

1 Cor. 14:13-25 "A Matter of Interpretation"

For the Children: Many schools today teach some foreign language to their students – Japanese, Chinese, French, or even Latin. If you know a foreign language and you are speaking it with others, what should you do if someone who does not know that language tries to join in with your group? It would be rude to keep speaking in a way they cannot understand. They would feel excluded. That is why we speak English in our worship services, so we can all benefit from it and so can any visitors. **Questions:** What is the problem if members of the church cannot understand what is going on in the service? What is the problem if visitors cannot understand? Should we change everything in our services to make it what unbelievers might like to have?

Introduction:

First Point: The Effect of Tongues on Other Believers

- 1) Mind and Spirit: It appears that there were those in Corinth who spoke, prayed and sang in tongues – though often without an interpreter. The apostle says that the one speaking in tongues may have some idea, internally (in his spirit) that he is praising God; but if the mind is not also involved, with a rational understanding and communication of the message, no one can be edified.
- 2) A Problem Saying "Amen": If worshippers do not understand, they cannot say "Amen" to it. "Amen" means the hearer has discerned that what has been said is true and faithful to God's Word.
- 3) Instruction, Edification and Unity: What the apostle desires for the church is edification (v. 17) by instruction (v. 19); and maturity (v. 20), which also requires understandable instruction.
- 4) The Apostle's Gift of Tongues: Paul mentions that he speaks in tongues more than all of them (v. 18). He is not restricting the use of tongues out of "sour grapes," or because he is an ungifted and unspiritual man.

Second Point: The Effect of Tongues on Unbelievers

- 1) A Sign of Judgement: In v. 21 the apostle introduces another aspect of the gift of tongues. He quotes Is. 28:11f, which warned Israel that God was about to judge them for their hardness of heart. They had complained that Isaiah was speaking to them as if they were babies. Now the punishment would be that they would indeed hear the sound of unintelligible speech, when foreigners surrounded their cities (the Assyrians). See also Dt. 28:49-50. The same happened with Judah and the Babylonians. There is an element of this with NT speaking in tongues: the sound of these foreign languages in Judea indicated that God was about to punish Israel for rejecting His Son.
- 2) A "Used-By" Date: Speaking in tongues actually had more than one purpose. It was a sign of the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit; it was a sign of judgement on Israel; it was a sign of the apostles; and it was a form of prophecy, when interpreted; However, all of these purposes were valid for only a limited time, until the judgement of Israel, the completion of the Scripture and the end of the time of the apostles.
- 3) Judgement on the Wrong People: The reason this is explained, is that if unbelievers entered the worship services at that time and heard uninterpreted tongues, they might conclude that everyone there was crazy! If they then rejected the Gospel, the tongues would again lead to judgement. But foreign tongues were a sign of judgement on Israel, not on unbelievers inquiring about the faith. If, however, they heard prophecy/interpreted tongues, with its understandable Gospel-content, they might be converted. They would then conclude with Is. 45:14 that "God is certainly among you." Note that the apostle is applying the edification principle to 2 groups who might be found in a worship service: believers and unbelievers

Conclusion:

