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1 Corinthians

What is *the conclusion* then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding. 1 Corinthians 14:15

The previous verse said, "For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful." Anytime someone prays in a foreign language, they have no change in their mental state concerning the prayer. If a person doesn't understand Latin, but knows prayers in Latin (a very common occurrence), there is no edification in uttering the prayer. They are just meaningless words which come off the tongue but which serve no actual purpose for the one praying. Nor do they serve any purpose for the one hearing if that person doesn't speak Latin.

This was the case in the Roman Catholic Church for eons. Until 1965, the Catholic Mass was completely in Latin and nobody was edified. It was a useless gesture to go to Mass in order to learn about Christ because there was nothing to learn. There were just incoherent words coming from the priest. This is still true with portions of many services and it actually serves no valid purpose according to Paul. In response to such ostentation, he asks an obvious question. "What is the *conclusion* then?"

He is asking those at Corinth (and thus us!) to think this issue through. What good at all is such a display other than to have the one making it feel good about speaking in a tongue no one understands? Or even worse, to withhold vital information from the hearer. This was the case in the Roman Catholic Church. The liturgy was intentionally kept in Latin to keep congregants in the dark as to their

spiritual needs. Instead of learning about Christ, they were kept dependent on the church. It became a dark and sinister practice of bondage.

In response to such unfruitfulness, Paul proclaims, "I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding." There needs to be a uniting of the spirit (the breath, meaning the words issued off the tongue) and the mind, or understanding. If not, then there has been only wasted effort on the part of the one praying. But continuing further, and in a point that we should not miss, he says, "I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding."

Paul, speaking in the first person, but using it as a tool to mean all people individually, includes singing along with speaking. It is an important thing he has said here to refute the doctrine of speaking in incoherent tongues, such as are heard in Charismatic churches. His words demonstrate conclusively that the "tongues" Paul is speaking about are known languages. As he combines prayer and singing in one verse which is discussing the same subject, it shows that the sounds that he has been, is, and will continue to be speaking of are known languages, not made up sounds.

Songs are written in known languages. They may not be known to the hearers, but they always have a known message by the one composing them. This was addressed by Paul earlier when speaking of the three aspects of sound - voice, distinction, and sound. Together, these are combined with words which then produce a song. It is more than unreasonable to assume that Paul means anything other than a real song which uses known words. To claim otherwise would be done so based on a presupposition which is not supported at all by his commentary in this chapter.

Life application: 才能薰陶，一個人需要說話連貫和指令的接收者可理解的語言。Paul 要求我們用陶冶和與別人建立良好的詞。讓我們努力永遠這樣做。Oh, I'm sorry. What I said is, "In order to be edified, one needs to speak coherently and in a language that the receiver of the instruction understands. Paul asks us to use words which edify and build others up. Let us endeavor to always do so."

Otherwise, if you bless with the spirit, how will he who occupies the place of the uninformed say “Amen” at your giving of thanks, since he does not understand what you say? 1 Corinthians 14:16

Paul now changes to the second person for this verse and the one following. He is not writing about his practice, but the practice of the congregants at Corinth. He is showing what he desires for those in Corinth in the surrounding verses and contrasting that with what they are actually doing.

He just made a conclusion which he desired the Corinthians to emulate. "I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding." Based on that conclusion, he shows that what they are doing in the church is contrary to it. If they do as he said, there will be understanding. Should they not follow his instruction, the result will be (otherwise) "if you bless with the spirit, how will he who occupies the place of the uninformed say 'Amen' at your giving of thanks, since he does not understand what you say?"

The "spirit" is the breath of the man; the utterance he makes. If a person prays, sings, or blesses in a language which is unknown to another, the uninformed, there will be nothing to edify him. The uninformed is a person who knows neither the language nor the meaning of the words. In other words, if the gospel is spoken in a language foreign to a person, it certainly has meaning, but not to the hearer of the words. If a prayer for relief is spoken in a foreign language, it does have meaning, but not to the hearers of the words. For the hearer, then, there is no gospel message; for the hearer, then, there is no prayer of relief; and for the hearer, then, there is no change in the mind.

