
Chapter 12.8
Tongues & the Greek Text
of 1 Corinthians 14
Not Everything Spiritual is Holy

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- The use of *pneumatikon* indicates Paul is referring to simply “spiritual manifestations,” not Christian spiritual gifts.
- This same word can be used to refer to evil spiritual manifestations not of the Holy Spirit (cf. Eph 6:12).
- It is a mistake to assume that a reference to a spiritual manifestation in this passage is automatically referring to an authentic Christian *charisma* (gift).
- The real gift of tongues is referred to with the Greek plural *glossais* (“**tongues**”) everywhere else in the NT, implying that “**a tongue**” is something different.
- When the Apostle has something suspicious or negative to say about the phenomena occurring in Corinth, he uses the singular “**a tongue**” throughout 1 Corinthians 14. On the other hand, every time the Apostle has something clearly positive to say, he uses the plural term “**tongues.**”
- There are obviously two different tongues phenomena being addressed in 1 Corinthians 14. Therefore, in the Apostle’s desire to contrast the pagan tongue prayer from the Christian gift of tongues, he not only repeatedly describes them differently, but uses different Greek terms to refer to them.
- Whenever we encounter *glosse* in this chapter, it needs to be interpreted as an “unknown” tongue utterance, and cannot be interpreted automatically or necessarily as the authentic Christian gift of tongues.
- An “unknown” tongue in 1 Corinthians 14 simply means that because it was not yet interpreted, it was impossible to discern if it was the mere gibberish of pagan tongue prayer, or the miraculous and meaningful speech in a real human language that was the Christian gift of tongues.
- Careful study of 1 Corinthians 14 reveals 1) The Greek singular *glosse* (“**a tongue**”) can always be interpreted as an incoherent tongue utterance that may either be pagan or Christian, but is “unknown” until it is miraculously interpreted,¹ and 2) The plural Greek *glossais*, (“tongues”) can always be interpreted as the authentic Christian gift of miraculously speaking in foreign human languages, but which may not have the intended effect if not also miraculously interpreted.

A) Not all Spiritual Manifestations are Holy: *The unknown pneumatika vs. the authentic charismata*

In our view, the biblical, moral, and religious contexts of 1 Corinthians 14 suggest that the Apostle is attempting to weed out of the Corinthian congregation a pagan worship practice that mimicked the gift of tongues. Accordingly, there are several ways that he differentiates between what he knows is the real gift and incoherent utterances which have an unknown source and purpose. Another way in which he makes this distinction is revealed in a close study of the Greek text.

The Apostle introduces 1 Corinthians 12-14 with the following phrase: **“Now concerning spiritual gifts [pneumatikon], brethren, I do not want you to be unaware”** (12:1 NASB). The NASB translation puts **“gifts”** in italics reflecting the fact that “gifts” are not in the Greek text, a fact overlooked by most modern translations. *Pneumatikon*, the word the Apostle uses here, is very significant to understanding this section of Scripture. It literally means “the spirituals” or “spiritual things.”¹ Accordingly, the *NIDNTT* says this word:

conveys the sense of belonging to the realm of spirit/Spirit, of the essence or nature of spirit/Spirit, embodying or manifesting spirit/Spirit. Within the NT it is almost exclusively a Pauline word; . . . 15 out of the 24 Pauline occurrences are in 1 Cor.²

Therefore, the Apostle’s use of this word in 12:1 tells us that he is now turning his attention to “spiritual manifestations” in the assembly, not simply Christian spiritual gifts. The Apostle is not necessarily opposed to *pneumatikon*, or spiritual manifestations in the assembly, and, in fact, says prophecy is a good *pneumatikon* (cf. 14:1, 14:12). But this same word can be used to refer to evil spiritual manifestations, which have nothing to do with the Holy Spirit. For example, the Apostle writes the Ephesians:

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual [pneumatika] forces of evil in the heavenly realms. (Eph 6:12)

The Apostle’s use of the ambiguous *pneumatikon* in his introduction to 1 Corinthians 12-14, again, reflects the fact that spontaneous, obscure utterances were occurring in the Corinthian assembly, and because they resembled precisely what was being practiced and even demonically inspired in nearby pagan temples, some Corinthians were wondering how they could tell the

difference. Accordingly, the *NIDNTT* makes a very important observation:

The Corinthian situation and the way in which Paul introduces the subject of 1 Cor. 12-14 strongly suggest that "the spirituals [*pneumatikon*]" is the word preferred by many Corinthians, emphasizing perhaps thereby the more ecstatic character of their spirituality.

