

“Whether There Be Tongues, They Shall Cease”?

(1Corinthians 13:8)

This is a question that has been at the center of controversy in the Church for many years. Some say it is no controversy because they speak in tongues now. Others say tongues have long ago ceased and any tongues now are Satanic. There are still others in the middle, who may not speak in tongues, but acknowledge that the gift is now current in others. What is the truth of this issue? Some would side step the issue and would rather not talk about it at all. Others are more bold and forbid any such utterances in their midst. Which is right? Well, the Bible is right. Perhaps we can discover what the Bible says in this controversy so that we will not be *tossed about by every wind of doctrine*. Since this has nothing to do with politics, we are not concerned with the general consensus of the people. We will not try to strike a compromise with both camps to satisfy everyone. In fact, no matter what position we come to, someone will not be happy. But, that is OK. “*Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God?*” Why not let Paul answer, “*If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ*” (Gal 1:10).

We should take some time to establish some ground rules. We all approach this issue from some prejudice. If we are going to discover the Biblical view, we must put aside our biases and be as objective as is possible (I include myself as well). The word of God is “*useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness...*” (2Tim 3:16). The word can only do this for us if we allow it. We must allow the thought to enter our minds that the position we hold may need some *rebuking* or *correcting*. We must *not* allow our experiences (for or against tongues) to cause us to jump to conclusions that cannot be molded by the testimony of the Word. When and if our experiences contradict the Word of God, the Word is *always* right and we are wrong. We must allow the word to have its effect upon us by having an attitude of humility. Humility is being teachable, submitting to the authority of God and His Word. True humility seeks to *know* God through the revelation of His word. Having said that, I must seek to be as fair and accurate as possible with this subject if it is going to reflect God’s word, and not my word.

What is my goal in this discourse? Unknown to some, this is a very detailed subject. Many scriptures come into play that span from the Old Testament to the New. It is almost impossible to cover this subject in great detail in the number of pages I want to confine this discourse. Therefore, it is my intention to only introduce the concepts and principles that are found in the word of God, not to write the last word on them. Of course I will come to a conclusion, I feel, that is the *only* conclusion the Word of God forces upon us. I will not leave the issue a mystery and add to the general confusion out there. I will take a position, whether the reader agrees or not. I do not feel that I am writing something unique, for I am not the originator of these ideas. Also, I am not saying that other writers on the subject are all wrong, to the contrary, there is some good material out there and I just hope to add to the great body of truth. I realize that many

will read this only to find out what my position is, not how I arrived at it. And, if I agree with them, it is a great discourse, the gospel truth; if I disagree with them, I am the enemy of God and truth.

Can we discover the truth about tongues? Has God spoken? There are some issues that the Word of God does not cover in enough detail to fully understand. In those cases, it is not for us to know because the “*secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law*” (Deut 29:29). We do not have to occupy ourselves with an issue that the Word has not sufficiently spoken on. When it *is* written, it is for us to know and “*follow.*” Well then, can we know about this issue? “*Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant*” (1Cor 12:1). According to this verse, God definitely does want us to know about spiritual gifts of which tongues is one, and is heavily mentioned in the following verses. So then, we would expect God to reveal to us in the Word what tongues are, their true purpose and their use. God does not want us ignorant, and we should want to know as well. Are you ignorant about spiritual gifts? You need not be.

What are tongues? Tongues are simply languages. However, the gift of tongues is given by God the Holy Spirit. He gives the ability to believers to speak in a language not previously known. After searching *all* the scripture references for tongues from Genesis to Revelation, I find that tongues only refer to actual languages. Never in the Bible is there a reference to a language that is unintelligible. If I have overlooked a reference (and this is possible), I would certainly hope the reader would point it out to me. Therefore, babbling or saying any syllable that comes to mind is not speaking in tongues. There is no reference to any such thing in the Bible. Tongues are actual languages, nothing more, and nothing less. To try and make a case for anything else is to go outside of the Word. If it is not in the Word, then you are treading on dangerous ground and can possibly be deceived; so Paul reminds us “*do not go beyond what is written*” (1Cor 4:6). It is like this popular trend among some of being “slain in the Spirit.” Since this is not found anywhere in the Bible, why are people pursuing this behavior? The Holy Spirit does not knock anybody unconscious to the floor. This activity is not Biblical at all, and I reject the notion that God the Holy Spirit causes anyone to act in such a manner.

