

Tongues, Part 2

By Phillip G. Kayser · Acts 2:4-13, Part 2 · 2005-6-26

When I was in Asia I found it really difficult to get around when I was by myself because I did not know any of the language. You think you ordered one thing at the restaurant and you end up with something totally different on the plate. I read that people were joking about the strange attempts of Americans to penetrate the Chinese market. When Coca Cola first introduced coke there, they used phonetics for "Kekoukela", meaning "Bite the wax tadpole" or "female horse stuffed with wax", depending on the dialect. And there were some faux pas that I can't even repeat. Pepsi's "Come Alive With the Pepsi Generation" translated into "Pepsi Brings Your Ancestors Back From the Grave" in Chinese. The original translation for the Kentucky Fried Chicken motto "finger lickin good" was badly interpreted as "eat your fingers off". Language is a tough barrier. Perhaps the greatest barrier to the Gospel going forth freely is the language barrier that God Himself erected at the tower of Babel. And we began seeing two weeks ago how God was reversing that curse of Babel.

But last time we really began to dig into the meaning and significance of tongues. This is obviously a very hotly debated subject. And I have no illusions that I will have the last word on this issue. Instead, what I have sought to do is to show step by step what I believe can be clearly demonstrated, and just leave those things that are unclear, unsaid.

Is this a gift of hearing or a gift of speaking? (v. 4,6,7,8,11)

The first thing that I believe is clear in this passage is that the speakers in Acts 2 clearly had the gift of tongues. And if you weren't here last time you might wonder why in the world there would even be a question about that. I mentioned that there are many scholars who try to drive a wedge between Acts 2 and 1 Corinthians 12-14 by insisting that this was a gift of hearing, not a gift of tongues. And there are both charismatics and non-charismatics who do this. And the reason is that their interpretation of 1 Corinthians 14 makes the tongues there look utterly, utterly different from the tongues in Acts 2. And many of them recognize that Acts 2 doesn't even closely resemble charismatic tongues. So they say that the speakers probably just spoke Hebrew or Aramaic, and it was the foreigners who heard what was said in other languages. In other words, it was a miracle of hearing, not a miracle of speaking.

But verse 4 clearly says, they "began to *speak* with other tongues." It wasn't just that languages were *heard*. The other languages were coming out of their mouths. And we looked at several other evidences that this was not a miracle of hearing, but a miracle of speaking.

Is tongues a true language? (v. 4,6,11)

A second thing that is clear is that they were speaking a true language. Some charismatics deny that in Acts 2, and most of them deny it in 1 Corinthians 14. Most of them today claim that modern tongues is the inarticulate groanings and inarticulate attempted prayers of Romans 8 – in other words, it wasn't a language. Today I won't get into what Romans 8 talks about. There *are* groanings in the spirit, and if people want to claim that this is what they are experiencing today, that is one thing. But I will insist that 1 Corinthians 14 is talking about true language.

And so is Acts 2. It is not (as some say) pre-linguistic, pre-rational communication; it is not inarticulate. Verse 4 says that these tongues were "as the Spirit gave them *utterance*," and the Greek word for "utterance" is defined in Strong's Dictionary as "to enunciate clearly... to declare, to speak forth." In other words, it *was* articulate speech. And secondly, it *was* true language. First, the word "tongue" *means* language. Second, Luke lists the languages being spoken in verses 9 and following. Third, the text clearly says that the disciples *spoke* all these languages.

Is the tongues in Acts 2 different from the tongues in 1 Corinthians 12-14? No. There are many evidences that they are the same:

Third, we began to look at evidences that the tongues of Acts 2 is identical to the tongues in 1 Corinthians 12-14. And in your outline there should be a Roman numeral III in front of point A. So we have already covered four proofs that they are the same. In fact, you can think of 1 Corinthians as being the inspired commentary on the meaning and nature of these tongues.

The tongues of 1 Corinthians 12-14 is a true language.

Under point A I gave 16 proofs that the tongues in 1 Corinthians 14 was a true language and I dealt with the objections. And if you did not hear that sermon, I hope you will take the time to get a copy because that is such a critical point in this debate. We saw that Paul used three words for language to describe tongues. We saw that the gift of interpretation is literally, the gift of translation. Well, you translate languages. Translation is by definition taking words from one language and conveying the meaning into words of another language. And of course Paul uses the term *words* to speak of tongues. For Paul it was not meaningless babble. It was words. In verse 21-22 Paul insists that the tongues of 1 Corinthians is the same as the tongues of Isaiah 28 – a foreign, human language. And you can look at some of the other proofs yourself some time. But we saw that there can be no question about the fact that it is a true language. It's not inarticulate groanings. And for proof, you will have to listen to that sermon.

Just as there were varieties of tongues (languages) in Acts 2, there were "varieties of tongues" (1 Cor. 12:28) in Corinth.

Under point B we saw how both Acts and Corinthians speak about varieties of tongues, and you would think that this phrase would describe the same phenomena. And Paul uses that phrase in parallel with the phrase "kinds of languages" in 1 Corinthians 14.

Just as the tongues in Acts 2 included an evangelistic purpose, the tongues mentioned in Corinth was primarily intended to be used outside the church.

Next (under point C), I gave three proofs that the tongues in 1 Corinthians has an evangelistic purpose just like it had in the book of Acts. In fact, Paul explicitly says in 1 Corinthians 14:22, "Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers..." It's primary focus is outside the church. And yet modern charismatics have completely changed that. And so the evangelist Paul, who was in constant contact with various languages in his evangelism, says in 1 Corinthians 14:18-19: "I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you 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." He was saying that his focus was outside the church. In fact, if we were to take him literally, it would be a 10,000 to five ratio. He constantly spoke in other languages, but almost never did so in the church. Why? Because the tongues of Corinthians had the same purpose that it did in Acts 2. It was evangelistic. Now if you have never studied charismatic issues, this may not seem so significant to you, but it shows how far off the map modern so-called tongues is.