The use of *pneumatika* in Eph. 6:12 in reference to evil spirits confirms that *pneumatika* has a more ambiguous meaning than *charismata* in Paul's mind and, underlines again the ambiguous nature of "spiritual things" [*pneumatikon*] which necessitates that discernment and evaluation (1 Cor. 2:13-15; 14:37) which the Corinthians [and the Church today!] so evidently lacked (14:12).³

More to the point, L. T. Johnson writes:

He [Paul] begins by reminding them that there is a difference between *ta pneumatika*, which can refer to any sort of "spiritual phenomenon," and *ta charismata*, the term Paul uses for the gifts given by the Holy Spirit. He does not deny the reality of *ta pneumatika* but stresses their ambiguity. When they were still pagans, such impulses led them away into [demonic] idolatry (12:1-2). Ecstasy is not self-validating but must be tested by its results. . . .

Thus . . . every *charism* given by [the Holy] Spirit must serve the upbuilding of the community. Each part of the body should work for the common good rather than for the benefit of individuals. [i.e. a *pneumatika* that builds up the self instead of others fails the test and is exposed as not being a *charisma*]. . . .

Paul's evaluation of glossolalia is best summarized by [1 Cor.] 14:20-25. He reverses the glossolalists' claim [that tongues are a sign of spirituality for believers] by suggesting that tongues are far from an unambiguous sign of belief: they can mean anything, and can come from anywhere.⁴

Raymond F. Collins, in his highly regarded commentary on 1 Corinthians, also notices the significant difference between these terms and the way that the Apostle is using them:

The choice of "gifts" (*charismata*) in v. 4 as a term to identify spiritual realities functions as a theological corrective to "spiritual phenomena" (*pneumatika*, v. 1), a term that highlights the ecstatic and the extraordinary. One of Paul's basic strategies [in 1 Corinthians] is "redefinition." In 12:4 he employs the strategy with great advantage, underscoring the

idea that authentic spiritual phenomena are gifts, charisms. . .

Paul's choice of "gifts" (*charismata*; cf. 1:7; 7:7; 12:4, 9, 28, 30, 31) to describe the spiritual phenomena (*pneumatika*) about which he will write is jarring. The new term provides a theological corrective to the popular Corinthian notion of spiritual phenomena. Instead of accentuating the ecstatic nature of the phenomena Paul draws attention to the fact that authentic spiritual realities are gifts. . . .

The relatively new term "charism" is one to which Paul provides his own personal nuance, that is, a charism is a gift of the Spirit to someone within the community for the sake of building up the community as the body of Christ [Whereas the Corinthian *pneumatikon*, like the pagan version of tongue speech edified the self].⁵

Therefore, it is a mistake to assume that every time the Apostle refers to a spiritual manifestation in this passage, that he is automatically referring to an authentic Christian *charisma* (gift).⁶ This too is a vital and common mistake made in interpreting this passage. It is not specifically, or only Holy Spirit empowered gifts that he is concerned about in this section, but rather distinguishing the nature of spiritual manifestations in a public worship service.

This is why the Apostle does not address all the different spiritual gifts here, but primarily the "showy" ones that the Corinthians thought (because of their pagan background) were marks of heightened spirituality. So we enter 1 Corinthians 14 knowing that not every public spiritual manifestation (*pneumatika*) even in a Christian assembly is holy. The same attitude is in great need today.

