

**I CORINTHIANS**  
**Chapter 14:12-22**

**INTRODUCTION:**

**I Corinthians chapter 14** deals exclusively with the subject of speaking in tongues. It is important to understand that when we speak of tongues we are speaking of that which was a language, and always understood by someone who heard it. The gift of tongues is never something that cannot be understood.

We are living in a day and time when there is much confusion and misunderstanding concerning the subject of speaking in tongues. However, as we read **verses 13-25**, Paul's emphasized the importance of understanding - **verses 14, 15, 16, 19, 20**. The real gift of tongues, as described by Paul, is to be understood.

**VERSE 12:**

The members of Corinth were very zealous of spiritual gifts and Paul commended them for this. But, he wanted them to profit with the gift; therefore, they should speak so as to edify the church. The people were using the gift of tongues in a way that was not profitable to the church.

The desire for spiritual gifts was good, as Paul had twice encouraged the members of the church at Corinth to desire them - **12:31, 14:1**. But, the desire must have the right motive. The gifts must never be sought after just for the purpose of self-gratification. Everything must be done for the glory of the Lord and for the edification of the church. Woe unto the person who wants an office in the church or a spiritual gift for selfish purposes!

**VERSE 13:**

Also, they should pray for the ability to interpret. This meant it was a language that did have meaning and not one that didn't have meaning and could not be interpreted by someone.

The point that Paul was making in - **verse 13** is what they were saying could not be interpreted. Paul challenged them to interpret what they had just said. In - **12:10** we saw that one of the gifts was the interpretation of tongues. If it was the true gift, it could and would have been interpreted.

There were those who interpreted the - **"unknown tongue"** as an angelic or heavenly language, a language not known to man. Yet, in every Bible example of someone speaking in tongues there was a known language being spoken.

Nowhere do you find an example of someone speaking in such a way that cannot be understood by someone. Bible tongues are always, and I repeat always, a language known to man. As well, there is always the interpretation of that language.

**VERSE 14:**

God understands all languages and can answer a prayer in what ever language it is spoken or prayed. Yet, those hearing don't know nor understand the language; therefore praying and singing will be in vain to them. We should pray, sing, and speak in the spirit, and with understanding also. If we pray, sing, or speak, and those who hear do not understand, then it is all in vain and God is not glorified. Although it is a known language to the speaker, it isn't a known language to the ones listening. Paul says that he understood within himself what he was saying, but the others didn't.

If a man were to pray publicly in a New Testament Baptist Church, it was to be done in a language that would be "fruitful to the hearers." This is the truth being taught in this verse and all who would claim a "so called truth" contrary to this interpretation would contradict this whole chapter.

**"For if I am praying in a unknown tongue, my spirit** – (the human spirit, as moved by the Holy Spirit) - **prayeth, but my understanding** – (intelligence) – **is unfruitful** – (provides no benefits and gives no fruit in the understanding those who are listening).

How could the Holy Spirit lead a man to pray in a tongue that neither the one speaking nor the one listening understood? In - **verse 4** the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write: **"He that speaketh in a tongue edifieth himself."** And the same Holy Spirit moved Paul to state again and again in this chapter that a person is NOT edified except he understands the words that are spoken!

God the Holy Spirit cannot contradict Himself! Therefore, the entire context demands the interpretation we have given of the verse.

Today's promoters of speaking in unknown tongues make much of this verse as a proof that when they speak in their unknown tongues and don't know what they are saying, they are doing exactly what - **I Corinthians 14:14** states. BUT, we have shown that this verse does not say what they say it does. The verse does NOT say my understanding is dark or blind, but - **"my understanding is unfruitful"**; that is, though I understand as I pray in my spirit, it brings forth no fruit to the benefit or good of others as they do not understand what is being said. My spirit prays, but others cannot pray with me.

#### **VERSE 15:**

When we pray there is to be –**"understanding"**. When we sing we are to - **"sing with understanding"**. The question that Paul presented to the Corinthians is, "now that I have written this to you what are you going to do about it? What conclusion is to be formed? What is the purpose of my exhortations? Have you learned anything, and if so what will be done about it? Will you be just hearers of the Word or will you be doers also?"

