

Studies in 1 Corinthians

Lesson XXXII: Tongues in Perspective

Text: 1 Corinthians 14:6-19

6 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?

7 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? 8 For if the bugle produces an indistinct sound, who will prepare himself for battle? 9 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.

10 There are, perhaps, a great many kinds of languages in the world, and no kind is without meaning. 11 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. 12 So also you, since you are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek to abound for the edification of the church.

13 Therefore let one who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret. 14 For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. 15 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. 16 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? 17 For you are giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not edified.

18 I thank God, I speak in tongues more than you all; 19 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. 20 Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking be mature.

21 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. 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.

23 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?

Discussion Questions

1. What was the true purpose of the gift of tongues (i.e. languages)? (vv. 6, 22)
2. How were the Christians at Corinth misusing their gift of tongues? (vv. 14, 17, 23)
3. What did the Corinthians need to do to turn around this chaotic situation? (vs. 12-13)
4. Does God sanction worship that exalts esoteric experience above reason and discernment? (vv. 18-19)
5. Verse 22 tells us that tongues were a sign to unbelievers, while prophecy was a sign to believers. A sign of what? How did the manifestation of each gift accomplish this purpose?
6. Base on what you have learned today, is the contemporary practice of tongues (i.e. ecstatic speech) biblically sound? Support your answer with Scripture.
7. What can we take away from this passage to strengthen the worship and outreach of this congregation?