Tongues is not just a "prayer language." Just as Acts shows that tongues (a supernaturally given ability to speak in a foreign language) could be used for both prophesy (Acts 2:4,18) and teaching (Acts 2:11), so too Paul says that tongues has multiple purposes of communicating information "by revelation, by knowledge, by prophesying, or by teaching" (1 Cor. 14:6), praying (14:15), singing (14:15), blessing (14:16), giving thanks (14:17) and speaking to people outside the church (14:18 contrasted with verse 19).

One point of contrast that charismatics use is to say that Corinthians is only talking about a prayer language whereas in Acts it had other purposes. Charismatics typically point to 1 Corinthians 14:2 to prove that tongues is never addressed to men, but to God. And again, not all charismatics hold to this, but it seems to be the majority view. Verse 2 says, "For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries." Well, that seems like a pretty solid proof until you keep reading in the chapter and realize that Paul didn't *want* people *only talking to God* in a worship service. If speaking to foreigners in a foreign language was necessary, then Paul insisted that everything be translated. And without a translator, Paul explicitly said, keep silent.

And over and over again Paul indicates that tongues can be used not just to address God, but also to address humans. Gordon Fee disagrees and says, No - "the tongues speaker is not addressing fellow believers but God." But look at verse 6: "But now, brethren, if I come to *you* speaking with tongues, what shall I profit *you* unless I *speak to you* either by revelation..." etc. He was teaching *men* through tongues. Look at verse 21. "In the law it is written: "with men of other tongues and other lips *I will speak to this people...*" God intended them to be speaking to people with tongues. Look at verse 22. "Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe, but *to unbelievers.*" Verse 28 tells the person speaking in tongues, that if there is no interpreter, "let him *speak to himself* and to God." And we will have more to say about that passage in a moment. But it is clear that tongues was spoken to men, not just to God. In fact, the whole chapter argues that point by insisting that nothing be spoken that does not edify the whole congregation. If the tongues doesn't edify the *people*, he says we should keep silent. And I gave some other proofs that tongues did not have prayer as it's only purpose.

But that brings us up to one of the most hotly debated aspects of this whole controversy. And it is this: Do the tongues speakers in Corinth understand what they are saying? I say yes. The charismatics to a man say "no." That's about the only thing that they are agreed on – no one understands what they are saying. And they've got some pretty good scholars on their side, I'll have to say. So, if you were just counting noses, you could just dismiss this sermon that I am preaching today. But there has been some good scholarship to show that they did indeed understand what they were saying in Corinth just as they understood what they were saying in the book of Acts. Let me give you some evidence.

While people generally agree that the speakers in Acts 2 knew what they were saying, many people insist that the tongues speaker in Corinth does not know what he is saying.^[1] However, there are several evidences that the speaker did indeed understand exactly what he was saying when he spoke in another language.

1 Corinthians 14:2-4 indicates that untranslated tongues involves one in speaking "mysteries." That is a transliteration of the Greek word *musterion*, which does not mean something unintelligible, but refers to a secret made known.

"In each instance 'mystery' is truth made known." (Leonard Coppes)

"*mysterion* is that which is revealed" NET says, "*musterion* can mean either (1) a new revelation or (2) a revealing interpretation of existing revelation" (NIDNTT). "*musterion, ou n: the content of that which has not been known before but which has been revealed to an in-group or restricted constituency*" (Louw and Nida). *The reason tongues without interpretation is a mystery is because the speaker understands it and it is not understood by others. If no one understands the uninterpreted tongue, it is not a mystery.*

Turn first of all to 1 Corinthians 14:2-4. We've just read that, but I'm going to make another deduction from it. Beginning at verse 2:

He who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries. But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men. He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church.

Two things to notice in verse 2. First, Paul says that the tongues speaker speaks *mysterias*. That is a transliteration of the Greek word *musterion*, which does not mean something unintelligible or non-understandable, but it refers to knowledge held by the *musterion* holders, but kept secret from others. In fact, it was a word coined by the pagan mystery religions where there was an in-group (that was the mystery religion) that knew the meaning of the secret teachings and no one else did. But it was taken over in the Bible to refer to teachings that were revealed to the disciples but hidden from the non-elect. For example, Matthew 13:11 says, "Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given." They were mysteries because the disciples knew them, but no one else did. It wouldn't be a mystery if no one knew it. You can't tell a secret if no one (including yourself) knows that the secret is. And "secret" is another translation of "mystery."

Mark 4:11 To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but to those who are outside, all things come in parables, Luke 8:10 And He said, "To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest *it is given* in parables, that

'Seeing they may not see,

And hearing they may not understand.'

And so, whether you are talking about Biblical usage or secular usage, this term *musterion* always (without exception) refers to something known by the speaker of the mystery, but unknown to the uninitiated. Let me repeat that: this term *musterion* always (without exception) refers to something known by the speaker of the mystery, but unknown to the uninitiated. Louw and Nida's dictionary says, "*musterion*, [is] the content of that which has not been known before but which has been revealed to an in-group or restricted constituency" So the reason tongues without interpretation is a mystery is because the speaker understands it (and maybe one or two foreigners) but the others do not. If no one understood the uninterpreted tongue, it would not be a mystery.

There are no exceptions to that definition in sacred or secular literature. And so if you read charismatic commentaries on this verse, you will see that this is an incredibly embarrassing verse for charismatics. Gordon Fee claims that in this verse mystery couldn't have the same meaning that it has elsewhere in the New Testament. Well, very convenient, but you can't just go and redefine terms to make it fit your interpretation. Leonard Coppes examines every instance of the use of this word and says, "In each instance 'mystery' is truth made known." Now it is hidden to others, but it is not hidden to those who hold the mystery. He says, "it is truth made known." And so if there is no translator in the church, the tongues speaker is automatically speaking mysteries: truth known to him, but unknown to others. Hopefully I have repeated that enough times for you to see that this is a very significant truth.

