

The Gift of Tongues — The Importance of Being Understood

— PART 1 —

The Charismatic gift of *'speaking in tongues'* is called glossolalia. Glossolalia is a transliteration of the Greek word γλωσσολαλία, glōssolalia, itself a compound of the words γλῶσσα, glōssa, meaning 'tongue' or 'language' and λαλεῖν, lalein, 'to talk'. Therefore 'glossolalia' quite literally means *'speaking in tongues.'*

● **BACKGROUND ON THE WORD 'TONGUE'** — The Greek word translated 'tongue' (γλῶσσα, glōssa) is used fifty times in the New Testament and is always translated as 'tongue' in the KJV. Listed below are the times the word is used, divided as to its meaning:

34 x — used to mean language

Mark 16:17 And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new **tongues**;

Acts 2:4 And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other **tongues**, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Acts 2:11 Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our **tongues** the wonderful works of God.

Acts 10:46 For they heard them speak with **tongues**, and magnify God. Then answered Peter,

Acts 19:6 And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with **tongues**, and prophesied.

1 Corinthians 12:10 To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of **tongues**; to another the interpretation of **tongues**:

1 Corinthians 12:28 And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps,, governments, diversities of **tongues**.

1 Corinthians 12:30 Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with **tongues**? do all interpret?

1 Corinthians 13:1 Though I speak with the **tongues** of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

1 Corinthians 13:8 Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be **tongues**, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.

1 Corinthians 14:2 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.

1 Corinthians 14:4 He that speaketh in an unknown **tongue** edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church.

1 Corinthians 14:5 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.

1 Corinthians 14:6 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?

1 Corinthians 14:9 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.

1 Corinthians 14:13 Wherefore let him that speaketh in an unknown **tongue** pray that he may interpret.

1 Corinthians 14:14 For if I pray in an unknown **tongue**, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful.

1 Corinthians 14:18 I thank my God, I speak with **tongues** more than ye all:

1 Corinthians 14:19 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**.

1 Corinthians 14:22 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.

1 Corinthians 14:23 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?

1 Corinthians 14:26 How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a **tongue**, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying.

1 Corinthians 14:27 If any man speak in an unknown **tongue**, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course; and let one interpret.

1 Corinthians 14:39 Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with **tongues**.

1 John 3:18 My little children, let us not love in word, neither in **tongue**; but in deed and in truth.

Revelation 5:9 And they sung a new song, saying,, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and **tongue**, and people, and nation;

Revelation 7:9 After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and **tongues**, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands;

Revelation 10:11 And he said unto me, Thou must prophesy again before many peoples, and nations, and **tongues**, and kings.

Revelation 11:9 And they of the people and kindreds and **tongues** and nations shall see their dead bodies three days and an half, and shall not suffer their dead bodies to be put in graves.

Revelation 13:7 And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and **tongues**, and nations.

Revelation 14:6 And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and **tongue**, and people,

Revelation 17:15 And he saith unto me, The waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and **tongues**.

5 x — used to mean the physical, literal tongue

Mark 7:33 And he took him aside from the multitude, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spit, and touched his **tongue**;

Mark 7:35 And straightway his ears were opened, and the string of his **tongue** was loosed, and he spake plain.

Luke 1:64 And his mouth was opened immediately, and his **tongue** loosed, and he spake, and praised God.

Luke 16:24 And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my **tongue**; for I am tormented in this flame.

Revelation 16:10 And the fifth angel poured out his vial upon the seat of the beast; and his kingdom was full of darkness; and they gnawed their **tongues** for pain,

10 x — used of the literal tongue but in the sense of ‘speech’ or ‘language’

Acts 2:26 Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my **tongue** was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope:

Romans 3:13 Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their **tongues** they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips:

Romans 14:11 For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every **tongue** shall confess to God.

Philippians 2:11 And that every **tongue** should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

James 1:26 If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his **tongue**, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.

James 3:5 Even so the **tongue** is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!

James 3:6 And the **tongue** is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the **tongue** among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.

James 3:8 But the **tongue** can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.

1 Peter 3:10 For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his **tongue** from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile:

1 x — used metaphorically as ‘cloven tongues as of fire’

Acts 2:3 And there appeared unto them cloven **tongues** like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.

Note a form of the word γλῶσσα, glōssa, is used once; this word is ἑτερογλώσσοις, heteroglōssois, which is a compound of our word for ‘tongue’ with a prefix meaning ‘other’

1 Corinthians 14:21 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.

● **THE WORD ‘TONGUE’ IS A COMMON OLD ENGLISH WORD MEANING ‘LANGUAGE’** — We can see the evolution

and usage of this word from several old English translations (note: the bold words are translations of two different Greek words; see comments further below):

Wycliffe's 1384 Translation

*“And alle weren fillid with the Hooli Goost, and thei bigunnen to speke diuerse **langagis**, as the Hooli Goost yaf to hem for to speke. ... And whanne this vois was maad, the multitude cam togidere, and thei weren astonyed in thouyt, for ech man herde hem spekinge in his **langage**. And alle weren astonyed, and wondriden, and seiden togidere, Whether not alle these that speken ben men of Galyle, and hou herden we ech man his **langage** in which we ben borun? ... and proselitis, men of Crete, and of Arabie, we han herd hem spekyng in oure **langagis** the grete thingis of God.”* — Acts 2:4, 6-8, 11 Wycliffe 1384

Tyndale's 1526 New Testament

*“And they were all filled with the holy goost and beganne to speake with other **tonges** even as the sprete gave them vtterance.... When this was noysed aboute the multitude came to gether and were astonyed because that every man hearde the speake his awne **touge**. They wondred all and marveyled sayinge amoge them selves: Beholde are not all these which speake of Galile? And how heare we every man his awne **touge** wherein we were boren? ... Grekes and Arabians: we have herde them speake with oure awne **tonges** the greate workes of God.”* — Acts 2:4, 6-8, 11 Tyndale's 1526 NT

Geneva 1560 Translation

*“And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other **tongues**, as the Spirit gave them utterance.... Now when this was noised, the multitude came together and were astonished, because that every man heard them speak his own **language**. And they wondered all, and marveled, saying among themselves, Behold, are not all these which speak, of Galilee? How then hear we every man our own **language**, wherein we were born? ... Cretes, and Arabians: we heard them speak in our own **tongues** the wonderful works of God.”* — Acts 2:4, 6-8, 11 Geneva 1560 Version with modern spelling

KJV Translation

*“And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other **tongues**, as the Spirit gave them utterance.... Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own **language**. And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans? And how hear we every man in our own **tongue**, wherein we were born? ... Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our **tongues** the wonderful works of God.”* — Acts 2:4, 6-8, 11 KJV

That it was a common use of the word is evident by the original preface of the KJV 1611:

Epistle and Dedicatorie

To the most high and mightie Prince, James by the grace of God

King of Great Britaine, France and Ireland, Defender of the Faith, &c.

