

Adult Bible Institute
Spiritual Gifts Class, Session#10
Topic: "Issue of Tongues in 1 Corinthians 14"
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Introduction:

- A. 1 Corinthians 14 is the only chapter in the N.T. written to directly address the issue of tongues.
- B. The context of 1 Cor. 14 is the use of tongues in public worship. It is not about private use of tongues. To try and create a theology about private tongues from 1 Cor. 14 has two problems:
 - 1. It violates the context of the chapter which is public worship. (see vv. 5b, 6, 9,11-12, 16, 19, 23-25, 26-28, 29-30, 33b, 35).
 - 2. It violates the purpose of spiritual gifts which is ministry in the body, not personal edification. (1 Cor. 12:7).
 - 3. Those who try to build a theology of a "private prayer language" from this chapter (using vv. 4 or 14) are taking these verses out of context and "proof texting" (beware of proof texting---all kinds of false cults including Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons appear to be able to prove their doctrines by taking individual verses in isolation from their context and proof texting).
- C. The central point of 1 Cor. 14 that Paul is trying to get across is that there is no edification without understanding.

I. THE IMPORTANCE OF UNDERSTANDING TO EDIFICATION.

- A. The gift of prophecy (proclamation of the Word) is superior to tongues without interpretation because the message is understood by the hearers.
 - 1. Desire the operation of prophecy. (14:1).
 - 2. No one understands a person who speaks in tongues without interpretation (14:2).
 - 3. Everyone who prophesies strengthens and comforts others. (14:3).
 - 4. Thus, the one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless there is interpretation. (14:4).
 - 5. If there was a choice between all speaking in tongues and all

prophesying, Paul would rather see all prophesying (it is not possible for all to have any particular gift. Paul is using hyperbole to make a point about the superiority of prophecy over uninterpreted tongues). (14:5).

6. What good are tongues without understanding? (14:6).
7. Tongues without interpretation is compared to a musical instrument that is playing no distinct tune (14:7-9). The speaker is just wasting his wind (14:9).
8. Unless the language spoken is understood, it is useless to the hearer. (14:10-11).
9. Emphasize gifts that build up the church not useless gifts like tongues without interpretation. (14:12).
10. This is an important enough issue, that if you are going to speak in a tongue you had better pray you can also interpret (Paul is being sarcastic to make a point). (14:13).
11. It is unfruitful to pray (public worship not private prayer) only with your spirit (emotions) and not your mind (understanding). (14:14-15).
 - a. Clearly, this is referring to prayer in public worship (14:16-17).
12. Understanding is so critical to edification that Paul says he would rather speak 5 words that people can understand than 10,000 words in an unknown tongue (14:19).
 - a. In the face of such a profound statement, it absolutely mystifies me why people fight so hard to hold on to speaking in tongues.

II. PAUL'S VIEW OF TONGUES.

- A. The Corinthians emphasis on tongues was a mark of their immaturity (14:20).
- B. It was a sign gift oriented toward unbelieving Jews. (14:21-22; see also 1 Cor. 1:22).
- C. Uninterpreted tongues cause confusion and discredit the church. (14:23) while prophesy convinces the sinner (14:24-25).
- D. The focus of public worship is the strengthening of the church. (14:26).

- E. Tongues-speaking must be limited and there must be interpretation. (14:27-28).
- F. Prophecy must be done in a orderly manner. The speakers should take turns and not be speaking simultaneously and disorderly (14:31-32).
- G. Women are not permitted to speak in tongues in public worship (14:34-35). (This alone wipes out fully 95% of the tongues-speaking in Charismatic circles as almost all of it is usually done by women).

Concluding thoughts:

- A. Paul defends his authority to instruct on this matter. (14:36-38).
 - B. They should not view Paul's strong rebuke concerning tongues to mean that tongues was not a legitimate spiritual gift (vv. 5,18,39).
 - C. They were not to go to the other extreme in response to Paul's instruction and forbid speaking in tongues. The sign gift of tongues was still in operation (14:39) as this was the apostolic age.
 - D. There is really no teaching in the New Testament that authorizes the operation of tongues the way they are used by most Charismatics publicly and privately today. Defense of such usage is based on poor interpretation and/or proof-texting, taking verses out of context. The emphasis should be on hearing and understanding the Word of God through prophecy.
- B.