

“What About The Gift Of Tongues?”

1 Corinthians 14:1-25

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Teaching Aim: To explore the spiritual gift of tongues and see if the gift is still active today? To examine differing opinions on tongues and to assist each believer in making up his or her own mind on this controversial topic. To encourage believers to be sensitive to Paul’s admonition: *“do not forbid speaking in tongues”*.

DIGGING DEEPER INTO GOD’S WORD (BIBLE STUDY)

Part I: A comparison of the spiritual gifts of prophecy and speaking in tongues (1 Cor. 14:1-5)

1. Why is *“agape”* love (*a self-sacrificial Christ-like love that considers the welfare of others before yourself*) so important when it comes to spiritual gifts (**vs. 1**)? According to **verse 1**, is it okay for a believer to desire spiritual gifts that he or she does not already have? What is the purpose of spiritual gifts? In what two ways do we find the gift of prophecy being used in Scripture? (**See Isa. 48:3; 1 Cor. 14:24-25**)

2. Christians who believe in a personal prayer language (*or an unknown tongue*) often look to **verse 2** as a proof text. According to **verse 2**, can the average person understand what a person speaking in tongues is saying? Who is the person speaking in an unknown language ultimately speaking to? What is a *“mystery”*? How can tongues be considered a *“mystery”* (**vs. 2**)?

3. According to **verse 3**, what happens to other believers when the gift of prophecy is properly used? Does proper use of prophecy build up the church body or tear it down? What is the major difference between the spiritual gift of prophecy and the gift of tongues as revealed in **verse 4**?

4. When is it wrong to use the gift of tongues in the corporate setting (**vs. 5**)? As important as the spiritual gift of tongues (*or languages*) is, what is even more important to the health of the local church body? According to **verse 5**, what is the purpose of *“prophecy”*? Why is the gift of *“interpretation of tongues”* so important to believers in the local church?

Part II: The importance of communicating with understanding (1 Cor. 14:6-19)

1. What is Paul's point in **verse 6**? If a statement is unintelligible, what is communicated? How do "*unknown tongues*" edify or build up the hearer?
2. Paul uses three examples to illustrate his point: 1) musical instruments and music in general; 2) the use of a trumpet to communicate military commands; 3) the necessity of understanding in everyday conversation. What are some of the differences between a child banging on a piano keyboard and a skilled pianist in concert (**vs. 7**)? What kinds of communication can come through different kinds of music? Does music have the ability to change one's emotions?
3. Discuss how a trumpet might be used in communicating military commands (**vs. 8**). Do we see trumpets being used in the Bible as an instrument of communication? If so how? (See **Exod. 19:19-21; 20:18-19; Josh. 6:20; Judg. 7:18-22; 1 Kings 1:39**)
4. Have you ever found yourself near a group of people laughing while looking at you and talking to each other in another language that you didn't understand (**vs. 9**)? How did you feel? Did the experience build you up in a positive way or did you find yourself wondering suspiciously if the others were talking about you? How does this imagery relate to people speaking in an unknown tongue at a worship service without the presence of an interpreter?
5. It is estimated there are anywhere between 3,000 and 8,000 living languages in the world today. Are any of these languages without meaning (**vs. 10**)? What is the purpose behind language? (See Dictionary) According to Paul, how do people feel when they don't understand the language being spoken (**vs. 11**)? What kind of spiritual gifts should we be zealous of (**vs. 12**)?
6. What conclusion did Paul come to in **verse 13**? Why? How does praying in an "*unknown tongue*" affect the spirit and mind according to **verse 14**? What conclusion does Paul come to in **verse 15**? Why is it important for the mind and intellect to be engaged when praying or singing worship songs? Are you more likely to remember a sermon or the words of a song?

7. Is it ok for Christians to say “*Amen!*” out loud in a worship service? Where do we find the evidence biblically? (**Hint: See vs. 16**) What are you actually saying when you say “*Amen?*” (See Commentaries) When is the only time a Christian should say “*Amen?*” Who is edified when someone says thanks for an “*unknown tongue*” (**vs. 17**)? Who is not edified?
8. What did Paul acknowledge in **verse 18**? Does this surprise you? Do you think Paul is referring to human languages or to a heavenly language? According to **verse 19**, which is more important in the church setting, speaking many words in an unknown tongue or speaking just a few words in a language that is understood? Why?

Part III: The purpose of tongues and the impact of prophecy (1 Cor. 14:20-25)

1. The Corinthians seemed to have a fascination with the spectacular and showy “*spiritual gifts.*” Many in Corinth were misusing these gifts to give the impression that they were more spiritual than others. What are we not to be children in (**vs. 20**)? Why? What should every believer in Christ seek? What are you doing to deepen your understanding of God’s Word?
2. In **verse 21**, Paul used the word law to refer to the entire Old Testament. Understanding **verse 21** is key to understanding **1 Cor. 14**. **Isaiah 28:11-13** refers to the judgment that came upon the nation of Israel at the hands of the Assyrians because of Israel’s disobedience. Isaiah proclaimed the message of God to Israel, but most refused to listen and believe. (**See Isaiah 6:8-10**) Jesus used parables when around unbelievers which were incomprehensible to their unbelieving hearts as a sign of impending judgment. (See **Matt. 13:13, 34-35; Mark 4:10-12**) In what way was the gift of tongues “*a sign*” of God’s judgment toward unbelievers, particularly the unbelieving Jews (**vs. 22**)?
3. According to Paul, “*speaking in tongues*” was a sign for unbelievers, but who was *the gift of “prophecy”* for (**vs. 22**)? Why? Should tongues ever be used in the corporate church setting without an interpreter present (**vs. 23**)? Why or why not? The Greek word used for “*uninformed*” is “*idiotes*”. What English word is derived from this Greek word? According to **verse 23**, who are the “*idiotes*”? Should the primary focus of the church service be upon “*unbelievers*” who might happen to walk in, or on building up the body of Christ to maturity? (See **Eph. 4:11-13**)

4. What are some ways that “*prophesying*” and “*speaking in tongues*” differ in the effect they have on unbelievers at church (vv. 24-25)? Which of the two should take priority in the corporate worship setting? Why? (See **Isaiah 55:11**)

5. Should churches forbid attendees from speaking in tongues? (See **1 Cor. 14:39-40**) Why or why not? When are tongues not to be spoken in the corporate setting? (See **1 Cor. 14:28**)

MINER’S CORNER ~ Manna to live by!

- He who speaks in an unknown tongue edifies himself, but he who speaks prophetic words builds up the entire church body!
- Tongues (*in the sense of unknown languages*) are of no benefit to the others in the corporate worship setting and is actually a distraction without an interpreter!
- Believers should desire spiritual gifts that build up the entire church body!
- Speaking in tongues is a spiritual gift from God but should only be used in the proper setting; if corporately, only when an interpreter is present!
- A few words of clear instruction in the church are of much more value than many words in an unknown tongue!
- We should be sensitive today to Paul’s command “*do not forbid to speak with tongues!*”