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1 Corinthians

Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in *those who are* uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say that you are out of your mind? 1 Corinthians 14:23

"Therefore" explains what Paul just said, that tongues are a sign to unbelievers. If an unbeliever hears of an unusual set of occurrences happening in a church, they will naturally be curious as to what is going on. This continues to this day as people hear of great preachers, wonderful singers, etc. who are found in any given church. A church's hope should rightly be to draw in unbelievers with the anticipation that they will hear the message of Christ and be converted.

And so as the body is gathered, if all they are doing is speaking in foreign languages that have no meaning for the others in the church, there will only be pandemonium. If "uninformed or unbelievers" come into such a gathering, their perception will be exactly what one would expect - the people are out of their minds.

All one needs to do is think of a college calling a debate on evolution. During the debate, one person starts debating why the college should have a new wing dedicated to global warming. Another debates why minorities should be given preferential treatment in hiring. And a third person speaks in Chinese about the superiority of communism. Anyone attending such a gathering would feel he had entered the Twilight Zone.

The church has a purpose and that purpose is Christ. If there isn't instruction about Him, from His word, then it isn't meeting that purpose. And not only this, the instruction needs to be in an intelligible form which will edify those in attendance. In Acts 2, the Holy Spirit came and caused the gospel to be heard in the various languages (known languages) of those gathered. It was a sign to them of the truth of the message.

However, some misperceived what was occurring. Rather than hearing the message, all they heard was the chaotic sound of many languages being uttered. The result was that they accused the apostles of being drunk (full of new wine). Unless the message of the sign is understood, the sign has no meaning. And so it is with tongues. Unless they are understood, they have no meaning. If they have no meaning, they should not be uttered.

Life application: Speaking in tongues that no one understands and which do not edify the body is contrary to the intent of tongues. Therefore, the one speaking such tongues cannot be "Spirit-filled." The Holy Spirit will never work in a manner contrary to His nature.

But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all. 1 Corinthians 14:24

Paul has spent 22 verses arguing the point that he made in 1 Corinthians 14:1 -

"Pursue love, and desire spiritual *gifts*, but especially that you may prophesy."

As soon as he said that, he began to explain why "tongues" are a lesser gift. He has clearly demonstrated that they are often more of a hindrance than a help when spoken in the congregation. It is rather astonishing to think that with all of his time dedicated to this instruction, his words have been so utterly dismissed by many churches.

As he desires that believers prophesy rather than speak tongues, he now provides the reason for it. He notes that "if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all." This is the reason for sharing the gospel! This is the reason for being a mature and informed Christian! And thus, this is the reason for learning Scripture and then explaining it to others in an articulate manner!

When a member of the body properly speaks the truth of God's word, it is an argument intended for conviction. Where there is conviction, there is a change in heart. And where there is a change in heart, there is conversion. In conversion, there is belief. In belief, there is the sealing of the Holy Spirit. This is the work we are called to do - to preach, convince, and then make disciples. As Paul says in Romans 10:17 -

"So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

When speaking in tongues that are unknown to the hearer, the hearer is not edified. But when a person speaks the words of Scripture, faith becomes possible. And through faith comes salvation.

Life application: Learn the Bible and share what you learn. It can have heavenly rewards.

And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on *his* face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you.

1 Corinthians 14:25

Paul, noting the difference between people speaking unknown languages and people preaching the word of God (prophesying) shows the contrast in this verse. If everyone is speaking in a foreign tongue, a visitor to the church will think they are mad. However, if everyone speaks coherent words which proclaim Scripture, "the secrets of his heart are revealed."

The Bible has the power to convict because it reveals the fallen state of man. Among other reasons, God has given us this word to show our fallen state and how the breach between us can be repaired. As the author of Hebrews notes -

"For the word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." Hebrews 4:12

As the Bible is properly explained, those who hear it will be edified concerning whatever subject matter is being treated. In response to this, there will be a reaction to the words by the hearer of them. In the case of the uninformed, He may be convicted of his need for Christ. Thus, "falling down on *his* face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you."

This "falling down on his face" is the way that someone in the Middle East would show deep emotion and humility. It is found numerous times in Scripture and would be comparable to a westerner breaking down in tears and covering his face with his hands. There is nothing in this verse which would support being "slain in the Spirit" as Charismatic churches do. The intent is a humble response and a deep-felt conviction at hearing the word of God, not an ostentatious display at hearing a bunch of nonsense issue from the lips of men who would turn a church meeting into a carnival display.

The intent of church is to teach people about God. A church can only teach people about God if they proclaim Christ, who reveals God the Father. And a church can only teach people about Christ if they do so from His word, which is our source for knowing Him. It is from hearing the word properly preached that faith arises, and from properly directed faith will come salvation. When a person comes to this point in the congregation, he will rightly utter "God is truly among you."

