

THE CONFUSION OF TONGUES USAGE

INTRODUCTION

- In two main passages, the Apostle Paul lists the separate spiritual gifts: Romans 12:6-8 and 1 Corinthians 12:8-10....These lists are exhaustive — i.e. all spiritual gifts fit in these lists

Romans 12:6-8 ~ Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

1 Corinthians 12:8-10 ~ For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues.

- These gifts fall into 2 general types: speaking gifts and serving gifts

1 Peter 4:11 ~ Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

- We understand that some of these gifts were temporary and some are permanent:
 - Permanent Gifts
 - Speaking: Wisdom (1 Cor 12:8), Knowledge (1 Cor 12:8), Prophecy - the forthtelling aspect not the foretelling aspect (1 Cor 12:10; Rom 12:6), Teaching (Rom 12:7), Exhortation (Rom 12:8)
 - Serving: Faith (1 Cor 12:9), Discerning of Spirits (1 Cor 12:10), Helps/Service (1 Cor 12:28; Rom 12:7), Giving (Rom 12:8), Leadership (Rom 12:8), Mercy (Rom 12:8)
 - Temporary Gifts
 - Speaking: Tongues (1 Cor 12:10), Interpretation of Tongues (1 Cor 12:10)
 - Serving: Healings (1 Cor 12:9), Miracles (1 Cor 12:20)

1 CORINTHIANS 14

- The key to interpreting this passage is understanding that the singular word “tongue” refers to the counterfeit use of tongues and the plural word “tongues” refers to the genuine use of this gift as a known language (this is because there can’t be plural kinds of gibberish, but there can be a plurality of languages)
- The singular “tongue” is used in vs. 2, 4, 13, 14, 19; the plural is used in vs. 5, 6, 18, 22, 23, 29 (the only exception to this is in vs. 27-28 where the singular is used of the proper gift expressed by an individual)

The Superiority of Prophecy Over Tongues (vs. 1-19)

1 Cor 14:2-4 ~ For one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God; for no one understands, but in *his* spirit he speaks mysteries. But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation. One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; but one who prophesies edifies the church.

- The singular “tongue” here indicates this is referring to the counterfeit use of tongues; the result is that “no one understands”
- In contrast, the person who prophesies (speaks forth God’s truth) edifies the body, which is what all spiritual gifts do...they build up the body rather than self

1 Cor 14:5 ~ Now I wish that you all spoke in tongues, but *even* more that you would prophesy; and greater is one who prophesies than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may receive edifying

- Here the plural “tongues” refers to the proper use of tongues as known languages
- Paul is not suggesting that he really wants everyone to have the gift of tongues, but rather that, if they are going to clamor for gifts (which they shouldn’t do in the first place – see 1 Cor 12:11), they should at least desire the gifts that would edify the body (prophecy)

1 Cor 14:6-9 ~ But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking in tongues, what will I profit you unless I speak to you either by way of revelation or of knowledge or of prophecy or of teaching? Yet *even* lifeless things, either flute or harp, in producing a sound, if they do not produce a distinction in the tones, how will it be known what is played on the flute or on the harp? For if the bugle produces an indistinct sound, who will prepare himself for battle? So also you, unless you utter by the tongue speech that is clear, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air.

- Again, Paul affirms that even if they speak in known languages, it will not benefit the church unless it is interpreted
- He illustrates that truth by showing that even musical instruments are expected to make sensible sounds

1 Cor 14:10-12 ~ There are, perhaps, a great many kinds of languages in the world, and no *kind* is without meaning. If then I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be to the one who speaks a barbarian, and the one who speaks will be a barbarian to me. So also you, since you are zealous of spiritual *gifts*, seek to abound for the edification of the church.

- Paul continues to urge the proper use of the gift of tongues by showing that all language exists to communicate sensibly, not result in confusion
- So, their desire ought to be the edification of the church through the proper use of tongues rather than the counterfeit gibberish

1 Cor 14:13-17 ~ Therefore let one who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret. For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. What is *the outcome* then? I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also; I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also. Otherwise if you bless in the spirit *only*, how will the one who fills the place of the ungifted say the “Amen” at your giving of thanks, since he does not know what you are saying? For you are giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not edified

- Notice the singular “tongue” again...referring to the counterfeit form
- He shows the foolishness of speaking in unintelligible speech because it won’t be understood by those who listen...they cannot comprehend with their minds what is said...thus, how can they say “amen” in response?

