

Lesson 20: 1 Corinthians 14:1-25

I. The Gift of Tongues

- A.** Chapter 14 is a favorite chapter of those who believe that the gift of tongues involved (and according to them, continues to involve) ecstatic utterances of words known only to God.
1. As one commentator explains it: "The Corinthian gift of tongues was not speaking an unlearned foreign language. It was instead the utterance of inarticulate noises and syllables. No earthly lexicon could decipher their meaning."
 2. They point, for example, to verse 2 of this chapter: "For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries."
 3. They also point to verse 10, where Paul uses the Greek word *phone* (translated voice or language) rather than the Greek word *glosse* (translated tongue). They argue that if the tongue meant language, then why did Paul use two different words?
- B.** It is helpful to know the historical setting in which Paul wrote these chapters.
1. As we have mentioned before, Corinth was a center of the pagan mystery religions, and uncontrolled ranting was part of some of the mystery rites. Some of the Corinthians had likely been associated with these false religions, and they perhaps had brought some of those false practices into the church.
 2. A contemporary historian (Livy) described the rites as a cacophony of noise resounding with shrieks, chanting, cymbals clashing, drums beating, and cries. "Men, apparently out of their wits, would utter prophecies with frenzied bodily convulsions."
 3. If we conclude that the gift of tongues in the New Testament included ecstatic utterances, then we must conclude that God was not interested in making the church distinctive from the pagan religions in this regard. But is that really what we would expect from our study of the Bible? If the gift of tongues instead involves speaking foreign languages you have never studied, then the church was totally distinctive because no one in those pagan religions was able to do that.
- C.** Before we deal with these questions in detail, it is instructive to begin by surveying all that the Bible has to say about the gift of tongues outside of this letter to the Corinthians -- and that task is surprisingly easy.
1. Outside of 1 Corinthians, the gift of tongues is mentioned in only two other

books of the Bible: Mark (chapter 16) and Acts (chapters 2, 10, 19). Paul never mentioned it in any of his other letters, including his second letter to this very same group.

- a) **Mark 16:15-18** And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. 16 He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. 17 And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with **new tongues**; 18 They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.
- b) **Acts 2:1-13** And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. 2 And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. 3 And there appeared unto them cloven **tongues** like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with **other tongues**, as the Spirit gave them utterance. 5 And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. 6 Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. 7 And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans? 8 And how hear we every man in **our own tongue**, wherein we were born? 9 Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, 10 Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, 11 Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in **our tongues** the wonderful works of God. 12 And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this? 13 Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine.
- c) **Acts 10:44-47** While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. 45 And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. 46 For they heard them **speak with tongues**, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, 47 Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?
- d) **Acts 19:4-7** Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. 5 When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 6 And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they **spake with tongues**, and prophesied. 7 And all the men were about twelve.

2. The passage from Acts 2 is particularly instructive. From that chapter we know with absolute certainty that tongue speaking in the first century church included the ability to speak in a human language that is otherwise unknown to you.
 - a) Thus, the question is **not** whether the gift of tongues is speaking in a human language unknown to you or speaking in a language unknown to any human. We know from Acts 2 that the gift definitely included the former. Thus, the real question is whether it **also** included the latter.
 - b) This is a critical point with regard to present day tongue speaking. Why? Because the latter phenomenon can be faked while the former phenomenon cannot. It is very telling that no modern day tongue speaker is able to do what the apostles did in Acts 2 even though we know with absolute certainty that the first century gift of tongues encompassed the ability to speak in human languages that you have never studied.
3. These four passages about tongues are also instructive as to another point. We will soon discuss the effect that tongue speaking has on believers and unbelievers.
 - a) In Acts 2, the gift of tongues was exhibited by Christians as a sign to non-Christians. Yet in Acts 10, the gift of tongues was exhibited by non-Christians as a sign to Christians. Specifically, Cornelius and his family were given the gift to show Peter that the gospel was extended to the Gentiles.