With that definition, look at the verse again: "For he who speaks in a tongue, does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him; however, in the spirit [notice that is a small 's' spirit. In the spirit] "he speaks mysteries." His own spirit understands, but no one else does. That's the point that Paul is making. It's a secret between God and them and there should be no

secrets in the church. And that interpretation makes sense of the rest of the chapter. Let's look at the next evidence. Point #2.

The second thing to notice is that this interpretation flows naturally into the next two verses which explain why a prophet edifies everyone whereas an uninterpreted tongue speaker only edifies himself. It's because everyone understands the prophet whereas only the tongues speaker understands himself: "But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men. He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church." That's why verse 5 equates interpreted tongues as equivalent in edification to prophecy – everyone understands it. And so Matthew Henry rightly comments: "What cannot be understood can never edify." Jamiesson, Fausset and Brown agree, saying that the speaker edifies himself, "as he understands the meaning of what the particular tongue expresses." Charles Hodge says, "They were edifying, and therefore intelligible to him who uttered them."

Notice that my interpretation flows naturally into the next two verses which explain why a prophet edifies everyone whereas an uninterpreted tongue speaker only edifies himself. It's because *everyone else understands the prophet* whereas only the tongues speaker understands himself. Look at verse 3:

But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men. He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church.

(14:3-4). That's why verse 5 equates interpreted tongues as equal in edification to prophecy – because now that it's interpreted, everyone understands it. Look at verse 5: "I wish you all spoke with tongues, but even more that you prophesied; for he who prophesies is greater than he who speaks with tongues, *unless* indeed he interprets, that the church may receive edification." Notice the word "unless." "Unless indeed he interprets" or translates. That word "unless" indicates that translated tongues is no less important than prophecy because now everyone understands, and thus everyone is edified.

And so Matthew Henry summarizes the conclusion that Paul is making. He says, "What cannot be understood can never edify." Let me repeat that, *because that is the theme of this sermon*. Matthew Henry is saying that for Paul, "What cannot be understood can never edify." OK, with that in mind, let's go back and read verse 4 again: "He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself..." The only logical conclusion you can come to is that he understands what he is saying. Do you see the logic there? In verses 2-5 Paul is insisting that what is not understood never edifies, but verse 4 says that the tongues speaker edifies himself. Here's the conclusion that Jamiesson, Fausset and Brown's commentary makes. The speaker edifies himself, "as he understands the meaning of what the particular tongue expresses." Charles Hodge says, "They were edifying, and therefore intelligible to him who uttered them." Now as far as I'm concerned, we don't even need to go on to the other proofs because those two annihilate the charismatic interpretation. But I think it is still wise to go through other proofs and also deal with their interpretations.

If a tongues speaker always understood what he was saying, then the tongues in this chapter would be identical to the tongues in Acts 2, and what charismatics are describing as tongues would not be the tongues of the Bible. I won't get into whether it may have other legitimate

uses (it theoretically may), but I do not believe the modern tongues movement is the same phenomena as what Paul is describing or what Acts 2 is describing. On the other hand, it perfectly dovetails with the examples I gave last time of missionaries who have been given an immediate ability to understand and speak a foreign language. I know people who have been given this miraculous gift and there is no question about the fact that they can speak and understand another language fluently. Some have had the gift for many years. Others have only had it for a short missions trip. Others have been given the ability to speak in new languages every time they go to a new region. But that ability to understand and speak a new language is quite different from what goes on in charismatic circles.

But let's move on. Let's look at more proofs that tongues was indeed understood by the speaker.

Paul insists on intelligibility throughout the passage.

First, notice the ascription of conscious speaking to both the prophet as well as the tongues speaker throughout the entire chapter ("you may prophesy," "he who prophesies" etc and "he who speaks in a tongue," "I wish you all spoke with tongues," etc.)

Think of the analogy of how canonical prophecy came into being: Though Scripture is 100% the Word of God and never originated in the will of man (2 Peter 1:20-21), yet those "holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (v. 21). God did not bypass their minds and dictate the message. Thus prophecy used the unique vocabulary, styles and experiences of the men, and when they prophesied, they always consciously prophesied. Thus, Mark 7:10 can say, "For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother,' yet Exodus 20 says about the giving of those ten commandments, "God spoke all these words" (Ex. 20:1). Both are true, just as Christ was consciously fully divine and fully human, the Scripture has both divine and human characteristics. Note well that the Scripture does not contain the word of God (that view is a heresy). Rather, every letter is the Word of God. Yet it did not bypass the minds of the prophets and therefore they could write in the first person singular ("I," "me," "my").

Third proof: Paul insists on intelligibility all the way through the passage. Point after point hammers this insistence on intelligibility home. Why? In part it was to oppose the demonic prophecies and tongues that the cults of Appollo and Dionysius had. Their eyes would roll back in their heads and the demons would completely bypass their minds. But Paul says that the Spirit of God never works in that way. Let me give you some examples. First, the relationship between Spirit and human speaker are described with the same language for both prophecy and tongues. Though it is the Holy Spirit who miraculously enables tongues, the human is the one who is said to speak. For example, though it is the Holy Spirit who moves the prophet to speak new revelation, and gives the revelation, it is the prophet who actually speaks. (It says that "you may prophesy," "he who prophesies" etc and "he who speaks in a tongue," "I wish you all spoke with tongues," etc.) That may not seem like such a profound statement. But when you analyze it, it demonstrates that the Holy Spirit never bypasses the mind when he gives His miraculous gifts.