"Truth from his lips prevailed with double sway,
And fools, who came to scoff, remained to pray." Goldsmith

Life application: It may not be sensational by today's standards to hear the Bible properly preached, but in the context of eternity for the human soul, it is the most sensational message possible. Be sure to find a church where the Bible is held in high regard and properly explained.

How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. 1 Corinthians 14:26

Paul's words in this verse are for proper order in the church and they are based on what he has said in the preceding verses concerning tongues. When the whole congregation is speaking in tongues and an uninformed visitor comes in, he will think everyone is crazy. This is certainly not how a church should be conducted and so he asks, "How is it then, brethren?" In essence, "What is the proper way of conducting oneself in the church?"

In response to his own question, he provides the answer. "Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation." The Spirit has given various gifts to the body and He has distributed those gifts according to His will. But each gift needs to be brought out at the proper time. In just a few verses, he is going to note that God is the author of peace, not confusion. As this is so, then blurting out nonsense or cutting others off with a "tongue" or a "revelation" cannot be of God.

The Holy Spirit will never inspire anyone to do anything which is contrary to His nature; therefore, the conduct of those in Corinth could not be Spirit-led. Instead, their actions were merely for self-aggrandizement. Because of this, Paul will give very explicit instructions concerning the use of tongues. These instructions will confirm for all future church gatherings that those who do not follow them are not Spirit-led in their actions.

One mark of a church that is properly adhering to God's word, and to the leading of the Spirit, is that they will, "let all things be done for edification."

Life application: Edification of the body is a necessary component of the gathering together of the saints. If this is not occurring, then the gathering is a wasted effort. Remember this and be a person who edifies others.

If anyone speaks in a tongue, *let there be two or at the most three, each in turn, and let one interpret.* 1 Corinthians 14:27

Paul now gives explicit instructions concerning tongues. This is a prescriptive verse for the church at Corinth (and thus to us because the letter is included in Scripture). To not adhere to this verse is to then violate a command found in the book which establishes faith and doctrine for the church. Logically, we can consider the following:

- 1) The words of the Bible are inspired by the Spirit of God.
- 2) The Spirit of God will never violate a precept which is found in the Bible, which He has inspired. Therefore,
- 3) Any practice or occurrence which is seen in a church and which violates the prescriptions of the Bible cannot be inspired by the Spirit.

Let's remember this as we continue. Paul says that "if anyone speaks in a tongue" (which has been shown clearly in this chapter to be a known language), "*let there be two or at the most three, each in turn, and let one interpret.*" The Spirit-inspired words of Paul note that speaking in a tongue (a known language) is acceptable within the church, but there are rules which must be followed -

1. No more than two or three may speak in a tongue during any one service. This can only be interpreted this way. It doesn't mean "two or three at once" based on his continued words in this verse.
2. Each person speaking in tongues must do so in turn, not at the same time. The idea and design for speaking in tongues is that it is a tool to convince unbelievers; they are a sign to them. Therefore, in order to edify the

church, there should be order and harmony rather than disorder in the speaking of tongues.

3. If a tongue is spoken within the church, it must be interpreted. If a tongue is spoken in a church and there is no interpreter, then there will be no edification. As edification is the intent of such speech, then the words should not even be uttered aloud.

These rules are given in the Bible. They are not exhortations, nor are they mere suggestions. They are instead prescriptive elements which are expected to be adhered to. Understanding this, then we can very easily root out any false tongues. Again, if the Spirit inspired the Bible and there is a practice which occurs within a church which does not conform to the Bible, then the source of that practice *cannot* be Spirit led.

Any "tongue" spoken in a church which is not interpreted *cannot* be a Spirit-led tongue. Any congregation where more than three people speak in a tongue *cannot* claim to be led by the Spirit. And any gathering where more than one tongue is spoken at a time *cannot* be speaking by the Spirit.

Life application: The Spirit of God isn't confused.

But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God. 1 Corinthians 14:28

This verse continues on with the prescriptions of the previous verse. They are commands, given by the Lord as the Holy Spirit guided Paul's pen. Taken together they say -

"If anyone speaks in a tongue, *let there be* two or at the most three, *each* in turn, and let one interpret. ²⁸ But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God."

How is it that such plain and simple sentences can be so utterly neglected by churches? The answer is that the Bible is held in little esteem by them. The word of God is useful to them only when it tickles the ear. And this is what the supposed "tongues" of most churches do, ear-tickle. However, Paul has spent an inordinate amount of time on this subject in order to get those in Corinth (and thus us!) to be reasonable in our conduct in the church. Like his words in the previous verse, what he says now also commands just that.

