but also because Paul really cared for them. He was there when the church was born. He cares about how they're going. So a long letter makes sense.

Compare Paul too to the other authors in the New Testament. Paul is single (1 Cor 7:7), I don't think he was married. Then look at the length of Peter's letters: he was married, he

probably had kids. So yes, you do have more availability to write and to pray and read at different stages of life. So make the most of it.

Learn more: ["Christ Amid Chaos" \(1 Cor 1:1–9\) @ PCBC English](#)

Q: Had many of the Corinthians been out of Corinth?

Ps William: Very likely some had – Corinth was a city between two harbours and no doubt people came and went (e.g. Apollos, Prisca and Aquila in Acts 18–19). As with many churches though, it is easy to miss things that are peculiar to your own culture. For example, I wonder how many problems and misunderstandings in our churches stem from forgetting that the kingdom of God is bigger than Corinth church / our church. Even Paul telling the Corinthians that “the churches from Asia greet you...” (1 Cor 16:19) is also a gentle reminder to them not to be so inward-looking and consumed by their own problems.

Learn more: ["Reaching the City" \(Acts 18:1–19:20\) @ PCBC English](#)

Q: If we don't like someone can we still love them (1 Cor 13)?

Ps Albert: OK – think of the person you don't like. I'm sure we all have people we don't like. But what did Jesus say? You have to love those who persecute you (Matthew 5:43-45). What good is it if we only love those we like? If Jesus commands us to do it, He knows and believes we can do it. But it's not by my own strength. I believe we have the Holy Spirit and we can do all things by His Spirit.

Now the thing is, how? We need to continue to exercise this. For me, I believe praying for that person is a very powerful thing. The late Tim Keller once said: “When you pray for someone, you and him or her are both sinners before our gracious Lord.” So what are the reasons that I can't forgive? If I need forgiveness from God, why can't I forgive someone that hurt me or did wrong to me? So for me, it's a practical and powerful thing to pray for someone I don't like, and allow the Spirit of God to change me. Not to change him or her – I believe it's always me first. So let's be putting people on our prayer lists, because we love them.

Learn more: ["Blazing Love" \(1 Corinthians 13:1–13\) @ PCBC English](#)

Q: What's the difference between the fruits of the Spirit and spiritual gifts?

Ps William: The basic difference is that every genuine believer will grow in spiritual fruits, whereas each believer will have certain spiritual gifts. Every Christian should be growing in the fruits of the Spirit (Gal 5:22–24) – no one ought to say: “I don't have to practise love, joy, peace, patience, kindness... it's not my gift!” But when it comes to spiritual gifts, the

Holy Spirit distributes them as He wills (1 Cor 12:11), to some believers and not others (in 1 Cor 12:29–30 the expected answer is “no, not everyone has each gift”), for the purpose of building up God’s church.

Q: Does PCBC hold to a particular view on the gifts of the Holy Spirit?

Ps William: The fourth statement from [our church’s Statement of Faith](#) states:

“We believe that the Holy Spirit is a person, who convicts man of sin, shows salvation of Christ to the unsaved, and who guides and sanctifies believers.” (John 14:17, John 16:8, 1 Corinthians 6:19, Titus 3:5-7)

Beyond this, our church doesn’t officially require a formal position on the gifts of the Holy Spirit, nor do we require people to adopt a particular position on spiritual gifts to be welcomed into the PCBC family.

Another example of how to navigate this question is this statement of faith that some house churches in China put together. [This is how they phrased it](#):

We believe the Holy Spirit is the third person in the Godhead. He is the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of truth, and the Spirit of holiness.

The illumination of the Holy Spirit convicts man of his sins, brings him to the knowledge of truth, leads him to faith in Christ and therefore to being born again and salvation. The Holy Spirit leads believers into the truth, teaches them to understand the truth, and guides them to submission to Christ as well as to the fruitfulness of the abundant life. The Holy Spirit bestows upon believers all kinds of power, and witnesses the powerful deeds of God with signs and wonders. The Holy Spirit searches all things.

