

**To Be Continued...**  
The Holy Spirit & His Gifts  
First Corinthians 14:6-12

*Seinfeld*, Season 2, Episode 11, "The Chinese Restaurant."

Jerry, Elaine, and George endure a series of misadventures while waiting the entire episode to get a table at a Chinese restaurant.

A high point in the comedy is when the Chinese maitre d' calls "Cartwright" instead of "Costanza," and they cannot understand what he is saying.

We are in the "cartwright" section of First Corinthians fourteen. It is where Paul goes to some lengths to point out that when what you say cannot be understood, it cannot be beneficial.

1 Corinthians 14:6 But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you unless I speak to you either by revelation, by knowledge, by prophesying, or by teaching?

I must reiterate something we established in our previous study about the gift of speaking in tongues. In this chapter, Paul has in mind their practice of speaking in tongues without any corresponding gift of interpretation.

It is *uninterpreted* tongues that are the problem. When an utterance in tongues is interpreted, and is therefore intelligible, it is on an equal par with any other speaking gift.

Interpreted tongues edifies; uninterpreted tongues does not, and it can not in Paul's theology.

If Paul were to "come" to their meetings and speak with uninterpreted "tongues, it would not, it could not, "profit" them.

He mentions four examples of speaking that does profit everyone:

- We are not exactly sure what Paul meant by the word "revelation." By that I mean we are not sure how it differs from "prophecy," but apparently it did in Paul's mind. It may refer to the unique gifting of an apostle to reveal the Word of God - as Paul was doing in this letter to them.
- "Knowledge" we take to be the gift of the word of knowledge - knowing by the Holy Spirit something that you did not know or find out for yourself.
- "Prophecy" we've talked about. It is an immediate word from God, including a verse or verses from the Word of God, that speaks to the situation a believer or believers are in.
- "Teaching" certainly encompasses what we recognize as formal teaching of the Word; but it would include anointed use of God's Word in discipling and otherwise instructing believers in a less formal setting.

It would be wrong to say Paul was ranking these speaking gifts in order of importance. We've established that the best, or greater, gift is always whichever one is needed to accomplish God's purposes at the time.

It is interesting to note that revelation and knowledge and prophecy and teaching are mentioned as four separate gifts. Cessationists like to argue that the pastor, in his formal teaching of the Bible, automatically exercises all three of these. But it would seem that Paul thought any one of them could be exercised independently of the others by lay persons who were thus gifted by the Holy Spirit.

Regardless the finer points of these four gifts, the argument Paul was making is clear: they profit the Christian because they are spoken in language that is intelligible and can be understood by any and all in the assembly.

To drive home his point, Paul appealed to two analogies - musical instruments, and foreign languages.

1 Corinthians 14:7 Even things without life, whether flute or harp, when they make a sound, unless they make a distinction in the sounds, how will it be known what is piped or played?

1 Corinthians 14:8 For if the trumpet makes an uncertain sound, who will prepare for battle?

This always reminds me of the game show, *Name That Tune*. It's pretty amazing, really, how quickly you can recognize certain songs. In the more modern versions of the show, they also give you clues, and sometimes you can guess the song without even hearing a single note. Lame!

Musical instruments must make distinct sounds in order for you to understand the song being played.

A military trumpet must make distinct sounds if you are to understand the order being given.

I've officiated at the graveside of funerals in which a military honor guard is on hand; one of the things they do is play Taps. It's getting rarer to have a bugler who can actually play Taps. The Ceremonial Bugle was introduced so that veterans' families have a choice on how Taps will be sounded when a live bugler is not available for a military funeral. The families may elect either a CD/cassette version or the Ceremonial Bugle.

The Ceremonial Bugle has an electronic insert that enables an individual to "symbolically" play Taps.

They really should do that for bagpipes, too! I've heard some awful renditions of *Amazing Grace*.

1 Corinthians 14:9 So likewise you, unless you utter by the tongue words easy to understand, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air.

Pardon the pun, but I think Paul was being a little 'tongue in cheek' when he said "you will be speaking into the air." *They were wasting their breath.*

1 Corinthians 14:10 There are, it may be, so many kinds of languages in the world, and none of them is without significance.