"But" is given in contrast to verse 27. "If there is no interpreter" is obvious. If someone wants to speak in a foreign language, maybe Latin or Hebrew, they may do so if they meet the requirements of verse 27. However, if they don't understand the language, they must have an interpreter present who can. Suppose there is a prayer to be read in Hebrew. Unless there is a competent translation of that prayer, or someone who can translate the words which are being read, then "let him keep silent in church."

This means that they are not to openly speak or read the thing they had intended to impart. Why? Because no one understands it. Thus it is both a waste of valuable time, and the words have no value for edification. If there is no edification, then it is merely an ostentatious display meant to attract attention to the individual and not bring any sort of glory to God. Because of this, Paul instructs that he should remain quiet and "speak to himself and to God."

If the individual with the tongue to be spoken cannot translate the words, and if there is no one else who can translate them, then if they want to go ahead and speak them, they are to do so to God alone, who alone understands the words.

Paul's words are precise and the same logic of the previous verse applies to this one:

1. The words of the Bible, as given by Paul's hand, are inspired by the Spirit of God.

2. The Spirit of God will never violate a precept which is found in the Bible, which He has inspired. Therefore,
3. Any practice or occurrence which is seen in a church and which violates the prescriptions of the Bible cannot be inspired by the Spirit.

Therefore, any tongue which is spoken in a church which is not translated cannot have been inspired by the Spirit of God; its prompting is not of divine origin. If supposed "tongue speaking" Charismatic churches actually followed the prescriptions found in these two verses from the hand of Paul, there wouldn't be the embarrassing displays of ostentation found in them.

Life application: The word of God is not confused, nor does it promote confusion. However, neglecting the word of God will inevitably do so. Stick to the word of God and let your doctrine be pure and undefiled.

Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge. 1 Corinthians 14:29

In contrast to "tongues" which Paul has been dealing with in immense detail, and upon which he has placed great restrictions, he now turns to prophesying. His admonition is "Let two or three prophets speak." Notice that he does not add in "at the most" as he did with tongues. Why did he so restrict tongues and not prophesying? The answer is that tongues serve no purpose in the congregation unless they are translated. And even if they are translated, they often interrupt more than they edify.

In the case of prophesying, he does not want to quench the spirit when edification is the aim of the speaker. This follows perfectly with his words of 1 Thessalonians 5:19-21 -

"Do not quench the Spirit.²⁰ Do not despise prophecies.²¹ Test all things; hold fast what is good."

Having allowed the speaking of prophesy openly, and with the thought that two or three should speak, he then says, "and let the others judge." This is an important thought to consider. People claim "inspiration" all the time, but not all who speak are inspired. All we need to do is look at any person who speaks in an incoherent tongue within a church to see how prevalent this is. Based on Paul's words of instruction in this chapter, not one of them is under the inspiration of the Spirit.

Just like these false tongue speakers, people who speak coherently in a known language are not necessarily speaking under the influence of the Holy Spirit. There is enough about false prophets and false teachers in the Bible that we should truly pay heed to every word uttered as the congregation meets. Those who hear should judge the truth of what is said based on a competent understanding of Scripture. And the only way to make such a competent evaluation is to:

1. Have the Bible handy for reference; and
2. Know where to go in the Bible to evaluate what is said.

One cannot do these things unless the nose is kept in its pages constantly. If this doesn't occur as people speak, inevitably false doctrine will creep in. John warns us specifically about this in his first epistle -

"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world." 1 John 4:1

Life application: The old saying, "Trust no one" is good advice. Until a person's words have been compared to the word of God, they should be taken cautiously.

But if *anything* is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent.

1 Corinthians 14:30

Taken together, verses 29 & 30 state -

"Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge. ³⁰ But if *anything* is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent."

Under the inspiration of the Spirit, Paul notes that as people are prophesying, it is to be done in order, not simultaneously. This is a command for the church in order to keep harmony. But it is also a command to avoid confusion. The intent of such speaking is edification. If two are speaking simultaneously, others must choose to focus on one or the other. Some people may not be able to focus on either. Because of this, there can be no edification from at least one of the speakers and quite possibly both. Just as if tongues were spoken, there would be only noise and confusion.

And so if one is speaking and another desires to impart what is revealed to him, "let the first keep silent." Just as in any adult conversation, be it among friends or in a business setting, it is polite and proper to allow others to speak without interruption.

Paul's words noted here are a command. Thus once again we see the utterly false nature of churches where the congregation, or a portion of the congregation, supposedly "prophesy" at the same time. As the Spirit has breathed out the words of the Bible, and as the Spirit will never contradict Himself, there is no congregation which conducts such "prophesying" which is actually guided by the Spirit.

Life application: If you attend a church which speaks in false tongues or allows people to "prophesy" at the same time, it is time for you to find a new church. Don't let claims of "Holy Spirit power" lull you into participating in disobedience to the word of God.