

# The Gift of Tongues II

## 1 Corinthians 14

Follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy.

<sup>2</sup> For he that speaketh in an *unknown* tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries.

<sup>3</sup> But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort.

<sup>4</sup> He that speaketh in an *unknown* tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church.

<sup>5</sup> I would that ye all spake with tongues but rather that ye prophesied: for greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying.

<sup>6</sup> Now, brethren, if I come unto you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you, except I shall speak to you either by revelation, or by knowledge, or by prophesying, or by doctrine?

<sup>7</sup> And even things without life giving sound, whether pipe or harp, except they give a distinction in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped?

<sup>8</sup> For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?

<sup>9</sup> So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the air.

<sup>10</sup> There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world, and none of them is without signification.

<sup>11</sup> Therefore if I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh shall be a barbarian unto me.

<sup>12</sup> Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church.

<sup>13</sup> Wherefore let him that speaketh in an *unknown* tongue pray that he may interpret.

<sup>14</sup> For if I pray in an *unknown* tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful.

<sup>15</sup> What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.

<sup>16</sup> Else when thou shalt bless with the spirit, how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say Amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest?

<sup>17</sup> For thou verily givest thanks well, but the other is not edified.

<sup>18</sup> I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all:

<sup>19</sup> Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an *unknown* tongue.

<sup>20</sup> Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men.

<sup>21</sup> In the law it is written, with men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that will they not hear me, saith the Lord.

<sup>22</sup> Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not: but prophesying serveth not for them that believe not, but for them which believe.

<sup>23</sup> If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad?

<sup>24</sup> But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all:

<sup>25</sup> And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth.

<sup>26</sup> How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying.

<sup>27</sup> If any man speak in an *unknown* tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course; and let one interpret.

<sup>28</sup> But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God.

<sup>29</sup> Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge.

<sup>30</sup> If any thing be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace.

<sup>31</sup> For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted.

<sup>32</sup> And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.

<sup>33</sup> For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.

<sup>34</sup> Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience as also saith the law.

<sup>35</sup> And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.

<sup>36</sup> What? came the word of God out from you? or came it unto you only?

<sup>37</sup> If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.

<sup>38</sup> But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant.

<sup>39</sup> Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues.

<sup>40</sup> Let all things be done decently and in order.

## The Unknown Tongue

Many today speak in tongues but, the truth is, no one is edified, no message is given, and it is done under the disguise of the “unknown” tongue. Well it may come as a shock to many but the word unknown which is shown 7 times in 1 Cor. 14, before the word “tongues”, giving rise to the phrase “the unknown tongue” is supplied by the translators of the Bible and it was not found in the original Greek manuscript. Paul never referred to “tongues” as if it were unknown (meaning could not be understood or translated). So, what do we mean by supplied? The word was added to either make the English readable or to help with the understanding of the passage. To do this, and maintain the authenticity of the translation, the translators must show or indicate which words are supplied so that the reader can choose to ignore it if he or she chooses. In the KJV Bible ([which is an essential literal translation, one of the most accurate translations](#)) all supplied words are written in italics so that the reader will know that it was not in the original Greek manuscript. If we look closely, the word “unknown” which is used to describe the “tongue” is also in italics. It means that this word is supplied and can be ignored. This word was supplied to give the reader a clearer understanding of the issue being discussed which is the gift of tongues but unfortunately it has caused much confusion.

Many use this unknown tongue to suggest that there is a tongue that cannot be understood by men but by God, the Holy Spirit and maybe the Angels only. Unfortunately, this is not the case, Paul never described the tongue as unknown (meaning could not be understood or translated), and so what we can do is ignore the word “unknown” and look at the text to see if we could get a clearer picture without the confusion or see if we could arrive at the proper use of the word “unknown”.

However, if we could push the argument a little further, what is the edification to the saints if someone in the congregation is speaking to God, they don't know what they are saying, and no one else knows what they are saying. This is fundamentally wrong! All gifts that are given by the Holy Spirit is to edify the one to whom it is given and the one who bears witness to the manifestation of the gift.

### [1Corinthians 12:7](#)

[But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.](#)

So, with that said let's go through prayerfully 1Corinthians 14.

### 1Corinthians 14:2,4

Now that we have removed the mysticism of the word "unknown" let's get the proper meaning of its usage or what the translators, really intended for us to understand. If we remove the word "unknown" and read 1 Cor. 14:2, this is what we get,

*"For he that speaketh in a tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries".*

So, we have removed the supplied word, which shows what the original manuscript would have contained. The word "tongue" (glossa is the Greek word from which it is translated) when examined it means - a language or dialect used by a particular people. So, let's expand the text to reflect this meaning,

*"For he that speaketh in a language or dialect of a particular people speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries."*

Looking at the text, it is saying that if we speak in a language or dialect we are not speaking to those listening, but to God who alone would be able to understand. The reason for this is that those listening doesn't know the language or dialect, but God can speak all the languages known to men, in fact he created all the languages known today. In the original Greek manuscript, it is strongly communicated that this tongue or language is not familiar to those listening. However, if we read the translation in English this idea is not explicitly expressed and so the translators added the word "unknown" to help understand what Paul was saying so let's re-insert the word "unknown",

*"For he that speaketh in an unknown language or dialect of a particular people speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries."*

So, now we get a clearer picture as to where the apostle Paul was directing the focus of his readers. He even further emphasized the point by his closing statement, "howbeit in the Spirit he speaketh mysteries". He shows the confusion that could arise concerning the work of the Spirit. How could one be filled with the Spirit and talk "mysteries" when

the Spirit is the one to bring understanding and clarity of God's word to his people.

### 1Corinthians 12:7

But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.

In verse 4 he then builds on verse 2,

“He that speaketh in an *unknown* language or dialect of a particular people edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church.”

Isn't this wonderful, the Bible is crystal clear, if someone is speaking in Spanish to an English-speaking audience without a translator, no one will benefit from the message except the one giving it, because he or she will be the only one who understands it. Paul suggests you prophesy instead of speaking in a language, that no one understands, it would be of more benefit to the church. Also, it shows that the one speaking in a tongue that no one knows is only edifying him/herself because only they could understand what they are saying. They know the message. Is this true of those who speak in tongues today?

I believe we have enough evidence to conclude that those speaking in tongues must understand what **they are saying** and everyone listening must also be able to **understand what is being said**. With this as our foundation we will then build and expand on our understanding as we go through the remaining verses of 1 Corinthians 14.

### 1 Corinthians 14:5-11

Verses 5,6 gives us some more insight into God's will on the matter as he leads Paul to write. In many Christian churches today, the gift of tongues is portrayed as “the gift of all gifts”, so those that can speak in tongues, they are separate and apart, elevated in the congregation, because of the apparent use of this gift. The Apostle makes it quite clear, this gift should be the least coveted and that it only makes sense if a translator is present. He is also very clear that if you are speaking in tongues, you must be speaking the revealed will of God, or prophesying, or bringing clarity to a doctrine. Tongues is another language, and if the

gift was given, it is to declare the word of God for those who can understand, to hear and be convicted and converted.

### **Acts 2:11**

Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.

You see, they just didn't talk in tongues for the sake of just speaking another language to show that they were eloquent. It was done to reach everyone no matter what language they spoke and to convince them that Jesus the Son of God came to seek and to save those who are lost. It was the Gospel they declared. The gift was used in another sense to confirm the authenticity of the message given. How can babbling gibberish, be a gift of the Spirit when no glory is given to God but only to men.

Paul uses the analogy of an instrument. If someone is playing an instrument and he or she doesn't follow any standard musical progression or doesn't follow the rules of music and just plays a random disorderly noise, no one will know what is being played or how to analyze the piece. Is it 4/4 timing or is 2/4, what key is it being played in? They would not even know when the piece is coming to an end. It would be a musical nightmare. Now that's what happens when someone starts babbling gibberish that no one understands and what is even worst, it cannot be repeated by those who have witnessed the event to bless someone else, even if it was intended to do so. The message cannot be carried because none was given.

### **Vs 10,11**

In verse 10,11 the word voice is used, interchangeably with the word tongues. How did we arrive at this conclusion? Let's look at other examples in which this same word has been used in the Bible.

### **Matthew 2:18**

In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.

### **Mark 15:34**

And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

### **Luke 3:22**

And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased.

In all three instances the word voice was used to describe the human sound, and in all instances, it conveyed a message that the hearer could understand and appreciate. Let's examine the examples,

- In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation and weeping. From this voice, although no words are shown to be expressed (but could have been) we understand that something terrible and tragic has happened, so that it is communicating something.
- Jesus cried with a loud voice saying... So, Jesus used his voice to communicate a message, that could be understood, because it was interpreted and recorded, so we can read it today and be blessed.
- And a voice came from heaven...Again a message was declared, and it was understood.

We want to dive into the Greek but only to add to our understanding

Verse 10,

*“kinds”* – This word is translated from the Greek word *“genos”*, and it means nations, nationality, stock, tribe or nation....

*“without signification”* – This phrase is translated from the Greek word *“aphonos”*, and it means dumb, speechless, meaningless, without faculty of speech.



Let's get to the heart of the matter,

### 1Corinthians 14:10

There are, it may be, so many kinds (nations, tribes) of voices in the world, and none of them is without signification (dumb, speechless, meaningless).