D. Seven Reasons why "Tongues" means "Languages"

1. **Reason # 1:** The Greek word *glossa* primarily means human language in the Bible. Several times in the New Testament it refers to the physical tongue, but it is the normal word that is used for human language. It appears about 30 times in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, and each time it denotes human language.
2. **Reason # 2:** The Greek word *dialektos* is also used in Acts 2 (verses 6 and 8) to describe the tongues (*glossa* in verses 4 and 11) being spoken by the apostles. Thus, the hearers not only heard their own language, they heard it in their own dialect. The word *dialektos* would have no meaning when applied to ecstatic speech.
3. **Reason # 3:** The same word used to denote language in Acts 2 (*glossa*) is used in 1 Corinthians to describe the gift of tongues. Pentecostals sometimes claim that although languages were spoken in Acts 2, after that the gift of tongues meant something else -- and yet the same word is used. It is also important to note that this word is often used in its plural form -- tongues or languages. We know that there are many languages in the world

-- but what about ecstatic gibberish? Are there many different kinds of gibberishes? It is telling that the dictionary does not include the plural of gibberish -- there is only one kind of gibberish.

4. **Reason # 4:** The tongues in the Bible can be translated or interpreted. In fact, some seem to have been given the opposite gift to the gift of tongues -- not the gift to speak in an unknown tongue but rather the gift to understand an unknown tongue. Paul will say here that the first gift should be used only when someone is present with the second gift, and he suggests that it could be one and the same person. Thus, while the person speaking in tongues might not understand what he was saying, it was possible that he could if he had been given both gifts.
5. **Reason # 5:** In 12:10, Paul mentions *genos of glossa* -- kinds of tongues. Again, how could there be different kinds of gibberish?
6. **Reason # 6:** In 14:21, Paul will compare the gift of tongues to the tongues mentioned in Isaiah 28:11-12, where God sent men of strange tongues as a sign of judgment to his people. And who were these men? Assyrians who spoke Assyrian. It might have sounded like gibberish to the Israelites, but it was not gibberish to those who spoke Assyrian.
7. **Reason # 7:** Modern day tongue-speakers appear to enter a trance-like state in which the ecstatic gibberish is uttered completely apart from their own control. That is not at all the picture we see here in Chapter 14. The tongue-speakers here are depicted as having full control to either stop or start so that they or others may interpret what is being said.

E. Three Final Issues Before We Begin

1. **Issue # 1:** Even if tongues means languages, then could it still not be the case that a tongue-speaker is speaking a language, but a language unknown to any man -- perhaps the language of angels from 1 Corinthians 13?
 - a) Perhaps, but this would require there to exist a non-earthly language that is able to be spoken by humans. Who is speaking this language and where are they? Are angelic beings in the spiritual realm speaking with human vocal chords and producing sound waves bouncing off of physical ears? It seems very unusual to me. I think the much better view is that these languages are human languages -- just as they were in Acts 2.
2. **Issue # 2:** When a tongue-speaker was speaking a foreign language he did not know, did the tongue-speaker himself necessarily know what he was saying?
 - a) I think this question is crucial to understanding Chapter 14, and I think the answer must be no. We will see during our study that Paul's focus is on

tongues that are spoken without interpretation by anybody -- including the person doing the speaking!

b) Matthew 10:19-20 But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. 20 For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you.

3. Issue # 3: What difference, if any, was there between the gift of prophecy and the gift of tongues when the latter was accompanied by an interpreter or delivered to someone who actually spoke that language?

a) I think the answer to that question is likely little or no difference. Interpretation turns tongue-speaking into prophecy, as I believe we will see is suggested by verse 5.

b) The gift of prophecy appeared to include both the proclamation of God's will and the prediction of specific events. It is possible that the gift of tongues did not include the latter, although that is just speculation.

c) Acts 2 is instructive here. Peter and the apostles used the gift of tongues to prophesy; that is, they used the gift of tongues to speak on behalf of God. And the outcome in Acts 2 was precisely the same outcome that Paul in verse 25 of this chapter will ascribe to the gift of prophecy.

II. ¹ Follow after charity, and desire spiritual *gifts*, but rather that ye may prophesy. ² For he that speaketh in an *unknown* tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth *him*; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries. ³ But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men *to* edification, and exhortation, and comfort. ⁴ He that speaketh in an *unknown* tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church. ⁵ I would that ye all spake with tongues, but rather that ye prophesied: for greater *is* he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying.