The Apostle goes on in the rest of chapter 12 to describe some of the authentic manifestations of the Holy Spirit. It will be noticed that he intentionally switches to the use of *charisma* here and does not describe them as *pneumatika* (cf. 12:4, 9, 28, 30, 31). *Charisma* is the NT term for authentic spiritual gifts, not *pneumatika* (cf. Rom 12:6; 1 Pet 4:10). The Apostle's change in terms is intentional and significant.

Accordingly, as L. T. Johnson had written above, "He [Paul] begins by reminding them that there is a difference between *pneumatika*, which can refer to any sort of "spiritual phenomenon," and *charismata*, the term Paul uses for the gifts given by the Holy Spirit."

B) Not All “Tongues” are Christian: *the unknown glosse vs. the Christian glossais*

Many NT scholars have recognized the fact that the Apostle is attempting to distinguish unknown spiritual manifestations and authentic Christian ones in 1 Corinthians 12-14 by using the terms *pneumatikon* and *charisma* respectively. What is not as commonly recognized is that he would seem to be intending the same throughout chapter 14 with a conspicuous changing back and forth between “**a tongue**” (*glosse*, singular in the Greek), and “**tongues**” (*glossais*, plural in the Greek).

In fact, it is rather surprising to us why so few even ask the question as to why the Apostle conspicuously alternates the terms. His use of “**a tongue** [*glosse*]” is conspicuous because the real gift of tongues is referred to with the Greek plural *glossais* (“**tongues**”) everywhere else in the NT, implying that “**a tongue**” is something different.

For example, we read in Mark 16:17 “**And these signs will accompany those who believe: In My name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues.**” This is a clear reference to the real gift of speaking in foreign human languages and the plural “**tongues** (*glossais*)” is used.

Likewise, when the gift of tongues is referred to in Acts, without exception the plural Greek *glossais* is used. Its first occurrence is described as follows: “**All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues** [*glossais*: “languages”] **as the Spirit** [miraculously] **enabled them**” (Acts 2:4). Accordingly, those hearing it exclaimed, “**we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!** [*glossais*]” (Acts 2:11).

Here we see the reason that the real gift was referred to as “**tongues** [*glossais*]” in the plural. The real gift was the miraculous ability to speak foreign human languages the speaker did not know. Accordingly, in its second occurrence, Luke records that the disciples heard the first Gentile Christians, “**speaking in tongues** [*glossais*] **and praising God**” (Acts 10:46). In the final reference to the gift of tongues in Acts, Luke records that some unsaved disciples of John the Baptist, “**spoke in tongues** [*glossais*] **and prophesied**” (Acts 19:6).

Therefore, we are not surprised that when we turn to 1 Corinthians, that the first five times the Apostle speaks of the tongues phenomenon in question, he is clearly speaking of the Christian variety and he only uses the plural form of “**tongues**” (*glossais*) to do so. In 12:10 he describes the authentic Christian gift as “**speaking in different kinds of tongues** [*glossais*,

plural]." In 12:28 he labels the gift, "**speaking in different kinds of tongues** [*glossais*]," again using the plural form. In 12:30 he is again clearly referring to the gift and asks, "**All do not speak in tongues** [*glossais*] **do they?**" In 13:1, he again refers to the Christian gift as being able to "**speak in the tongues** [*glossais*] **of men.**" And in 13:8, when he says, "**where there are tongues** [*glossais*], **they will be stilled**" he is again referring to the Christian gift.

Therefore, we should take special notice when we come to 1 Corinthians 14 and the Apostle writes:

Anyone who speaks in a tongue [*glosse*; singular] **does not speak to men. . . . Indeed, no one understands him; he utters mysteries with his spirit** [not the Holy Spirit]. . . . **He who speaks in a tongue** [*glosse*; singular] **edifies himself.** (1 Cor 14:2-3)

What we should notice is that the Apostle is obviously no longer speaking about the authentic Christian gift of tongues. This is not only because the "**tongue**" phenomena he speaks of has completely different attributes than the biblical gift of tongues, but because he has conspicuously switched to a different Greek term to refer to this phenomena.