In Christ, God grants a diversity of gifts of the Holy Spirit to the church so as to manifest the glory of Christ. With faith and desire, Christians can experience the pouring down of the Holy Spirit on them and be filled with the Holy Spirit.

We deny any doctrine that teaches the cessation of signs and wonders or the termination of the gifts of the Holy Spirit after the age of the apostles.

We don’t forbid the speaking of tongues, neither do we force people to speak in tongues, or insist that speaking in tongues is the evidence of salvation.

We refute the view that the Holy Spirit is merely a kind of inspiration instead of being a personal member of the Godhead.

- Article 5, Statement of Faith of Chinese House Churches, November 1998

For our context, to begin with perhaps it's helpful to distinguish between what members of PCBC must affirm about the person and work of the Holy Spirit that is clearly taught in Scripture as primary ("God says..."), versus what each person is personally convinced from the Scriptures as secondary ("I think what's meant here is...").

In 1 Corinthians 12:1, Paul says he doesn't want us to be "uninformed" about spiritual gifts (or people). However, with the gospel, he declares it is "of first importance" (1 Cor 15:1-4). So we need to keep everything in perspective: spiritual gifts are of *secondary* importance. On this topic our posture should be to weigh and test everything with the inerrant, infallible words of the Holy Spirit in Scripture (c.f. 1 Tim 3:16). We encourage brothers and sisters to engage with and consider this topic with grace and humility.

Learn more:

- ["Supernatural Church" \(1 Corinthians 12:1 – 11\) @ PCBC English](#)
- [《超然教會》【林前 12:1-11】- 東浸粵語崇拜](#)

[Q: When do we get the spiritual gifts?](#)

Eva: The thing with spiritual gifts is that we can't kind of expect them on a date. On my daughter's birthday, she can expect birthday gifts, right? And on Christmas, we expect Christmas presents. But the thing with spiritual gifts, the Bible tells us very clearly, that the gifts are used to build up the church (1 Cor 12:7, 14:26). 1 Corinthians 12:11 also says: "All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and He gives them to each one just as He determines." So when do we get the spiritual gifts? If the purpose of the spiritual gifts is to build up the church, then I think when there's a need, and when the Holy Spirit sees there is a need, He will give it.

Ps William: Maybe I'll add to that as well. My favorite book is Ephesians. And when Paul first talks about the Holy Spirit here, in Ephesians 1:13 he says: "Having believed you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession, to the praise of his glory."

This verse reminds us that when you are saved, when you trust Jesus, you have every spiritual blessing. So I think behind this question is a concern: "Have I missed out? When do I get my spiritual gift?" And I want to say to you as a Christian: brother or sister, you have not missed out. If you are in Christ, you have every spiritual blessing. That being said, I think with spiritual gifts, there are spectacular looking ones, and there ones that seem ordinary. Yet if you're a Christian, you already have some kind of gift. Actually, part of our church's responsibility is to find out how to use them, and how to develop and grow them.

[Q: Do we need to practice or train in the spiritual gifts?](#)

Albert: A gift is a gift, right? If I'm not gifted in an area, no matter how much I practice, I will never be gifted as someone who has the particular gifts. Yet it doesn't mean that I

believe if God has given me the gift, it means that naturally I'd just do it. I do need to practice. For instance, before I became a Christian, I was very shy. I never would be able to speak in front of people. But after becoming a Christian, God gave me this passion to speak from the Bible. I had to do it anyway, whether I liked it or not. Then, I slowly discovered that perhaps God had given me this gift of preaching. But I had to practice, or it just wouldn't come.