A. In verse 1, Paul said to follow after charity, or to **pursue** love.

1. Paul is speaking here of spiritual effort.

a) Romans 14:19 Let us therefore **follow after** the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.

b) Philippians 3:13-14 Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, 14 I **press toward** the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

2. Love is to be pursued, while spiritual gifts are to be desired.

- a) Again, Paul stresses the difference between gifts and love, which he calls a way rather than a gift. We may desire a gift, and some will receive the gift and others will not, but we can all pursue the way of love. That is something we can all aspire to.
 - b) The Corinthians no doubt all earnestly desired spiritual gifts, but Paul again reminds them that desire must be accompanied by a pursuit of love. With love as their aim, it will prevent those from being zealous only for those gifts that will enable them to steal the show and outshine all the others. "Love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up."
- B. Also in verse 1, and despite the Corinthians own apparent preference for tongue speaking, Paul expresses a definite preference for prophecy.
1. To prophesy means to proclaim a divine revelation or to speak on behalf of God.
 2. Prophecy (verse 3 tells us) provides edification, and exhortation, and comfort. Verse 25 will tell us that prophecy can convict unbelievers and lead them to repentance and proper worship.
- C. We don't have the gift of prophecy today, right? Well, yes and no.
1. We certainly do not have the miraculous gift of prophecy today, but we are able to proclaim a divine revelation. We do so each time we read from the word of God.
 2. Considering Paul's comments in this letter and the importance that prophesy played in the worship of the early church, I think it would be wise for us to reconsider the amount of time we spend in our worship service reading the word of God. Instead of reading just a verse or two, we might take the time to read at least a chapter or two.
- D. Verse 5 is the key to understanding verse 2.
1. In verse 5 Paul says that the gift of prophecy is greater than the gift of tongues -- **unless the latter is interpreted**. Thus, presumably, with interpretation, the two gifts have the same value in that, as Paul explains, each edifies the church. Thus, verse 5 tells us that the discussion of tongues in the earlier verses must be considering tongue-speaking without interpretation.
 2. With that context in mind, let's now look again at verse 2: "For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries."
 3. If someone with the gift of tongues started speaking in a language that was

unknown to anyone in the assembly then who would that person be speaking to? He would not be speaking to men, but only to God. God would know what he was saying, but no one else would. Even the speaker would be unaware of what he was saying unless he or someone else was able to interpret.

4. Paul says that in this situation, the tongue-speaker is not edifying the church, and thus the greater gift is the gift of prophesy -- unless there is someone who can interpret the language of the tongue-speaker. The Corinthians no doubt thought that tongue-speaking was the greater gift and was a sign that the one speaking was a member of the spiritual elite. Paul tells them that the opposite is true.
- E.** One of the themes in Chapter 14 is that edification is the benchmark by which to measure what goes on in the public worship.
1. The word edify mean to build up or cause growth in another. Paul uses the verb form of this word three times and the noun form four times in this chapter.
 2. Our worship is directed to God, and we are participants rather than spectators, but worship is not an individual activity. That is the trap the Corinthians had fallen into. Their abuses of the Lord's Supper that we studied earlier were caused largely by their view that they owed nothing to their fellow worshipers. And yet, Paul's message was that no one can worship God and possess that attitude toward their fellow worshipers.
 3. Proper worship is a corporate activity that is directed to God but that builds up and promotes spiritual growth and maturity in the participants.
- F.** Tongues without interpretation edifies only the speaker.
1. Anyone who had a spiritual gift would be edified when he practiced that gift. Even without understanding what was said, a tongue-speaker would know that God was working in him to perform a miracle. But absent interpretation, no one else would get very much out of the experience. All they would see is someone speaking a language they do not understand.
 2. I think we see here yet another proof that the tongue speaking of the New Testament was not the wild, ecstatic, trance-like mumbo-jumbo that we see today in the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements. The tongue-speaking of the New Testament edified only the speaker, which to me suggests that outside observers would see nothing other than someone speaking normally in a language they did not understand.
- G.** In verse 5, Paul expresses his desire that all of the Corinthians could speak in

tongues.