The translators of The Bible, wish Grace, Mercie, and Peace, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

*Great and manifold were the blessings (most dread Sovereigne) which Almighty GOD, the Father of all Mercies, bestowed upon us the people of ENGLAND, when first he sent your Majesties Royall person to rule and raigne over us.... For when your Highnesse had once out of deepe judgment apprehended, how convenient it was, That out of the Originall sacred **tongues**, together with comparing of the labours, both in our owne and other forreigne **Languages**, of many worthy men who went before us, there should be one more exact Translation of the holy Scriptures into the English **tongue**; your MAJESTIE did never desist, to urge and to excite those to whom it was commended, that the worke might be hastened, and that the businesse might be expedited in so decent a maner, as a matter of such importance might justly require.*

To therefore translate these verses using the word ‘tongue(s)’ is not an error but merely a use of the language of the time. Even in our modern times it is not an error to use ‘tongue’ to mean ‘language’ even if it is not in common usage as it once was. **But in my opinion it is misleading to continue to translate these verses in such a manner considering the present Charismatic controversy.** As with other such words which are either left transliterated or intentionally mis-translated (cp. baptism = immersion, church = assembly, congregation), to continue to translate γλῶσσα, glōssa, as ‘tongue(s)’ where the meaning is clearly ‘language’ is to intentionally ‘muddy the waters’. (To maintain balance, let me add that most translations are works of committees and therefore translating glōssa as ‘tongues’ is probably an acceptable compromise within committee. Also note that translating glōssa as ‘language’ would not remove all difficulties and the Charismatic teaching does not rest upon how this word is translated.) Note our modern translations continue in this usage:

*“And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other **tongues**, as the Spirit gave them utterance.... And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in his own **language**. And they were amazed and wondered, saying, Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native **language**? ... Cretans and Arabians, we hear them telling in our own **tongues** the mighty works of God.”* — Acts 2:4, 6-8, 11 RSV

“And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other **tongues**, as the Spirit gave them utterance.... And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own **language**. Then they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, Look, are not all these who speak Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each in our own **language** in which we were born? ... Cretans and Arabs — we hear them speaking in our own **tongues** the wonderful works of God.” — Acts 2:4, 6-8, 11 NKJV

“And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other **tongues**, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.... And when this sound occurred, the crowd came together, and were bewildered because each one of them was hearing them speak in his own **language**. They were amazed and astonished, saying, Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we each hear them in our own **language** to which we were born? ... Cretans and Arabs — we hear them in our own **tongues** speaking of the mighty deeds of God.” — Acts 2:4, 6-8, 11 NASV

“All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other **tongues** as the Spirit enabled them.... When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own **language**. Utterly amazed, they asked: Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native **language**? ... (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs — we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own **tongues!**” — Acts 2:4, 6-8, 11 NIV

“And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other **tongues** as the Spirit gave them utterance.... And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own **language**. And they were amazed and astonished, saying, Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native **language**? ... both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians — we hear them telling in our own **tongues** the mighty works of God.” — Acts 2:4, 6-8, 11 ESV

● (ACTS 2) TONGUES IS WITHOUT QUESTION AN UNDERSTANDABLE LANGUAGE ON THE DAY OF PENTECOST — As we read of the events on that day of Pentecost, let us note several key things:

- The Greek word γλῶσσα, glōssa (or a form of that word) is used 3x in this section. In vs. 3 it is properly translated ‘tongues’ (‘there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire’). But in vss. 4 and 11 the sense is obviously ‘language’ and in my opinion should be translated as such.
- Twice in this section is the Greek word διαλέκτω, dialektōi, which is used 6x in the NT. Five times it is translated ‘tongue’ in the KJV (Acts 1:19; 2:8; 21:40; 22:2; 26:14) and once ‘language’ (Acts 2:6). It could be translated ‘language’ or more properly ‘dialect.’ Friberg’s Lexicon defines it as ‘of the form of speech characteristic of a nation or region, *dialect, language, way of speaking.*’ Thayer’s Lexicon defines it as ‘*the tongue or language peculiar to any people.*’ The Louw-Nida Lexicon defines it as language but also adds this comment: “It is possible, though perhaps not probable, that διαλέκτος in Ac 2.6 may be understood not only as a language as such, but as a particular form of such a language, and hence would have a meaning of ‘manner of speaking’ or even ‘accent’.”
- The Greek word translated ‘utterance’ in v. 4 is ἀποφθέγγεσθαι, apophthengesthai. Thayer’s Lexicon defines it as such: ‘*to speak out, speak forth, pronounce*, not a word of everyday speech, but one “belonging to dignified and elevated discourse, like the Latin *profari, pronuntiare*; properly it has the force of *to utter or declare oneself, give one’s opinion*, and is used not only of prophets but also of wise men and philosophers.” The reason I bring this forth is because this speaks against the ‘tongues’ on the day of Pentecost as being ‘senseless babblings’.
- That the languages used that day were known languages, foreign to the speakers (and thus the miracle of glossolalia) yet known to those in attendance, is obvious from v. 7,8: ‘*Those speaking are Jews from Galilee, yet they are speaking in our very own dialect*’; and v. 11: ‘*We hear these Galileans speaking in our own native languages.*’

Here is the text in the KJV:

¹ 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 (γλῶσσαί, glōssai) 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 (γλώσσαίς, glōssais), 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 (διαλέκτω, dialektōi). ⁷ And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans? ⁸ And how hear we every man in our own tongue (διαλέκτω, dialektōi), 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 (γλώσσαίς, glōssais) 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. — Acts 2:1-13 KJV

Let us read this again, using what we learned above:

¹ 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 (γλώσσαι, glōssai) 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 [foreign] languages (γλώσσαις, glōssais), as the Spirit gave them the dignified and elevated discourses to say to those in attendance. 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 dialect (διαλέκτω, dialektōi). 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 dialect (διαλέκτω, dialektōi), 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 [own native] languages (γλώσσαις, glōssais) 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. — Acts 2:1-13 KJV

Reading it in this fashion puts a whole different slant on this passage, does it not? Therefore, in my opinion, this passage without question teaches that the languages spoken on the Day of Pentecost were known languages, foreign to the speakers but understandable to those in attendance from all over the then-known world.

