

VERSES 26-27

As much as people hate restrictions, Paul gives us some restrictions for the use of the gift of tongues. Only 2 or 3 are to speak, not all at the same time, and not the entire congregation. And what we see happening today is the whole church is speaking in tongues at the same time and that is not Scriptural. Not only that but if the gift of tongues is given, then there must be another who will interpret what was said. Back then, as today, people love to draw attention to themselves, and this gift does have the potential to do that. That is why Paul was trying to set things in order, to get them to understand the proper function of the gift of tongues and the interpretation of tongues.

And once again you need to keep in mind that this was an early letter and the Bible was not completed yet. The leaders were new Christians and so they still needed to grow in the faith. Also, some feel that there were many home churches and this may relate to them. In either case, on a Sunday, someone would read a Psalm, another would teach, someone would speak in tongues and there would be an interpretation, someone may give a revelation and the problem was their selfishness, their lack of love, their desire to be heard and it caused a mess in the church. Thus, Paul says, "**Let all things be done for edification.**" If everyone is speaking at the same time there is no edification only a lot of noise! You see, the goal of coming together as a body of believers is not entertainment, it is not for ourselves, to meet our needs, but it is for the edification of the body of Christ, being built up in the Spirit by the Spirit of God and the Word of God!

VERSE 28

Here we see another restriction by Paul. Some today would say that Paul is quenching the Spirit by all these restrictions, you just need to let go and let the Spirit do whatever He wants. Not at all, that would just bring about confusion and God is not the author of confusion. In fact, when you think about it, just letting things go, do whatever you want, when things are chaotic, when there is no order, when people have moved outside the Word of God, that is what quenches what the Spirit is trying to do! And so, if there is no one to interpret, then the gift of tongues is not to be exercised.

And what we see here in these verses is that Paul is laying the ground rules for speaking in tongues. He tells us that at the most 3 people can speak in tongues during a service and then there must be the gift of interpretation also working. If not, the gift is not to be exercised.

Now here is a question some of you may have. "Why don't we see the gift of tongues in operation on Thursday evenings or Sunday mornings here at Calvary?" First of all tongues is used in our private devotions, but as I said, not exclusively! Also, think about this for a minute. As we are worshipping the Lord, singing praises unto Him, why would God interrupt the worship of Himself? During the teaching of God's Word God is speaking through me with the gift of wisdom, knowledge, teaching, prophecy and-so-on. And again, why would God interrupt Himself during the teaching? He wouldn't! During our praise, prayer and worship nights that we have on Thursday's every so often, that is when the gift of tongues and the gift of interpretation is to be in operation besides being in our own personal devotional time as I have said.

VERSES 37-38

Now what Paul says here is interesting. You might not think it fits in, but it does. You see, Paul understands that some are not going to accept what he has to say. Some may reject it and may even think that Paul is quenching the work of the Spirit by his restrictions. So Paul hits them hard by telling them that if they are really spiritual, if they are mature, then they will understand that these things are from God and not out of Paul's own heart. But for those who still want to come against him, he tells them to remain ignorant, fight with yourself because he is not going to waste his time trying to convince them otherwise. Here is the information and they needed to receive it. Paul was not politically correct, but he did make his point with them.

Yes, we can quench the Spirits work in our lives by disobeying Him, rejecting what He wants us to do. It is like throwing a bucket of water on a fire, it will be quenched. But also understand that all that He wants us to do is in accordance with the Word of God and not apart from it!

VERSES 39-40

There is nothing wrong with the gift of tongues; in fact, it is a gift that the Holy Spirit gives to us. Paul's point is simple, don't forbid tongues in a public setting, but if it is exercised, make sure there is the gift of interpretation to go with it. If not, then tongues should not be exercised in the public setting. There does need to be a balance, and Paul rightly recognizes that prophecy is the best gift to be used in a public setting.

And so as Paul closes out I Corinthians chapter 14 he sums things up for us. Tongues are not bad, there is nothing wrong with this gift but prophecy is better during a church service for the people will be edified, exhorted, comforted by the Word of God!

The interpretation of tongues is a powerful and effective tool that the Holy Spirit has given to us, may we use it properly with the gift of tongues! The gift of interpretation of tongues!

What the Bible says about . . . Gifts of the Spirit Part 10

9. INTERPRETATION OF TONGUES

Another gift of the Spirit is the interpretation of tongues as Paul tells us in I Corinthians 12:7-11. Now the Greek word that Paul uses for "**interpretation**" is HERMENEIA, (her-may-ni'-ah) from which we get our word "hermeneutics" from, which refers to the science of Scriptural interpretation.