1. This verse finds a parallel in the book of Numbers when Moses was urged by Joshua to forbid Eldad and Medad from prophesying in the camp. Moses responded:

a) Numbers 11:29 Then Moses said to him, "Are you zealous for my sake? Oh, that all the LORD's people were prophets and that the LORD would put His Spirit upon them!"

2. In one sense it would be wonderful if they all spoke in tongues and all prophesied because it would show that the power of God was upon them all. But Paul has already told them that not everyone has the same gift. (12:29-30)

III.⁶ Now, brethren, if I come unto you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you, except I shall speak to you either by revelation, or by knowledge, or by prophesying, or by doctrine? ⁷ And even things without life giving sound, whether pipe or harp, except they give a distinction in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped? ⁸ For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle? ⁹ So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the air.

A. As we studied during our introduction to this letter, this congregation owed its existence to the missionary efforts of the apostle Paul. But what if Paul had only spoken to them in tongues that they did not understand? How effective would a babbling apostle have been?

1. We send people down to Mexico today to proclaim the gospel. All of the Spanish brethren speak Spanish and some no doubt speak English, but how many speak German? What if we sent missionaries to Mexico who spoke only German? How effective do you think they would be?
2. Does that sound absurd? Well, what if we sent people who spoke only Latin? Mexico is largely a Catholic nation and for years the priests spoke only Latin during their worship services. How edifying were those services?
3. Most missionaries I imagine would love to possess the gift of tongues, but the goal would be so that they could speak in the language of their hearers rather than in a language that no one understands. They are already able to speak a language no one understands!

B. Paul uses three analogies to make his case for forbidding uninterpreted tongues in the worship assembly. The first two analogies occur in verses 7-9.

1. The first analogy compares indistinct notes played on a flute or a harp. They are described as lifeless instruments. If they are just blown or plucked

randomly, they will produce nothing but noise. But when directed by the mind they produce a melody.

2. The second analogy involves a bugle that is intended to convey a warning rather than produce a melody. If the sound is garbled or uncertain, it will not have the desired effect. No one will understand its message.
3. When does the tongue-speaker produce a melody rather than noise? When does he produce a warning message rather than an uncertain sound? When what he says is interpreted. Absent interpretation, he is simply making noise; he is conveying no messages.

C. Paul mentions musical instruments in these verses. That means we can use musical instruments in the worship assembly, right?

1. By that logic, we should invite Satan to read the scripture this morning because he read the scripture in Matthew 4. By that logic, we should not only have a trumpet in our worship service, but we should also have a battle, because that is also mentioned in verse 8.

D. The focus on edification in this chapter is instructive with regard to the issue of instrumental music and its use in the worship service.

1. First, it is instructive to notice that he calls them, not just instruments, but lifeless instruments.
2. Second, it is instructive to note that Paul told the Corinthians that tongue-speaking without interpretation was not proper for the worship assembly **even though they likely saw nothing wrong with it and it was likely their personal preference to engage in that activity during worship.**
3. Paul did not defer to their personal dislikes and preferences when it came to proper worship, and neither should we. The denominational world may have exalted the desires of men over the desire of God, but that can never be true of the Lord's church.

IV.¹⁰ There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world, and none of them *is* without signification. ¹¹ Therefore if I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh *shall be* a barbarian unto me. ¹² Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual *gifts*, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church.

A. Paul's third analogy occurs in verses 10-11. It concerns the sound or *phonos* of the many different languages throughout the world.

1. I think this third example is less of an analogy and more of an actual

description of what was going on in the Corinthian assembly.