More specifically, when the Apostle has something suspicious or negative to say about the phenomena occurring in Corinth, he uses the singular "**a tongue**" throughout 1 Corinthians 14. On the other hand, every time the Apostle has something clearly positive to say, he uses the plural term "**tongues.**"

Accordingly, the Apostle says, "**Anyone who speaks in** (an "unknown," possibly pagan) **tongue** [*glosse*] . . . **no one understands him** (v. 2) . . . [and he] **edifies himself**" (v. 4), and his "**mind is unfruitful**" (v. 14). But then he says, "**I thank God I speak in tongues** [*glossais*, the authentic Christian gift] **more than all of you**" (v. 18). Is the Apostle saying he thanks God that he habitually practices a self-edifying and mindless pattern of speech that no one understands? Not at all. The Greek term *glosse* throughout the passage never automatically refers to the Christian gift, but an "unknown" utterance that may be the pagan practice of obscure, meaningless utterances.

This point is supported by the fact that in 1 Corinthians 14, when the biblical gift of tongues is clearly and unreservedly mentioned in the most positive terms, the Apostle returns to the Greek term *glossais* which he used in chapters 12-13 and which Luke used throughout Acts. In 14:5 he says, "**I wish that you all spoke in tongues** [*glossais*]," and in 14:18 he says, "**I thank God that I speak in tongues** [*glossais*] **more than all of you.**" In a

clear reference to the gift in 14:21, he quotes Isaiah using "**tongues** [*glossais*]" in the Greek plural.

Likewise, in 14:22 he makes the most definitive statement in the whole passage regarding the authentic gift and says, "**Tongues** [*glossais*] **are a sign . . . for unbelievers**" again using the Greek plural. Likewise, in 14:39 he says, "**do not forbid to speak in tongues** [*glossais*]," obviously referring to the authentic Christian gift.

However, when the Apostle says something apprehensive or even negative about spontaneous utterances in the assembly, it would seem he turns to the singular *glosse* "**a tongue.**" Accordingly, the Apostle says in 14:2, "**Anyone who speaks in tongue** [*glosse*] **does not speak to men** [unlike how the gift operated in Acts] . . . **no one understands him; he utters mysteries** [like the pagans do] **with his spirit** [*Not* the Holy Spirit].

In 14:4 he says "**He who speaks in a tongue** [*glosse*] **edifies himself**" unlike any Christian spiritual gift is to operate. In 14:9 Paul points out if someone speaks in a tongue that does not have "**intelligible words**" they "**will just be speaking to the air.**"

Because no one can know the contents or source of an incoherent utterance, nor does it edify anybody, in 14:13 the Apostle says, "**anyone who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret.**" In 14:14 he says, "**If I pray in a tongue** [*glosse*] **my mind is unfruitful**, which is not good, and therefore it is something Paul will not do, but rather, he says, "**I will** [at the same time] **also pray with my mind.**" We note as well that the Holy Spirit is never mentioned in conjunction with the "tongue" phenomenon, but always merely the human spirit (cf. 14:2, 14).

Additional reasons for believing that the Apostle, 1) introduces the term "**a tongue** [*glosse*]," and 2) intentionally differentiates it from "**tongues**" [*glossais*] are the following. First of all, it is important to keep in mind the religious context of the Apostle's discussion of tongues. He and the Corinthians are well aware of the common practice in the pagan temples of publicly uttering obscure speech as a way of demonstrating spirituality.

If we accept the probability that this pagan variety of prayer was occurring in the Corinthian assembly then we can be sure that the Apostle would desire to identify and exclude it in some way. It is suggested here that he does this by referring to the authentic Christian gift invariably with the plural "**tongues**" [*glossais*] and to everything else with the singular "**a tongue** [*glosse*]."

Secondly, it has already been pointed out that there are obviously two different tongues phenomena being addressed in 1

Corinthians 14. In verse 2 the Apostle says, **“anyone who speaks in a tongue (*glosse*, singular, “unknown” possibly pagan variety) does not speak to men. . . . Indeed, no one understands him.”** But then a few verses later the Apostle says, **“Tongues (*glossais*, plural, Christian variety) . . . are a (miraculous public) sign . . . for unbeliever”** (v. 22). It would seem impossible to suggest that a private “prayer” in an incoherent tongue could be a miraculous **“sign . . . for unbelievers.”** Therefore, in the Apostle’s desire to contrast the pagan tongue prayer from the Christian gift of tongues, he not only repeatedly describes them differently, but uses different Greek terms to refer to them.