There are also some who claim they are speaking in tongues and clearly are just babbling. This is *not* speaking in tongues and whatever it is, God the Holy Spirit is not behind it. By far the greatest references to tongues are found in two books, Acts and Corinthians. In Acts, we find the testimony that the Apostles in Jerusalem did speak in tongues (languages). In Acts 2:6--11, we see when the gift first came and they were certainly speaking in *real* languages. In 1Corinthians 12, 13, and 14, we see tongues mentioned again and explained in detail. Again, we do not see tongues being anything but real languages. We also find another gift that gives us more evidence that tongues were real languages, that is, “*the interpretation of tongues*” (1Cor 12:11, 30; 14:5). Only real languages would need interpretation. 1Corinthians 14:28 says that if there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep silent. Tongues are real languages.

This point would not be complete without addressing Romans 8:26, 27 (KJV). In this passage, tongues are not in view, “*Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities; for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself (Himself) maketh intercession for us (FOR us, not in us, not through us, but He Himself, the Holy Spirit makes the intercession--for us, to the Father, on our behalf, in our place) with groanings which cannot be uttered.*” Notice that the language is said to be “*groanings*” a special language, or as it is expressed to us, a language between God the Holy Spirit and God the Father. The phrase “*which cannot be uttered,*” means that no man can speak, or which no person has the ability to speak. First, this is not tongues, and they are not even mentioned in the passage. Second, tongues are languages, real languages, that people understand. Third, the Holy Spirit Himself is the One doing the speaking, not us. Fourth, the language the Spirit uses (groanings) is not tongues spoken, why? Because the Holy Spirit gives the ability to speak in tongues, they CAN be uttered. “*And they were filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance*” (Acts 2:4). Notice *they* began to speak in tongues, and the Spirit gave them this ability. Our text says that these groanings CANNOT be uttered. The Spirit is making intercession *for us*, to God the Father.

Later in the passage in Romans 8, it says that Christ is at the right hand of God making intercession for us as well (Rom 8:34). Certainly these intercessions between the Holy Spirit and Christ to God on our behalf are not a reference to the gift of tongues. I bring up this passage in Romans because many have come to me, saying that this is praying to God in tongues. This to me is a far stretch, especially when tongues are not mentioned and the weak saint is *not* the one doing the speaking. Even though this is the case, many just grasp at the words in the text without a careful examination of them. This is not an accurate handling of the Word of Truth. What we have discovered so far is what tongues are, not their purpose or use. Therefore, from the testimony of Scripture, there is nothing that would cause us to believe that tongues are anything other than actual human languages.

The title of this discourse is posed as a question. However, the verse (1Cor 13:8) does not pose the statement about tongues ceasing as a question, but as a statement of fact. I added the question mark because of the controversy of *when* they would cease. The fact is that this verse says that tongues would cease, so there is no question that they will stop. All the gifts, including the ability to speak in other languages, are given by the Spirit, “*and he gives them to each one, just as he determines*” (1Cor 12:11). Since tongues will cease, then God the Holy Spirit will cease giving the ability to exercise the gift to believers. In other words when tongues cease, no believer will be *able* to use the gift even if they wanted to, because they have no power of themselves, and the Spirit will no longer give the power or ability to speak in tongues. How can we determine when tongues will cease? One way would be to study carefully the context of the 1 Corinthians 13 where the verse is found. But, before we study the context, we should determine the *purpose* for tongues. If we can determine the true purpose God gave tongues, then perhaps it will be easier to decide when the gift will cease. Why not take some time go over some points:

1. True humility seeks to know God through the revelation of His Word.

2. If our experience contradicts the Word, the Word is always right.
3. God does not want us to be ignorant about spiritual gifts (1Cor 12:1).
4. Therefore, we would expect God to reveal somewhere in His word the meaning, purpose and use of tongues.
5. Tongues are actual intelligible languages, nothing more and nothing less.
6. Therefore, babbling and saying anything that comes to mind is not speaking in tongues.
7. The gift of tongues which is given by God the Holy Spirit, is the Spirit giving the ability
to the speaker to speak in a language not previously know to the speaker.
8. The Holy Spirit's making intercession for us with groanings to the Father is not speaking tongues; for the Spirit is doing the speaking, not us.
9. Tongues *will* cease, our study is to focus on when.