1 Cor 14:18-19 ~ I thank God, I speak in tongues more than you all; however, in the church I desire to speak five words with my mind so that I may instruct others also, rather than ten thousand words in a tongue.

- Notice the use of plural “tongues” – shows that Paul is not condemning the proper use of them...in fact, he acknowledges that he has spoken in tongues previously (even though there is no record of that)
- But he would much rather speak in words that are intelligible in order to teach and instruct others

The Sign of Tongues to Unbelievers (vs. 20-25)

1 Cor 14:20-21 ~ Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking be mature. In the Law it is written, “BY MEN OF STRANGE TONGUES AND BY THE LIPS OF STRANGERS I WILL SPEAK TO THIS PEOPLE, AND EVEN SO THEY WILL NOT LISTEN TO ME,” says the Lord.

- He exhorts them to be mature in understanding the gift of tongues...being mature is essential because the use of tongues can easily appeal to the flesh and its desire to promote self

- Paul shows that the OT actually looked forward to the day when God would use men speaking foreign languages as a sign to unbelieving Israel...just as Assyrian-speaking men would indicate judgment on Israel/Judah, so too would men speaking foreign languages at Pentecost indicate God's judgment on Israel for rejecting Christ (i.e. the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD)

1 Cor 14:22 ~ So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophecy *is for a sign*, not to unbelievers but to those who believe.

- Tongues were a sign to unbelievers in that they showed God's judgment upon Israel; and once that sign served its purpose and God judged Israel by putting them on hold to begin His plan with the church, the need for the sign ceased...so tongues are not for the believers but for unbelievers
- Conversely, prophecy is not for unbelievers but for believers

1 Cor 14:23-25 ~ Therefore if the whole church assembles together and all speak in tongues, and ungifted men or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are mad? But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an ungifted man enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all; the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so he will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you

- Paul's point is: Even if everyone did use the proper gift of tongues, it would be confusing for anyone entering the assembly...better to proclaim the Word of God (prophecy) so that people can hear the Gospel and God's truth and become a true worshipper of God

The Suitable Use of Tongues (vs. 26-40)

1 Cor 14:26 ~ What is *the outcome* then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.

- Paul calls for a halt to their chaotic worship services (notice singular "tongue") and urges them to function in a way that promotes edification within the body

1 Cor 14:27-28 ~ If anyone speaks in a tongue, *it should be* by two or at the most three, and *each* in turn, and one must interpret; but if there is no interpreter, he must keep silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God.

- This singular "tongue" is an exception since it is referring to an individual speaking tongues in the proper manner'
- Notice the guidelines for their proper use within the assembly: 1) Only 2 or 3 people; 2) Each in turn; 3) With interpretation
- If these criteria are not met, then the use of tongues should not occur

1 Cor 14:29-33 ~ Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment. But if a revelation is made to another who is seated, the first one must keep silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted; and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets; for God is not *a God* of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.

- Paul gives regulations for those who preach and communicate God's truth in the church

OTHER REASONS TO BELIEVE TONGUES WERE TEMPORARY

1 Corinthians 13:8 Says Tongues Will Cease

1 Cor 13:8 ~ Love never fails; but if *there are gifts of prophecy*, they will be done away; if *there are tongues*, they will cease; if *there is knowledge*, it will be done away

- Both uses of the verb "will be done away," referring to prophecy and knowledge, are in the passive voice, meaning that something will cause them to cease (i.e. "the perfect" described in verse 10, namely the eternal state)
- The verb "will cease," referring to tongues, is in the middle voice, meaning that they will cease by themselves prior to "the perfect" coming
- Vine's notes that this word "cease" means "to stop, to make an end, [and] is used chiefly in the Middle Voice in the N.T., signifying to come to an end, to take one's rest, a willing cessation (in contrast to the Passive Voice which denotes a forced cessation)"

Tongues Were Only for a Very Unique Time in Biblical History

- Tongues and other miraculous abilities were revelatory gifts given to unique people at unique times in history for the purpose of confirming the revelation being given
- We know of only three times in history when these gifts were given and used:
 - a. Time of Moses
 - b. Time of Elijah and Elisha
 - c. Time of Christ and the Apostles
- During these three times, God was giving His revelation, His Word, and in order to confirm that the message being spoken was from God, men were given these unique abilities
 - a. Moses = Pentateuch
 - b. Elijah/Elisha = Prophets
 - c. Christ/Apostles = New Testament
- Specifically, in the New Testament, these revelatory gifts were used to confirm the apostolic message and establish the foundation of the church