1 Corinthians 14:11 Therefore, if I do not know the meaning of the language, I shall be a foreigner to him who speaks, and he who speaks will be a foreigner to me.

If someone speaks to you in a foreign language, you cannot understand them without an interpretation. It is frustrating and confusing.

In that same way, when someone speaks in an unknown tongue, you cannot understand them without an interpretation. It is frustrating and confusing.

Something more needs to be said about this. We need to be reminded that it is an analogy. Paul was not saying tongues is a known foreign language that I have not learned but could if I wanted to.

No, he was saying that speaking in tongues publicly, without the corresponding gift of interpretation, is *LIKE* a foreigner speaking to me in a language I do not know.

An analogy of something is not the thing itself. We talked at some length previously about why we believe that the supernatural gift of speaking in tongues is not a known or knowable human language.

The use of foreign languages as an analogy confirms that tongues is *NOT* a known language.

We've been tossing around the gift of interpretation. If tongues is not a known foreign language, how can we interpret it?

First of all, we cannot interpret it. It requires a gift of interpretation from the Holy Spirit. If tongues were a known foreign language, you'd never say that it required a gift to interpret it; only a native speaker or someone who had learned it, to translate it.

Second of all, interpretation is not translation. I translate a language; I interpret a poem, or a painting, or a sculpture.

The interpretation will capture the theme of the utterance rather than the detail of each word.

One charismatic author wrote:

Paul assumes that some people are known to have the gift of interpretation (v28), and ready to interpret a tongue that comes. Practically speaking, the best person to bring an interpretation is the one(s) who feel a rise of faith or excitement as the tongue is being brought, and who get a sense of the theme of the tongue – not the detail, just the theme. If that is you, then step out in faith.

When I start to interpret I only ever have the idea of the first couple of sentences, and I find that as I start to speak God gives me the idea for the next sentence, and so on. Remember, it is important that the interpretation is man-speaking-to-God.

Note that it is an interpretation, not a translation. This means that the interpretation will capture the theme of the utterance rather than the detail of each word.

1 Corinthians 14:12 Even so you, since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, let it be for the edification of the church that you seek to excel.

There's nothing wrong with being "zealous for spiritual gifts." There is a sense in which it is better to be exercising gifts in a way that requires correction, than to not be exercising them at all.

This is no excuse for allowing error, or aberrant experiences. Many times I've heard charismatics defend all manner of weird behaviors by saying that when people are in a discovery mode, they should be expected to get a little out of order.

This issue was raised during the Great Awakening and resulted in a conversation between John Wesley and George Whitfield.

John Wesley fiercely criticized Whitefield for allowing fanaticism to exist under his preaching. Whitefield acknowledged that not all that took place under his ministry was of God. Some of it was of the flesh indeed.

“Then stamp out the flesh and what is false,” countered Wesley.

“But,” said Whitefield, “if you stamp out what is of the flesh you will stamp out what is real as well.”

I'm not sure that's even true. The answer is to correct them and do things decently and orderly.

The believers who were out of order in Corinth needed to be redirected. They needed to subordinate everything they said in public to the principle of building-up others. And the only way to build-up others is to speak in ways that can be understood by them.

Gordon Fee comments,

The point of everything in corporate worship is not personal experience in the Spirit, but building up the church itself. Much that comes under the banner of charismatic or pentecostal worship seems very often to fail right at this point.

Another commentator had this insight:

The church as a whole should strive to have the gifts that build up its members. It should support those who serve in those capacities, and it should redirect its zeal from a desire to speak in tongues to a desire to serve the Lord in the best way that will build up the church.

I like that last idea - "the best way that will build up the church."  
It's the Lord's church and He knows the best way to build up each local expression of it.

I might think we are lacking in some gift, or activity, or discipline.  
It's possible we are; but it's also possible that I have my own ideas and agenda that is different from the Lord's.

I'm not being rebellious; just not staying connected to The Lord, not listening to Him.

We wait... Wait... Wait on The Lord to direct us in the things that He knows, from searching our hearts, that we definitely need.