What is the purpose God gave tongues? Having asked this question to many, I received many different answers. Why is there so much confusion about the purpose? I think it is because many look at the uses the Scriptures present, and then try to determine their purpose *from* their uses. In other words, if we only look at the scriptures that state the uses of tongues, the regulation of tongues and the reality of the gift, we will have a hard time figuring out their actual purpose. What I have done to resolve this is to let the Word speak for itself. Again, after reviewing every scripture on tongues in the Bible, I find there is only one that tells the actual purpose God gave tongues. Right in the heart of the tongues chapter (1Cor 14), we find this statement: "*In the law it is written: With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak to 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 for them that believe not; but prophecy serveth not for them that believe not, but for them which believe*" (1Cor 14:21, 22 KJV). This passage is the only one in the Word that explains what tongues are *for*. If you can find another verse that describes the purpose for tongues, please bring it to my attention. Since my search only reveals these verses, they are very important in our study of tongues. Lets look at the verses more closely:

"*In the law it is written*" (1Cor 14:21a) is a reference to Isaiah 28:11, 12, in the Old Testament. This may come as a surprise to many, but Paul is sending us back to the Old Testament for us to learn the true purpose for tongues. Now, if Paul sends us back to Isaiah 28 to explain what tongues are for, we had better understand the context. So, when we go back to Isaiah, we find the context is that God is addressing Israel through Isaiah. He is describing a very low point in Israel's history and how they had become a Nation of drunkards (Isa 28:3-8). Worse than that, the Priests and leaders had also become drunks. You see, God had warned the Nation early on, that there would be serious consequences to the Nation's disobedience (Deut 29). This whole generation had gone astray. "*Who is it he is trying to teach? To whom is he explaining his message? To children weaned from their milk, to those just taken from the breast?*" (Isa 28:9). God is discarding the entire generation and looking toward the children in the next.

Now, Israel was God's Priest Nation. Their job was to represent God to the world. God had chosen and elected them to great privilege. Through this people the Messiah

would come. Over the years, Israel failed many times and God disciplined them when they failed. Of course their greatest failure was that they did not recognize their Messiah when He finally came. God even sent a forerunner in the person of John the Baptist to warn the Nation and bring them to repentance, to be ready to welcome their Messiah. But, “*he came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him*” (John 1:12). For this they would be judged most severely. This judgment was predicted thousands of years before it would actually occur. Jesus says of this judgment, “*for this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written... There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people. They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled” (Luke 21:22--24). Notice that Jesus acknowledges that this judgment was previously written in the Old Testament scriptures. Also, notice the familiar phrase “*this people*” we saw in our text (1Cor 14:21), referring to Israel and the destruction of Jerusalem. Why are we discussing judgment and destruction anyway, our subject is tongues, right? Right, and it is Paul’s fault because he sent us back to Isaiah to understand the context for which God gave the gift.*

“*With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak to this people*” (1Cor 14:21b). **First**, who is “*this people*”? For that we need to understand that in Isaiah, God was speaking to His people, Israel. So then, in 2Corinthians 14, Paul is quoting a prophecy God made to Israel through the Prophet Isaiah about tongues. Then, *Paul* is applying this prophecy to the gift of tongues in the New Testament. According to Paul then, tongues are a prophecy fulfilled, and this prophecy is directed toward Israel or “*this people*.” When we go back to Isaiah we see it was a prophecy of judgment on Israel, who was God’s Priest Nation to the world. The Jews spoke Hebrew, and the Gentiles all around them spoke in “*other tongues*” or languages. The ironic thing is, the Jews were supposed to evangelize and be a light to the Gentiles, but they were in such a state of apostasy that God turned the tables. They, Israel, would be the ones needing the evangelizing. **Second**, the context of Isaiah 28 speaks of a judgment. “*...The Lord, the LORD Almighty, has told me of the destruction decreed against the whole land” (Isa 28:22). There were judgments in Israel’s history since this prophecy, but we will look further into the context of Isaiah and he will tell us exactly when this judgment would occur. Also, we will see that this is the same judgment spoken of by our Lord in Luke 21:22—24. This is going to be very important in our study of tongues because Paul is pointing out the true purpose for tongues from the standpoint of Isaiah 28. **Third**, we know now that “*this people*” refers to Israel. Therefore, God is speaking to Israel in “*other tongues*” or languages to tell them something. So then, tongues are directed toward Israel.*

“*And yet for all that, they will not hear me saith the Lord*” (1Cor 14:21c), is the next phrase. For all that, even though God speaks to His people Israel in other languages, they will not hear, they will not listen. We see that since they will not listen, there is a *destruction decreed* on Israel and it is proper that they would of course be warned. The way God chose to warn them was to speak to them in *other tongues* or Gentile languages. Even though this happens, just as God said through Isaiah about 700 years earlier, Israel still will not heed the warning.

Wherefore, tongues are for a sign” (1Cor 14:22a). The “*wherefore*” Paul uses here is very important. With this connective word in the Greek (HOSTE), he links verse 21 with verse 22. So, what Paul is saying is, because of verse 21, therefore verse 22. Wherefore means literally, because of this, or, for this reason. In other words, since Israel was in a state of apostasy, God would use tongues to try and reach them. But, they would not listen to God and repent and receive their Messiah, so it follows, they will definitely receive the destruction decreed. Wherefore, because of that, for this reason, tongues are for a sign--a warning by God to unbelieving Israel says Paul. Even though many get saved through the gift, its true purpose is a warning that goes unheeded by National Israel.