● **(ISA 28) TONGUES WAS A SIGN TO A REBELLIOUS JEWISH NATION** — To understand this next point we must look at the Old Testament writings of the Prophet Isaiah. While the temptation is present to delve deep into Isaiah's comments since they are so full and rich with meaning, to do so would be a digression from the topic at hand. Comments therefore will be kept to a minimum so as to not miss the point of Isaiah's relevant statement (and Paul's use of that statement in 1 Cor 14:21).

The approximate date of this section of Isaiah is generally acknowledged to be after the fall of Damascus in 732 BC but before the fall of Samaria in 721 BC. These chapters are a continuation of a thought-stream which began in Isaiah 7 which one commentator has entitled 'the foolishness of trusting the nations instead of the Lord.' "Faced with the threats of Syria and Northern Israel, Ahaz had an opportunity to trust God for deliverance. Instead he trusted Assyria, his worst enemy. The result, as Isaiah predicted [in chaps 8-12], was that Assyria herself overran the land." [Oswalt, Isaiah, 194]

In our passage Assyria is first finishing up with Samaria (Isa 28:1-13) and then will turn its attentions towards Judah (Isa 29:7-8). The verses we wish to concentrate upon deal with the northern kingdom of Israel (called here Ephraim; note not all agree that this entire section is speaking of Israel, some see v. 7 as a transition to Judah).

Verse 1 is a double entendre: as garlands of flowers worn on the heads of drunken partygoers (the leaders of Israel) are attractive at first, as the night wears on neither the flowers nor the partygoers look attractive any more. But more than men themselves, this is also speaking of Israel's 'crown of pride', the city of Samaria. Like a faded garland, Samaria's time is short as Assyria is already at her gates.

"Woe to the crown of pride, to the drunkards of Ephraim, whose glorious beauty is a fading flower, which are on the head of the fat valleys of them that are overcome with wine!" (Isa 28:1)

Using as strong of words as possible, Isaiah tries to alert his people of their danger from Assyria, the 'mighty and strong one from the Lord.' They are powerful and violent and will burst upon Israel as a storm, flattening everything.

"Behold, the Lord hath a mighty and strong one, which as a tempest of hail and a destroying storm, as a flood of mighty waters overflowing, shall cast down to the earth with the hand." (Isa 28:2)

Using another double entendre, nothing will be left after the storm. The city will be devoured as one hastily eats an early fig. An 'early fig' appears in June well before the main harvest in September and October. These are large and sweet and usually eaten as soon as they are discovered (Hos 9:10; Mich 7:1; Nah 3:12; Jer 24:2).

"The crown of pride, the drunkards of Ephraim, shall be trodden under feet: and the glorious beauty, which is on the head of the fat valley, shall be a fading flower, and as the hasty fruit before the summer; which when he that looketh upon it seeth, while it is yet in his hand he eateth it up." (Isa 28:3,4)

Isaiah then prophesies what could have happened had their trust been in the Lord and (despite the present failure of Israel) what will ultimately come to pass when the Lord's purpose is ultimately worked out.

"In that day shall the LORD of hosts be for a crown of glory, and for a diadem of beauty, unto the residue of his people, and for a spirit of judgment to him that sitteth in judgment, and for strength to them that turn the battle to the gate." (Isa 28:5,6)

Not only have the leaders failed by being drunken and foolish, but the religious leaders are in the same condition.

But they also have erred through wine, and through strong drink are out of the way; the priest and the prophet have erred through strong drink, they are swallowed up of wine, they are out of the way through strong drink; they err in vision, they stumble in judgment. For all tables are full of vomit and filthiness, so that there is no place clean." (Isa 28:7,8)

It was bad enough that the religious leaders were involved in such debauchery; but to aggravate their sin was their attitude towards those who preached the truth. Rather than being repentant, they mocked the prophets who sought to correct them. **"There is no more**

hardened nor cynical person in the world than a religious leader who has seared his conscience. For them, tender appeals which would move anyone else become sources of amusement. They have learned how to debunk everything and to believe nothing (Heb 10:26-31), all the while speaking loftily of matters of the spirit (Jas 3:13-1).” [Oswalt, Isaiah, 509] Essentially the drunkards lash out against the prophet as if to say they are old enough to know what they are doing, they do not need someone ‘harping’ on their sins as one would teach a child, using simple, repetitive instructions.

“Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts. For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little:” (Isa 28:9,10)

“The prophet now turns the mockers’ words back upon themselves as he pronounces the word of judgment. God’s words to them were in fact simple and gentle. But since they refused to hear them, they will indeed hear the harsh repetitive words, but from the lips of Assyrian taskmasters. Since they would not learn the simple truths of life from God’s spokesmen, they will learn them at the end of whip and prod.” [Oswalt, Isaiah, 512] The Lord had actually spoken clearly and kindly with His people to find their rest in Him, not in foreign alliances. But they would not listen.

“For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people. 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.” (Isa 28:11,12)

Since His people would not learn by the ‘simple admonitions’ but rather mocked them, the people of Samaria would learn the effects of sin at the hands of harsh experience.