Think about how the giving of prophetic Scripture works. Evangelical Protestants agree that every letter of the Bible was given by the Spirit and is the Word of God and is thus inerrant. 2 Peter 1:21 says, "Prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." So it originates in God, is moved by God and is uttered by God, yet the same verse indicates that *men* utter the prophecy as well. The text says, "holy men of God spoke." *They* spoke. The Holy Spirit did not bypass their minds. And many Reformed theologians have likened the giving of Scripture to the incarnation of Jesus. Just as there was an incarnation of the Divine Son taking to Himself a human nature, and just as Jesus spoke as fully God and fully man, so too Scripture is 100% the Word of God, yet it is spoken not by dictation of

God through a passive person who is out of his mind, but through the minds of men. And that explains why each book of the Bible has the human author's unique vocabulary, style of writing and experiences, yet it is God speaking. And so in the outline I point out that Mark 7:10 can say, "For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother,'" yet Exodus 20 says about the giving of those ten commandments, "God spoke all these words" (Ex. 20:1).

I think every evangelical agrees that Scriptural prophecy always functioned this way. Though God gives it, the fact that the passage says that the *prophets* speak the prophecy shows that God is not bypassing his mind. He knows exactly what he is saying. And so, in chapter 14:30 it speaks of a prophet receiving a revelation from God. He didn't make this up. Yet, he is able to speak it or to keep silent according to verse 29. He is in such control of his mind that he is able to take turns, to stop speaking when another starts speaking. Verses 32-33 say, "And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets, for God is not the author of confusion, but of peace." It would be confusion if God treated them like robots and they had no control over their minds. But Paul insists that they can control themselves despite the fact that God is the author.

Notice the same language is used for the revelations spoken by the prophets in 1 Corinthians 14. Every verse in the chapter shows consciousness. Thus, though they are speaking only what is revealed by the Holy Spirit (14:30), they are the ones who speak (v. 29), who know when it is appropriate to keep silent (v. 30), who consciously take turns (v. 31) and who are in rational control of their minds when they do so (v. 32-33). Never think of a prophet as out of his mind (like pagan prophets were).

But notice the same language is used of tongues speakers. They are ascribed with the speaking throughout the passage, and are able to keep silent (v. 28), who consciously take turns (v. 27) and who are in rational control of their minds throughout the tongues speaking (vv. 27-28). This all argues that tongues speakers know what they are saying.

And here's the point: exactly the same language that is used to describe man's role in prophecy is used to describe man's role in tongues. *They* are the ones who are doing the speaking throughout this chapter. They are able to keep silent (verse 28), to consciously take turns speaking (verse 27) and to rationally control their minds throughout the tongues speaking process (verses 27-28).

Paul gives permission for a tongues speaker to translate his message himself (v. 5).

In fact, it is interesting that in verse 5 Paul gives permission to the tongues speaker to translate his own words. If any of you have done translation work, you know that it is an awkward thing to translate for yourself. It's much better to get someone else to translate for you, because you tend to get confused about where you left off on English portion, and so sometimes you miss out phrase that you thought you had spoken, or you repeat yourself. So it's the rare person who can do that. That's why verse 13 encourages such a person to pray for the gift of translation. (And we will look at that in a bit.) But if there are no translators, Paul still gives permission to translate for yourself in verse 5. How could he translate his own words unless he understood them?

Notice the rational descriptors of the tongues speaking in verse 6. (Note, that the "unless" shows that the speaker is still speaking in tongues when he engages in the giving of revelation, giving of knowledge, prophesying and teaching.)

But verse 6 gives another powerful proof that tongues was understood by the speaker. I want you to notice all the rational terms used to describe this tongues speaking. It says, "But now,

brethren, if I come to you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you unless I speak to you either by revelation, by knowledge, by prophesying, or by teaching." The word "unless" shows that the speaker is still speaking in tongues when he engages in the giving of revelation, knowledge, prophesying and teaching. That tongues won't profit anyone unless it is clearly communicating one of those four things. Well, let's look at each of those four.

If he is speaking a "revelation" in tongues, then this indicates understanding: "revelation, what is revealed, disclosure, to make information known with an implication that the information can be understood." (NIV Greek) to reveal, to disclose, to make fully known, revelation.' (Louw & Nida) "making fully known, revelation, disclosure" (BDAG)

Revelation is never treated as unknown. It is the very opposite of unknown. The NIV Greek Dictionary defines *apokalupsis* as "revelation, what is revealed, disclosure, to make information known with an implication that the information can be understood." The speaker has already had the revelation (which means he knows it). Otherwise it can't be described as a revelation. All that is left now is to communicate it to the foreigners through the foreign language and to the rest of the congregation through a translation. And Paul says that it needs to be communicated. But the main point is that you can't turn revelation into its opposite: something unknown.

If he is speaking "knowledge" by a tongue, his mind must be engaged.

Think of the second word, "knowledge." Who has the knowledge that is being communicated in tongues? It's the speaker. If he is communicating knowledge by tongues, he knew it, or it would be a contradiction of terms.

If he is speaking prophecy, then the previous point shows how this must be rational.

The next word shows that tongues speakers sometimes spoke "prophecy" when they spoke in tongues. Unfortunately, some Reformed people think that is the only thing that tongues speakers did, and because prophecy has passed away, that tongues has passed away. And we dealt with the exegetical problems with that last time. But the main point here is that we have already demonstrated that God never bypassed the mind of a prophet when he gave prophecy. Never. Pagan religions did, but not the Biblical religion. Which means what? It means that whatever you think of tongues, he already knew the prophecy that he was now trying to communicate in tongues, or it would not have been a Biblical prophecy. It was something known that he was communicating in another language.

If he is "teaching" then it is communicating information from his mind to the minds of the hearers.

The last word in verse 6 is "teaching," and since teaching is the clear communication of truth from the speaker to the hearer, the speaker had to know the truth before he could teach it. If he doesn't know what he is saying until a translator translates it, then he is not teaching. The translator is. And again, I know that this is overkill. But unless I demonstrate how abundantly clear this teaching is, you will be stumped by a couple verses later on in the chapter. You need to be so convinced that tongues was understood by the speaker that about now you are getting bored with my proofs. I want this to be overkill. This is such a divisive issue in many churches that it is imperative that we be grounded in the Scriptures. I want you to come away from this sermon convinced that true tongues was *known by the speaker*.