Eva: Yeah, I agree. Paul also once told Timothy:

“Command and teach these things. Don't let anyone look down on you because you're young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith, and in purity. Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders lay their hands on you. Be diligent in these matters. Give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.” (1 Timothy 4:11–16 NIV)

So here, we can see that gifts can be neglected. But it can also be improved upon. That's why Paul actually told Timothy, you need to keep doing this. And then you will get better. Other people will see the progress. So practising and training in the gifts makes sense, because no one is perfect in the things I do to serve the church, and there's always other people that you can learn from. So we can also see with the nature of the gifts, a lot of them work together. So practicing and training actually means you need to humble yourself, know your weaknesses, and practice with other people. You might be Celine Dion, you sing perfectly well, but then the other members of the worship team may not be as good. Then you need to practice and maybe your gift may be singing really well, but perhaps what you need to train in is humility. So in order to give our best to God, we need to practice and train.

Ps William: Practically speaking, we should all memorise 1 Timothy 4:12 – *“Let no one look down on your youth, but set the believers and example in speech and conduct, faith, love and purity.”* Those are five things we can work on very practically. I want to echo what Eva said, we need each other as a family. Imagine you want to get really big biceps. You can't do it on your own. You can but it's hard, right? Sometimes you have to have someone “spot” you. It's the same with church and your spiritual gifts. So find someone that maybe has an interest in helps, or prophecy, or teaching, or whatever gifts that have been listed here in 1 Corinthians or aren't here. Then say to them: “Can you help me out? You know, I want to grow in this area of my faith.” Again, it's much harder to do that when you're on your own. So that's why God gifts us a community.

Q: Since spiritual gifts are talked about more than other topics in 1 Corinthians, does that mean they are more important?

Ps William: Not necessarily. Sometimes, the issues people ask about for aren't always the issues people need to address. I do wonder if Paul wrote a letter to PCBC, what questions he would address (e.g. spiritual gifts, confusing QMMs), and what he would challenge unprompted (e.g. whether we truly believe the gospel is of first importance, our love of comfort and material wealth, our eagerness to divide and take sides).

Q: Have the miraculous gifts (e.g. tongues, healings, prophecy) ceased?

Ps William: Regarding miraculous spiritual gifts, I teach from a cautious but "continuationist" position (and not a "cessationist" position, e.g. [TMS Doctrinal Statement, paragraph 5 under "The Church"](#)). I personally believe that while 1 Cor 13:8-12 refers to tongues, prophecies and other miraculous gifts ceasing, this happens when "the fullness comes" (1 Cor 13:10), which I understand as Jesus's return or when we see Him "face to face" (1 Cor 13:12). The context seems to fit Christ's return (which is explicitly discussed in 1 Corinthians 15:52), rather than the end of the apostolic era or NT canon. Therefore, I think that Christians can still pray for and expect gifts listed in 1 Cor 12 such as healing, "works of power", prophecy, and languages to be present and active in the life of our church until Jesus returns.

Where and when do these kinds of gifts occur today? I personally see and hear of these miraculous gifts being authentic and present in some contexts more than others:

- among unreached people groups who have no other way of encountering Jesus personally;
- cultures where magic and power encounters are more prevalent such as Latin America, Africa, Asia;
- spaces where the Holy Spirit's God-breathed Scriptures have not yet been translated into their heart language;
- extreme situations of life and death.

Whatever the context, as Christians we need to be clear: when these gifts occur, God will never use them to contradict His Word or give glory to anyone other than Himself.

Unfortunately, it's also true that in some Christian circles, spiritual gifts are frequently misused, or often taken to unbiblical extremes (e.g. "straightening someone's leg" counts as healing, faking cases of healing to solicit tithes). I love many of my more Pentecostal and Charismatic brothers and sisters in Christ, but I can't support a whole bunch of other practices that are frequently taught and encouraged which appear spiritual on the surface, yet fail to clearly point to Jesus Christ as Lord. Examples of practices that aren't found in Scripture include, but aren't limited to, [the use of "manifesting" language](#), the practice of being "slain in the spirit", "territorial combat", [the 7 Mountain Mandate](#), [divine health](#) and so on. I don't see these as genuine spiritual gifts or marks of a spiritual person. I won't advocate for them as I don't see them commanded in Scripture for us to believe or practice today for the good of God's gathered church. However, I do think it's possible to be both

Charismatic in belief and practice and gospel-centred (e.g. [Sam Storms](#), [Andrew Wilson](#), [Bob Kauflin and Sovereign Grace Music](#)).