“But the word of the LORD was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little; that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken.” (Isa 28:13)

I realize this is just a quick overview but the important point we should get from Isaiah’s message is this: **when the Lord’s people refuse to hear when God uses ordinary means, God will use extraordinary means to get His message across.** Paul picks up on this lesson as he discusses the gift of tongues in 1 Cor 14 —

“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. Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not” (1 Cor 14:21, 22a)

In a loose quotation from Isaiah, Paul makes the application to the situation in Corinth: **as the Jews would not listen to ‘ordinary means’ of NT prophets as John the Baptist and even the Lord Jesus Himself, the Lord uses ‘extraordinary means’ to reach them – the prophets miraculously preaching the gospel in the native languages of the hearers.**

● **SUMMARY STATEMENTS** — This lesson is to be continued but here is what we have learned so far:

- The Greek word γλῶσσα, glōssa, means ‘tongue(s)’ and is used many times throughout the NT both to mean the literal tongue and also in the sense of ‘language’ or ‘speech’.
- Translating γλῶσσα, glōssa, as ‘tongue’ is not an error but it would help eliminate errors if it would be translated ‘language’ when the sense demands such a translation.
- The languages spoken on the Day of Pentecost were known languages, foreign to their speakers but understandable by those present from different countries.
- When God’s people were rebellious and refused to obey while He was speaking through the prophets, God used foreign conquest to teach His people through harsh experience. Paul uses Isaiah’s comments to show tongues are for a sign, not to believers but to unbelievers. Since the Jews refused to hear the preaching of Christ through ordinary means, God used a miracle to attest the gospel message.

The Gift of Tongues — The Importance of Being Understood

— PART 2 —

- **REVIEW** — This lesson is a continuation of an earlier lesson. Here is what we have learned thus far:
 - The Greek word γλῶσσα, glōssa, means ‘tongue(s)’ and is used many times throughout the NT both to mean the literal tongue and also in the sense of ‘language’ or ‘speech’.
 - Translating γλῶσσα, glōssa, as ‘tongue’ is not an error but it would help eliminate errors if it would be translated ‘language’ when the sense demands such a translation.
 - The languages spoken on the Day of Pentecost were known languages, foreign to their speakers but understandable by those present from different countries.
 - When God’s people were rebellious and refused to obey while He was speaking through the prophets, God used foreign conquest to teach His people through harsh experience. Paul uses Isaiah’s comments to show tongues are for a sign, not to believers but to unbelievers. Since the Jews refused to hear the preaching of Christ through ordinary means, God used a miracle to attest the gospel message.
- **INTRODUCTION** — This second part of the lesson will essentially be a look at Paul’s comments concerning the gift of tongues found in 1 Corinthians 14. Prior to beginning, let me make a few general statements concerning this chapter:
 - **NO ATTEMPT WILL BE MADE TO BRING FORTH ALL THE DIFFERENT INTERPRETATIONS INVOLVED WITH TONGUES OR THIS CHAPTER** — As someone has rightfully noted, ‘*It is better to teach the truth than to attempt to teach all the errors. One knowing the truth will recognize the errors.*’ That has no better application anywhere than today’s topic. There are so many different understandings relating to the gift of tongues and this chapter that it would be impossible to study each error individually. Therefore this morning’s lesson will focus on what this chapter is teaching rather than the errors present in our modern Christian culture.
 - **WITHOUT QUESTION, THIS IS A DIFFICULT CHAPTER** — That there are difficulties within this chapter is accepted by every honest expositor, regardless of their position on the gift of tongues. *I make no pretense to having all the answers and the reader should understand that at the beginning. I do however believe my interpretation makes sense, does not violate the content and context of this chapter, and it correlates with what we learned of the gift of tongues in Acts 2.*
 - **PART OF THE DIFFICULTY IN UNDERSTANDING THIS CHAPTER IS DUE TO THE CESSATION OF THE GIFT OF TONGUES** — If we possessed full understanding of all the particulars of the Apostolic age, I am certain we would be able to interpret Paul’s comments without problem. But the very fact that there are such difficulties in understanding this chapter argues for the cessation of the gift of tongues. This was admitted by several of the ‘church fathers’:

“This whole place is very obscure: but the obscurity is produced by our ignorance of the facts referred to and by their cessation, being such as then used to occur but now no longer take place.” [Chrysostom, b. 347 – d. 407 AD, Archbishop of Constantinople, in his Homilies of St John Chrysostom on the First Epistle of St Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians, Homily 29 on 1 Cor 12:1,2]

“In the earliest times, ‘the Holy Ghost fell upon them that believed: and they spake with tongues,’ which they had not learned, ‘as the Spirit gave them utterance.’ These were signs adapted to the time. For there behooved to be that betokening of the Holy Spirit in all tongues, to shew that the Gospel of God was to run through all tongues over the whole earth. That thing was done for a betokening, and it passed away.” [Augustine, b. 354 – d. 430 AD, Bishop of Hippo, in his Homilies on the First Epistle of John, translated by Rev. H. Browne; Homily 6 on 1 John 3:19-4:3]

~ OBSERVATIONS FROM 1 CORINTHIANS 14 ~

- **SUMMATION STATEMENTS CONCERNING 1 COR 14** —
 - *The Corinthians were using their gift of tongues in a carnal fashion, almost using it as a test of spirituality*
 - *Paul is not condemning the use of tongues per se; rather he is correcting the Corinthians’ mis-use of their gift*
 - *The emphasis of the chapter is that if God is going to use us to bless others, the others must understand what we are saying*
- **PAUL IS CONTINUING HIS CORRECTIVE COUNSEL TO THE CORINTHIAN’S MIS-USE OF THEIR GIFTS** — This chapter continues a discussion Paul began several chapters back with the intent of correcting the Corinthian’s mis-use of their spiritual gifts. *In 1 Cor 12 Paul’s argument was that of diversity, that it is the Holy Spirit that gives the gifts as it pleases Him, with tongues only being one of the many gifts, for the good of the congregation as a whole:*

“But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; to another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues: but all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.” — 1 Cor 12:7-11

Paul continues in his theme of the ‘common good’ by insisting that no one, not even himself, counts for anything without the manifestation and motive of love:

“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not [love], I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not [love], I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not [love], it profiteth me nothing.” — 1 Cor 13:1-3

Paul then makes practical application of his comments by insisting the goal of the Corinthian’s ‘spiritual zeal’ should be love which is expressed in the language of ‘building up’ the congregation:

“Follow after [love], and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy.... He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church. 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..... Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church.... For thou verily givest thanks well, but the other is not edified.... How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying.” — 1 Cor 14:1, 4-5, 12, 17, 26

● **THE IMPORTANCE OF LOVE IN THE USE OF OUR SPIRITUAL GIFTS** — Some have said that Paul addressed spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians chapters 12 and 14 but chapter 13 is an interlude. This is to miss the point of chapter 13 in relation to what follows, as is evident in Paul’s first command in verse 1:

“Follow after [love], and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy. 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. But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort.” — 1 Cor 14:1-3

The command ‘follow after love, follow the way of love’ makes an imperative out of what Paul said in the previous chapter (1 Cor 13). **For one to have the gift of tongues was indeed a blessing from the Holy Spirit but to use it in a congregational setting without an interpreter would be entirely self-serving. Who but the speaker is benefitted from such an act? So Paul says to act in love, think of others rather than solely yourself and your own spiritual gift, and use what gifts you have for the spiritual edification of the congregation as a whole, not just yourself.** As with all of life, the issue put forth by Paul in this chapter may be characterized as an issue of ‘self’ vs. ‘love’. Therefore chapter 13 is not an ‘interlude’ in Paul’s thinking but rather one of his main arguments against the mis-use of the spiritual gifts to the Corinthians.

● **PROPHECY IS ONLY ‘GREATER’ THAN TONGUES BECAUSE PROPHECY CAN EDIFY THE CONGREGATION** — *It would be a mistake to believe Paul is denigrating the gift of tongues for some inherent value but rather, within the context of a congregational service, the question becomes ‘which one edifies the body of believers?’*

“But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort. He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church. 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.” — 1 Cor 14:3-5

Although Paul does not expound upon this idea, it would fit within the context of this chapter to teach that there may be instances where the gift of tongues is ‘greater’ than the gift of prophecy; e.g., if one is on a missionary journey and encounters those who speak a foreign language, the gift of tongues at that point could be greatly used by the Lord to reach those unsaved foreigners.

● **PAUL IS NOT TEACHING AGAINST TONGUES PER SE, BUT THEIR MISUSE WITHIN THE CONGREGATION** — There is a proper use of the gift of tongues and the gift can be used to honor the Lord when kept in its proper place. The problem Paul is trying to correct is the Corinthian’s mis-use of the gift, not the gift itself. Note Paul states the gift is proper even within the confines of the congregational service, if one interprets what is being said so all may understand:

“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.... Wherefore let him that speaketh in an unknown tongue pray that he may interpret.... If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course; and let one interpret. But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God.” — 1 Cor 14:5, 13, 27-28

Paul later adds that although he has the gift of speaking in tongues, his spiritual gift is secondary to what is best for the congregation as a whole:

“I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all: 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.” — 1 Cor 14:18, 19

● **PAUL USES A RHETORICAL QUESTION WITH SEVERAL ANALOGIES TO MAKE HIS POINT** — Paul’s rhetorical question sets the theme for the next paragraph: *no one benefits when they cannot understand what is being heard*. Paul uses two different examples, the first being musical instruments (vss 7-9)

“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? For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?” — 1 Cor 14:7-8

... and then natural foreign languages, those which occur among nations without the use of spiritual gifts (vss 10-11).

“There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world, and none of them is without signification. 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.” — 1 Cor 14:10, 11

Paul applies each of these examples to the Corinthians with a similar ‘so it is with you’ (vss 9, 12).

“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.... Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church.” — 1 Cor 14:9, 12

Paul then finishes with the thought he began with: their zeal for the spiritual gifts should be for the edification of the congregation.

“... seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church.” — 1 Cor 14:12b

● **QUITE PROBABLY PAUL IS DEFENDING HIS OWN SPIRITUALITY AND GIFTS** — From Paul’s arguments and comments, it is believed by some that part of the Corinthian problem included the elevation of the gift of tongues as evidence of true spirituality while being negative towards Paul for his shortcomings at this point. If true then Paul is probably not just asking a rhetorical question in v. 6 but is actually defensive:

“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?” — 1 Cor 14:6

The Corinthians may have expected that one as spiritual as Paul would come with their criterion for being spiritual: that he come using his gift of speaking in tongues. If so, then Paul is refusing to come to them speaking in tongues since it would be of no profit to them. Paul says the same thing later in the chapter:

“I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all: 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. Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men.” — 1 Cor 14:18-20

Gordon Fee’s comments at this point are very well stated:

“If our suggestion has been correct, that there is an undercurrent of apologetic in these references, where Paul is both defending his own status with regard to their criterion – the gift of tongues – and rejecting their use of it, then these sentences are intended to fall like something of a bombshell in Corinth. Despite what they may think, he can assert – with thanksgiving to God! – ‘I speak in tongues more than all of you.’ His concern throughout has been with uninterpreted tongues in the assembly, because they cannot edify the church. With this sentence he outmaneuvers the Corinthians altogether. He herewith affirms their gift in the strongest of terms; but he does so in order to reorder their own thinking about what was going on in the assembly.” [Fee, *1 Corinthians*, p 675]

● **DIFFICULT VERSES – ‘MY UNDERSTANDING IS UNFRUITFUL’** — Verses 14, 15 are some of the most difficult verses within this chapter:

“For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful. 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.” — 1 Cor 14:14,15

I have found three essential interpretations for these verses:

● **‘Tongues are a heavenly (or angelic) language which is spoken by my spirit to God and is incapable of being understood by humans.’** — Those accepting this interpretation would be mostly those who believe the gift of tongues is a spiritual gift present today. Some of those are very unscriptural when considered with the rest of this chapter (speaking in tongues without interpretation, tongues dominating the church service, etc) while others closely adhere to Paul’s comments to the Corinthians. An example of one who tries to remain scriptural with their tongues is Gordon Fee:

“When I pray in tongues I pray in the Spirit, but it does not benefit my mind – the implication being, as he will go on to argue in vv. 16-17, that neither does it benefit the minds of others.... Contrary to the opinion of many, spiritual edification can take place in ways other than through the cortex of the brain. Paul believed in an immediate

communing with God by means of the S/spirit that sometimes bypassed the mind; and in vv. 14-15 he argues that for his own edification he will have both. But in church he will have only what can also communicate to other believers through their minds.” [Fee, *NICNT: The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p 657, 669]

So to Gordon Fee and others, tongues is an angelic / heavenly prayer / praise language to be used in private devotion to God. When used in such a manner, the human spirit and / or the Holy Spirit communes with the Lord in prayer and praise in a language which is not understood by the speaker. While I must confess this is at least scriptural within the confines of what Paul says in chapter 14, I reject the notion that we worship outside the use of our own intellect.