Paul likens tongues to playing and listening to musical instruments (vv. 7-8)

In verses 7-8 Paul likens tongues to both playing and listening to musical instruments.

Even things without life, whether flute or harp, when they make a sound, unless they make a distinction in the sounds, how will it be known what is piped or played? For if a trumpet makes an uncertain sound, who will prepare for battle?

In Thiselton's massive commentary he points out that the Greek words indicate instruments out of tune. When they are out of tune, they cannot communicate what the musician is trying to communicate. Again, the problem is not with the musician or tongues speaker, but with the instrument or language. Without a good instrument (in other words, without a known language), neither those listening to the music or those listening to the tongues can appreciate what is being played. It doesn't benefit. But again, it's not the musician's lack of knowledge, but the hearer's lack of knowledge that is being highlighted.

Obviously, it would be rather important for soldiers to know the varied trumpet calls and what they mean. The one playing the trumpet is trying to communicate a message. And so this illustration of music again reinforces the rationality of the speaker, and the importance that this rationality be rationally communicated.

The lack of understanding in verse 9 is with the hearers who don't know the foreign language.

Fifth, The lack of understanding in verse 9 is with the hearers who don't know the foreign language. "So likewise you, unless you utter by the tongue words easy to understand, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air." Talking needs to be done to someone, but without translation it is like talking to the wind. Notice that he doesn't say that the speaker's head is full of air, or that he doesn't know what he is saying. Paul is just indicating that there is no audience to appreciate all that the speaker is saying.

Just as a foreigner understands what he speaks to you, but you do not, so a tongues speaker understands what he speaks, but if untranslated, you do not: Paul defines tongues as the languages of the world (v. 10), and insists that "none of them is without meaning." This makes a one-to-one parallel (see the "therefore" of verses 11) between how hearers hear tongues speaking in the church and how you might hear a foreigner speak in his language. The foreigner knows what he is saying, but you don't (v. 11)

Seventh, verse 10 defines tongues as the languages of the world. "There are, it may be, so many kinds of languages in the world..." Furthermore, Paul indicates that these languages all have meaning, even if you don't understand them. "and none of them is without significance" [or as the margin says, literally, "without meaning"]. And then he starts with a "therefore" in verse 11, which means that there is a one-to-one parallel between what people in a church were hearing with untranslated tongues, and what *you* would hear if a foreigner talked to you in his language. He would know exactly what he was saying, but you would not. Verse 11 says, "Therefore, if I do not know the meaning of the language, I shall be a foreigner to him who speaks, and he who speaks will be a foreigner to me." Foreigners always understand what they are saying. If tongues speaking makes him a foreigner to me, by definition, the tongues speaker knows what he is saying just as a foreigner would know what he is saying. Can you see that

there is a consistent emphasis all the way through this chapter of understanding on the part of the speaker?

Verses 12-13 again emphasize the importance of the tongues speaker trying to edify the church. Just as in verse 5, the tongues speaker is given permission to do his own translation, though it is recognized that such would need divine help to do properly.

Before we look at the key verses that charismatics appeal to, let me point out that Paul once again puts the onus of responsibility upon the tongues speaker to make sure that he doesn't just edify himself, but that he gives edification to the whole congregation. Verse 12 says, "Even so you, since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, let it be for the edification of the church that you seek to excel." How do you edify? Verse 13 tells us: by translation. "Therefore let him who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret."

Verses 13-14 do not contradict this interpretation.

If one was given the ability to speak in another language fluently, he could understand that language perfectly, yet it would still be a difficult thing to translate from that language back into his mother language. Thus the need to pray for an ability to translate (v. 13). Anyone who knows two or more languages well knows the great difficulty in getting concepts that are easily expressed in one language into the second language.

But of course, that verse contains the first of three arguments that charismatics bring against the traditional position to say that tongues speakers do not understand a word that they speak. Their first argument is that if he truly understood what he said, it would be unnecessary for him to have to ask God for the ability to translate. If he knew it, he wouldn't just do it? Right? Well, that seems like a legitimate objection at first. Look at verse 13: "Therefore let him who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret." But that objection is totally missing the logic of Paul's argument; of Paul's "therefore." Paul has been insisting all along that without knowledge there is no edification. Verse 12 asks that the whole church be edified, and verse 13 indicates that the only way that can be achieved is through translation. But nowhere in verse 13 does Paul indicate that the speaker is not edified or that the speaker does not understand. Paul assumes that you will remember verse 4 which says, "He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself." Paul assumes you're going to know that he understands what he is saying.

But, they will object, "Why does he need to ask God's help to translate if he already understands what he is saying? He'd just translate, wouldn't he? He wouldn't have to ask." And the answer is that *being able to translate requires totally different skills than being able to speak in another language*. I know several people who are fluent in two or more languages, but who are lousy translators. They know exactly what they are saying in any of the languages, but they stumble and are slow in translating it back into even their mother tongue. They can translate on paper, but on the spot being able to translate what somebody else says puts them at a loss. They don't know how to do it. *How much more difficult if you are translating for yourself*. And I think that anybody who is gifted in multiple languages knows that this can be a major issue. And so, if there are no translators in the building, and there are foreigners who need to hear the word, Paul is giving permission for the person with the gift of tongues to translate for himself. But recognizing what a difficult thing that is, Paul says that it is quite appropriate to pray for the gift of translation. If you look at chapter 12:10, you will see that ordinarily those two gifts are given to different people. "To another different kinds of tongues,

to another the interpretation of tongues." If speaking in another language automatically made you a good translator, he wouldn't have separated those into two entirely different gifts. Does that make sense? They are quite different abilities.

It's sort of like a friend of Kathy's at College who was an expert organist, and Kathy asked him how he played a given sequence, and his response was, "I don't know how to explain it, I just do it." Well, that's not very helpful. Though he was an expert organist, he didn't know how to explain what he was doing. Being able to play is sort of like speaking in tongues (or speaking another language), and being able to explain *how* you played is sort of like translation. They are two different skills.