“*Not to them that believe, but for them which believe not*” (1Cor 14:22b). Tongues then, are a warning to unbelieving Israel, and they are not directed to those Jews who have heeded the warning and have believed in Christ. Paul is in context explaining about how tongues should be used in public worship. Since the Corinthians were abusing the gift, Paul reminds them of the reason God gave the gift. He doesn’t spend much time on it, he simply mentions it to remind them of their true purpose. Paul probably had taught this to them in detail already, but since the Corinthians had so many problems; they probably just needed some reminding.

Now we need to see more specifically - *who* in Israel is tongues message of warning directed? In Isaiah 28:14-29, the Word says, “*Therefore hear the word of the Lord, you scoffers who rule this people* (note the warning is to the leaders). *You boast, We have entered into a covenant with death, with the grave we have made an agreement* (they thought they were so favored by God that nothing could harm them). *When the overwhelming scourge sweeps by, it cannot touch us, for we have made a lie our refuge and falsehood our hiding place. So this is what the Sovereign Lord says: See I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious corner stone* (Now, we discover that the time of this prophecy is fixed because we know for sure who this corner stone is--Jesus Christ, see 1Peter 2:4-8; 1Cor 3:11) *for a sure foundation; the one who trusts will never be dismayed. I will make justice the measuring line* (God will only accept the righteousness of His Son, and whoever does not measure up will perish) *and righteousness the plum line...*” Please read to the end of the chapter. Here we understand that Isaiah was talking about the time when the Messiah would come and present himself to His people, and how they would reject Him. Then the chapter goes on to say they would *certainly* be judged. This judgment where God judges His own people, Israel, is called “*his strange work*” (Isa 28:21 also 10:12).

Now in the New Testament, Jesus continues this same rebuke to the leaders of Israel at Jerusalem in His scathing remarks in the form of Seven Woes, see Matthew 23. Take time and read the rebukes from the Lord directed toward the “*teachers of the law and Pharisees.*” The first display of tongues was in Jerusalem at the time of Pentecost to the Jews assembled there (see Acts 2:5, 22). The Apostle Peter understood this judgment was coming and preached earnestly, “*With many other words he warned them; and pleaded with them, Save yourselves from this corrupt generation*” (Acts 2:40). That warning started with tongues. Perhaps Peter remembered the Lord’s words on the mount: “*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how*

*often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing” (Matt 23:37). We see now that God gave tongues to warn Israel of a judgment to come. We can also see in this warning grace before judgment, for many heeded the warning and escaped the destruction to come. Luke says that in one day, three thousand were saved (Acts 2:41); but this was not enough to turn aside the wrath of God from the *destruction decreed*. Lets summarize some points:*

1. After a careful search of the all the Scriptures pertaining to tongues, we find many passages explaining the function, the reality, the results of tongues. But, we find only one stating the purpose for tongues (1Cor 14:21, 22).
2. Therefore, any attempt to identify the meaning, purpose and use of tongues without an understanding 1Corinthians 14:21, 22 and their related verses would be futile; and would not yield the full understanding God intended for us to have.
3. From the context of 1Cor. 14 and Isaiah 28, we find that tongues are directed toward *“this people”* or Israel and especially the leaders.
4. Even though God uses Gentile languages to evangelize wayward Israel, just as the Scripture says, *“yet for all that, will they not hear me saith the Lord”* (1Cor 14:21).
5. Since Israel would not listen, we would expect God to follow through with judgment.
6. Many Old Testament prophets including our Lord Jesus Christ predicted this judgment to come and therefore, it was certain (Isa 28; Luke 21; Matt 23, 24).
7. The crucifixion of Jesus Christ sealed the fate of Jerusalem even though God continued to warn of that destruction for many years to come.
8. Tongues then, are for a warning, not to those Jews who are believers in Christ, but to unbelieving Israel.
9. The true purpose of tongues is not what is commonly accepted--evangelism, but a warning to unbelieving leaders in Israel (see Isa 28:14). That is why the Scripture says *“...but even then (even though they have been warned through the gift of tongues) they will not listen to me says the Lord.”*