And so, this gift of the interpretation of tongues is the supernatural ability that has been given to us by the Holy Spirit so that we may interpret tongues, a language that we don't know or understand. Now every time you speak in tongues it doesn't have to have an interpretation. The interpretation is only needed in a public setting, in fact it is required. On the other hand, in your own private devotional time, if you speak in tongues, no interpretation is required. Also, this is an interpretation, not necessarily a verbatim translation. In fact, most of the time it is a paraphrase of what was spoken for it may be very difficult to translate from that language to English.

Let me go through some verses here in I Corinthians chapter 14 as we examine this gift.

I CORINTHIANS 14

VERSES 1-2

Paul is speaking in general terms regarding tongues, that no one understands tongues unless there is someone to interpret them. Pastor Chuck tells a story that took place many years ago. About 55 or 60 people had gathered together on Pentecost Sunday to wait upon the Lord and remember what He did when he sent His Spirit upon the Church.

As they worshiped and praised the Lord a woman named Lynn stood up and began to speak in tongues, and Pastor Chuck recognized she was speaking French, although he could not make out all that she was saying. But what he understood was she was giving praise unto God. This woman was thanking God for the beautiful new song He had put into her heart as He moved her from singing in nightclubs to singing for Jesus. Pastor Chuck could understand just enough of what she was saying, but not enough to give an interpretation, which of course if he knew the language it would just be an interpretation, not the supernatural gift of interpretation.



Now Pastor Chuck's wife, who doesn't understand any French, began to interpret the message that was given in tongues. Pastor Chuck goes on to say, "A Jewish visitor from Palm Springs who was going through some marital problems had joined us that night. A friend had brought her so I could counsel her after the meeting. When the people left and we were getting ready to talk, she said 'Before we get into my problems, I would like you to explain to me why the one lady spoke to the group in French and why the other lady translated what she said.'"

"Would you believe it if I told you that neither of those ladies know French?' I asked."

"No I wouldn't' she explained."

Pastor Chuck went on to say that he has known his wife for years and she doesn't know any French and neither does the other lady. And he took her to the Scriptures showing her the gift of tongues and the interpretation of tongues.

"Well,' she said, 'that was the most beautiful French I have ever heard. It was spoken with a perfect aristocratic accent. I lived in Paris for five years and it isn't street French; it was the aristocratic form of the language. And the other lady gave a perfect translation.'"

That is the gift of tongues and the interpretation of tongues properly used in a public setting. As I have said, in a private setting you don't need the interpretation; it is your spirit communicating with God's Spirit!

VERSES 3-5

Paul's point is simple. Tongues edifies you and that is why its primary use is in private. Prophecy is beneficial to the body of Christ and thus it is used in a public setting. The only time tongues is beneficial in a public setting is when an interpretation is given, and tongues is praise, not teaching!

Does everyone speak in tongues? It would seem that Paul is saying, "No, not at all!" for he tells us, "**I wish you all spoke with tongues.**" If you do that is great, if you don't, that does not make you less spiritual, not at all. The Spirit gives to us as He wills, we can ask because it is a beautiful prayer and praise language unto God, but then it is up to the Holy Spirit to give the gift to us!

VERSE 6

Notice what Paul is saying here. If a person can't understand what is being said, then it is of no real benefit to them. Now Paul is going to give to us some illustrations to drive home his point.

VERSES 7-8

Back in those days the sound a trumpet made would call you to battle, wake you up, call you for meals, when to retreat in battle, and-so-on. Thus, it was very important that you made the right sound with the trumpet so the soldiers would know what to do. You wouldn't want to call the soldiers to battle when you want them to retreat, that would not be good! And like our language, pre-arranged sounds mean certain things to us.

VERSES 9-11

In other words, if you don't understand the language, then the words are meaningless. They make no sense and they don't help you or anyone at all. But the gift of tongues is different in that the person speaking it can be edified, drawn closer to God. Tongues can benefit you and of course God understands it for it is primarily but not exclusively praise unto Him!

VERSES 12-13

Paul is speaking here of the use of tongues in a public setting. If you exercise this gift in a public setting there needs to be someone to interpret. If not, then no other tongues should be spoken. Paul is not speaking of the use of tongues in a private setting when there does not need to be an interpretation.