One objection that I have heard is that a person wouldn't need to pray to himself (verse 28) in a different language if his mother tongue was quite adequate. But that's actually not true. I knew a professor who was fluent in over 40 languages, and I've known others who knew several languages, and when they prayed, sometimes they said that they would switch from one language to another because there are concepts that are beautifully expressed in one language that there are no words for in the second language – or at least their mother tongue didn't convey their feelings as adequately. (My father, who was fluent in several languages, frequently experienced a difficulty in conveying back into English something that he enjoyed in Low German.)

But anyway, back to this verse: What verse 5 did was to give permission to a tongues speaker to translate for himself, even though that could be awkward. And what verse 13 is doing is (recognizing the difficulty of both speaking and translating for yourself), tells the person that he can ask God to help him translate by giving him the gift of translation. My mother has used many, many translators, and she will tell you that some people are good translators and some are not, and it doesn't have anything to do with how well they can speak in a foreign language. They truly are two separate gifts as chapter 12:10 points out. So I don't believe that is a legitimate objection. Verse 13 perfectly fits the traditional explanation.

Verse 14 is the lynchpin of the charismatic belief that tongues is not understood by the speaker. It says, "For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is not fruitful." It is claimed that the spirit and understanding are contrasted.

But there is another objection that is always brought up, and that is found in verse 14. Verse 14 says, "For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful." They say, "If a man's understanding is unfruitful, that means that he has no understanding." Gordon Fee, an amazingly gifted charismatic commentator holds to this view, but he recognizes that it is an exceedingly awkward interpretation. And he spends a whole paragraph trying to explain what he calls "a very difficult sentence in the middle of this argument." Well, I think it is only difficult because he has misunderstood the argument. But he is referring to the part where it says, "For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays."

He points out how the explanatory "for" ties verse 14 logically together with verse 13's demand for interpretation, but he doesn't want to say that a tongues speaker needs to understand the

tongue in order to be edified by it. That goes contrary to his theology of tongues. So he admits that the explanatory "for" seems out of place.

Secondly, he finds it very awkward that Paul says, "my spirit prays," because that seems to imply understanding. So he opts for making the word spirit into a capital "S" Spirit (in other words, the Holy Spirit). His commentary says, "When I pray in tongues I pray in the Spirit, but it does not benefit my mind." But then in the next paragraph he admits that there is no "the" in front of Spirit, and he says, "the possessive 'my' and the contrast with 'my mind' indicate that he is here referring to his own 'spirit' at prayer." So Fee tries to compromise by saying that it could be both my small 's' spirit and "the [capital S] Spirit." And throughout the next paragraphs he has "my small s slash big S Spirit." Very awkward. And he recognizes it.

And I give this background to demonstrate the point that charismatics recognize what they see as an apparent contradiction *in their strongest verse*. As far as I am concerned, this verse and the next one are the only ones on which they have a leg to stand on, in saying that tongues is not understood by the speaker. And it's the last phrase that they appeal to. The last phrase says, "my understanding is unfruitful." They claim that this means that Paul did not understand anything he said when he spoke in tongues. And so, when his spirit prayed, it is in total contrast to his mind; it bypassed his mind. And they say, verse 15 bears this out. Verse 15 says:

What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding.

So there you have it: spirit is contrasted with understanding.

However, this would contradict Paul's usage of the term spirit completely. In 1 Corinthians 2:11 Paul said, "For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him?" The spirit is by definition the knowing faculty. And you find this throughout the Scripture. Mark 2:8 says, "Immediately, Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts." The spirit is not the unconscious part of a man, but the rational part of the man.

Well, at first it may seem like an impressive argument. But let's examine the text a bit closer. In fact, let's let Paul define his terms. And we will start with Paul's understanding of the word spirit. Please turn to 1 Corinthians 2:11 and I'll give you an example of how Paul uses the term "spirit." 1 Corinthians 2:11 shows that spirit and mind are actually synonyms in the Bible. Paul says, "For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him?" He is saying that only the spirit of a man knows the things of that man. The spirit *is by definition* the knowing faculty. And even if you were to take Fee's forced exegesis in chapter 14 and say that it was the Holy Spirit that was Paul's Spirit, look at the next verse in 1 Corinthians 2. Verse 12 says, "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God." The idea that the Spirit gives us unknowable, irrational or pre-rational things is foreign to Scripture. The Holy Spirit helps our spirit to know. But the main point is that our spirit is the knowing faculty. And you find this throughout the Scripture. Mark 2:8 says, "Immediately, Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts." He knew in His spirit. The spirit is not the unconscious part of a man, but the rational part of the man. To say that a person could pray with his own spirit without knowing what he was saying is contrary to Pauline theology, to Markan theology, to Biblical theology. The rest of 1 Corinthians chapter 2 shows that the Spirit always produces rationality.

It is clearly Paul's spirit that does the praying here, again implying rationality. (This is not to deny that the Holy Spirit prays through him too – that is, when there is revelatory tongues (v. 15), but Paul insists that His mind is always also engaged (v. 15).)

In verse 14 Paul says, "my spirit prays." This is a reference to his own human spirit.

In verse 15 Paul says, "I will pray with the spirit," and since the article is used here, it is likely a reference to the Holy Spirit. But Paul then insists that simply because the Spirit helps him to pray and to sing does not mean that he has no understanding. As with every other point in the chapter, it is both/and. The Spirit miraculously gives the tongues, but Paul is still praying with the understanding. And more pointedly, he wants the understanding of everyone. If his understanding bears fruit (v. 14) by being translated, then the understanding will be common to all.

So with that as a background, let's see what Paul is trying to say in these verses. Verse 14: "For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays." This is clearly a reference to his own human spirit. There is no article "the" in front of spirit. It's Paul's spirit that prays. But in verse 15 it is highly probably that Paul switches to the Holy Spirit because he puts the article "the" in front of it.