#### **VERSE 16:**

The word - **"unlearned"** speaks of the unskilled and no doubt spoke of those who did not have the gift of speaking in tongues. If they could not understand they could not say **"amen"** or **"give thanks."**

**"Bless"** - here means to offer praise to God. "The room of the unlearned" does not refer to a separate room, or a special part of the room as some have claimed. It simply represents a person who was unskilled or unlearned in the gift of tongues. Therefore, he had no understanding of what was being said in the language that was foreign to him.

**"Amen"** - when spoken by men in this manner, means "so let it be," or "so be it." It is here quite evident that the men in the early churches were in the habit of saying - **"Amen"** in the services. Thus, associating themselves audibly with the speaker as they were led in prayer, or in another's giving of thanks. And no doubt, this was also done as they listened to the Word of God being preached.

How sad that today saying - **"Amen"** in a Baptist church service has all but ended. **Amen** - spoken in agreement with what is being taught from God's Word is a word that was spoken in Bible times, in latter years, and will be spoken in heaven. **Revelation 5:14 - And the four beasts said, Amen. And the four and twenty elders fell down and worshipped him that liveth for ever and ever.**

**VERSE 17:**

The apostle wanted them to understand that he was not belittling the gift of speaking in tongues or foreign languages. They were indeed giving thanks to God from their hearts. However, the others in the church were not edified because they could not understand the language. Thus the gift was misused; it was worthless, for it did not edify the church. Through Paul, the Holy Spirit repeatedly emphasizes this point of edifying the church. If the Holy Spirit deemed it necessary and wise to repeat the emphasis, so should we.

**VERSE 18-19:**

Only words that are understood please God and edify those that hear. If one speaks better in a native tongue (language) to which he was born, but a language not understood by the listeners in the church, of what value is it?

Corinth was a great cosmopolitan center with many races, nationalities, and languages. If one feels he cannot express himself very well except in his native language, let him pray that he can interpret his message into the language all will understand, or be silent as - **verses 27** and **28** say.

There are two great prerequisites to witnessing for God as well as speaking or praying in public. They are the power of the Holy Spirit, and speaking to be understood or edification of the listeners.

**". . . I speak with tongues more than ye all,"** - Again, let me state that Paul shows us that he in no way despised or under-valued the gift of speaking a foreign language. Paul said, "I always spoke so people could understand what I was saying". He always emphasized the importance of the hearer being able to hear with understanding of what was being said.

Nowhere does the apostle state how many languages he could speak, but we are able to note the languages we know he spoke. He spoke Hebrew, the ancient Jewish language - **Acts 21:4**; Greek, **Acts 21:37**, and Aramaic. All his New Testament books were written in Greek. He preached in Greek everywhere. Of course, he spoke the common Aramaic language which was used at that time throughout Palestine. Probably, he spoke Latin for he was a Roman citizen - **Acts 22:25-28**. Paul was never a jabberer of some **"unknown tongue"** that people could not understand.

He had rather speak – **"five words"** in communicating Divine knowledge to the church than to speak – **"ten thousand words"** in a language they could not understand. Of what value is it if a doctrine was taught and understood by the speaker if the message which was spoken was spoken in a language the people did not understand? Paul would not stoop to the point that He would put on a display of his spiritual gifts from God and parade them before the people for his own self gratification. Such a behavior might cause people to praise him for his knowledge, but it would not be approved of by God.

This verse alone is enough to cause one to reject the "so called" modern day movement of speaking in tongues. Modern day tongues do a LOT for one's emotions, but of what value is it to the edification of the hearers. It may cause one to leave a building all excited by what went on in the "church", but what glory was given to God? What knowledge was gained by those in attendance and what knowledge did they gain from God's Word?

I am convinced and convicted that this chapter by simplicity shows us the error of the tongues movement is some religions today. Even though this verse is enough to teach us the truth concerning the gift of **"tongues"** he uses the whole chapter to leave no doubt in the mind of a person truly seeking the mind of God.

**VERSE 20:**

**"Brethren be not children in understanding:"**

Take notice that the plea is to – **“brethren”**, to those who had been saved by the grace of God. In their minds they were thinking like small children, and were behaving as children. Little children are attracted by new things, the unusual, the new, and something different. Even though the new things were of no real value, they still got the attention of small children, as well as adults with childish minds.

This was a very blunt appeal to the members of the church at Corinth. It was given to rebuke the Corinthians for their pride in making a show of their gifts. It was also a rebuke to those who enjoyed hearing foreign languages which they did not understand more than they enjoyed being taught or instructed in God's Word by which they could be edified spiritually.

