

First Corinthians 14:1-14

Paul is concerned about edification of the church.

The problem is that tongues are not intelligible and so unable to edify the church.

Paul is going to indicate he prefers prophecy over tongues.

The issue, though, is not **tongues** itself but instead **uninterrupted tongues**.

14:1 “Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy.”

Paul sums up chapter 13 and resumes the thought of 12:31

The following two imperatives (“follow” and “desire”) serve as a transition from chapter 13 (a comparison of love and charismata) into the real issue (non-intelligible gifts)

“**Follow the way of love**” is in the present imperative.

- The imperative mood makes it a command.
- The present tense makes it a call for continuous action

“**Eagerly desire spiritual gifts**”, also present imperative.

- indicates that the gifts God graciously gives must be pursued.
- And again, it is a command for continuous habitual action

Paul had ended chapter 12:31 by saying “eagerly desire the greater gifts”.

Now he adds “especially the gift of prophecy” which serves as a definition for or a sample of the “greater gifts.” The greater gifts are gifts that communicate and edify. The lesser gifts would be the unintelligible gifts like tongues that can not communicate or edify.

In 12:31 Paul writes:

“Eagerly desire the greater gifts” (NIV)

“ζηλουτε δε τα χαρισματα τα μειζονα”
“you desire eagerly the **gifts** greater”

In 14:1 Paul writes:

“eagerly desire spiritual gifts”

“ζηλουτε δε τα πνευματικα”
“you desire eagerly the **spirituals**”

14:2 “For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God. Indeed, no one understands him; he utters mysteries with his spirit.”

Important to decide: If tongues are a known human language supernaturally spoken then the interpreter could understand them in one of two ways. One, they could understand it because they academically knew the language. Two, they supernaturally understood a foreign language (tongues) they had never known

before. If this is the case then on the day of Pentecost the disciples were speaking different human languages that the people listening naturally understood. But, if tongues are an ecstatic speech that is not a human language then both on the day of Pentecost and in the Corinthian church no one could understand them naturally. They were not speaking a human language. If this is the case then tongues could only be understood supernaturally by the gift of interpretation. Scripture supports this second method and nowhere (not even at Pentecost) are tongues a natural language nor are they naturally understood.

“Anyone who speaks in a tongue”:

1. Does not speak to men
 - a. Tongues are not spoken to men
 - b. Tongues are then clearly not used for speaking the gospel to men
2. Speaks to God
 - a. Notice it does not say speaks **for** God
 - b. Speaking **to** God would be prayer or praise
 - c. The charismatic concept of a message given to the church through tongues is not mentioned in this verse
3. No one understands him
 - a. When it says “No one understands him” this means no man with his natural ability or language development understands the language of tongues.
 - b. Since it says “No one understands” we might assume that it does not mean “only people who know the language” will understand
4. He utters mysteries
 - a. Mysteries refers to things that have always been true but have not always been revealed to man
 - b. Mysteries are things not naturally known to man
 - c. Does God need to hear these mysteries? Verse 14:4 tells us this speaking edifies the speaker. The answer is found in 14:14, 15
5. He utters with his spirit
 - a. A distinction between the mind and the spirit will be made later
 - b. Tongues do not come from the mind or the intellect but from the spirit
 - c. Thus, once again, tongues cannot be a human language that can be learned, studied or understood by the mind.

The point of this information in context: Tongues are of no value in a congregation of people who have gathered for edification and exhortation.

14:3 “But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort.”

Official Apostles	The Twelve and the Apostle Paul
Functional (unofficial) apostles	Church planters and missionaries
Official Prophets	Communicated new revelation
Functional (unofficial) prophets	Communicated edification, exhortation, and consolation

1. **Strengthening** “οικοδομη” means “edification, building up”
 - a. This word “edification” or “building up” is a theme
 - i. 8:1 – “love builds up”
 - ii. 14:3 – here prophecy “builds up”
 - iii. Thus, prophecy in a congregation is easily aligned with love since they both “build up”
2. **Encouragement** “παρακλησις” means “exhortation, encouragement, consolation”
 - a. This word may be used by Paul to say exhort since the next word clearly speaks of consolation.
3. **Comfort** ‘παραμυθια’ means encouragement, consolation.
 - a. It is a synonym with “παρακλησις” above, but is used in the NT to describe the comfort that God provides.

Please note: There is nothing said of prophecy predicting the future. Even the OT prophets who spoke of future events where doing so primarily to provide the people of Israel with “strength”, “exhortation”, and “comfort”. The prophetic element that we use to build our eschatological frame work on was secondary.

14:4 “He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church.”

Tongues and prophecy “edifies” “οικοδιμει” (same word)

- Means “to edify” or “to build up”
- It is present indicative active which “emphasizes the continual action that which is habitual and always true.” (Linguistic Key)

Tongues even though it is not understood with the mind (14:2) builds up the speaker (14:4) in his spirit (14:14-15).

This quote misses the entire concept of “spirit” and makes it sound like a person speaking in tongues is a cheerleader at a pep rally:

“Though he himself would not comprehend the content of that praise, his feelings and emotions would be enlivened, leading to a general exhilaration and euphoria. This was not a bad thing. Paul certainly was no advocate of cold, dispassionate worship.” (Lowery, 1 Corinthians, p. 538)

14:5 “I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy. He who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may be edified.”

The point continues here: Edification of the people at a meeting of the congregation is the purpose for the assembly. Thus, the gifts that accomplish this are “greater” in this context.

Tongues are not said here to be a lesser gift over all, but a lesser gift or less productive and less beneficial when the church is gathered for exhortation.

Paul says he wishes everyone would speak in tongues. Why? So they could be edified or built-up in their spirit. Does not an edified employee do better work for the company? Does not a built-up athlete produce better results in the game for the team? It is ridiculous for some teachers to say tongues are a selfish gift based on this verse. To follow the logic then an athlete who lifts weights during the off season is only thinking of themselves and not the team. So a true team player would stop lifting weights?

14:6 “Now, brothers, if I come to you and speak in tongues, what good will I be to you, unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or word of instruction?”

14:7 “Even in the case of lifeless things that make sounds, such as the flute or harp, how will anyone know what tune is being played unless there is a distinction in the notes?”

14:8 “Again, if the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle?”

14:9 “So it is with you. Unless you speak intelligible words with your tongue, how will anyone know what you are saying? You will just be speaking into the air.”

14:10 “Undoubtedly there are all sorts of languages in the world, yet none of them is without meaning.”

14:11 “If then I do not grasp the meaning of what someone is saying, I am a foreigner to the speaker, and he is a foreigner to me.”

14:12 “So it is with you. Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church.”

First Corinthians 14:13-19 – Effect of Tongues on Assembled Believers

14:13 “For this reason anyone who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret what he says.”

Paul begins the application of the argument of unintelligible

14:14 “For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful.”

εαν γαρ προσευχωμαι γλωσση το πνευμα
if For I pray in a tongue the spirit

μου προσευχεται ο δε νους μου ακαρπος εστιν
of me prays but the mind of me unfruitful is

Notice the **mou** or the “of me” in reference to “spirit” in verse 14 compared to only “spirit” in verse 15. But, “spirit” should be kept in context with “mind” in verse 15.

“unfruitful” ακαρπος means clearly “unfruitful”

A poor comment from a commentary says concerning this verse:

“The gift of Tongues is inferior to other gifts, because in it the reason has no control; and the Apostle has misgivings about devotions in which the reason has no part. (see verse 14:19) Strange that Corinthians should need to be told that intellect is not to be ignored, but ought to be brought to full development (see verse 14:20) ‘Feeling is a precious gift; but when men parade it and give way to it, it is weakness instead of strength (Robertson)’ ” (*Driver, Plummer, Briggs in The International Critical Commentary*)

14:15

τι ουν εστιν προσευξομαι τω πνευματι
 What therefore is it I will pray with the spirit

(future middle is assertive or votive
 expressing the determined decision of Paul’s will)

προσευξομαι δε και το νοι ψαλω τω πνευματι
 I will pray and also with the mind I will sing with the spirit

ψαλω δε και τω νοι
 I will sing and also with the mind

14:16

επει εαν ευλογης εν πνευματι ο αναπληρων
 otherwise if you bless in spirit the one occupying

τον τοπον του ιδιωτου πως ερει το αμην
 the place of the uninstructed how will he say the amen

επι τη ση ευχαριστια επειδη τι λεγεις ουκ οιδεν
 at - your giving thanks since what you say not he knows

NIV “**those who do not understand**” is literally “*uninstructed*” or Greek “ιδιωτου”.

- It means “unskilled, unlearned, a layman in contrast to an expert”

“**Amen**” “αμην” was a Jewish and early Christian custom to express agreement in prayer.

First Corinthians 14:20-25 – Effect of Tongues on Unbelievers

The previous section (13-19) basically makes tongues inappropriate for public use since it is incapable of edifying in church meaning among a group of assembled believers.

Now Paul discusses the effects of tongues on the unbelievers.