More specifically, it is suggested that whenever we encounter *glosse* in this chapter, it needs to be interpreted as an “unknown” tongue utterance, and cannot be interpreted automatically or necessarily as the authentic Christian gift of tongues. The term “unknown tongue” comes from the KJV. Its translators apparently recognized the significance of these two different terms and translated *glosse* as **“an unknown tongue”** (italics in translation) and *glossais*, simply as **“tongues”** or languages throughout 1 Corinthians 14.⁷ An “unknown” tongue in 1 Corinthians 14 simply means that because it was not yet interpreted, it was impossible to discern if it was the mere gibberish of pagan tongue prayer, or the miraculous and meaningful speech in a real human language that was the Christian gift of tongues.

It should not surprise us that the plural *glossais* would refer to the authentic gift of tongues and *glosse* would not. As demonstrated elsewhere, the gift of speaking in tongues clearly involved the ability to speak in many different human languages (cf. Acts 2:5-12).⁸ However, obscure sounds that have no **“distinction”** (1 Cor 14:7), are unrecognizable (14:8), not **“intelligible”** (14:9), and not human language at all, could not be distinguished into different languages (tongues) and could be lumped together as a single “tongue” because it all sounds the same.

It is suggested here then that careful study of 1 Corinthians 14 reveals 1) The Greek singular *glosse* (“**a tongue**”) can always be interpreted as an incoherent tongue utterance that may either be pagan or Christian, but is “unknown” until it is miraculously interpreted,⁹ and 2) The plural Greek *glossais*, (“tongues”) can always be interpreted as the authentic Christian gift of miraculously speaking in foreign human languages, but which may not have the intended effect if not also miraculously interpreted. This will be demonstrated in the following chapters.

It should be repeated here that *glosse* (singular **“tongue”**) cannot be assumed to always be referring necessarily to only pagan

tongues, but simply unknown tongues. For example, Dr. MacArthur says, "Apparently the apostle used the singular form to indicate the counterfeited gift and the plural to indicate the true."¹⁰ The latter part of his statement is true, but the first part regarding *glosse* is perhaps too simplistic.

Throughout 1 Corinthians 14 the Apostle recognizes that even something uttered in "an unknown tongue" may turn out to be coming from the true gift, and recognized as such, after a legitimate and miraculous interpretation is given and the utterance is found to contain meaningful Christian content. For example, we read in 1 Corinthians 14:26-28:

When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a [unknown] tongue [that needs interpretation to know what it is], has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. If anyone speaks in a [unknown] tongue, it *should be* by two or at the most three, and *each* in turn, and one must interpret; but if there is no interpreter, he must keep silent in the church. (NASB)

This is because neither Paul nor the Corinthians can know the source of the unknown tongue utterance unless it is interpreted. Accordingly, even here the singular *glosse* refers to an unknown utterance that may be pagan or Christian, and must be interpreted to know. Otherwise, the Apostle did not want the utterance spoken, because no one could know what the utterance was.

Nonetheless, even though the Apostle's use of *glosse* "unknown tongue" cannot be automatically interpreted as the pagan variety, it is significant that the Apostle's descriptions of such utterances in "an unknown tongue" (*glosse*) often describe the obscure, self-centered pagan variety of tongue prayer that the Corinthians were accustomed to. Unfortunately, however, the absence of interpretation would also leave an authentic utterance of the gift of tongues under the same suspicion as the pagan tongues.

Additionally, it will be pointed out in the next chapter that none of the references to an unknown "**tongue**" in 1 Corinthians 14 were intended by the Apostle to legitimize the obscure, private, self-centered, and empty variety of pagan "tongue prayer," as a legitimate additional variety of the miraculous, public, and meaningful gift of tongues that operated in Acts as "**a sign . . . for unbelievers**" (1 Cor 14:22).