Q: What is the difference between a “word of wisdom” and a “word of knowledge” in 1 Cor 12:8?

“To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit...” (1 Cor 12:8 NIV)

Ps William: Recall that in 1 Corinthians 12, Paul is speaking concerning spiritual gifts, and lists a few of them out (1 Cor 12:8-10, 27–31). Remember too that these are not a full list of every kind of spiritual gift (cf Romans 12:6–8, Eph 4:11, 1 Pet 4:10-11). These two gifts are only mentioned here and nowhere else in the Bible. So it’s a bit of a mystery, and some people do ask about it and come up with lots of different ideas about it.

Literally, Paul’s words originally read λόγος σοφίας (*logos sophias*, “message of wisdom”). *Logos* can mean “word” or “message”. While it only appears here once as a spiritual gift, this phrase does show up earlier in 1 Corinthians 2:6. Remember early on how Paul was trying to address division, and says: “We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature...” (1 Cor 2:6). And then he goes on and explains this wisdom is the gospel, how they didn’t understand it, otherwise “they would not have crucified the Lord of glory” (1 Cor 2:8). So my take (and this is what I think, rather than know absolutely 100 percent) is that “message of wisdom” here refers to some kind of evangelistic gift. It must be connected to sharing the gospel in some way. I think of some people who are gifted at evangelism perhaps, or outlining something.

But what’s the difference between that and the “message of knowledge” ()? I think for me, my personal opinion is that it’s some kind of supernatural ability to really know when someone is struggling and to be able to offer advice and counsel. So one is more evangelism focused, while the other is more counselling related. But again, these words only appear once.

In some circles, “message of knowledge” or “words of knowledge” refers to a special prophetic insight. While that may be true, because Paul talks about prophecy separately in these chapters, I’m not sure why there needs to be two separate terms. But that’s just my take, others may disagree.

Q: What exactly is prophecy in 1 Corinthians then?

Ps William: Based on Paul’s descriptions in 1 Cor 12-14, I don’t think NT prophecy is directly equivalent to Old Testament “Prophecy” that is typically treated as the Word of the LORD (e.g. Balaam’s oracles in Numbers 23-25 or anything that begins with “thus says the LORD”). The prophecy in Corinth is “revelation” (14:6, 26, 30) that can convict unbelievers and lay

bare their secrets (14:24), reveal the presence of God among His people (v25), build up the church (v26), must be weighed by others (v29), can be spontaneous or not (v30), and is actually something every believer can and should pursue (14:1, 39). I think biblical New Testament prophecy is probably more like some of the wonderful insights we hear from our MCs when they prepare and share (e.g. [Venus sharing how we can glorify God](#)), interviewees (e.g. [Debbie once sharing off the cuff how second generation Chinese are uniquely prepared for God's mission](#)), [baptism testimonies](#), [church safety videos](#), mission updates, and so on -- whether spontaneous or prepared, they are all supernaturally given by the Spirit. 1 Corinthians 12-14 teaches that this kind of prophecy blesses the gathered church, and should be encouraged and elevated over uninterpreted languages/tongues that don't benefit anyone.