There are still many adults with such childish minds or understanding in the Lord's churches today. They had much rather be teased, tickled and entertained, than to be edified spiritually by the preaching of God's holy Word which - **“is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness”** - II Timothy 3:16. How sad it is that many churches today are dying and turning away from the truth to “stuff” that makes them feel good but is of no value for spiritual growth and service for the Lord.

Paul is mainly referring to the gift of speaking in tongues which these Corinthians were so eager to have, yet when they had it they only acted like children. For the Corinthians to prefer the gift of tongues to other gifts, which were more useful and beneficial, showed a childish arrogance which the apostle discouraged.

**“howbeit in malice be ye children”** - Again, **“children”** here” are “babes” or “infants.” This is in one respect a time in which Christians may act scripturally as infants. In other things it is admirable to imitate children, and be like them. Acting like a child in their innocence and harmlessness of speaking; to be meek, modest, and humble, free from pride and vain glory; to be without guile and hypocrisy, without bitterness, envying and - **“malice”**, but tender hearted and ready to forgive. This method of being like a child is recommended by the apostle Paul.

**“But in understanding be men”** - or “perfect,” of ripe and full age, who have their senses exercised to discern between good and evil. In exercising intelligence, especially spiritual intelligence we are to be full grown men. We must mature spiritually, and manifest that spiritual maturity in dealing with other members of the church, each desiring for the other only spiritual good and profit.

#### **VERSE 21:**

Beginning in - **verse 21**, Paul emphasizes the purpose of spiritual gifts. We read - **“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.”** This was a prophesy quoted from - **Isaiah 28:11-12**. About 15 years before Isaiah gave this prophesy the northern kingdom (Israel) had been conquered and taken captive by the Assyrians. The word of the Lord was sent to the southern kingdom that the same thing would happen to them. The tongues would be a sign to them of this coming judgment.

There are several references in the New Testament that shows that the **“law”** oftentimes referred to the entire Old Testament.

**“Is it not written in your law, I said, ye are Gods?”** - **John 10:34**. This has reference to the **Psalms 82:6** and not to the law proper. Thus, the term **“law”** here again refers to the Old Testament in general.

**“The people answered Him, we have heard out of the law that Christ abideth for ever...”** - **John 12:34**. This is a truth taught generally in the Old Testament and cannot be restricted only to the law.

**“But this cometh to pass, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated me without a cause”** - **John 15:25**. This is another quotation from the **Psalms** and thus **“law”** here

cannot mean anything else other than the entire Old Testament. It is therefore clear that Paul; when using the term "**law**" while quoting from **Isaiah** is using the word "**law**" here to mean the Old Testament.

Let's look again at how the passage in **Isaiah** ties into the subject of tongues. The passage in Isaiah means that when God spoke to Israel through Isaiah and other prophets, they refused the message of rest and refreshing which God sent to them. Therefore God promises them that He would speak to them in judgment through foreign invaders using a language that would be strange and unintelligible to His rebellious people. God did this with the invasions of the Assyrians. But the messages of God through His prophets fell upon deaf ears, for the people were rebellious and refused to hear the warning.

The connection is this: God spoke to unbelieving men by giving some of the members of the early churches the ability to speak in tongues or foreign languages as a proof that the churches of the Lord Jesus Christ were indeed of God; and that the message of the churches of peace, rest, refreshing, and salvation only in Jesus Christ the Saviour was God's message of salvation by grace through Him. But, in spite of this marvelous work of God, the vast majority of the lost would not heed the message of God and would therefore die in their sins. They would ignore God's "sign" to them as Paul goes on to show.

### **VERSE 22:**

**"Wherefore tongues are for a sign"** - I am convinced that the misunderstanding surrounding the gift of tongues is the lack of understanding that tongues were primarily a sign for unbelievers. The miraculous gift of tongues was never intended for the benefit of those who have already believed, but for the instruction of unbelievers, that they might see from such a miracle that this is the work of God and receive the Gospel. In our day and time the practice of tongues is entirely focused around believers. Yet, in Bible examples and in Paul's teaching, tongues were a sign for – "**unbelievers**".

The tongues on the Day of Pentecost would have been understood by the Jewish people who understood Isaiah's prophecy that God's judgment was coming. God's judgment did come in A.D. 70 when the city of Jerusalem was captured and the Jews were forced to flee their country.

The point is this: if what was being said could not be understood, how could the unbeliever be warned of this judgment?