2. It is true that Paul does not use the same word *glossa* that he has been using to describe the gift of tongues, but that does not mean that *glossa* means something other than language. Instead, Paul is focusing here on the sound the speaker makes in speaking the language, and in fact the Greek word he uses *phonos* is where we get our word "phonetic," which refers to speech sounds.
 3. Paul's word choice also allows him to engage in a bit of word play in verse 10. He literally says, "There are many sounds (*phonos*) in the world, and none without sound (*aphonos*)."
- B.** If I do not know the meaning of the sounds that are being spoken, then the speaker will appear to be a barbarian to me, and vice versa if they do not understand the sounds they I am making.
1. Paul, the missionary, had no doubt had this very experience, which likely explains why he had spoken in tongues more than any of the Corinthians. Paul did it out of necessity so that he could teach others; the Corinthians did it merely to impress others.
 2. The Greek word *barbaros* was an onomatopoetic term in Greek because foreign speech sounded to the Greek ear like "bar, bar, bar." Absent interpretation, the gift of tongues would sound the same way.
- C.** If we are looking for modern day lessons from this first century problem, we have an important one here.
1. Paul's critique of tongues implies that it did more than simply create frustration; it also erected barriers of alienation. It left others with the sick feeling that they did not belong.
 2. Tongue speaking no doubt fostered cliques. Cliques between those who understood the language and those who did not. Cliques between those who could speak in tongues and those who could not.
 3. There are many problems with having an "in crowd" in the church, but perhaps the biggest problem is that if there is an "in crowd" there must also be an "out crowd." There must then be a group that is alienated and excluded by others within the body of Christ, and that is something we must never tolerate.
- D.** Another lesson we can glean involves how we conduct our worship services.
1. With their orchestras, slides shows, lights, cameras, praise teams, drama ministers, and choirs, many denominational services resemble a circus much

more than they do a worship service. Paul's fear here was that if people chattering in tongues without interpretation dominated the worship service, then the church would become a Tower of Babel filled with nothing but competing gibberish.

2. **C. S. Lewis:** Novelty, simply as such, can have only an entertainment value. And they don't go to church to be entertained. ...The perfect church service would be one we were almost unaware of; our attention would have been on God. But every novelty prevents this. It fixes our attention on the service itself; and thinking about worship is a different thing from worshipping. Novelty may fix our attention not even on the service but on the [speaker]. You know what I mean. Try as one may to exclude it, the question "What on earth is he up to now?" will intrude. It lays one's devotion waste. There is really some excuse for the man who said, "I wish they'd remember that the charge to Peter was 'Feed my sheep, not experiment on my rats, or even, Teach my performing dogs new tricks.'" (From *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer*)

E. In verse 12, Paul says that the Corinthians are zealous for spiritual gifts. As we discussed in Lesson 18, this may have involved one of the many Corinthian slogans. But as with their other slogans, Paul does not disagree with it, but rather he qualifies it.

1. If they are zealous for gifts, they should seek those that edify the church. The gift of tongues without interpretation does not fall into that category.
2. Their zeal is fine, but it needs some constraint. Also, their zeal needs to be motivated by love and needs to be tempered by an understanding of Paul's message. Paul spoke elsewhere of the danger of zeal without knowledge. (Romans 10:2) Zeal without love is equally dangerous.

V. ¹³ Wherefore let him that speaketh in an *unknown* tongue pray that he may interpret. ¹⁴ For if I pray in an *unknown* tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful. ¹⁵ What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.

A. The key issue for Paul emerges in the command in verse 13 that one who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret. What is spoken in the assembly should be understandable, and if it is not there must be an interpreter to make it understandable.

B. Verse 14 must be read in the context of verse 5, just as we did with verse 2.

1. Throughout this chapter Paul has been saying that prophecy is greater than speaking in tongues because prophecy edifies the church and speaking in tongues does not. But verse 5 says tongue speaking loses its inferior status

