

Text: 1 Cor 14.6-19**Summarizing 1 Cor 12-14 so far****1 Corinthians 12: Emphasis on unity of spirit and clarity of understanding**

- **The context:** In the mystery religions of the ancient world, ecstatic practices resembling the gift of tongues *confused* the Corinthians
- **The issue:** Some Christians in Corinth equated tongues-speaking as the mark of true spirituality, skewing their focus from serving others to exalting self
- **Biblical gifts:**
 - Comprise a variety of equally valued gifts from the Triune God
 - Given for the benefit of the church as a whole: “the common good” (7), “just as He wills” (11)
 - Differing in nature according to the times:
 1. At-will miracle supernatural gifts in apostolic times
 2. Day-to-day ordinary gifts in all times and all places
- **The importance of the Body** for contextualizing the use of gifts
- **The Ranking of Gifts** (1 Cor 12.27-31a)

1 Corinthians 13: Partial digression

- **Spiritual Fruit: superior to Spiritual Gifts** (12.31b-13.13)
 - **A pause for definitions**

1 Corinthians 14: Priority of intelligibility in the church

- Contrasting prophecy and tongues (14.1-5)

Today: Illustrations for clarity (14.6-12)

1. Illustration of Paul himself (6)

“If I come to you...” Who is Paul focusing on here? **himself**

Paul himself had used the gift of tongues (see v. 18). Perhaps the Corinthians had heard him speak in tongues themselves. What does Paul’s question assume about such a use of tongues among them? Would he be speaking in their language?

He assumes he is speaking in a language unknown to the Corinthians

If Paul could not profit them while speaking with an unknown language, how could he profit them? What gift from 1 Cor 12 might Paul be referring to?

- a. **revelation** Gift: **apostle**
- b. **knowledge** Gift: **word of knowledge**
- c. **prophecy** Gift: **prophecy**
- d. **teaching** Gift: **teaching**

What makes these gifts more profitable? **understanding**

2. Illustration of lifeless things (7)

What are the lifeless things in this verse? **musical instruments**

Do these lifeless things “speak” in human language? **no**

Yet what is required for understanding the sound of the lifeless things?
distinction in tones

3. Illustration of the bugle (8)

The bugle is a specific “lifeless thing.” What is it primarily used for?
communicating on the battlefield

If the bugle cannot be understood, what is at risk? **understanding**

4. Illustration of the Corinthians themselves (9)

If the Corinthians don’t utter clear speech, what is at risk?
understanding

What would an unclear speaker be speaking to? **the air**

5. The illustration of multiple languages (10-11)

There are many languages in the world, all languages have **meaning**

If the hearer does not know the language, he appears to be a barbarian to the **speaker** and the **speaker** is a barbarian to the **hearer**

(The word “barbarian” is basically a transliteration of the Greek word, *barbaros*. “The Greeks used βάρβαρος of *any foreigner ignorant of the Greek language and the Greek culture, whether mental or moral, with the added notion, after the Persian war, of rudeness and brutality.*”

[Thayer] They used it in mimicry of foreign speech which sounded to them like “bar bar bar.”)

Conclusion to the illustrations section (12):

What does Paul assume about their zeal?

They desired spiritual gifts

What should they use their desires for?

They should desire and use gifts that would benefit the local church

The difficulties of using tongues in church services (13-19)

1. Consider the whole paragraph. When Paul says, “let one who speaks in a tongue” (13), where does he assume this speaking is occurring?

in the church

2. What should the tongues speaker pray for? **interpretation, ability to interpret**

3. Verse 14 suggests that some were “praying” in a tongue, but their human spirit did not understand what they themselves were saying. What would be the benefit to themselves for someone praying like that? **none**, their mind would be **unfruitful**

Please note: most of the time when considering the Biblical gift of tongues, we think the Scripture means definite human languages. However, in this passage it appears Paul is referring to their own experience in Corinth.

If we are correct in this note, what could such unintelligible tongues resemble in the modern church?

The unintelligible babble of modern tongues speaking

4. Notice in the NAU the words “the outcome” are in italics. Other versions translate more literally: “What is it then?” (ΚΙΥ) What is Paul determining in verse 15?

he is determined to pray with his spirit and his mind, to sing with his spirit and his mind

Why was Paul determined to engage both mind and spirit in his Christian communication? He desired **understanding**

“Public worship should be performed so as to be understood.”¹

Suppose someone was given a gift of a human language but that he himself did not understand it. Suppose he used it as a “private prayer language.” Would he understand himself? **no**

Would there be any benefit to this experience? **no**

Constable comments:

“A pastor friend of mine who used to ‘speak in tongues’ (gibberish) told me that he had taught many Christians to ‘speak in tongues,’ and he could teach anyone to do so. According to him it just required learning a few phrases, getting oneself into the proper emotional state, and releasing one’s inhibitions.

“Paul did not discourage speaking unknown languages in private. Nevertheless the relative value and profitability of such an experience are so minimal that its practice seems almost foolish in view of the more edifying activities that are open to Christians. Perhaps the current preoccupation with feeling good, in contrast to having to work hard with one’s mind to edify the church, is what makes this practice attractive to many people today.”²

5. Verses 16-17 talks about someone giving a blessing “in the spirit” (presumably in a ‘tongue’). What is the problem for the hearers who do not understand this speech? They don’t know when to say **Amen**

Paul says the thanksgiving is done “well enough” but where does that leave the other person [the hearer]? **unified**

6. Paul’s conclusion (18-19)

Has Paul himself exercised the gift of tongues? **yes**

What does Paul desire to do in the church rather than speak in tongues?

He desires to speak to instruct others

¹ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*, rpt., vol. 6 (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, n.d.), 1 Cor 14.15.

² Tom Constable, *Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), 1 Co 14.15.

What exaggerated comparison does he make?

Five intelligible words are better than 10,000 words in a tongue

“Paul affirmed the gift that the Corinthians apparently regarded as the sign of genuine spirituality, but he did so by correcting their thinking about what was really important in their meetings. Worship should never be selfish, and it should always be intelligible and edifying.”³

Note: Paul doesn't argue against the Corinthians by saying they do *not* have the gift of tongues, although they may have been guilty of imitating it rather than really having it. He argues here for understanding and intelligibility.

In the next section, he will define what is the real point of the gift of tongues and offer regulations for their use in church services.

³ Constable, 1Co 14.18.