Now that we have the understood the meaning and purpose of tongues, we should have enough information to determine if tongues have ceased, or if they are still valid for today. If you have been following along closely, you may have already figured it out. Since we have discovered the purpose for tongues, we can now easily determine if they have or have not fulfilled their purpose. So, since tongues (according to Paul) were given by God to warn Israel of an impending destruction; and since Israel *“will not listen”* to God and repent and receive their Messiah, they will most certainly receive that judgment. It is a matter of history that Jerusalem was destroyed in AD 70 by Titus. The destruction came just as Jesus had prophesied, and it was horrible! It is very interesting to note the words of the Roman, Titus, who lead the siege against Jerusalem. He is quoted by Josephus a Jewish historian, born about AD 37, as saying: *“We have certainly had God for our assistant in this war, and it was no other than God who ejected the Jews out of these fortifications; for what could the hands of men or any machines do toward overthrowing these towers!”* The Works of Josephus p.748. Also on page 749, he describes that about 97,000 were carried away as captives (slaves), and the total number of Jews that perished was 2,700,000. The destruction was as dreadful as predicted by the

prophets, *“The understanding of this message will bring sheer terror”* (Isa 28:19). Just as Jesus predicted, *“not one stone shall be left on another; every one shall be thrown down”* (Matt 24:2). Jerusalem was totally demolished by the Roman soldiers who were trying to recover the gold used in the buildings.

As devastating as the destruction was, those that heeded the warnings were spared. Now that Jerusalem was destroyed, and all the Scriptures fulfilled, there is no longer any need to warn Israel. Therefore, God would no longer need to give the gift of tongues to *“speak to this people.”* When did tongues cease? August of AD 70, when what they were warning about finally came to pass *“in fulfillment of all that had been written”* (Luke 21:22). This may be hard for some to believe, but I did not originate this, it is found in the Word of God. From the Word of God we discovered the true purpose for the gift of tongues and found that now they have no useful purpose. God is not the author of confusion. Therefore, God would not continue to give the gift of tongues because Jerusalem was destroyed and the purpose of that gift was to warn of that destruction. Of course if we disregard the Scripture, we can come up with any purpose we want for speaking in tongues. But, we don't have the freedom to assign a purpose for tongues that is not revealed in the Word, for we are commanded, *“Do not go beyond what is written”* (1Cor 4:6). The real question now becomes, since God the Holy Spirit has not given the ability to believers to warn Israel in Gentile languages since AD 70, what is this phenomenon in many churches today they call tongues?

The reason the Apostle Paul had to explain the spiritual gifts is because of the confusion in the Corinthian church. Their worship services had become chaos and disorder. There was jealousy and quarreling, striving and bullying, arrogance, impatience and self seeking running rampant in their of worship. If you look throughout the two books Paul wrote to this Church, you will find these problems and more. *“What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church”* (1Cor 14:26). What a mess this must have been, everybody jumping up speaking at the same time, some singing, some teaching, some speaking Gentile languages not known to anyone in attendance. Paul was not trying to hinder the ministry of the Spirit, *“But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way”* (1Cor 14:40). So he attempts to lay down rules for the regulation of and use of the gifts (1Cor 14:27-39). Earlier in Chapter 12, Paul identifies some of the gifts and their source (1Cor 12:1-11). Then, he emphasizes their importance and usefulness to the body as a whole. Also, that there is not any choice in who gets which gift, for God the Holy Spirit *“gives them to each one, just as he determines”* (1Cor 12:11). Therefore, we are to leave who gets which gift to the wisdom of God. Each gift is equally important to the body of Christ, just as each body part is equally important to the body (1Cor 12:14-21). Because the Corinthians were ecstatic about certain gifts they considered spectacular, and indifferent to ones they considered insignificant, many developed superiority and inferiority complexes (1Cor 14:21-27). Paul said this should not be, *“but that its parts should have equal concern for each other”* (1Cor 14:25). Paul then summarizes by saying that everyone will not have any gift they want, and certainly it would not make sense for everyone to have the same gifts. The gifts are used *for* the body, and each one with a gift is to understand that they are an important part of the body even if their gift is

not visible or considered spectacular. They were to see themselves as one body, and “*eagerly desire the greater gifts*” (verse 31) to be used or displayed when they came together for worship. They were not to be overly impressed with what they considered spiritual and spectacular.

Can tongues be used for self edification? We already discovered the purpose for tongues, and to properly answer this question we need to go to the verses where it is mentioned. In 1Cor 14:2 we read “*For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue* (the word “*unknown*” is not found in the Greek text. It was added by the translators, they say for clarity. It does not refer to some prayer language, or mysterious language.) *speaketh not unto men, but unto God* (here the person is speaking in a tongue or language that is not known to anyone in the worship service. No one understands him, but God does, for He knows all the languages.): *For no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries.*” We see here in this setting great confusion. Speaking in languages that are not known sounds like gibberish, but not to God, although obviously it is a spiritual exercise, it is of no value in the church.

Verse 3, “*But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort.*” When a person prophecies (foretelling and forth telling), this is what builds up those in the church, why? People can understand what is being said, this is the point.

Verse 4: “*He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself* (this is a play on words and I believe is sarcasm. The purpose for speaking in a church service is to bring edification, exhortation and comfort, not to self, but for others. Speaking in a language that no one understands fails in every respect to accomplish that purpose. The scriptures are clear that spiritual gifts were never designed to build up self, see 1Cor 12:7; 1Pet 4:10; 1Cor 10:24. Now, the person may be exercising his spiritual gift, but to no end. The only edification he could possibly receive is knowing that he is exercising a spiritual gift, but that is no edification at all. The purpose for tongues is not self edification, anyway he is really not edified at all, and we will see why later.); *but he that prophesieth edifieth the church.*” Now the church is edified or built up. Since the goal is to edify the church, which gift do you think accomplished God's purpose?

Verse 5: “*I would that ye all spake with tongues* (everyone did not have the gift of tongues, but because of their confusion and spiritual ignorance, everybody lusted after the gift. Paul recognizes this and does not want to hinder it but, regulate it, put it in its proper place, and dispel the ignorance about it.), *but rather that ye prophesied: for greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues* (the gift of prophecy is greater than tongues, although tongues to them seemed more spectacular), *except he interpret that the church may receive edifying.*” If the language can be interpreted than it can be of use for building up the church, for then those in the audience will understand what is said. But this is clumsy, believers have to hear a language they don't understand, and then it is interpreted for them and they say “Oh, I see.” Prophecy is better, or greater since they can hear and simply understand. Keep in mind, the key to edification is *understanding!* Not everyone has the gift of prophecy or tongues for the Spirit gives them or distributes them just as He wills and as it pleases Him (see 1Cor 12)

Verse 6: *Now brethren, if I come unto you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you* (No profit! Tongues fail in the area of communication if no one understands the language spoken. Even when they are used by the Apostle.), *except I shall speak to you either by revelation, or by knowledge, or by prophesying, or by doctrine?*” Paul says that if they are going to be edified or profited, they will have to understand what is being said. Of all the methods of communicating doctrine, tongues fail, where the others succeed. The Corinthian church really did not care about edification, but only what they considered to be spectacular.

Verses 7 through 12 are self explanatory and illustrate what we just went over, please take time now to read them. Let us go on to verse 13: “*Wherefore* (because of that, for this reason) *let him that speaketh in an unknown tongue pray that he interpret.*” Why? Not to hinder speaking in tongues, which at this time was a legitimate spiritual gift, but to avoid confusion, and to accomplish edification, pray that what is said may be interpreted.

Verse 14: “*For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth but my understanding is unfruitful.*” This *must* refer to public prayer because of the context and verse 16 as a response to prayer and singing. Here is where in verse 4, I said that edification of self by speaking in a tongue that no one understands is a play on words or sarcasm. The person speaking does not understand what he himself is saying, how can he be edified? If there is no understanding, there is no edification! Unfruitful, means that there is no good, no useful purpose in praying in tongues, even to the person! There is not some special prayer language that is edifying, or some mysterious heavenly language that is edifying. If the person speaking the tongues doesn't understand, it is unfruitful, useless, unproductive, unprofitable and not edifying to that person! There is absolutely no evidence in Scripture to validate something other than tongues being actual languages. The evidence everywhere we look says that it is an intelligible language. Praying in an unknown tongue was simply of no value to anybody even when tongues were legitimate.

Verse 15: “*What is it then?* (or literally, Then what am I to do?, or So what shall I do? or So what is to be done?) *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.*” Here we have it, if we are going to pray or sing, we must do so with the spirit or by means of the filling of the Holy Spirit, who is within us. And ALSO, with the understanding, and NOT in tongues! To resolve the problem of communication, we should not pray and sing in tongues, but in a language that is understood. That is what we should do concludes Paul.

Verse 16: “*Else, when thou shalt bless with the spirit* (clearly a reference to someone attempting to pray in tongues not known to the hearers) *how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say Amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest?*” Good point Paul! No comment from me on this one.

Verse 17: “*For thou verily givest thanks well, but the other is not edified.*” You may have done a fantastic job giving thanks and praising God, but it is of no benefit, no one got the point, not even the person praying (Vs 14). Again divine sarcasm, just like giving all your goods to feed the poor, without love it means nothing.

Verse 18 - 19, are pertinent to establish the truths already illustrated. One point is that Paul spoke in tongues more than all of them, but he was clear on the true purpose of tongues. Therefore, he would rather speak five words in language understood by the hearers, then ten thousand words in a tongue not known to the hearers. The Corinthians were the opposite; they would rather hear ten thousand words in languages they don't understand and be impressed with what they consider a spectacular spiritual gift, than hear five intelligible words they could grow by. Talk about wrong priorities!