- if someone is there to interpret.
2. Verse 13 continued that theme by saying that a tongue speaker should pray that he may interpret. Why? Verse 14 answers that question. If I am praying in an unknown tongue and if I cannot interpret it then my spirit may be praying, but my mind does not understand what is said. This problem goes away when an interpreter is present.
- C. But what does Paul mean when he says his spirit prays but his understanding is unfruitful? Can my spirit pray without my mind somehow being involved?
1. I think the best explanation is that the phrase "my spirit" in verse 14 is shorthand for "my spiritual gift." The gift is causing him to pray, but he does not understand what is being said absent the gift of interpretation.
 - a) If you look at verse 12, for example, you see the phrase "zealous of spiritual gifts," but if you notice in the KJV, the word gifts is italicized. It is not present in the Greek. Thus, Paul is saying there "you are zealous of spiritual." The word gift may be understood in verse 14 as it is in verse 12.
 2. The other commonly considered option is to have "my spirit" refer to Paul's innermost deepest thoughts, which are presumably somehow able to bypass his understanding. They point to Romans 8:26, where we read that "the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered."
 - a) Perhaps, but I tend to reject any theory that would make irrationality a sign of the abundance of the Holy Spirit. In this very letter, Paul has said that the Corinthians should have the same mind (not spirit) in 1:10 and should have the mind of Christ (not spirit) in 2:16. In Romans 12:2 he says that we are transformed by the renewing of our minds.
 - b) The idea that we get the spirit when we turn off our brain is precisely what had led to the nonsense that we see on the television. The religious con men that lead those groups love it when their followers turn off their brains.
 - c) Although the media delights in portraying Christianity as anti-intellectual, the opposite is true (as is the case with so much that we hear today in the media). Christianity is based on facts that are open to historical investigation. Salvation in Christ is based on knowledge of the truth and obedience to the written word of God. Faith is contrasted not with reason, but with sight. Our faith is neither mindless nor irrational. One of the great distinctions between Christianity and the mystery religions or Greek religions that surrounded it in the city of Corinth was that Christianity is a thinking person's religion. It is based on knowledge and reason rather

than on emotional or sensual experiences.

- d) Indeed, Paul's focus in this chapter is on the intelligibility of worship. There is no such thing as mindless worship.

D. The spirit in verse 15 is not preceded with "my" as it is in verse 14 and thus this spirit may not be a personal spiritual gift, but may denote the spirit and the truth that must be the basis for all true worship. (John 4:24) Or Paul could still be referring to the spiritual gift, which would suggest that people both prayed and sang in these unknown tongues.

1. Paul's point remains the same. To be edifying, our prayer and our singing must be accompanied by understanding. And if we are praying and singing in tongues, then to have understanding there must be an interpreter.
2. Otherwise how could a listener say "Amen" to indicate agreement with what you are saying?

VI. ¹⁶ Else when thou shalt bless with the spirit, how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say Amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest? ¹⁷ For thou verily givest thanks well, but the other is not edified. ¹⁸ I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all: ¹⁹ Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that *by my voice* I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an *unknown* tongue.

A. Paul focuses here in verses 16-17 on those who are neophytes. The King James version translates the Greek word as "unlearned." Others translate it as ungifted, outsider, or inquirer.

1. Paul's point is that if this person does not understand what is being said, then it is really all for nothing, no matter how miraculous it might be.
2. Instead of being edified, that person is left disconcerted, disoriented, and distracted.

B. Rather than risk that ever occurring -- and even though Paul spoke with tongues more than any of them -- he would rather speak 5 words with understanding than speak 10000 words in the unknown tongue.

VII. ²⁰ Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men.

A. In 3:1, Paul told the Corinthians that he had to address them as babes in Christ. In 13:11, he used the image of childishness as a contrast to reaching maturity and to illustrate the superiority of love over spiritual gifts that would come to an end.

B. Jeremiah 4:22 "For My people are foolish, They have not known Me. They are silly children, And they have no understanding. They are wise to do evil, But to do good they have no knowledge."

C. Now Paul exhorts them not to be childish in their understanding, but to rather be mature in their understanding.

1. Children are by nature self-centered. They like to call attention to themselves. They like to be entertained.
2. The Corinthians likely put on quite a show during their worship assembly, with each spiritual act trying to outdo the one before. Entertainment seems to have taken the place of edification.
3. Is there a message there for us? The denominational world has long been focused on entertainment as a means or perhaps the means to attract crowds. And the level of entertainment must constantly increase to keep them from leaving. But the church is not in the entertainment business, and we do not draw people by lifting up the latest Christian rock band or motivational speaker. We draw people by lifting up Jesus Christ.

a) John 12:32 "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me."

