

## SOME COMMENTS ON 1 COR. 14 (Updated 15/5/2013)

My Speaking In Tongues videos are at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qi6ffUvpvZUI>

In Mark 16:15-18, Jesus said that tongues would be one of the signs to follow the evangelists as they went into the world and this was fulfilled, as shown in the book of Acts. About 20 years after Jesus spoke these words, 1 Corinthians was written stating that tongues would cease and this occurred some years later when the Temple was destroyed (70AD) or perhaps later. 1 Cor. 14 makes many statements governing the use of tongues and these rules applied to the church *before* the gift was withdrawn. The rules were put in place because of the abuse of the gift and had no bearing on the fact that tongues, being just a sign, was to cease at a later stage when the sign had served its purpose.

### TONGUES WAS SIMPLY A SIGN OF JUDGMENT

Tongues (foreign languages) was used as a sign of judgment three times in the Old Testament:

- 1) In Gen. 11 God judged the people of Babel by confusing their tongues (languages).
- 2) In Isa. 28:11-13, Isaiah prophesied that men of strange tongues, the Assyrians, would be God's instrument of judgment against Israel.
- 3) In Jer. 5:15-17, Jeremiah prophesied that people of another language, the Babylonians, would be God's instrument of judgment against Judah.

Then, in the New Testament, 1 Cor. 14:21-22 says that through "*men of strange tongues*" God would speak to "*this people*" (the Jews) and it would be a sign to them. The quote in these verses comes from Isa. 28:11-14 so it is obvious that tongues was, once again, a sign of forthcoming judgment against Israel, this time for rejecting their Messiah. This judgment came against "*this people*", Israel, when Jerusalem was destroyed in 70AD by people of a foreign tongue. The sign of tongues was not likely needed beyond that point in time because tongues had served its purpose and judgment had come.

Many people believe that tongues is a private prayer language despite the fact that there is not a single verse which says this. If tongues was a private prayer language then why would Paul tell the Corinthians to be adult in their thinking rather than babble in an unknown tongue like a child (1 Cor. 14:20)? Why would Paul tell them that using their (supposed) God-given prayer language in church was childish? The fact is, the purpose of speaking in tongues was not for prayer but to be a sign of judgement to those who had rejected their Messiah. Immediately after telling the Corinthians to be adult, Paul explained the purpose of tongues. He continued on in vs.21-22 to say that God would speak to "*this people*" with strange tongues and that it was a sign for unbelievers (The term 'this people' refers to the Jews as Isa. 28:11-14 tell us). Together, these verses tell us that tongues was simply a sign to the Jewish unbelievers, nothing more. The very nature of the sign, God being praised in foreign languages, tells us the nature of the Jewish unbelief. They refused to believe that foreigners, Gentiles, were part of God's salvation plan and this is clear from the violent Jewish opposition Paul endured all throughout Acts. To the Jews, the idea of being united with the Gentiles was more that they could bear as they believed that they alone were God's people. Acts 2:4-12 tells us that the Jews from other nations were amazed to hear 'their' God being praised in foreign languages. **It was a powerful sign to the Jews – God was being praised in languages of the Barbarians. There is no way that a non Jew would be amazed to hear anyone praising God in any language so it is quite clear that tongues was a sign only for the Jews.**

Tongues was a sign to the Jews when the evangelists went out into the world, as stated in Mark 16:15-18. The sign was for evangelism, not for prayer nor prophecy nor for general church use. In vs.18-19 Paul said "*I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. **But in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct ...***" The words "*But in the church*" tell us that

tongues were not normal for church meetings, but intelligible words were. Paul would rather speak intelligibly in the church than speak in tongues.

The word 'but' is used four times in vs. 2-5 showing that tongues was not for prophecy. In Acts 2:11, the men who spoke in tongues were declaring the wonders of God and 1 Cor. 14:16 says that praying in the spirit is praising God and giving thanks. These examples show that tongues was for speaking to God, as 1 Cor. 14:2 says, and not for receiving messages from God. 1 Cor. 14:2 says, "*anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God*", so tongues was not for giving messages to man. In Acts 19:6, men "*spoke in tongues and prophesied*" but this is not saying that they prophesied in tongues.

Given that tongues was always speaking to God, it is certain that the gospel was never presented in tongues. Further to this, those who had the gift of tongues did not necessarily know what they were saying and to effectively convey the gospel a common language is needed for questions and debate. An evangelist would be dumbfounded if someone questioned him in a language he didn't understand. However, if an evangelist simply praised God or declared His wonders in a tongue, unknown to himself, then the sign would have been given to the Jews present and the gospel could then be presented in a common language. Also, as tongues were a sign to the Jews, the gift would not have been used to spread the gospel to the Gentiles - the sign was specifically for the Jews. Note that in two of the three cases where tongues is mentioned, in Acts, tongues were spoken by those who received the gospel (Cornelius and company in Ch.10 & the twelve Jews who had received John's baptism in Ch.19). This further emphasises the fact that tongues was not for conveying the gospel but was simply a sign for the Jews who were present when tongues were spoken. Also, in Acts 2, tongues were spoken in many different languages after which Peter presented the gospel to the crowd. The gospel would have been presented by Peter once, in a common language (Greek most likely, or Aramaic), not many times in many different languages.