● **‘Tongues are a known language which may not be understood by the speaker’** — I found this interpretation while reading B. H. Carroll and he is the only person of which I am aware who holds to this belief:

“‘If I pray in a tongue ... my understanding is unfruitful.’ I don’t know what the words mean, but if it was an exstacy that language would not be so applicable. I have no doubt that when God gave power to Balaam’s beast to speak audibly, his language was not understood by him. He spoke in a language that he himself didn’t understand.” [Carroll, *An Interpretation of the English Bible: James, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Corinthians*, p 214]

This has the added benefit of believing tongues are known human languages which is scripturally consistent. But I believe he is misunderstanding Paul’s point is in these verses. Also note B. H. Carroll is not dogmatic; he in essence ‘throws this out’ for our consideration but admits he is unsure of Paul’s meaning.

● **‘Tongues are a known language which produces no benefit in the hearers if they do not know that foreign language’** — This is the only interpretation I have comes across which in my opinion remains consistent with the rest of scripture regarding tongues yet answers the difficulties of these verses. Several agree with this interpretation:

“What is meant by saying, my understanding is unfruitful? It may mean, My understanding is not profited, gains no fruit; that is, I do not understand what I say. Though the words in themselves may have this meaning, this interpretation contradicts all those passages which teach that the speaker with tongues did understand himself. The words, therefore, must be understood to mean, *‘my understanding produces no fruit,’ i.e. it does not benefit others.* This is in accordance with all that precedes, and with the uniform use of the word, Ephesians 5:11; Titus 3:14; 2 Peter 1:8; Matthew 13:22. *Paul had, from the beginning, been urging his readers to have regard to the edification of the church, and he here says, that if he prayed in an unknown tongue, though he acted under the guidance of the Spirit, his prayer could not profit others. This interpretation is confirmed by vs. 16, 17, as remarked above, where the same idea is expressed by saying, the unlearned could not say Amen to such a prayer. By his understanding being unfruitful is therefore meant, that others did not understand what he said.*” [Charles Hodge, *Geneva Series: 1 and 2 Corinthians*, 287f]

“‘But my understanding is unfruitful’; that is, *what I say with understanding to myself is unprofitable to others, not being understood by them.*” [Gill, *Commentary on the English Bible: 1 Corinthians*]

“*[T]he sense is, ‘My feelings find utterance in prayer; my heart is engaged in devotion; my prayer will be acceptable to God, who looks upon the feelings of the heart, and I may have true enjoyment; but my understanding will be unfruitful, that is, will not profit others. What I say will not be understood by them; and of course, however much benefit I might derive from my devotions, yet they would be useless to others.’*” [Barne’s Notes on the Bible, *1 Cor*]

“*For if I pray in an unknown tongue – If my prayers are composed of sentences and sayings taken out of the prophets, etc., and in their own language – my spirit prayeth, my heart is engaged in the work, and my prayers answer all the purpose of prayers to myself; but my understanding is unfruitful to all others, because they do not understand my prayers, and I either do not or cannot interpret them.*” [Adam Clarke, *Clarke’s Commentary*]

“If I pray in an unknown tongue – The apostle, as he did at 1Cor 14:6, transfers it to himself. My spirit prayeth – By the power of the Spirit I understand the words myself. *But my understanding is unfruitful – The knowledge I have is no benefit to others.*” [John Wesley, *Wesley’s Notes on the Bible*]

“One way out of [the difficulty of these verses] has been to make ἀκαρπός [akarpós, ‘barren, unfruitful, useless’] active in meaning; thus *‘my mind produces no results for anyone’* (Williams; cf. Goodspeed, Moffett, Conzelmann).” [Fee, *1 Corinthians*, p 669]

As some remarked in the comments above, I also believe this interpretation fits within the whole framework of what Paul is saying when you add vss. 16,17:

“*For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful. 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. 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? For thou verily givest thanks well, but the other is not edified.*” — 1 Cor 14:14-17

● **THE GIFT OF TONGUES ARE FOR A SIGN FOR UNBELIEVING JEWS** — As discussed in the previous lesson, Paul quotes from the prophet Isaiah:

“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.” — 1 Cor 14:21

The Lord spoke through the prophet Isaiah to warn Israel of their upcoming judgement. In essence what the Lord was saying was that because His people refused to learn when He sent prophets speaking to them in the Jewish language, God would therefore teach them through adversity. God was sending foreigners (Assyria for the northern tribes of Israel, Babylon for the southern tribe of Judah) who would conquer and take them away. The Jews would learn but they would learn from those speaking in foreign tongues. Paul picks up on this thought and uses it as another illustration to the Corinthians as to the reason for tongues:

“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.” — 1 Cor 14:22

This is not to imply the gift of tongues is an act of judgment upon Israel; rather the focus is upon the Lord using foreign languages to reach His people when they will not be reached by their own language. In Isaiah’s day, the Lord was sending the Assyrians / Babylonians to teach His rebellious nation. In Paul’s day, since the Jews refused to hear the NT prophets such as John the Baptist, the Apostles and even the Lord Jesus Himself, the Lord sent a spiritual miracle as a sign to those unbelieving Jews. He concludes his thoughts by an illustration of an unbeliever coming into a congregation where one group is all wrapped up in themselves and showing off their own spiritual gifts while others could not understand their words, versus an unbeliever coming into a congregation where the Word of God is being preached in an understandable fashion and the listeners were all quietly hearing what the Lord has to say to them. Paul’s point is the effect upon that person in those difference scenarios:

“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? 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: 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.” — 1 Cor 14:23-25

● **INSTRUCTIONS AND CORRECTION ON THE USE OF TONGUES** — The bulk of the rest of the chapter is short admonitions concerning the proper use of their spiritual gifts of tongues and prophecy:

● **there should be no more than two or three** — *“If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three ... Let the prophets speak two or three”* — 1 Cor 14:27a, 29a

● **they must speak one at a time** — *“If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course ... For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted.... For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.”* — 1 Cor 14:27a-b, 31a, 33

● **the tongues must be interpreted, the prophecy ‘discerned’** — *“... and let one interpret.... and let the other judge.”* — 1 Cor 14:27c, 29b. The latter is the verb for ‘distinguishing between spirits’ in 1 Cor 12:10. It is probably best understood as being an example of ‘test the spirits’ to see if they are of God:

“Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.” — 1 John 4:1

Gordon Fee’s comments here are appropriate: *“At best one can argue that prophecies did not have independent authority in the church, but must always be the province of the corporate body, who in the Spirit were to determine the sense or perhaps viability of what had been said.”* [Fee, *1 Corinthians*, p 694]

● **under certain conditions, they are to keep silent** — *“But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church If any thing be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace. For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted. And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.”* — 1 Cor 14:28a, 30-32

● **concluding where he began (cp vss 2-4) – tongues speaker should speak privately to God; if properly regulated, prophecy will bring about instruction and encouragement** — *“... and let him speak to himself, and to God.... For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted.”* — 1 Cor 14:28b, 31

● **NEITHER TONGUES NOR PROPHECY IS ‘UNCONTROLLABLE ECSTASY** — Paul argues against either tongues or prophecy as being ‘out of control.’ The Holy Spirit never ‘possesses’ nor ‘overpowers’ the speaker in a fashion that what is said is not done in an orderly or intelligible way. How does that admonition compare with what is seen in many of our modern churches?

“And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.” — 1 Cor 14:32, 33

● **THE ROLE OF WOMEN WITHIN THE CONGREGATIONAL SERVICE** — These verses are again difficult, not in relation to the subject at hand but for reasons of their own, not the least of which is textual authority:

“Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame

for women to speak in the church.” — 1 Cor 14:34, 35

It would be difficult to take the ‘rule’ in a total absolute sense (‘the women must keep silence in the churches’) since Paul allows women praying and prophesying elsewhere in his letter:

“But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoreth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven.... Judge in yourselves: is it comely that a woman pray unto God uncovered?” — 1 Cor 11:5, 13

Having said that much, allow me to take the coward’s way out and continue on to other items. In my justification: the role of women within the church is strongly influenced by cultural demands, both in the Apostolic era and in our present day. How much does Paul say which in truth related solely to the circumstances of first-century Corinth? And how much of Paul’s admonitions are being re-evaluated today merely because of the pressures of our present-day liberal cultural influences? To look at those questions would require much more time than I had to prepare for this lesson and since it does not directly relate to today’s topic, I excuse myself from that conversation for the time being.

● **CONCLUSION REGARDING SPIRITUALITY** — The essential issue dividing Paul and the Corinthians was the issue of spirituality: the Corinthians insisted spirituality centered around their gift of tongues which they approached with such zeal as to create havoc within their congregational meetings. *Not only would they defend their practice but they would also call into question Paul’s spirituality for not following their mis-guided zeal.*

“What? came the word of God out from you? or came it unto you only? If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord. But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant.” — 1 Cor 14:36-38

“Paul’s response to all this has been twofold. First, they are to broaden their perspective to recognize that being Spirit people by its very nature means a great variety of gifts and ministries in the church (chap. 12). Second, the whole point of the gathered people of God is edification, the true expression of love for the saints. Whatever they do in the assembly must be both intelligible and orderly so that the whole community may be edified; thus it must reflect the character of God, which is how it is (or is to be) in all the churches of the saints (v. 33).” [Fee, 1 Corinthians, p 709]

Then in a few final words, Paul sums up what he has been saying in this chapter:

“Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues. Let all things be done decently and in order.” — 1 Cor 14:39, 40

● **PAUL’S POINT: WE MUST BE UNDERSTOOD WHEN WE SPEAK** — This chapter had great importance to the Reformers as they used this against the Church of Rome in the Roman practice of having liturgy and mass in Latin. Essentially, ‘what good is the service is no one present can speak Latin? Speak it if you want but tell them what the Latin means.’ But this also has application to ourselves as well. One such consideration is for a teacher / preacher to ‘know your audience’ and to speak to them, not ‘above’ them. B. H. Carroll gives an illustration regarding this error:

“I remember when I was very small my father, who was a preacher, was sitting on the gallery and one of our smartest Negroes, Aunt Sarah, came up and was telling about her new preacher. Father asked how she liked him. ‘O, he is fine.’ ‘What do you mean by fine?’ ‘Well, he does speak such big sounding words.’ ‘What words did he use?’ ‘Well, I remember the word “fecundity.”’ ‘Well,’ father asked, ‘do you know what that means?’ ‘O no, and I don’t care whether I does or not; it’s a mighty big word and it just thrilled me.’ Her understanding was not profited at all.” [Carroll, 1 Cor, p 219]

This does not preclude the importance of educating your audience by giving them words they may not understand. But there is a difference in ‘speaking over people’s heads’ in order to impress versus using words in the effort to stretch and expand the thinking of those attending. Another such example is when we witness to others, such as:

“If you are not converted, your soul will suffer in everlasting perdition. But God sent His Son to be a propitiation for our sins, that by repenting and trusting in His work on the cross you will be justified.”