In essence, then, it will be demonstrated that the verses that our *glossaist* brothers and sisters habitually use to support their version of tongues is actually referring to a practice of pagan "tongue prayer," not Christian tongues. And it is not surprising,

then, that today's phenomenon does not reflect the attributes of the authentic gift of miraculously speaking in real human foreign languages, but rather the obscure, self-centered, meaningless utterances practiced by pagans both then and today. ¹¹

At this point we offer the following excerpt of 1 Corinthians 14 from the NASB. ¹² Remember it is written to a church filled with people who have been converted out of pagan worship, some of whom had probably experienced the pagan practice of "tongue prayer," and no doubt were continuing to do so in the Corinthian church. We take the liberty of inserting "unknown" at every reference to *glosse*, "**a tongue**" in the singular.

Additionally, it is suggested that you interpret every reference to "**tongues**" plural as the authentic gift of miraculously speaking in human foreign languages. No doubt such an exercise will clarify the passage, and the following study as well. Hopefully it will be abundantly clear that the Apostle is *not* intending to introduce or legitimize a new or additional gift of tongues, especially one that was precisely like the pagan variety practiced in Corinth. His purpose is to eliminate, or at least sideline the pagan practice of "tongue prayer," while leaving room for the Christian sign gift of miraculously speaking in real human foreign languages to operate if and when it is present. He accomplishes this by demanding miraculous and legitimate interpretation of any utterance in an "unknown" tongue.

¹Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy. ²For one who speaks in a [unknown] tongue does not speak to men but to [God ¹³]; for no one understands, but in his spirit he speaks mysteries. ³But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation. ⁴One who speaks in a [unknown] tongue edifies himself; but one who prophesies edifies the church. ⁵Now I wish that you all spoke in [the gift of] tongues, but even more that you would prophesy; and greater is one who prophesies than one who speaks in [the gift of] tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may receive edifying.

⁶But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking in [the gift of] tongues, what will I profit you unless I speak to you either by way of revelation or of knowledge or of prophecy or of teaching? ⁷Yet even lifeless things, either flute or harp, in producing a sound, if they do not produce a distinction in the tones, how will it be known what is played on the flute or on the harp? ⁸For if the bugle produces an indistinct sound, who will prepare himself for battle? ⁹So also you, unless you

utter by the tongue speech that is clear, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air.

¹⁰There are, perhaps, a great many kinds of languages in the world, and no *kind* is without meaning. ¹¹If then I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be to the one who speaks a barbarian, and the one who speaks will be a barbarian to me. ¹²So also you, since you are zealous of spiritual *gifts*, seek to abound for the edification of the church.

¹³Therefore let one who speaks in a [unknown] tongue pray that he may interpret. ¹⁴For if I pray in a [unknown] tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. ¹⁵What is *the outcome* then? I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also; I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also. ¹⁶Otherwise if you bless in the spirit *only*, how will the one who fills the place of the ungifted say the "Amen" at your giving of thanks, since he does not know what you are saying? ¹⁷For you are giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not edified. ¹⁸I thank God, I speak in [the gift of] tongues more than you all; ¹⁹however, in the church I desire to speak five words with my mind so that I may instruct others also, rather than ten thousand words in a [unknown] tongue.

²⁰Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking be mature. ²¹In the Law it is written, "BY MEN OF STRANGE TONGUES AND BY THE LIPS OF STRANGERS I WILL SPEAK TO THIS PEOPLE, AND EVEN SO THEY WILL NOT LISTEN TO ME," says the Lord. ²²So then [the gift of] tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophecy *is for a sign*, not to unbelievers but to those who believe.

²³Therefore if the whole church assembles together and all speak in [the gift of] tongues, and ungifted men or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are mad? ²⁴But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an ungifted man enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all; ²⁵the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so he will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you.