Since tongues ceased – **chapter 13:8**, when the New Testament was completed there remains no gift from God to speak in tongues. There is clear evidence - **13:8** that tongues ceased. Where is instruction, exhortation, or command in the New Testament for continuing to speak in tongues? It is clearly stated in **chapter 13:13**, that faith, hope, and love abides or continues forever, but where in all the New Testament is it stated that tongues or God given ability to speak in foreign languages would continue even to our day?

Furthermore, since the practice of speaking in tongues in the church is here so plainly refuted, where in the New Testament does God remove the rebuke and put His approval upon such action? Where is there undeniable proof that any child of God in our day can, without any previous knowledge of a foreign language, suddenly speak the Gospel in a foreign language?

In view of the meaning of the passage in - **Isaiah** and the Holy Spirit's application of it here in **1 Corinthians 14**, were not the tongues a sign primarily, if not entirely, to the Jews? What would be the use of tongues in the Lord's churches of today which are made up almost entirely of Gentiles?

**"But Prophesying Serveth Not For Them That Believe Not, But For Them Which Believe."**

**"Prophesying serveth not"** - more literally, "is not" for unbelievers. That is, it is not for them only as the Holy Spirit goes on to show in the verses that follow. "Prophesying" - telling forth the mind and will of God, is for the purpose of "edification, exhortation, and comfort".

***“Tongues”*** - is for the unbelievers while prophesying was for the believers. How sad that this truth is not accepted in so many “so called” churches today. While the gift of tongues have ceased the gift of prophesying continues to this day.

May God help us to understand and put into practice what the Bible says and not what man teaches to be truth. God’s is always truth and man’s opinion is just that - “man’s opinion”.

## I CORINTHIANS 14:12-22

## Work Sheet

1. What does the whole **chapter 14** deal with? Why?
2. Does the gift of tongues still exist today? Explain your answer from this lesson.
3. In this lesson Paul emphasized the importance of \_\_\_\_\_. Why?
4. The REAL gift of tongues is to be \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Whenever a man spoke in the church, the purpose was to always \_\_\_\_\_ members of the church.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ do you find an example of someone speaking in such a way that is \_\_\_\_\_ be \_\_\_\_\_ by \_\_\_\_\_.
7. Bible tongues \_\_\_\_\_, and I repeat always a \_\_\_\_\_ to man. As well, there is always the \_\_\_\_\_ of that language.
8. God understands all \_\_\_\_\_ and can answer a prayer in what ever language it is spoken or prayed. Yet, those \_\_\_\_\_ don't know nor \_\_\_\_\_ the language; therefore praying and singing will be in \_\_\_\_\_ to them.
9. When we pray there is to be –“\_\_\_\_\_”. When we sing we are to - **“sing with \_\_\_\_\_”**.
10. What question did Paul present to the Corinthians concerning his message to them?
11. What does the word - **“unlearned”** mean?
12. **“Bless”** – means what?
13. **“Amen”** means what? Is it still biblical for men to say **“amen”** in our churches today? Explain your answer.
14. Only words that are \_\_\_\_\_ please \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ those that \_\_\_\_\_.
15. Name the two great prerequisites to witnessing for God as well as speaking or praying in public.
16. When Paul spoke a message he always spoke so people could \_\_\_\_\_.
17. Name at least three languages Paul spoke.
18. How many words would Paul rather speak with understanding?
19. Modern day tongues do a LOT for one's \_\_\_\_\_, but of what value is it to the \_\_\_\_\_ of the hearers.
20. Does this chapter show the error of modern day tongues that some “so called church” practice?
21. In **verse 20** who is Paul referring to?
22. Define and explain Paul's use of the word – “children”. Explain how they were NOT to act like – **“children”** and explain how they WERE to act like – **“children”**.

23. What subject does Paul emphasize beginning with - **verse 21?**
24. What does the word - **"law"** refer to? Explain answer.
25. **"Wherefore tongues are for a sign"** – *Tongues* was primarily a sign for \_\_\_\_\_. The miraculous gift of tongues was \_\_\_\_\_ intended for the benefit of those who have \_\_\_\_\_, but for the instruction of \_\_\_\_\_.
26. In our day and time the practice of tongues is entirely focused around \_\_\_\_\_. Yet, in Bible examples and in Paul's teaching, tongues were a sign for – **"\_\_\_\_\_"**.
27. According to **I Corinthians 13:8**, what had already ceased to exist?