Q: [What different ways can we practice prophecy as a church \(1 Cor 14:1\)? How can we learn supernatural aspects?](#)

1 Corinthians 14:1: *"Follow the way of love and eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit, especially prophecy."*

Ps William: This verse seems to say that prophecy is important. In context, throughout the rest of 1 Corinthians 14 Paul is saying, "We want to edify everyone, not just certain people, when we gather together to worship" (1 Cor 14:4, 5, 12, 17, 26, 31, 40). For this reason, when Paul thinks about all the different spiritual gifts there are, he says that if there's prophecy – that is, "intelligible, controlled speech that strengthens, encourages, equips and comforts the church, which may have supernatural insight, but always edifies everyone" – let's prefer that, rather than tongues. However you view tongues, as human or angelic languages, only with an interpretation is it beneficial for the whole church family here when we when we worship together? And so he says prefer prophecy.

I personally have a very broad view when it comes to prophecy. I know sometimes you might look at YouTube videos and there might be people that say, "This is how you prophesy". When we listen to Paul, what do we hear? We hear that it's a gift for everyone to excel in. That means prophecy must be something that even children can do, and that you and I can do. So I think New Testament prophecy is simply to share words that will encourage the whole church. So that's a very broad definition.

Some people might say, Oh, look, isn't prophecy more like telling the future like, you know, getting a really special word? It could be, but remember how prophecy works elsewhere in the Bible. Think about the book of Isaiah. There's a bit of future focused "foretelling", but there's actually a lot of "forthtelling" as well. Pointing out Israel's sin doesn't require telling the future. So we can be really broad when it comes to defining prophecy. Any words that encourage equip, inspire, for men and women.

So what are some practical ways we can do prophecy? Well, let's do more Q&A's like this. Let's pass the mic around more in church. It's a shame if mine is the only voice you hear in a worship service.

Our family were in a church called Petersham Baptist in Sydney, and they had a “Community News” time. They would actually say: “Anyone with news to share, just come on up.” That was wonderful. It was sometimes chaos. Sometimes you had to do some quality control: “Okay, what are you going to share?” Yet it was lovely, a good time, one of our favourite parts of the worship service. So I'm sure we can find ways to be “prophetic” among us.

Ps Albert: By now I think we've realised that all these spiritual gifts – whether it was tongues or prophecies – were functions, instead of offices (e.g. where someone was a “prophet”). And in 1 Corinthians 14, Paul states that even the gift of prophecy, when exercised, was better than tongues, because it was intelligible (1 Cor 14:18–19). Yet you still had to discern, because when they were speaking, the word of God, you have to discern. You cannot take for granted that when somebody has the mic, he must be speaking Word of God. You will have to discern!

Once I was actually was kind of prophesied over, and it wasn't hard to discern because I knew it was wrong. One of my colleagues in Hong Kong said something like, “I felt that the Lord was telling me something, I'm seeing your family joyfully dancing in the field.” I thought: “Oh, that's nice, thank you very much.” Then he continued: “Who I saw wasn't your wife.” That was a problem! Yet sometimes the errors can be even more subtle, you really have to discern whether that was from God. So this is why I believe that Paul was also telling the people there, you have to discern (1 Cor 12:10).

Eva: If we want to understand prophecy better, the clearest way to see this is through the Old Testament, when there was the office of the prophet. Yet when we actually read through those prophetic books, prophetic words, actually, most of them are not about the future. In the Old Testament, there are different genres of books. There are historical narratives, which are basically records of what happened from a human point of view (e.g. this king was born, and then he had a son, and then he died, and then whatever, this nation, defeated that, and then there was a war). Yet there's also a parallel history of the prophetic narratives, that records the same events, but from God's point of view. For example, during Solomon's reign, everyone thought he was so great, like he's famous, he's wealthy, everyone came to talk to him. But then when you look at the prophetic words, God wasn't pleased with Solomon, because he was sinning. And so I think prophecy has this aspect of looking at the same events but from God's point of view.

Sometimes as a church, we have to tackle very practical issues. Now do we tackle it from a worldly point of view? Like some kind of organisation? Do we just look at the rules of the world, how people actually practice the law of the land? Or do we look at it through the lens of the gospel, which is what Paul has been doing? Throughout the whole of 1 Corinthians with every issue that people threw at Paul, he just answered with Jesus -- because Jesus is the answer! So when we look at everyday issues, personal issues or global issues from God's perspective, I think that in a way is prophecy. So how can we learn supernatural aspects? Basically, where we learn to think like Christ, that is already a supernatural aspect, because naturally we won't be able to do it.