Verse 20: "*Brethren, be not children in understanding* (in context, being children is craving tongues when they have no value as a means of communication. Or, using tongues in a way God never intended. I did not forget that tongues can be interpreted and then have value for edification, neither did Paul for he regulates tongues in verses 27, 28) *howbeit in malice be ye children* (in regard to evil be infants, *note*, using tongues the wrong way is getting into evil!), *but in understanding be men.*" In your thinking be mature or adults is the exhortation. How can we be adults or mature in our thinking with regard to the role of tongues? We can be mature by our understanding of the true purpose for tongues. By this we can dispel the false issues and uses of tongues and place them in their proper perspective. We are right back to where we started, verse 21, and 22, where Paul gives the true purpose for tongues. It is important to note the context of 1Corinthians 12-14, because public worship is the issue. Private prayer or private worship is not mentioned. Once someone told me that they pray in tongues in their prayer life. I explained to them that if he was depending on those verses (1Cor 12-14) to support that practice, he was taking them out of context. I find many scriptures on prayer in the Bible, but none exhorting us to pray in tongues, in fact, we found the opposite in the verses we just covered.

Well, this study would not be complete without covering 1Corinthians 13. The ironic thing is, that many say the evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit is speaking in tongues. The true evidence is the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22). Jesus said, "*By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another*" (John 13:35 cf. Rom 5:5). The Scripture never says anywhere that the evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit is speaking in tongues. Everyone in Acts who was saved did not speak in tongues, read through and see for yourself. Some in the Corinthian church spoke in tongues, yet lacked the virtues love provides. They were occupied with the wrong things and Paul wanted to show them the "*most excellent way*" (1Cor 12:31). Paul goes to great extremes to illustrate that no matter how spectacular you or others think your spiritual gift is, if you do not have love, you are nothing (1Cor 13:1-3). One quick note, Paul is not saying he did all those things, he is saying that even if he did them, without love, he is nothing. He is exaggerating the point to show that without a doubt, love is the basis for the spiritual life, and not the flamboyant display of spiritual gifts. There are four gifts mentioned in verses 1-3: tongues, faith (1Cor 12:9), prophecy, and knowledge (1Cor 12:8). The next verses describe love from the standpoint of the problems that existed in the Church. We can look at these verses and see that they were impatient, unkind, envious, boastful, rude, self-seeking, easily angered and delighting in evil (1Cor 13:4-7). Even though they were zealous for spiritual gifts, this is how they would treat their brothers and sisters in Christ.

Paul needed to let them know what a true demonstration of the power of the Spirit was like.

“Love never fails (If you want to crave something, let it be something that is permanent). But where there are prophecies (a reference to people exercising the gift of prophecy) they will cease, whether there are tongues, they will be stilled, where there is knowledge (a reference to the gift of knowledge) it will pass away” (1Cor 13:8). Here we must be ever mindful of the context. After noting that love is permanent, Paul goes on to state what is temporary and therefore *not* something to be occupied with.

“For we know in part and we prophesy in part (the gifts of knowledge and prophecy are in part, or fragmentary, incomplete, temporary), but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears” (verses 9, 10). If God gives these gifts and they are temporary, incomplete and imperfect, then there must be something better that will supersede them. The *“perfection”* refers to a perfect thing, not a perfect person. It should be translated *“completed.”* So, according to the Greek, this is not a reference to the coming of Jesus Christ. Also, the completed is in contrast to that which is temporary or imperfect. Since the gifts of knowledge and prophecy were used mainly to give the Church new revelation and direction from God, being temporary they look toward the complete revelation to the Church, or the *completed* Canon of Scripture. The Church was new and its doctrines were new, in fact, the Church and all the doctrines pertaining to it are called a *“mystery”* (see Eph 3:2-11), because they were not revealed in the Old Testament. With the assimilation of the Gentiles, and the Jews clamoring to go back to the Mosaic Law, they needed guidance and direction. There was nothing in writing to refer to, so God gave these temporary gifts to guide the Church in those tough times of its infancy. Note, tongues are not mentioned in verse 9 or 10, because their ceasing does not have anything to do with the completed Canon of Scripture. It is fitting that they should not be mentioned in verses 9 and 10, because we found already that they ceased in AD 70, *before* the last New Testament book was written. They are mentioned rightly in verse 8, because they were pre-occupied with tongues, just as the others.