D. But Paul does want the Corinthians to be like children in one respect -- in regard to wickedness.

1. Children have other qualities: they are innocent, naive, and unspoiled -- and a millstone awaits anyone who disturbs those qualities. (Matthew 18:6)
2. There is a sense in which we must all be like children:
 - a) Matthew 18:3** "And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."

VIII. ²¹ In the law it is written, With *men of* other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that will they not hear me, saith the Lord. ²² Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not: but prophesying *serveth* not for them that believe not, but for them which believe.

A. In verse 21, Paul paraphrases Isaiah 28:11-12, which he refers to as the law.

1. **Isaiah 28:11-12** For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people. ¹² To whom he said, This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing: yet they would not hear.

2. Paul cites this passage to lay the basis for his crowning argument against uninterpreted tongues in the worship assembly.
 - a) Because Israel had refused to heed what God spoke to them in understandable language through the prophet Isaiah, God was going to approach them by means of the foreign language of the conquering Assyrians.
 - b) Earlier in Chapter 28, Isaiah had clashed with the drunken priests and prophets who mocked his prophetic declarations as simplistic nonsense for small children (verses 9-10, 13). In the Hebrew language they mimicked his prophetic proclamations as baby talk.
 - (1) The said that Isaiah's message was "Do and do, do and do, rule on rule, rule on rule." In Hebrew, these lines sound like baby talk: *sav lasav sav lasav kav lakav kav lakav*.
 - c) God's judgment for rejecting his prophet was simple: His word would now come to them as sounds without meaning, as sounds in a language they do not understand. Their inability to understand the message will assure their unbelief and become a sign of God's judgment.
3. Why does Paul cite this passage from Isaiah?
 - a) One reason may be to show that tongue-speaking without interpretation in the public worship is wrong because it places God's own people in the situation of feeling like foreigners in a foreign land and not at home in their own country. It is like worshipping in Assyria while surrounded by Assyrians. It as if God's judgment in Isaiah 28 had been intended as a judgment on believers rather than unbelievers.
 - b) Another reason may be to show that, despite how spiritually superior the Corinthians might feel, tongue-speaking without interpretation will not bring the message of the gospel home to unbelievers. Those who hear it will become like those to whom God deliberately hid his word as a sign in the days of Isaiah.
 - c) Yet a third reason may be to show that when God speaks intelligibly, it is to reveal, and when God speaks unintelligibly, it is to judge. Thus, tongues without interpretation is a sign of judgment in Corinth just as it was in the days of Isaiah.
 - (1) And note, that the tongue in Isaiah was not meaningless gibberish. Rather it was a language -- the Assyrian language -- albeit a language the Israelites did not understand. The word "tongues" in verse 21 (*heteroglossos* -- other tongues) is the same Greek word that Paul has been using for "tongues" (*glossos*) elsewhere in this chapter -- and here we know it means a foreign

language.

B. What does verse 22 mean?

1. Some see this verse as presenting a big problem. Paul says in verse 22 that tongues are a sign to unbelievers while prophecy is not, but the illustrations he gives starting in verse 23 seem to contradict that statement by depicting the negative effect of tongues upon unbelievers and the positive effect of prophecy not on believers but on unbelievers. If tongues are a sign for unbelievers, why does he encourage them to use prophecy instead when unbelievers are present?
2. What is the solution to this seeming contradiction?
 - a) First, let me tell you what the solution is not. J. B. Phillips published a translation of the New Testament in 1947 called "The New Testament in Modern English." He translated verse 22 as follows: "That means that tongues are a sign of God's power, not for those who are unbelievers but for those who already believe." The astute reader notices two things: First, that translation is the exact opposite of what the Greek text says. Second, Phillips included a footnote marker. Following that marker, one finds the following explanation: "This is the sole instance of the translator's departing from the accepted text. He felt bound to conclude, from the sense of the next three verses, that we have here either **a slip of the pen on the part of Paul**, or, more probably, a copyist's error." **What incredible and unbridled arrogance!**
 - b) The solution to this apparent problem hinges on what Paul means by the word "sign." Also, verses 21 and following must be read in light of the passage from Isaiah that Paul quoted.
 - c) Verse 22 is explained by verse 21. In Isaiah's day, prophecy served those who believed. They heeded the message of God and listened to the plain language spoken by his prophet. Tongues, by contrast, were a sign to the unbelievers. They rejected the plain message of God, and the foreign language they then heard was a sign of their unbelief. The word "sign" in verse 22 has a negative sense -- it is a sign of their unbelief.
 - d) There might come a time when the unbelievers in Corinth would need to be sent a sign of their unbelief as a judgment for rejecting the plain and simple message of God -- **but how could that time be before they had ever heard the plain and simple message of God?** The Corinthians are putting the cart before the horse. It would have been as if Isaiah himself spoke only Assyrian! And that is the very point that Paul makes in the next three verses.
 - e) It is also important to note that Paul is speaking here of **uninterpreted**

tongues. Tongues were given for a purpose and that purpose was shown in Acts 2 when they were first used. They helped a small group of people who spoke the same language spread the word of God to large groups of people who spoke many different languages. (And of course they showed the power of God as they did both in Acts 2 and in Acts 10.) Once the word of God was known by these many people with many different languages, the gift of tongues was needed less and less, and in fact it seems to have been the first spiritual gift to pass away. It is mentioned only here in the early letter to the Corinth and in the early accounts in the book of Acts (as well as at the end of Mark prior to those events). When tongues were used absent understanding, they had the opposite effect on unbelievers -- as is shown by the reaction of some in Acts 2 who thought the apostles were drunk when they heard them speaking languages they did not understand.

IX. ²³ If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in *those that are* unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad? ²⁴ But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or *one* unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all: ²⁵ And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on *his* face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth.

- A.** Paul's first illustration envisions the entire church speaking in tongues. What effect would that have on the unlearned or on unbelievers?
1. The words in the phrase "unlearned or unbeliever" are likely describing the same group and could be translated as "unbelieving outsiders" or "those unacquainted with Christianity." This group could include non-Christian spouses, unconverted slaves, invited guests, or possibly just the curious who might wander in.
 2. People in this group would conclude that these Christians were stark raving mad! Or as in Acts 2 they might conclude that Christians are all drunkards! They will not be led to God because they will not hear the gospel. And they can't be said to fall under the judgment of Isaiah 28 because never having heard the gospel they haven't rejected the gospel.
 3. Aside: We have noted before that the worship assembly should not be primary focus of our evangelistic efforts because the lost are primarily out there in the world rather than in here in the assembly. **But** these verses confirm that evangelism has an important place in our worship assemblies as well. I am thankful that here at Katy the Lord's invitation is offered at every worship service because that is not the case at many other congregations where the invitation is not offered. In fact, invitation songs are hard to find in the so-called "contemporary" song books. Why? Because inviting someone to be saved indicates that they are lost -- and that is considered judgmental and negative. **No one is going to obey the good news until they first**

understand the bad news!

- B.** Paul's second illustration envisions the entire church prophesying. What effect would that have on the unbelieving outsiders?
1. You take away the spiritual fireworks, you take away the circus atmosphere, you take away the entertainment, you take away pomp and circumstance -- and what is left? The simple yet powerful gospel message. You don't need any spiritual gift to proclaim it; you don't need to proclaim it in an unknown tongue; you can't proclaim it if your focus is on yourself or anyone other than Christ. When the proclamation meets understanding, the effect is dramatic: the hearer is convinced of all, the hearer is judged of all: And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth.
 2. The unbeliever comes to recognize that these Christians know things that could only have been revealed to them by God. Struck by this light, he casts himself in the dust, not before men, but before God. Where tongues leads to confusion, the proclamation of the gospel leads to confession and to worship of the one true God.
- C.** If we are looking for a modern day lesson from this discourse on a first century problem, it is this: not only do we have a responsibility to proclaim the gospel, we have a responsibility to do so clearly. If we blow the warning trumpet in such a way that the sound is uncertain, then the warning will not be heard and the world will remain oblivious, hopeless, and Hell-bound. The Corinthians obscured the gospel by proclaiming it in a foreign tongue; modern man obscures it by distorting it, by embellishing it, or by subtracting from it. In many ways what we moderns do is worse because it results not just in confusion but in a false sense of security.