What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the Spirit

[that's the Holy Spirit], "and I will also pray with the understanding." [and notice that there is no "my" here either. It's not just Paul's understanding he is concerned about. He is concerned about understanding as a principle. So he says, "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." What Paul is saying is that Christianity is nothing like the pagan religions in Corinth that spoke in tongues and had ecstatic prophecies where people were out of their minds. And by the way, many pagan ancient religions had those. The religion of Appollo had people demonically speaking in tongues. The oracle at Delphi had that priestess going out of her mind and speaking in foreign languages and prophesying by a familiar spirit. But in all of the pagan religions, the demons bypassed the human mind. Demons *tend to do that* to people. They destroy the image of God in man. But when Paul prays with the help of the Holy Spirit in tongues, his mind is also in gear. The Holy Spirit never bypasses the human mind; it never makes us irrational. Anyone who is given the ability to speak in another language will also be given a heightened understanding of exactly what he is saying. So the Holy Spirit and my spirit both have understanding.

Also, this would misunderstand the meaning of "unfruitful." Many commentators have pointed out that this has an "active meaning" such as is shown in Williams translation: "my mind produces no results for anyone." (see Goodspeed, Moffatt, etc.) Spicq's dictionary defines the word "unfruitful" as "the condition of that which does not produce anything." What is unfruitful in verse 14? "my understanding." He possesses understanding, but it is not producing anything. NIV Greek defines it as, "unproductive, something generally useless." In other words, the understanding he does have ("my understanding") is unproductive in the lives of others and is thus useless. We should not interpret this to mean, "my understanding has no understanding," but rather, "my understanding is not multiplying by bearing fruit in the lives of others. It is unproductive."

But they will object that this contradicts the last phrase of verse 14 which says, "my mind is unfruitful." If this meant my mind does not understand what it is saying, then this is the only phrase in the whole chapter which shows that. But if you look in Gordon Fee's charismatic commentary, even he admits that this phrase often has an active meaning of "does not bear fruit in the lives of others." I would say it always has that meaning. He is just so stuck on his view that there can be no understanding, because tongues speakers today have no understanding, that he opts for a very odd interpretation of the phrase. On Fee's interpretation, the last phrase says, "my understanding has no understanding." Do you catch the contradiction? That's the effect of his argument. It is to say, "my understanding has no understanding." Or, if you translate the Greek word *nous* in its usual sense of "mind," then Paul

is saying, "my mind has no mind." But that is not what Paul says. His mind or his understanding was not bearing fruit in the minds of others.

Saying that Paul's understanding is unfruitful is quite different from saying that Paul's understanding is non-existent. If the thinking spirit is the fruit tree, the tree is alive, but because there is no translation, no one else can pick the fruit of this understanding and benefit. That's what he is getting at. And so there is a perfect harmony all the way through this chapter. And the only change that needs to be made in translation is in verse 15 where you capitalize the word "spirit," and then there is a perfect harmony.

But on Gordon Fee's interpretation, there is point after point from verse 2 and on that has to be explained away. And certainly in this verse, he not only has heartburn over the word "for" at the beginning of verse 14, and the words "my spirit," but he also makes a muddle of verse 15 and cannot explain the existence of the word "otherwise" in verse 16. In verse 15 Fee claims that "I will pray with the Spirit" means tongues prayer language in the private closet and "I will pray with the understanding" refers to ordinary prayer in Greek in the worship service. That puts these verses on collision course with everything that he has said so far.

So let me paraphrase the meaning of verses 14-15 for you. In effect Paul is saying, "For if I pray in a foreign language, my spirit prays and thus understands exactly what I am saying, but the clear understanding that I possess is not producing fruit in the lives of the congregation. It is not edifying them." Verse 15: So what is the conclusion? To sum up everything that I have said before, I will pray in another language with the Holy Spirit's enabling, but I want to make sure that my prayer is fully understood. I will sing in a foreign language with the Holy Spirit's enabling, but I want to make sure that what I have sung is translated and understood by all.

Verse 15 is not therefore contrasting Paul's spirit with Paul's mind. On the contrary, the spirit is so constantly linked with the mind in Scripture that one can speak equally well of the "mind of the Spirit" (Rom. 8:27) or "the spirit of your mind" (Eph. 4:23). An irrational spirit is repugnant to the Scriptural vision since God has given us "a spirit... of a sound mind" (2 Tim. 1:7). The spirit clearly knows (Mark 2:8; 1 Cor. 2:11). Instead, we should see this as a reference to the Holy Spirit. Thus the difference between "my spirit" in verse 14 and "the Spirit" in verse 15. Paul is saying that the Spirit gives the ability to speak in a foreign language, but the Spirit always accompanies His rational work with rationality.

This is consistent with Paul's question: "What is the conclusion then?" He is concluding a long series of arguments that the speaker understood what he was saying and thus edified himself, but it is important that he speak words that lead to corporate understanding ("the understanding.") This praying with understanding honors the Spirit of wisdom and understanding.

This is parallel with verse 2 (see the interpretation given above).

This is the interpretation of many older commentaries such as Matthew Henry, Matthew Poole, Charles Hodge, John Wesley, etc. Wesley said, "By the power of the Spirit I understand the words myself... [however] the knowledge I have is no benefit to others." Matthew Poole says, "Nor is it here said, my understanding is dark or blind, but unfruitful, that is, though myself understand, yet my knowledge bringeth forth no fruit to the advantage or good of others."

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Other indicators of rational understanding by the speaker in tongues of what he is saying

The Spirit enables you to bless, but you do the blessing in tongues.

If lack of understanding keeps the congregation from saying "Amen" to the giving of thanks, how can the tongues speaker say Amen to it if he does not understand what he has said?