The novelty and pride of being able to speak in tongues was causing upset in the Corinthian church and for this reason rules governing the use of tongues were laid down and were to be followed in the interim period up until the time of the cessation of the gift. The gift of tongues would certainly not have been needed as a sign by the time the Bible was completed as:

- a) It was well known by then that the Gentiles were part of God's salvation plan and
- b) Jerusalem had been destroyed (God's severe judgment on the Jews for rejecting His Son).

That tongues was a sign to the Jews is clear as, in Acts, whenever tongues was mentioned, Jews were present. In Acts 2, Jews from many nations were present and in Acts 19 the twelve were more than likely all Jews as they had received John's baptism of repentance. Acts 10-11 shows where tongues was used as a sign to convince the Jews of Jerusalem, including Peter, that the Gentiles were part of God's salvation plan. The following PDF outlines where God has used tongues as a sign of judgment from Genesis through to the New Testament:

<http://www.christianissues.biz/pdf-bin/tongues/tonguesasasign.pdf>

### **TONGUES WAS NOT FOR PERSONAL EDIFICATION**

1 Cor. 12:7, 11 tell us that the Holy Spirit gives the various gifts "*just as he determines*" and then only "*for the common good*" of the church. 1 Cor. 14:4 says that tongues would edify (build up) the individual, however this was not the intended purpose of any of the gifts (note 1 Pet. 4:10). 1 Cor. 14:5 then says that it would be better if believers prophesied because prophecy edified the church. In 1 Cor. 14:1, Paul said that he especially desired people to seek prophecy as it edified the church as well as bringing sinners to repentance as in 1 Cor. 14:24-25. All gifts are given to build up the entire church, and not for personal edification, as the following list clearly shows:

1 Cor. 12:7 - "... now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good ..."

1 Cor. 12:11 - The Spirit gives gifts "... just as he determines."

1 Cor. 12:25 - "... but that each part should have equal concern for each other."

1 Cor. 14:3 - "... but everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort."

1 Cor. 14:4 - "... he edifies the church."

1 Cor. 14:5 - "... so that the church may be edified." (Note 1 Pet. 4:10)

1 Cor. 14:6 - "... what good will I be to you?"

1 Cor. 14:7 - "... how will anyone know...?"

1 Cor. 14:8 - "... who will get ready...?"

1 Cor. 14:9 - "... how will anyone know...?"

1 Cor. 14:16 - "... how can one who does not understand say 'amen'?"

1 Cor. 14:16 - "... since he does not know what you are saying."

1 Cor. 14:17 - "... the other man is not edified."

1 Cor. 14:19 - "... to instruct others..."

1 Cor. 14:26 - "... must be done for the strengthening of the church."

1 Cor. 14:31 - "... so that everyone may be instructed..."

1 Cor. 14:31 - "... so that everyone may be encouraged."

1 Cor. 13 deals with love which is a fruit for others - a tree does not bear fruit for itself.

### ALL TONGUES WERE KNOWN LANGUAGES

In 1 Cor. 14, the word 'unknown' appears in KJV. It was inserted by the translators and that is why it is in italics. 1 Cor. 14:10 tells us that all tongues were known languages, none were unknown. The belief that tongues can be an angelic language is a misinterpretation of 1 Cor. 13:1-3. Exaggerated language (hyperbole) is used in these verses to emphasise that love is more important than any gift. Paul is saying that *even if* he could speak in the tongues of angels, fathom all mysteries, had all knowledge or had faith to move mountains but didn't have love, then he had nothing. In 1 Cor. 13:9 he said that knowledge and prophecy were only in part so he wasn't saying that he could do these things but that *if* he could, yet didn't have love, then he had nothing. An angelic language, if there is such a thing, is not a known language on earth so there can't be any interpretation or edification. 1 Cor. 14:27-28 say that all tongues must be interpreted otherwise the speaker was to keep quiet. In 1 Cor. 14:19, Paul said that five intelligible words were preferable to ten thousand words in a tongue and in 1 Cor. 14:12-13 he stressed the need for interpretation so that the church may be built up. (In Rev. 5:9 the Greek word for tongues is translated as language in several versions which is what a tongue is, a known language).