²⁶What is *the outcome* then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a [unknown] tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. ²⁷If anyone speaks in a [unknown] tongue, *it should be* by two or at the most three,

and *each* in turn, and one must interpret; ²⁸but if there is no interpreter, he must keep silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God. ²⁹Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment. ³⁰But if a revelation is made to another who is seated, the first one must keep silent. ³¹For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted; ³²and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets; ³³for God is not a *God* of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.

³⁴The women are to keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but are to subject themselves, just as the Law also says. ³⁵If they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church. ³⁶Was it from you that the word of God *first* went forth? Or has it come to you only?

³⁷If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment. ³⁸But if anyone does not recognize *this*, he is not recognized.

³⁹Therefore, my brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak in [the gift of] tongues. ⁴⁰But all things must be done properly and in an orderly manner.

Extras & Endnotes

Gauging Your Grasp

- 1) What did we claim was the significance of the use of *pneumatika* and *charismata* throughout 1 Corinthians 12-14? Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 2) What did we claim was the significance of the use of "tongues [*glossais*]" and "tongue [*glossa*]," throughout 1 Corinthians 12-14? Do you agree or disagree and why?

Publications & Particulars

¹ There is admittedly some disagreement here as to whether the Apostle intended the word to mean "spiritual things" (neuter form) or "spiritual

people" (masculine form). The context allows for either and the difference has some bearing on the meaning of the whole passage.

Gordon Fee says:

The certain use of the neuter plural ["things"] in 14:1 in the imperative "Be zealous for [spiritual things] . . . has caused most commentators to opt for [the neuter form, "things" instead of "people" in 12:1]. . . . If so, then both here and in 14:1 the better translation might be "the things of the Spirit," which would refer to spiritual manifestations" (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians (NICNT)* (Eerdmans, 1987), 576, underlining added).

Further proof is that it is certainly in the neuter form in 14:12 which refers directly back to 12:1. Finally, the *NIDNTT* also lists it as a neuter noun here in 12:1.

However, although the primary thrust of the word here would seem to be "spiritual manifestations," obviously those manifestations come through people. As Dr. Collins comments:

The parallelism with 12:4 and 14:1 suggests that it is preferable to take *pneumatikon* as connoting spiritual phenomena [rather than people]. The difference between the two understandings is relatively minor. People of the Spirit participate in spiritual phenomena (*New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology (NIDNTT)*, Colin Brown, ed., 4 vols., (Zondervan, 1986), 447)

- ² *NIDNTT*, 3:706. We believe Dr. MacArthur errs when he says, "Except in Ephesians 6:12, the word *spiritual* [pneumatika] is always used in the New Testament of that which is in some way related to the Holy Spirit" (*1 Corinthians*, 282). This would not seem true, and in 1 Corinthians. 12-14 Paul does not make such an assumption.
- ³ *NIDNTT*, 3:707 (underlining added for emphasis).
- ⁴ L. T. Johnson *Religious Experience in Earliest Christianity: A Missing Dimension in New Testament Studies* [Augsburg Fortress, 1998], 121-2. It is unfortunate that while Dr. Johnson recognizes the differentiation between *pneumatika* and *charismata*, he misses the distinction between *glossa* and *glossais*, resulting, it would seem, in some unnecessary confusion on his part (Ibid.).
- ⁵ Raymond F. Collins, *1 Corinthians* (Sacra Pagina, 1999), 450, 452, n. 4. Underlining added.
- ⁶ Another indication that *pneumatikon* and *charisma* may not be synonymous in the Apostle's mind is the fact that he uses them side by side in Romans 1:11 when he writes: "**I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual [pneumatikon] gift [charisma] to make you strong**". If the words meant the exact same thing to the Apostle, or if *pneumatikon* automatically referred to spiritual gifts, the addition of *charisma* here would seem redundant.
- ⁷ With the exception of 14:26.
- ⁸ For discussion of the fact that the real gift of tongues involved real human

languages see chapter 12.2.

⁹ The only exception in 1 Corinthians 14 to “**a tongue**” referring to an obscure utterance with an unknown source would seem to be v. 9 where it refers to a person’s physical tongue.