“When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me” (verse 11). The next two verses are analogies to what Paul has just brought out in verses 8, 9, 10, therefore we must look at them in context, not arrive at a totally different understanding for them. Being childish is focusing on these spiritual gifts, without understanding their purpose and temporary nature. Similar to Israel’s pre-occupation with their traditions so much, that when the living Word came, they did not recognize Him (John 5:39). The Corinthians were so occupied with signs, wonders and spiritual gifts, they were in danger of missing out on the importance of the written Word. A child talks, thinks and reasons from a standpoint of ignorance and inexperience. Becoming an adult, is acting responsibly according to true knowledge and experience. Childish ways in context is running after temporary spiritual gifts without an understanding of their proper perspective. Becoming a man is to think in terms of the truth about spiritual gifts just as we saw in 1Corinthians 14:20. Putting childish ways behind us, is for us not to be ignorant about spiritual gifts (1Cor 12:1).

“Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known” (verse 12). Again, we

must not leave the context and adopt a separate meaning for this verse. Eternity is not in the context at all. Seeing a poor reflection means they did not have the full revelation of God to the Church. They only had that which is imperfect, incomplete, the temporary gifts. The mirror or glass represent God's revelation to us, or His Word which at the time was incomplete (see also 2Cor 3:18; James 1:23). The "then" in context is a reference to the time when the completed is come, the time when that which is incomplete is done away, the time childish ways are put behind. It is not a reference to eternity for that is not the issue; and it is not anywhere in the context. What you hold in your hand (the Bible) is the complete revelation of God to man, for all ages. Nothing need be added to it or taken from it (Jude 3; Rev 22:18, 19). Seeing face to face is understanding fully God's will, purpose and plan for the ages, the complete revelation of God to man. Knowing in part and then coming to know fully, refer again to God's incomplete knowledge to the Church in its infancy period of transition. Full or complete revelation is needed if we will "*reach unity in faith (doctrine) and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work*" (Eph 4:13-16). These verses are not referring to eternity but now. These things are attainable through the full revelation of God.

"And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love" (1Cor 13:13). Here again, we see that there is something that remains, not referring to remaining in eternity, but remains throughout the Church age; as contrasted with tongues ceasing in AD 70; Prophecy and knowledge ending with the completion and circulation of the Canon of Scripture. *Faith* here is not the gift mentioned earlier, but simple dependence, trust in God and His provisions. *Hope* is the confident expectation that we will receive from God, what we do not now have (see Rom 8:24, 25). *Love* is the manifestation of the Holy Spirit producing in us the Spiritual life. These are the things we should be focusing on and not carried away with the false use of spiritual gifts.

"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hosea 4:6). This was a problem for Israel, and it continues in the Church age. It was not that Israel did not have the knowledge, but if we keep reading the text, we find they "*rejected knowledge.*" How can we avoid repeating the same failures? Remember, humility is submission to God and the authority of His Word. If we can do that we will be fine. We must not let our religious training come to supersede the revelation of His Word. We must keep a humble attitude about our opinions and be ready to adjust our thinking to the Word. Today, there is a cavalier attitude toward the Word of God. There are so many voices trying to gain our attention. Who is right? God's Word will always be the answer to that question. Many in the Church have adopted practices and forms of worship that are not even mentioned in the Word of God. They have absolutely no Biblical basis for their clinging to them, and when it is pointed out to them, it doesn't seem to bother them. We should not be afraid to be wrong, I don't have all the answers, but I am ready and willing to learn. We

need to ask ourselves if the doctrines we hold can be supported from Scripture. I don't mean that we can find the words for what we believe in the Scripture, but truly ask ourselves, is this what the Word teaches?

Certainly I have not covered this subject in all the detail it deserves. That was not my goal, but it was to only introduce this subject to those concerned. If you have read this far, you are certainly interested and can use this as a launching pad for further study. There are so many issues surrounding tongues I could not address them all. Could I be wrong about tongues? Perhaps, but what I presented is the Scripture. If I am wrong, please point it out to me. Please do not just dismiss this as false doctrine without showing where I twisted or wrenched the verses mentioned out of context. Hopefully the goal was accomplished and I have shed some light on this controversial subject. I have taken a position and I believe it is in line with the Word. The more we study the infinite Word of God, the more we learn of Him. The most important thing we have in this life is the Word. I pray that it is handled accurately, not neglected and certainly not rejected. I hope I have not offended anyone who may have been on the other side of this issue. It was my intention to speak the truth in love. We need to study to show ourselves approved of God, workman that need not be ashamed, correctly handling the Word of Truth (2Tim 2:15). If we would spend more time doing that, we would *"always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give a reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect. Keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander"* (1Peter 3:15, 16).

Douglas E. Presley

01-31-97