Ephesians 2:19-20~ [you] are of God's household, having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner *stone*

2 Corinthians 12:12 ~ The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles

- Once the message of the Gospel was confirmed and the foundation of the church was laid, tongues and other miraculous gifts were no longer necessary and ceased to serve any purpose
- In fact, a point came when the revelatory gifts were already looked on as something in the past

Hebrews 2:3-4 ~ how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will"

- Thus, tongues were given to aid in ushering in a new era by confirming the message of the apostles. Once the transition from Old to New Covenant occurred, tongues and miraculous signs were no longer necessary

Only the Earliest Epistles Mention Tongues

- Tongues are only mentioned in Acts and 1 Corinthians, both written early in the New Testament
- Two other books, Romans and Ephesians, both written later, describe spiritual gifts, but fail to mention tongues...If tongues were still in effect when these later books were written, one would think that they would be mentioned
- No other New Testament book mentions tongues

Paul Had Lost Miraculous Abilities

Philippians 2:25-27 ~ But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus... because you had heard that he was sick. For indeed he was sick to the point of death, but God had mercy on him (written 62 AD)

1 Timothy 5:23 ~ No longer drink water *exclusively*, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments (written 65 AD)

2 Timothy 4:20 ~ but Trophimus I left sick at Miletus (written 67-68 AD)

- After the need for revelatory gifts had passed, Paul encountered many people who were sick, but he was apparently unable to heal them

Not All of Acts is Normative

- True, some converts mentioned in Acts did speak in tongues
 - Jews at Pentecost – Acts 2:4, 11
 - Cornelius and his household – Acts 10:46
 - John's disciples – Acts 19:6
- However, many converts in Acts did not speak in tongues
 - Ethiopian eunuch – Acts 8:25-40
 - Lydia – Acts 16:14-15
 - Philippian jailer – Acts 16:30-34
- Just because something happened in Acts does not mean that it was normative then, nor does it mean that it is normative for today
- No consistent pattern for the use of tongues is evident in Acts

5 Conditions are Necessary for Tongues to be Biblical

1. Tongues must be a known language

Acts 2:6-11 ~ they were each one hearing them speak in his own language. And they were amazed and marveled, saying, 'Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we each hear *them* in our own language to which we were born? Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—we hear them in our *own* tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God'

1 Corinthians 14:7-11 ~ Yet *even* lifeless things, either flute or harp, in producing a sound, if they do not produce a distinction in the tones, how will it be known what is played on the flute or on the harp? For if the bugle produces an indistinct sound, who will prepare himself for battle? So also you, unless you utter by the tongue speech that is clear, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air. There are, perhaps, a great many kinds of languages in the world, and no *kind* is without meaning. If then I do not know the meaning of the language, I shall be to the one who speaks a barbarian, and the one who speaks will be a barbarian to me

2. There must be an unbeliever present

1 Corinthians 14:21-22 ~ In the Law it is written, 'BY MEN OF STRANGE TONGUES AND BY THE LIPS OF STRANGERS I WILL SPEAK TO THIS PEOPLE, AND EVEN SO THEY WILL NOT LISTEN TO ME,' says the Lord. So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe, but to unbelievers

3. There must be an interpreter present

1 Corinthians 14:13~ Therefore let one who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret

1 Corinthians 14:27-28~ If anyone speaks in a tongue...let one interpret; but if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God

4. Tongues must be spoken in the church, in an orderly fashion, with only two or three speaking

1 Corinthians 14:18-19~ I thank God, I speak in tongues more than you all; however, **in the church** I desire to speak five words with my mind, that I may instruct others also, rather than ten thousand words in a tongue

1 Corinthians 14:23~ If therefore **the whole church** should assemble together and all speak in tongues, and ungifted men or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are mad?

1 Corinthians 14:26~ What is *the outcome* then, brethren? **When you assemble**, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation

1 Corinthians 14:27-28~ If anyone speaks in a tongue, *it should be* by **two or at the most three**, and **each in turn**, and let one interpret; but if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent **in the church**; and let him speak to himself and to God

5. It must be done for the edification of the body, not personal edification

1 Corinthians 12:7~ But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good

1 Corinthians 14:12~ So also you, since you are zealous of spiritual *gifts*, seek to abound for the edification of the church

1 Corinthians 14:26~ Let all things be done for edification