There is absolutely nothing wrong with that witness, everything stated is 100% scriptural. The problem however lies in the fact that our culture is no longer Bible-literate and the average person today would just stare at you as if you had just spoken to them in an unknown language. So even the most orthodox of us may derive a lesson from Paul’s comments to the Corinthians: **be understood!**

~ AN INTERPRETATIVE READING OF 1 CORINTHIANS 14 ~

¹ *When you meet together as a congregation, do not think solely of yourselves but follow the way of love by considering what is best for the congregation as a whole. Desire the spiritual gifts and the use thereof, but not in a self-serving fashion where you alone are edified. Rather seek the gift of prophecy so that the congregation as a whole may benefit from your spiritual gift. ² He that has the gift of being able to speak in foreign languages is not speaking unto others within the congregation because they cannot understand the foreign language which is being spoken; God alone understands your speech since He knows all languages. Even if you are speaking great truths about the Lord and from the Lord, it is of no use to anyone else in the congregation since they are unable to understand your foreign language. ³ But if someone prophesies in the language of those attending, he then can speak to their*

edification, exhortation and comfort. ⁴ He that speaks in a foreign language by the gifts of the Holy Spirit may truly edify himself, but he that prophesies in a language known by all attending edifies the congregation as a whole, not just himself. ⁵ I am not denigrating the spiritual gift of being able to speak in foreign languages, I wish you all had the gift. But I am saying that within the congregational meeting I would rather see the gift of prophecy being used rather than the gift of foreign languages, unless someone interprets the foreign language so that all within the congregation may be edified as well as the speaker.

⁶ Even if I as an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ came to you speaking in a foreign language which you could not understand, what good would I be to you? But if I spoke to you great truths I received by revelation, or by knowledge, or by my own prophesying, or by my teachings in a language you could understand, then you would be edified. ⁷ Let me give you a few examples: even lifeless things such as a pipe or harp, how would anyone know what is being played unless they could make a distinction in the sounds and notes? ⁸ And in the military, if a bugler blows a command by means of his trumpet but no one understands the command being given, who would prepare himself for the battle? ⁹ It is the same with you: unless you speak in a language which may be understood by your hearers, how will they know what you are saying? You may as well be speaking into the air with no one present, since no one understands your words anyway. ¹⁰ There are many different languages in the world, and each of them have their own significance to those who speak that language. ¹¹ But if I do not know the language which is being spoken to me, I will be the same as a foreigner to the one that is speaking, and he too shall be as a foreigner to me since we cannot understand each other's languages. ¹² This all applies to you. It is good you are zealous of the spiritual gifts, but instead of seeking the spiritual gifts which do not provide benefit within the congregational service, you should seek those gifts which edify the congregation as a whole and not just yourself.

¹³ If you are going to speak in a language which no one understands, pray that it may be interpreted for others to be able to understand. ¹⁴ Because if I pray in a foreign language which no one else present in the congregational service understands, I may truly be praying with all my being but no one else is edified since they cannot understand the language which I am speaking. ¹⁵ What should I do then? I will pray with my entire being in worship to our Lord, but I will also pray in a manner that those listening will understand what I am saying. I will praise and sing with my entire being in worship to our Lord, but I will also praise and sing in a manner that those listening will understand what I am saying. ¹⁶ If you are praying and blessing with the spirit but are speaking in a foreign language, how can someone listening even say he agrees with your giving of thanks if he cannot understand what you are saying? ¹⁷ Oh, you may truly be giving thanks well but the one listening who does not understand your language is not edified at all.

¹⁸ Do not misunderstand me, I am not saying the gift of tongues does not have its proper uses. In fact, I thank my God that I have the spiritual gift of speaking in foreign languages more than any of you in Corinth. ¹⁹ But in the congregational meeting I would rather speak five words in a language understandable by all present that I might be able to teach others than to speak ten thousand words in a foreign language no one present understands.

²⁰ Brethren, stop thinking and acting as children. In regards to sin be as innocent as children, but think and act as adults. ²¹ In the book of Isaiah it is written, 'with men of other languages and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that they will not listen and obey me, saith the Lord.' ²² As God used foreign languages to teach His people of old, in like manner God is using the spiritual gift of foreign languages as a miraculous sign; not for those who accept the gospel since they already believe, but for those who reject the Messiah. Prophecy however is not for unbelievers but for those who already believe and come to the congregational meetings to hear from God's Word. ²³ But if the whole congregation comes together in one place and everyone is speaking in their own foreign language which no one else can understand, and someone comes into the congregational meeting who is not a Christian, won't they say you are all crazy? ²⁴ But if all of you are prophesying within the congregational meeting, sharing truths from the Lord as either revealed from His Word or by direct revelation, and someone comes into the congregational meeting who is not a Christian, will not the Holy Spirit use what is being said to convict that person of his sin? Will he not see the truth of God in your lives and come under conviction? ²⁵ The hidden secrets of his heart will be made manifest to him and coming under conviction, he will fall on his face in worship to God and confess that God is truly in and among you all.

²⁶ How is it then, brethren, that when you meet together as a congregation every one of you has your own psalm, or your own teaching from God, or your own foreign language, or your own interpretation of a foreign language? You act as if the congregational meeting centers around yourselves. When you meet together as a congregation, let everything be done for the edification of the body as a whole. ²⁷ If anyone is going to speak in a foreign language which no one else understands, let it be by two or three at the most, all taking their own turns, and only if someone is going to interpret what is being said so the entire congregation may be edified. ²⁸ If no one is going to interpret what you say in your foreign language, then remain silent in the church; use your gift to speak to yourself and to God.

²⁹ If anyone is going to prophesy, let it too be by two or three, and let the congregation test what is being said to see if the prophesy really came from the Lord. ³⁰ If the Lord gives a revelation to a prophet while another prophet is speaking, the first speaker should stop so the second speaker may give his revelation from God. ³¹ All of you may prophesy one at a time so everyone present may be able to hear, so they all may be instructed and be encouraged. ³¹ No one should speak uncontrollably because the spirits of the prophets are under the control of the prophets. ³³ Uncontrollable actions, disorder and confusion does not come from God. God gives order and peace, as in all the Christian congregations.

³⁴ Let your women keep silence in the congregational meetings, because it is not permitted for them to speak but they are commanded to be in submission as the Law says. ³⁵ If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is a disgraceful thing for a woman to speak in the congregational meeting.

³⁶ Those among you who think yourself so spiritual: did the Word of God originate with you? Are you the only person who

has ever received the Word of God? ³⁷ If anyone among you thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, then let him acknowledge that what I have written unto you are the commandments from the Lord. ³⁸ But if he refuses to accept what I am saying, then no one should listen to that person since what he is saying is in direct contradiction from the commands of God.

³⁹ Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy and do not forbid the speaking in foreign languages as long as it conforms to what I have written. ⁴⁰ But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.