Q: What are tongues - human languages or angelic languages?

Ps Albert: There are two perceptions of this: one is human languages. At the time of Pentecost (Acts 2), there were different languages that suddenly the apostles were able to speak. It wouldn't have been their own talent, it would have been from the Holy Spirit. In our church we have the same setting as the early church, there were different ethnicities, different languages in church. So "tongues" could be human languages, and that's why interpretation is also a spiritual gift (1 Cor 12:10, 30).

But another perception comes from 1 Corinthians 13:

"If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels..." (1 Cor 13:1 NIV)

So would that be another, angelic kind of language? Note here, Paul is speaking hypothetically ("If I..."). Yet if you look at 1 Corinthians 14:2, it says: "For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to people but to God. Indeed, no one understands them; they utter mysteries by the Spirit." So this is another understanding for those who perceive tongues are an angelic or divine language. You're speaking to God – so why speak human languages to God? So there are two different views.

I personally think there is an angelic language. I don't have the gift. I think that's fine. As pastors at PCBC, we've talked about this, it's OK that we're different but we're still united in Christ. It's OK for Christians have different perceptions on these minor issues. As we heard in 1 Corinthians 13, we're looking in a mirror dimly now (1 Cor 13:12). We'll see face-to-face in the future.

Q: [What does 1st Corinthians 14:20 mean?](#)

"Brothers and sisters, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults." (1 Cor 14:20 NIV)

Ps William: The Corinthian church thought of themselves as very gifted – but in this passage Paul talks about them as children. This isn't the first time either, in fact earlier in 1 Corinthians he calls them babies – "mere infants in Christ" (1 Cor 3:1), he talks about them as children who are still on milk but need solid food (1 Cor 3:2).

So here in 1 Corinthians 14:20, Paul's really just shaking them up. He's saying, when you use your gift of tongues and do it all the time and no one understands what's going on in the worship service, you may think that you're spiritual, but actually it's quite childish. I think he comes on strong here because he can, he's their pastor. So this probably wouldn't be the first thing I'd say to someone who has a misunderstanding or leaning too far one way with their spiritual gifts. But he does go on, doesn't he? Actually remember that tongues, when no one understands what's going on, is kind of like what happened in Babylon or in Assyria

when the Israelites were all captured or scattered, and couldn't understand the culture around them. So let's not introduce that into our church services. Let's make our church services a place where, when someone comes in for the first time, they can get what's going on, so they can get who Jesus is and what He's done for them on the cross, paying for their sins. And whatever that clouds it: whether it's untranslated tongues, or someone speaking too long, let's cut those out. Let's make sure Jesus is clear.

Q: Do I need to be able to speak in "tongues" to be saved?

Ps William: No. I don't believe the Bible ever teaches that the gift and practice of "tongues" is required for salvation, necessary for acceptance into God's family, or marks someone as truly spiritual or confers a second baptism of the Holy Spirit. We need to be careful about taking what is described in the narratives of Acts and using it to prescribe whether someone is truly spiritual (the mistake the Corinthians were making).

It's also worth noting how Paul deliberately downplays the gift of tongues when he lists them (e.g. 1 Cor 12:10, 30 he lists them last each time; "tongues" are not mentioned in other spiritual gift lists in Romans 12, Eph 4). I think he wants us to realise that "tongues" are not as important or useful as some Christians were making them out to be, and to encourage the church to be zealous for the greater gifts (like prophecy, helping and administration!). It means that untranslated tongues don't belong in our worship gatherings, because they can't build people up intelligibly. Paul doesn't forbid the use of different languages in church (1 Cor 14:39), but counsels us to ensure they're orderly, interpreted and not excessive, in order that people are built up (imagine if we applied these principles to our members meetings too!)