Nowhere does the Bible speak of an uninterpretable tongue. On the contrary, right in the middle of his talk on tongues and interpretation, Paul said that "*there are all sorts of languages in the world, yet none of them is without meaning*" (1 Cor. 14:10). Note that Paul is talking about languages with meaning "*in the world*" and not tongues of angels in the heavenly realms. From this we can see that tongues were interpretable languages. The fact that people claim to speak in tongues today is not proof that it is from the Holy Spirit. Many religions and cults speak in tongues. Witches go into churches and are welcomed as 'sisters in Christ' because they speak in tongues. The witches say that the only difference between their tongues and the congregation's tongues is that they know exactly what they are saying as they curse the Pastor and congregation. The witches receive a genuine language from the devil, to serve his purposes.

I have an Indian friend who attended a Pentecostal Bible college. She told me that when the leader of the college spoke in tongues he repeated the names of two Hindu gods. The man was unknowingly calling up the evil spirits behind those gods.

There is a simple method of testing a tongue. Make a recording of the person speaking in tongues then take it to, say, three interpreters and ask them to tell you what has been said. If they all come up with the same thing then you will know that your tongue is genuine. But also record someone faking speaking in tongues and see how that is interpreted. I think that will tell a story. If the gift of tongues is still available then the gift of interpretation would be also and they must agree with each other as they go together. People are generally not willing to do this test and give all sorts of reasons but they need to bear in mind that the Lord tells us to test all spirits (1 John 4) and that the devil can appear as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11). If a tongues speaker does not know what he or she is saying then they are on very dangerous ground indeed. 1 Thess. 5:21-22 says, "*Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil*".

I have only had one person say that they were willing to do the recording test and I haven't heard the results yet but I know that, if I spoke in tongues, then I would submit to it to see if my tongue was real. I'd like to know for certain and would seek out men and women that I respected to see how they interpreted my tongue and if I got different interpretations then alarm bells would ring. Testing the spirits is not putting God to the test but rather it is a command of God - all tongues speakers will be without excuse on The Day.

### **TONGUES WAS NOT A PRIVATE PRAYER LANGUAGE BUT A PUBLIC SIGN**

There are many arguments against tongues being a private prayer language.

1. Nowhere in scripture does it say that tongues is a private prayer language but 1 Cor. 14:22 clearly tells us that tongues was a sign for unbelievers. As shown above, under the heading TONGUES WAS SIMPLY A SIGN OF JUDGMENT, the Old Testament gives us three examples where God used tongues as a sign of judgment. Judgment came upon Israel, for rejecting Jesus, when Jerusalem was destroyed in 70AD.
2. 1 Cor. 14:2 is cited as proof that tongues is a prayer language. However, if we take this verse at face value then it really makes no sense and needs clarification. The verse says, "*For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God. Indeed, no one understands him; he utters mysteries with his spirit.*" By itself, this verse is telling us that no one but God ever understood anyone speaking in tongues. We all know that this is not true because all tongues had meaning as they were "*languages in the world*" and an interpretation was always called for so that the church would be edified (1 Cor. 14:10, 5). 1 Cor. 14:27-28 also talk about speaking to God in tongues and say, "*If anyone speaks in a tongue ... someone must interpret. If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and God.*" These verses are telling us that if there was no interpreter then the speaker was to keep quiet and just speak to God because no one understood what was being said, no one was being edified.

With this in mind, 1 Cor. 14:2 makes sense when we realise that the reason no one understood what was being said was simply because there was no interpreter - it was a mystery. When we look at 1 Cor. 14:2, in the light of 1 Cor. 14:27-28, it is effectively saying, "*For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God. Indeed, [without an interpreter] no one understands him; he utters mysteries with his spirit.*" Once again, if we take 1 Cor. 14:2 at face value then it does not make sense as it is saying that no one but God ever understood anyone speaking in tongues. However, the verse does make sense when we realise that the reason there was no understanding was because there was no interpreter. So, 1 Cor. 14:2 is not saying that tongues was a prayer language; it is simply saying that without interpretation foreign languages were like mysteries to the listeners.

3. In 1 Cor. 14, all that is said regarding speaking or praying in tongues is in the context of public situations and interpretation was always required for the building up of the church. Tongues is constantly compared to prophecy, which is also always in a public setting to edify the hearers. There is not one verse which says that tongues is for private prayer. Also, all three tongues passages in Acts were in public settings so it is an argument from silence to say that tongues is a private prayer language. 1 Cor. 14:22 clearly and simply says that tongues is a sign to unbelievers - not a private prayer language nor a sign that believers have received the Holy Spirit.
4. In 1 Cor. 14:13-17, Paul said that prayer in tongues should be interpreted for the edification of others, so Paul was not talking about private prayer in tongues. He also said it was unfruitful to the mind unless there was interpretation – what use is an unfruitful prayer language? We are told to love God with all our heart, soul, strength and mind, not to speak mindlessly.
5. 1 Cor. 12:7, 11 tell us that the Spirit gives gifts as He determines and then only for the common good of the church, not for personal edification. Those who spoke in tongues would certainly have been edified, just as a person would be edified through healing someone, but that does not change the fact that all gifts were for the common good of the church and not for personal edification. Would someone with the gift of healing just heal himself? (see TONGUES WAS NOT FOR PERSONAL EDIFICATION above ).
6. If tongues was a prayer language then why would Paul tell the Corinthians to be adult and stop thinking like children (1 Cor. 14.20)? If God had given certain people a special prayer language then why would Paul tell them that using that language in church was childish? Praying in church is never considered to be childish. Again, tongues was just a sign.
7. 1 Cor. 12:30 tells us that not everyone spoke in tongues. God would be showing favouritism if He gave only certain people a special prayer language and left the rest with a restricted ability to pray. It would also create uncertainty of faith and feelings of inferiority in those who did not have a prayer language.
8. Considering that there is only one Greek word used for tongues then even if there was such a thing as a 'private prayer language' it has ceased as a close examination of 1 Cor. 13 shows that tongues have ceased ... all tongues!
9. The purpose of tongues is shown clearly in Mark 16:15-18. In these verses, Jesus said that tongues would be a sign to follow the evangelists as they went into the world preaching the gospel. Tongues was simply a sign to unbelieving Jews during evangelism and once the sign had served its purpose the gift ceased.

### **PRAYING IN THE SPIRIT**

Some say that where the Bible speaks of praying in the Spirit it means praying in tongues. It is far from good Bible interpretation to take the word 'Spirit' and replace it with the word 'tongues'. We are told to walk in the Spirit (Rom. 8:12-13), love in the Spirit (Col. 1:8) and John was in the Spirit in Rev. 1:10. It would be silly to replace the word Spirit with the word tongues in these verses.

Praying in the Spirit, as in Eph. 6:18, is not praying in tongues. Praying in the Spirit is praying according to God's will with the aid and guidance of the Spirit rather than selfish prayers, seeking things for oneself. A person cannot pray with "*all kinds of prayers and requests*" if they are praying in tongues and don't know what they are saying?

The following verses provide clear proof that praying in the Spirit is not praying in tongues:

- In Eph. 6:18, believers (**all** Christians) are given the command to “*pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests*”.
- 1 Cor. 12:29-30 ask us, “*are all apostles? ... do all work miracles? ... do all speak in tongues?*”. Because the answer to these rhetorical questions is “No”, we know that not everyone spoke in tongues.
- So, if praying in the Spirit is praying in tongues and not everyone speaks in tongues then the Lord has given an impossible command to those who don't speak in tongues. From this it is plain to see that praying in the Spirit is not praying in tongues.

1 Cor. 14:14 Paul equates praying in tongues with praying with *his* spirit and says that it was **unfruitful** to his mind. Praying 'in the Holy Spirit' is done with the mind and is never said to be unfruitful because it is intelligible prayer and God wants us to love Him with all our mind.

### **DO NOT FORBID SPEAKING IN TONGUES**

In 1 Cor. 14:39 Paul said “*do not forbid speaking in tongues*” because at that point in time speaking in tongues was still a gift and was to remain so for many more years until the sign had served its purpose. He also said in 1 Cor. 14:18 that he spoke in tongues more than anyone. This is because he was on the front line of evangelism. He travelled widely doing the pioneering work for the Gospel and always went to the Jews first, the very people the sign was for. With this in mind it is easy to see why he spoke in tongues more than anyone else. In 1 Cor. 14:5 he said that he wished all spoke in tongues. Two possible reasons for his saying this are 1) more individuals would be evangelising and encountering the Jews he loved and 2) it was edifying to be used by God in such a manner and he wished this edification on others.

### **THE GROANINGS OF ROMANS 8:26**

The groanings of Rom. 8:26 is often quoted as being tongues. This falls short of good interpretation for a couple of simple reasons.

- 1) The only other place the Greek word (G4726) for groaning is used is in Acts 7:34 where Stephen is talking about the sorrowful groans of the Israelites in Egypt. Obviously he was not speaking about tongues. In Rom. 8:26 the groanings refer to heartfelt sorrow and an inability to express oneself, as often felt in prayer. When this happens to an individual in prayer the Spirit intercedes for them.
- 2) The Spirit is said to intercede with “*groans that words cannot express*” (KJV says “*cannot be uttered*”). Considering that these groans cannot be expressed or uttered in words, it is clear that tongues is not being referred to as tongues was expression in known words.

These groanings are just what they are said to be ... groanings..

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Some of the quotes in this article were taken from the book All About Speaking In Tongues, by Fernand Legrand. It is free to download from <http://www.christianissues.biz/tongues.html>

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