But this is the purpose of words; to have an effect on the hearer. Therefore, if the person speaking, or if the person hearing, or if both the speaker and the hearer (whichever combination) cannot understand the words, there is no point in the words being spoken.

Paul's logic here perfectly demonstrates that unknown "ecstatic" or "prayer language" tongues uttered by Charismatics are false. As was noted in the commentary on verse 7, there is no language which can be unknown to God, because there is nothing that God doesn't know. There can be no words uttered with the intent of edifying Him because He knows all. But, Paul says that the words uttered by a person are to be uttered for the edification of himself or others. If the speaker utters a supposed "ecstatic" tongue which means nothing to anyone else, then it has no meaning at all; God doesn't need edification. Without understanding, there can be no "Amen." This would be contrary to the purpose of communication within the church.

Life application: Thinking through difficult issues, particularly when they have been so often misrepresented by others, is difficult. But this is what we are called to do. Think!

For you indeed give thanks well, but the other is not edified.

1 Corinthians 14:17

This verse really should be taken in conjunction with the previous one in order to understand what he is saying -

"Otherwise, if you bless with the spirit, how will he who occupies the place of the uninformed say 'Amen' at your giving of thanks, since he does not understand what you say? ¹⁷ For you indeed give thanks well, but the other is not edified."

Sure enough, if someone says the Eucharist in another language, Hebrew perhaps, he is indeed giving thanks in a good and appropriate way. God hears the words, understands them, and receives them as intended. This is a good thing in some sense. However, those who are in the congregation and don't understand Hebrew are not edified.

At the Superior Word in Sarasota, the Lord's Supper is taken every Sunday. The words of Paul, which provide the instruction for the Lord's Supper, are read aloud from 1 Corinthians 11. However, a blessing in Hebrew is pronounced over them as well. If this were all that occurred, God would have received His praise and thanks, but none in the congregation would be edified. And so the words are repeated in English for the edification of the congregation -

Baruch atah Adonai eloheynu, melekh ha'olam, ha'motzi lekhem min ha'aretz

Blessed are You O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.

Without the translation, there is no edification. With it, the congregation will, week by week, begin to understand these Hebrew words. They may even develop a desire to learn the language as well. Thus, the tongue serves a valid purpose.

Life application: In the church everything should be done with the thought of bringing edification to others.

I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all; 1 Corinthians 14:18

For most of the past seventeen verses, Paul has been speaking of coherent sounds which form understandable languages, not gobbledigoop. There is no chance then that he now departs from that in order to say something pertaining to unintelligible noises which would ecstatically roll off his tongue. To Paul, edification is the main intent of any words spoken in the church.

Understanding this, we can know that he is not referring to anything similar to the nonsense which is uttered in Charismatic churches today - ecstatic tongues, prayer languages, etc. Nor is he referring to the number of times that he speaks in foreign languages in a church. Rather, he is speaking of known languages that he has acquired, most of which the other congregants would not understand.

Paul would have known Hebrew. He would have learned it in his rabbinical training and used it in synagogues. He would have known Aramaic, the lingua franca of the land of Israel at his time. He would have known Greek, the standard language of the Roman Empire at his time. He also probably knew Latin, a language which was growing in ascendancy during his time. He was raised in Tarsus of Cilicia, and there was probably a regional dialect in that area that he grew up with. In addition to this, he was a tent maker and moved around as he shared the gospel. He probably learned many local dialects as he traveled. In all, his words in this verse are certainly true. He was a man of many languages, and for this he thanked his God. It made him a useful tool in the spreading of the most important message ever entrusted to man.

Life application: Tongues are known languages. When speaking in the church, use a tongue which is known to all.

...yet in the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that I may teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue.

1 Corinthians 14:19

Oh that people would simply read the Bible! How does the church wander into such strange and unbiblical doctrines? If we would but open the word of God and, without presuppositions, read and apply it to our lives, we wouldn't prohibit certain foods, we wouldn't mandate certain days for "Sabbath observance," and we wouldn't act childish as we applied our tongues to the wind in an incoherent manner! Paul's words in this verse are so obvious that they appear to need no commentary at all, and yet they have been so utterly ignored that commentary is needed.