Q: So when should we desire and practise tongues then?

Ps William: Look, we come from a diverse range of views on this. Remember first and foremost that we are brothers and sisters in the Lord. If you and I declare "Jesus is Lord" (1 Cor 12:3), we are part of the same body of Christ. For some of us, "tongues" means angelic tongues, it means a spiritual language, it means this is how I really connect with God. Yet some of you are really scared by the fact that someone will be babbling in the corner next to you. Whatever your view, Scripture is clear, Paul says: "Don't forbid tongues" (1 Cor 14:39), but it's not helpful in a gathered worship service without interpretation.

So when can we desire and practice tongues? I think it depends on your view. I personally lean towards the view that the tongues Paul was talking about were probably human languages that he hadn't learned. If this is the case, then there's practical ways to desire and practice the gift of tongues. I've been taking Chinese classes since I started at this church. My Cantonese has improved (only marginally!). I also go to the Pakuranga Night Market most Saturdays, and when I buy something I sometimes ask: "How do you say thank you in your language?" That's a conversation starter, it's also me practising my gift of tongues. I

know I won't master it - everyone has gifts that they're good and bad at. Yet I know that as I listen to others, as I pray and worship in other tongues, I'm connecting with them in some way. So that's one way I practise, but I won't use all these tongues in our worship services without a translation, because then you'll have no idea what I'm saying!

Ps Albert: We hold different views, and that's OK! We can be different, but we can still be united and serve together. To me, whether it's human languages or heavenly tongues, you can't understand them anyway without some spiritually gifted person to interpret it. Because you need someone, some gifted, spiritual, gifted spiritual gifts, that person to interpret it. So whether it's Italian, Russian or something else, if someone utters it out, I don't get it anyways. I need someone to interpret it for me. It doesn't matter either way: that's why Paul adds on, we're just looking in the mirror (1 Cor 13:12). We can't see clearly now, but one day we'll see. So for me, I think we follow the Bible. During the worship, if no one can interpret it, don't speak. Instead, speak something that's intelligible, that people can understand. That's the rule.

Eva: Personally, I have no idea where the tongues are. Like, I think from the book of Acts, we can see that tongues are people's actual languages and dialects. Yet to be honest, this passage is confusing. So is it the language of angels? Do they actually speak different languages? Because in our English Bible, they speak English. When they spoke to humans, they used human languages. Do angels have a specific language that we need to learn? If so, why? I'm not an angel!

However, I think Paul gives us a hint. 1 Corinthians 14:21, he quotes Isaiah 28:11–12, and if we read the context in Isaiah, in the Old Testament, God foretold a day when His messages will be preached in different languages – but it's a sign of judgement on the unbelieving Israelites. That is why if you read 1 Corinthians 14:22, Paul says: “Therefore, tongues are a sign not for believers, but for unbelievers.” This is about the unbelieving Jews. When they come into the church and see these people worshipping God but in different tongues, in foreign languages, then they'll know that this is the time that Isaiah was warning them about. This is a time of judgment on them for not truly believing God's gospel. So for us, when should we desire and practise tongues? If tongues is a sign of judgement for unbelieving Jews, then I really have no idea when we should desire that.

Q: What does 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 mean for women in PCBC?

Ps William: Let me say from the outset that this is a very difficult passage, and sadly it is often used in ways that have unnecessarily hurt our sisters in Christ. In addition, there are even some evangelical scholars who have argued that 1 Cor 14:34-35 were added to the Bible later, though I personally don't see good text-critical evidence for this. Assuming Paul indeed wrote these instructions (and not just some grumpy scribe), how do we interpret these puzzling words? A blanket ban on women speaking in church would contradict what Paul has already asked for in 1 Corinthians 11 – for women to speak (pray and prophesy) in church in an honouring way. Also, I don't think Paul here is trying to answer the question of “can women preach a sermon” here (he addresses this question in 1 Timothy 2:11-15).