¹⁰ John MacArthur, *1 Corinthians* (Moody Press, 1984), 373.

¹¹ Thomas Edgar goes to great length to prove that even the obscure “tongue” mentioned in 1 Corinthians 14 is the real gift of tongues and therefore a real human language (139-150). Thus, his conclusion, “There is only one kind of tongues in the New Testament, the miraculous ability to speak in foreign human languages” (*Satisfied by the Promise of the Spirit* [Kregel, 1996], 150).

Once again, not even the Apostle Paul would have presumed or could have known that an unknown, uninterpreted tongue utterance was a real human language and therefore the real gift, especially in the religious context of the day. Therefore, the lack of distinction between the unknown tongue (*glosse*) and the gift of tongues (*glossais*) makes Dr. Edgar’s interpretation of 1 Corinthians 12-14 rather incomplete, often confusing, and overall misguided in our opinion. This is perhaps our greatest critique of Dr. Edgar’s otherwise very good book.

Perhaps Dr. Edgar is motivated by the fact that the practice of “praying in a tongue” in the Greek mystery religions, has been used by liberal scholars to attack the Bible. Accordingly, Joseph Dillow writes:

It is important to note that the ecstatic utterance view came with the advent of the denial of the supernatural and the higher criticism against the Bible in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The critics attempted to identify the tongues speaking of I Corinthians 14 totally with the psychological pagan tongue speaking of the mystery religions. Their motivations were to remove the supernatural out of the Bible. (*Speaking in Tongues* [Zondervan, 1975], 15)

Contrary to liberal scholars we do not believe that the biblical gift was the same as the pagan practice, but was in fact miraculous.

The widely recognized NT Greek expert Spiros Zodhiates says much in agreement with our view of 1 Corinthians 14 in his book, *Speaking in Tongues and Public Worship: An Exegetical Commentary on First Corinthians Fourteen* (AMG, 1998). This includes one of the few who recognize the importance of the Apostle’s alternating use of *glosa* and *glossais* (cf. 69). However, the book is rather surfacy, and rarely sufficiently defends its points particularly against the complex arguments of contemporary *glossaism*.

¹² The NAS, NIV, KJV, NKJV, PME, and RSV translations also accurately reflect the distinction between *glosse* and *glossais*. However, the way in which several modern translations interpret the Greek in 1 Corinthians 14 is very unfortunate and misleading. The NLT, for example, uses the plural “tongues” throughout, mistranslating the singular *glosse*, and resulting in, “**if your gift** (not in the Gk.) **is the ability to speak in tongues** (sing. Gk. *glosse*) **you will be talking to God and not to people**” (v. 2) and “**A person who speaks in tongues** (sing. Gk.

glosse) is strengthened personally in the Lord" (14:4; cf. v. 13, 14).

The Jerusalem Bible also takes the liberty of erroneously translating the sing. Gk. *glosse* as "**the gift of tongues.**" The popular Message paraphrase puts it: "**If you praise him in the private language of tongues** (sing. Gk. *glosse*) **God understands you but no one else does, for you are sharing intimacies just between you and him**" (v. 2) and "**The one who prays using a private "prayer language" (*glosse*) certainly gets a lot out of it . . .**"

Although we know differently, one might assume some *glossaist* conspiracy on the part of these translators by virtue of the glowing terms used to describe a Greek word (*glosse*) that 1st century inhabitants of Corinth simply understood as potentially incoherent gibberish commonly practiced in their pagan temples. It should be remembered that these quotes are not the opinion of some commentator but, rather, what many Christians are reading for Scripture. This is not to condemn these translations entirely as they are very helpful in some cases. This is just not one of them. The CEV, NCV, and TEV contain the same inaccuracies.

- ¹³ We recognize that the Apostle's statement that the unknown tongue utterance is "**to God**" (v. 2, 28) strongly suggests a different kind of gift of tongues than described in Acts and by the Apostle in verse 22. Before drawing any conclusions about such statements, we would encourage the reader to consider our explanation of these statements in the next chapter 12.9.