He begins with "yet." This is the Greek word *alla* which indicates a contrast - "but." The contrast is in relation to what he just said - "I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all; yet..." Paul spoke many languages, but at Corinth it would be pointless for him to speak some of them. Most Corinthians probably didn't speak Aramaic. His home dialect of Tarsus would be unknown to them as well. Other than any learned Jews present, none would know Hebrew.

Despite knowing such languages, it would make no sense for him to come in and start speaking in any of them. Their "voice" would have no meaning to the people in Corinth. Without meaning, he would simply be wasting his time by speaking them. And so he tells them that "in the church," meaning whatever location the group gathered to meet - not a building, but a gathering; he says that he "would rather speak five words with my understanding, that I may teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue."

The words "five" and "ten thousand" are used in a superlative sense. It would be like the modern phrase "one in a million." In other words, he is telling them of the utter absurdity of speaking in a language that no one else understood; it is a completely pointless waste of breath. If there is no edification; the words would only be a distraction. This is the force and intent of Paul's words. How is it that churches have so far departed from what is plain, clear, and obvious? It is because the word of God, which is given for our instruction, is either completely ignored or it is selectively taken apart and divided up to meet the agenda of the reader.

What a shame! What sad consequences there will be for those who so abuse this precious gift of God. Let us not be found in such an unhappy position when we stand before Him for our rewards and losses.

Life application: There are many issues in the Bible which are difficult to understand and which result in various opinions concerning doctrine. These require a much deeper analysis in order to grasp. However there are issues which are clear and precise and which should be obvious to anyone who simply takes them at face value. The way to do this is to reject presuppositions and to allow the Lord's word to fill them with their plainly understood message. In such cases, drop all presuppositions and be a vessel prepared for pure doctrine.

Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature. 1 Corinthians 14:20

In the previous verse, Paul told the Corinthians that he would rather speak five intelligible words for edification than ten thousand in a tongue. Based on this, he tells those at Corinth (and thus us!) to "not be children in understanding." In other words, their use of tongues was self-centered, attention-seeking, and childish. There was no edification of others; there was only an immature display of "look at me." Instead of hoping for growth in others, there was only hope for fame and applause. Thus, their actions are to be considered childish.

The word translated as "understanding" is different than the word found in 1 Corinthians 14:15. Here it is the Greek word *phrén*. It is used twice in this verse and nowhere else in the New Testament. It indicates the inner parts of a person, specifically the midriff. It is where our English word for "diaphragm" comes from. As the diaphragm regulates breathing, it is an exceptional choice of wording for this particular issue of tongues. As the diaphragm regulates breath, and it is the breath which then goes on to produce sounds, Paul must have decided on *phren* as a sort of play on words, tying "understanding" in with "tongues." It denotes "reasoning power on the reflective side" rather than on the intellectual side.

In contrast to thinking like children concerning tongues when they should be thinking like adults, he says that they actually should have such an attitude in the area of malice. In malice, they should be as "babes." Because he is using malice in contradistinction to their attitude concerning tongues, it indicates that he viewed their reasoning behind the use of tongues as malicious. If edification wasn't the intent of the tongues, then there was something darker behind their use; division and one-upmanship. Paul viewed this as malicious and he is asking them to consider their ways.

In order to do this, he finishes this thought with, "but in understanding be mature." There are three categories in this verse: babes (infants), children, and the fully grown. In malice (because of their inappropriate use of tongues), Paul desires them to be as mere infants; and concerning tongues as a gift, he desires them to grow up from infancy into mature adults by seeking higher gifts. In so doing, they will be grown-up in their understanding (their *phren*). In using their diaphragms for edification rather than ostentation, they will become adult believers who are useful to the body.

Life application: Even the inner parts of our bodies should be used in a mature manner, bringing edification to others and glory to God.

In the law it is written:

“With *men of other tongues and other lips*

I will speak to this people;

And yet, for all that, they will not hear Me,”

says the Lord. 1 Corinthians 14:21

Paul now turns to Scripture itself to support his words concerning the use of tongues. He says here, "In the law it is written:" Generally, the books of the law are considered the five books of Moses, from Genesis to Deuteronomy. But in a broader sense, even though Isaiah is a part of the writings known as "the Prophets" he notes that it is a part of "the law." The reason for this is that the entire time, from the giving of the law until the establishment of the New Covenant in Christ's blood, is considered the time of the law. Thus Isaiah's writings are considered as "the law" in this wider sense.