This is what follows:

14:20 – an exhortation

14:21 – OT text

14:22 – Application

- Tongues a sign for unbelievers not for believers
- Prophecy a sign for believers not unbelievers

14:23 – Example of the above application of the effect of tongues on unbelievers

14:24-25 – Example of above application of effect of prophecy on unbelievers.

Notice the discussion still focuses on an assembled group of people not on tongues in private for self-edification.

Just like tongues does not edify the believer in a group setting,
So tongues does not lead an unbeliever to repentance

What occurs when tongues are used among unbelievers is a fulfillment of Isaiah 28:11-12. In that case the fact that the people in Isaiah's day did not understand the language was an indication of judgment.

14:20

- 1) Do not be children in your thinking
 - a. The Corinthians thought speaking in tongues in public was a sign they had reached the height of spirituality.
 - b. Do not be like the people (children) of Isaiah's day who rejected the word of God.
- 2) Be infants in evil
 - a. Selfish behavior, self-promotion, jealousy are areas you should be undeveloped in.
 - b. Be infants in pursuing tongues spoken in public since it does not edify the people but instead serves to draw meaningless attention to the person speaking.
- 3) Point: In your thinking be adults
 - a. Take this information and figure this out!

14:21

Isaiah 28:11-12

The "tongues" of Isaiah's day was a sign that judgment had come and the people had no idea why it was happening nor what was being said.

Paul adapts this Isaiah passage and applies it to the effect of tongues on an unbeliever.

These are the adaptations Paul makes to Isaiah 28:11-12:

1. Inverts “stammering lips” and “other tongues” to make his issue (“other tongues”) first.
2. Changes “stammering lips” to “the lips of others” which refers to the tongue talkers in Corinth.
3. Paul concludes the verse with “says the Lord” which may indicate he is using his apostolic authority to back up his teaching and his adaptations. Plus, the spiritual ones of Corinth may have been using this formula at the end of their tongues, interpretation or prophecy.
4. Replaces “and they would not hear (akouo)” the understandable words of the prophet Isaiah to “and even so they will not obey (eisakouo) me”. The change refers to the unbelievers not being able obey a message in tongues.

The point: The Assyrian language made no sense and brought no change to Israel in 721 BC. The Corinthian’s tongues do not communicate and so can bring no change to unbelievers in Paul’s day.

14:22

“so then” or “then” indicates Paul is about to make his point or application of the Isaiah verse.

The Corinthians thought tongues were “proof” or a “sign” that the Christian speaking in tongues was spiritual.

- But, Paul says, tongues are not a sign for believers because in Isaiah’s day tongues served as a “sign” to the unbelievers and the disobedient believers.
- Tongues, if they are a sign to anyone, they are a sign to unbelievers.
- And the sign they provide is a sign of judgment.
- If that is the case then during the church age tongues should not be used as a sign to unbelievers because the time of judgment has not yet come.

Point of Doctrine:

1. Tongues do not prove anything to a believer (“Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers.”)
2. Tongues are a sign of judgment on unbelievers and disobedient (Isaiah 28 and Acts 2)
3. Tongues are a sign that is not to be understood (Isaiah 28, Acts 2 and 1 Corinthians 14:23)

11:23

Here we have another indication of what an early church service would have been like.

- a. They met in homes
- b. There was general participation among the believers during the worship service (1 Cor. 11:2-16 – women and men were praying and prophesying while the church was assembled)
- c. There was a charismatic element included in this participation.

Notice the use of “all” or “everyone” is to describe speaking in tongues:

- 14:5 – “I would like every one of you to speak in tongues.”
- 14:18 – “I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you.”
- 14:23 – “If the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues. . .”
- 14:24 – in context and in contrast: “while everybody is prophesying”
- Balanced this with 12:30 – “Do all speak in tongues?” (Rhetorical answer: “No.”)

“you are out of your mind” is not the response we want to present to unbelievers or the uneducated believer.

Understand, there will be people who flock after the chaotic, emotional, super-natural atmosphere of an entire room of people speaking in tongues (etc.) but that does not mean they should nor does it mean the church should act this way to draw people. Paul did not say no one would stay. Certain people are drawn to this as is seen in cults around the world and throughout history including false churches. Paul says they would not repent indicating they could not find Christ there.

11:24

Now “**everybody is prophesying**” indicating the potential of Joel 2:28-30 and Acts 2:17-18

Not all are prophets but potentially all can prophesy.

In this case the unbeliever is “ελεγχεται” or “**he is convicted**”

- “**Convict**” means “to convict, to so present the evidence that one is driven to the conclusion that the argument is correct.”
- Present, Indicative, Passive
- This is the work of the Holy Spirit
- John 8:46 – Jesus could not be judged or convicted by the people
- Hebrews 4:12 – the word of God judges us