For the Spirit to bless and give thanks is one thing, but for the human to bless and give thanks (v. 16-17) implies the thanks and blessing comes from him, which in turn implies rationality.

"For you indeed give thanks well, but the other is not edified." (v. 17) This implies that no one else knew it was given well. But that in turn implies that the speaker does know that he gave thanks well.

Verse 20 calls us not to be children in understanding. Tongues as modernly practiced is even worse – no understanding.

Everyone admits that the tongues of verse 21 was understood by the speakers, yet Paul builds his theology of tongues upon that passage in Isaiah 28 (see 1 Cor. 14:22).

I'm going to skip over most of the other indicators of rationality, but let me just highlight two more. Look at verses 21-22. In verse 21 he says,

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

If Paul's "therefore" has any weight, the tongues in Corinth was the same kind of tongues as in Isaiah 28 – a foreign language. And everyone agrees that the foreigners in verse 21 understood what they were saying.

The accusation of being out of your mind (v. 23) is the same kind of accusation made in Acts 2:13, since drunkenness is a state of losing control of one's mind. Yet it is clear that Acts 2 was speaking of a true language. Someone talking for a long time in our congregation in Arabic might be thought to be crazy – especially if there were no Arabs present.

Verse 28 indicates that a tongue speaker who is not translating is just talking to himself and God. To talk to yourself implies that you understand what is being said.

And finally, verse 28 says, "But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God." If charismatics were correct when they say that the speaker of tongues has no idea what he is saying and that it is simply the Holy Spirit praying to the Father and bypassing the mind of the speaker, then you would expect that Paul would say that he is only talking to God when there is no interpreter. But this verse says that the tongues speaker is talking to himself just as much as he is talking to God. Which implies what? Both understood. Everyone acknowledges that God understands what is being said (and thus it is appropriate to say that he *is* talking to God), but how can you talk to yourself unless you understand what you are saying? Speaking to oneself assumes understanding.

Just as tongues was a sign in Acts 2 that God would judge Israel through the Gentiles if the Jews did not repent (70 AD) and would give the kingdom to the Gentiles (see especially Acts 2:20-21ff; 3:14-26), Paul indicates that the tongues of Corinth was fundamentally a sign of His judgment on unbelieving Israel (1 Cor. 14:21-22) as well as His reaching out in favor to the Gentiles (see previous point).

Just as tongues in Corinth could make people (who didn't know the language) think that the Corinthians were crazy (1 Cor. 14:23), so too Jews who didn't know foreign languages thought that the apostles were drunk (Acts 2:13).

In Acts, it was not the foreigners who needed an interpreter (Acts 2:6-8,11), but the locals (Acts 2:13). The same was true in Corinth. The foreign language of 1 Corinthians 14:11 could be understood by a foreigner, but when benefiting that foreigner by praying in his language or speaking briefly in his language, it is essential that one "interprets, that the church may receive edification" (1 Cor. 14:5).

The major difference between Acts 2 and 1 Corinthians 12-14 is that Acts describes tongues in an evangelistic setting outside the church whereas Paul is describing a church setting with only an accidental unbeliever who happens to come in. It is "in the church" (1 Cor. 12:28), and when "the whole church comes together in one place" (14:23) that these rules are so important because Paul wants to make sure that "the church may receive edification" (1 Cor. 14:5).

Next week I would like to finish off this subject by looking at nine rules that God gave to govern speaking in another language. I was hoping to get to that today because that's where a lot of the practical ramifications lie. But for today, let's rejoice that our God is a God of rationality. He wants us to think; He wants us to think clearly. He wants us to think logically. He doesn't appreciate worship that is mindless. What a glorious thing it was for the former demoniac to be sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. That's what God's grace does with us.

In complete contrast, Romans 7:23 says that our *sinful* nature is *irrational* and it is "warring against the law of my mind." The world, the flesh and the devil are constantly fighting against rationality. But not God. In contrast, Romans 12:2 commands believers by the power of the Spirit to "be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." Ephesians 4:23 says, "and be renewed in the spirit of your mind." Philippians 2:5 exhorts us to exhibit the mind of Christ, and never once did Christ show forth irrational thinking. Paul does not want the accusation to ever be directed against Christians, as it was in 1 Corinthians 14:23, **you are out of your mind**. For Paul, no accusation could hurt worse than the one given in verse 23. If we say things that can't be translated and aren't translated, there might be the tendency for people to think that we are irrational. An irrational Spirit is repugnant to the Scriptural vision since 2 Timothy 1:7 says that God has given us a spirit of a sound mind.

And it is precisely because God delights in rationality that we should translate for foreigners if at all possible. I loved the time at Trinity when we had two translators in the back and students could use headphones to switch to their language to hear the sermon. I would rejoice if God gave our congregation several people who understood and could speak foreign languages, whether miraculously and instantly, or whether through study. It would fit our goals of missions beautifully. But let's lay aside that which does not fit Paul's admonitions. Let's lay aside irrationality. Let's affirm that the Spirit never bypasses the mind. Certainly He transcends the mind (because His thoughts are far higher than our thoughts), but He never bypasses the mind. He may overwhelm it sometimes, but He never bypasses it. May we become a fruitful church by increasingly becoming a church where our minds are transformed by the renewing of the Holy Spirit; where our minds are captivated by the word of God; where our minds are not lazy; where our minds are used to the glory of God and for the edification of others. Amen.

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1. They base this on a misinterpretation of 1 Corinthians 14:14: "For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful." While this could be taken to mean that the speaker does not have understanding, such an interpretation violates the whole context of Paul's argument that nothing is edifying that cannot be understood. Paul says, "He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church" (1 Cor. 14:4). The reason prophecy edified the church is because the church understood it. The reason tongues edified the speaker is because he understands what he is saying. And even the immediate context of 1 Corinthians 14:16 demands such an interpretation. Paul insists, "I will pray with the spirit, and I will *also pray with the understanding*... 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? For you indeed give thanks well, but the other is not edified." 