His quote is from Isaiah 28. However, his citation is not an exact quote, but rather the imparting of the general sense of the words. Isaiah says -

"For with stammering lips and another tongue
He will speak to this people,
¹² To whom He said, 'This *is* the rest *with which*
You may cause the weary to rest,'
And, 'This *is* the refreshing';
Yet they would not hear." Isaiah 28:11, 12

Both Isaiah and Paul clearly indicate real languages spoken by real people. Further, Isaiah is specifically speaking of the coming of the Assyrians. These people were not of the covenant line and would not be speaking the tongue as a

gift of the Spirit, but rather as their normal language. In other words, Paul is once again referring to a known language which is not understood by its hearers. He is not referring to an ecstatic tongue or some type of "prayer language." Further, the Bible never speaks of, or even hints at, such concepts.

A couple other examples of what Paul is referring to can be found in Deuteronomy and Jeremiah as follows:

"The LORD will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, *as swift* as the eagle flies, a nation whose language you will not understand..."
Deuteronomy 28:49

"Behold, I will bring a nation against you from afar,
O house of Israel,' says the LORD.
'It *is* a mighty nation,
It *is* an ancient nation,
A nation whose language you do not know,
Nor can you understand what they say.'" Jeremiah 5:15

Paul's quoting of Isaiah, as well as the other OT references, show us that because the people wouldn't listen to the loving words of the Lord, which they understood, He would speak to them in harsh words by people whom they didn't understand. Paul will explain the purpose of this in the next verse.

Life application: The words of Scripture are given to the world for our edification and instruction. We have them translated into our language for this purpose and we are to apply them to our lives, not ignore them. Let us therefore cherish these precious words and let them guide our steps at all times.

Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophesying is not for unbelievers but for those who believe.

1 Corinthians 14:22

"Therefore" comes as a result of everything Paul has said to this point concerning tongues. His final note thus far, which is included in this, but to which "therefore" is not limited, was a quote from Isaiah concerning the speaking of a foreign language to the Jewish people who had refused to hear and pay heed to the word of Lord in the language that they knew. Such a tongue (a known, but foreign language) is "for a sign."

As Paul says elsewhere -

"For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom." 1 Corinthians 1:22

The Jews needed a sign and they were given that sign. It came at Pentecost and it was spoken in all the languages of those present at the time. This display was for the benefit "not to those who believe but to unbelievers." Only God could cause the words of a group of men who didn't speak the language of the hearers present to have their voices speak in a tongue they understood. It was a validation of the religion which the disciples already professed that was based on the Person and work of Jesus; the gospel that He proclaimed and which they continued to proclaim.

Therefore, churches (and there are many of them) that claim that tongues are an "initial evidence of Holy Spirit Baptism" have fundamentally misunderstood both the purpose of tongues and the sealing of the Holy Spirit. If a person is already a believer, they are sealed with the Spirit and saved. As tongues are a sign not to believers, but to unbelievers, it is obvious that the false tongues they speak are simply an ostentatious display bordering on that which is ludicrous.

Understanding the purpose of tongues, Paul next contrasts that to prophesying. He notes that as tongues are a sign to unbelievers, "prophesying is not for unbelievers but for those who believe." To prophesy is to take the word of God and explain it and declare it in a coherent, reasonable manner. If someone doesn't believe that the Bible is the word of God, then all the explanation of Scripture in the world will have no effect on the person.

Only after they have accepted that it is what it claims to be does it make any sense to proclaim it to that person. But once a person comes to believe in Christ, then they have a basis for hearing the word explained to them. They will have the desire to know Him, to learn what He commands, and to be obedient to those commands.

A sign then is a validation for something which is as yet unknown; in this case "belief." Prophesying is an edification of something which is known. If tongues are a sign in hopes of belief, then why would they be spoken in a church which is intended as a place of edification? It makes no sense. Paul will explain this in the next two verses.

Life application: The gathering together of the saints is for the edification of those saints. If unbelievers come in among them, they need to see order, not disorder. They need to see people being edified, not stupefied. Let us consider this as we gather.