VERSE 14

This really upsets our intellect. We want to figure out what we said and we try to make sense out of it. When we can't our mind tells us that these words are just made up and we try to reject what God is doing. We say that it is not real. The gift of tongues does take faith because it bypasses our intellect, we don't understand it. It also bypasses our fallen nature.

VERSE 15

There are times we don't know what to pray for and the Spirit makes intercession for us, praying in the will of God. That is what Paul said in Romans 8:26-27. But we also are to pray on our own, with understanding, so that we can know when God answers our prayers.

VERSES 16-18

Now please understand that there is nothing wrong with speaking in tongues, Paul himself spoke in tongues. But in a public setting, without an interpretation, no one is edified except you. The gift of tongues is primarily used in a private setting as we praise and thank God for all He is and all He has done.

VERSES 19-20

Again, notice Paul's focus, to build people up, and that is primarily done with the gift of prophecy. The problem in the Corinthian church was that they were self-centered and used the gifts to bring glory to themselves instead of building up the body of Christ. That is why Paul says that they are children or they are selfishly immature! In fact, Paul is telling them to grow-up, act their age, be mature, put on the mind of Christ. As you examine the life of Jesus He was others-centered instead of being self-centered! And, of course, He is a great example to follow! The gifts are not given to exalt us, but to honor and praise the Lord and build up the body of Christ. May we not forget that!

VERSES 21-25

Now there are some Scriptures that are difficult to understand and these are some of the most difficult verses to understand in the Bible, some of the hardest ones to figure out! J. B. Phillips, the famous Greek scholar, when he was translating the Greek Scriptures to English thought there was a copyist error because it didn't make sense to him. It seemed that Paul was contradicting himself. And so in verse 22 he said it was correctly translated this way, that tongues are for those who believe, to fit in with the rest of what Paul said in these verses.

I think this is hard to understand because many are trying to understand it without seeing what the Old Testament has to say about this. We saw that with the book of Revelation, that many of the things spoken of in the book of Revelation come right out of the Old Testament and if you don't approach the book that way, it can be confusing and you can come to the wrong conclusion!

Here's the thing. I don't believe there was a copyist error and I will show you why. Paul is using an Old Testament illustration from Isaiah chapter 28 to make his point. In Isaiah God is pronouncing judgment upon the Northern Kingdom of Israel by the hands of the Assyrians, and upon the Southern Kingdom of Judah by the hands of the Babylonians.

And God said that He sent them prophet after prophet who spoke to them in a language that they understood. And God was telling them through the prophets that they needed to repent and get right with God or judgment was going to come upon them.

And they refused to listen to what the prophets were saying and God was going to send them another people whose language they didn't understand, the Assyrians to the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and the Babylonians to the Southern Kingdom of Judah, and judgment would come upon them. They would speak to them in a language they did not understand!

Paul is now going to apply this illustration, but in verse 20 of I Corinthians chapter 14, before he does, listen to what he tells them, "**Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature.**" Paul is telling them not to be children, to grow up, to be mature, to understand these things. Tongues is not a sign of spiritual maturity or even that God is among you, for God used unbelievers to speak to Israel and Judah as a sign of judgment.

And thus, Paul is telling us that tongues is a sign to unbelievers in that it speaks to them of God's judgment that is coming upon them. I think Paul is speaking of people of faith who are refusing to hear what God is saying to them. You see, the prophets are speaking but they refuse to listen, and thus they are condemning themselves by rejecting Christ and what He has to say to them. Just as in Isaiah's day as they grew cold, indifferent to the Lord, I think that is who Paul is speaking of here. You see, if these were true unbelievers, then, as tongues are spoken in the hearing of unbelievers, most of the time it does not draw them to Christ, but pushes them out the door, they think you are crazy when they see this gift being exercised in front of them.

Prophecy, on the other hand, speaks to believers that God is among them, the Word of God, as it is being taught, ministers to the people.

Now the illustration may be a little confusing, it may be a little cloudy, but Paul draws his conclusion from this illustration beginning in verse 23 of I Corinthians chapter 14, when he said, "**Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those who are uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say that you are out of your mind? But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convicted by all, he is convicted by all. And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you.**" I Corinthians 14:23-25.

Here's the thought. Tongues, in general, does not minister to new believers or unbelievers. In fact many times they will think you are nuts, that you lost your mind. Therefore, in a public gathering, when you get new believers and unbelievers together, prophecy, the teaching of God's Word, is the gift that needs to be exercised. You see, prophecy cuts right to the heart as Hebrews 4:12-13 tell us. And so the idea here is that we see prophecy in a public setting and tongues in a private setting, that is the general rule.