Wow, Paul really went deep with this one. All languages can be understood. Plain and simple.

In verse 11 he then says if I (Paul) can't understand the voice of the speaker I am a barbarian to him and he is a barbarian to me. The Oxford English dictionary describes a barbarian as someone being uncultured and brutish. The fact is that in ages past many tribes were given this description because they were highly misunderstood. Isn't that what is happening today and clothed as a gift of the Spirit. According to Paul anyone speaking in a voice that no one can understand makes a barbarian of him or herself and the entire congregation. Me Tarzan, you Jane.... (hmmm, but we could understand that).

I believe that we have exhausted the fact that tongues are languages and must be understood by the one speaking and those hearing, and it must also convey a message to the honour and glory of God.

Let's Jump to vs 22 - 25

"Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not: but prophesying serveth not for them that believe not, but for them which believe."

<sup>23</sup> If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad?

<sup>24</sup> But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all:

And thus, are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on *his* face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth.

Simply put, why would multiple persons be given the gift to speak in an unknown language that is not native to the congregation of believers. So, in Trinidad and Tobago service is in progress and 2 or 3 members break out in German, Portuguese and French. And a visitor walks in the church for the first time and there is no interpreter. According to Paul – Madness!

However, if a revelation or prophecy is given and it is well understood and well received the visitor will know what the church believes and what is expected of him by its members, if he or she wishes to fellowship there.

Like on the day of Pentecost, there were men and women from all over the world that hadn't heard the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and as God's providence prevailed they were all together in one place. The gift of tongues was used to substantiate the truth that was heard, it gave credibility to the message. If these unlearned men could speak like this after being with Jesus then, he really is divine as they say, he must be the messiah.

I'm yet to understand how the noisy gibberish that we pass for tongues today would lead men and women to such a conclusion. The gift of tongues, as proposed by Paul, whom we believed wrote these words under the inspiration of the Spirit of God is for **unbelievers**, **not believers** in a congregation worshipping. The gift of tongues is a witness for **unbelievers**. How clearer can we get than this? So, for those who may think the gift of tongues elevates them in their status at church they are misguided and deceived. In most cases (if not all) they are not effective witnesses for Christ.

### 1Corinthians 14:27,28

<sup>27</sup> If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course; and let one interpret.

<sup>28</sup> But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God.

Verse 27 tells us that if any man should speak in an unknown language, or dialect, and there is more than one person preferably two or three at most, they must speak in turns and not at the same time so that those

listening can hear the message of salvation clearly and it must not sound like disorder and mayhem. This is amplified by the phrase, “and that by course”, in verse 27, which means to take turns speaking. And let there be an interpreter. The reason being all hearing must understand. This is critical, “**ALL HEARING MUST UNDERSTAND**”. If the one that is speaking cannot be understood, Paul makes it clear, he or she must be silent. If no one can understand and there is no interpreter, then it is best to say nothing at all. Whisper to yourself and God.

In closing, the gift of tongues is not to be trifled with. It is not to be made a spectacle. If you want to show your connection to Christ, do it with humility through service to others. If you must be Christlike show love to all men including the unlovable. If you must be a witness for Christ, then tell of how he has led you in the past and of the many blessings you have received. There is an interesting story told by Jesus in Matthew 25,

#### **Matthew 25:33-40**

<sup>33</sup> And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.

<sup>34</sup> Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

<sup>35</sup> For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in:

<sup>36</sup> Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.

<sup>37</sup> Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink?

<sup>38</sup> When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee?

<sup>39</sup> Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?

<sup>40</sup> And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

The righteous are rewarded for there service to their fellowmen. It is not so much how much you baptised or how much money you gave. Its

about the personal touch. Why am I saying all this? We need to bring everything into its proper perspective. The gifts that are given by the Spirit, the resources that God has entrusted to us is not for us to make a show or to exalt ourselves. It is given us so that we can be a blessing to those Christ has died for. We are to relieve suffering, bring comfort to those who are hurting, provide for those who are in need and share the good news of salvation, that Jesus Christ died to save us from our sins and that he is coming again. Then if everything we do is seen through the eyes of Christ as mentioned in Matthew 25:33-40, we will be very careful what activities we pass off as spiritual gifts. Taking in tongues can indeed be a spiritual gift when someone preaches the gospel in a language that is not his or her native language, it just happened automatically as led by the spirit. Or it can be someone speaking a language with an interpreter. The main goal is to reach a soul dying in sin and tell that Jesus is alive and that he is the answer. That's all there is to it.

Would you prefer someone yelling a garbled noise to you or someone speaking to you in a controlled tone in words you can understand. The scriptures are clear. The choice is yours. What will you believe?