From 1 Corinthians 12–14, I believe we should encourage both men and women to contribute to our church gatherings in biblically appropriate ways that edify the body of Christ. Regarding how to interpret 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, my personal take is that when Paul says: “It is shameful for a woman to speak in public” (14:35), Paul is asking wives (γυναῖκες can be translated either “women” or “wives”) to stop interrupting their own husband while he is prophesying or sharing in the worship service (τοὺς ἰδίου ἀνδράς is better read “their own husbands” rather than “their own men”), which in their honour-shame culture would have been inappropriate.

Some modern ways to apply 1 Cor 14:34-35 by honouring those who speak or “prophesy” during gathered worship could be:

- 1) When I’m sharing my testimony, my wife shouldn’t keep interrupting my every sentence and correcting me (even though she is most likely right), as it shows disrespect;
- 2) Mums with babies in the church nursery should refrain from chatting loudly over the live feed of the sermon and interrupt the preaching and hearing of God’s Word for other mums there;
- 3) Screen-addicted people need to put away their phones and listen to the proclamation of God’s Word and people’s testimonies;
- 4) In a members meeting, even if we are tired and hungry we should refrain from interrupting someone sincerely trying to make a point!

In all these examples, the point is that as we worship, the goal is to do all things with “order” and “beauty” (1 Cor 14:40), so that that “Jesus is Lord” is proclaimed and cherished in our church gatherings.

Q: Through your study of 1 Corinthians, what is one thing you’ve learned or are still learning?

Eva: I really thank God that PCBC has been looking deeply through this letter. We know there have been issues in our church that have been brewing for a long time. And what I’ve learned by looking back with Paul addressing all sorts of issues within the church of Corinth – some theological, some just ridiculous – every time he’s just used the gospel as the answer. We see how he truly demonstrates how that is “of first importance” (1 Cor 15:3–4). At the beginning of the letter, he also says “For I resolved to know nothing... except Christ and Him crucified” (1 Cor 2:2). That, for me, is a very good reminder. How do I look at issues in my life, through the lens of the gospel? A lot of times when things come up in my family, with church or at work, I look for practical ways to avoid or solve problem, things that make sense in this world. However this letter really reminded me that I’m a Christian, and my whole existence is because of the gospel. So the gospel really shouldn’t just be something that I think about every now and then. It should be my everything. It should be the lens through which I look at my life, my relationships, my problems. Jesus is the answer.

Ps Albert: I've learned quite a lot. If you're a church member, you'll know that since the quarterly meeting [in July 2023], we've really resonated with the truths in the Bible here, and the different views, attitudes, ways of presenting ideas, and results. Yet in the midst of all this diversity, and our different capabilities and ways of doing things, even how to talk about supernatural gifts and things like this, 1 Corinthians 13 gives us the answer. We can be different. But the blood of Christ runs through us. So that's why I've learned that I need to ask one question: "How do I love the person I don't like?" Because this is a command. You have to love. Despite whatever, despite my emotions, I will have to look into the eyes of someone who just scolded me, and say: "You're my brother." It's going to be difficult. But if I claim to be a Christian, then 1 Corinthians 13 says: "You have to be patient with him." I'm trying. I don't have it sussed out, but I'm trying.

Ps William: Fully agree. Praise God for this letter. I'm still trying to learn lessons, I think particularly around how to deal with church conflict. I think there's so much pastoral wisdom on this topic here. And God has a sense of humour, because now we're have our own live church conflicts. Yet even in my marriage, even at home with the kids, I've been trying to learn lessons from this book. Because of Jesus Christ, who has forgiven me, I can forgive you. Because Jesus is holy, I can live a holy life. We keep going back to Jesus, and we live it out. And that's a lesson for all of us. I've really appreciated it, it's been a good book, but there's also 65 other books in the Bible. So look forward to it.