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The Truth About Tongues

14: 6-12

The truth about tongues DIG: What point is Paul making with the musical instruments and the trumpet? How does Paul raise the idea of war and spiritual war, and link it to the idea of spiritual war with Rosh Ha'Shanah? How does Paul give us good reason to believe that when Paul wrote about the true gift of tongues, he was referring to known languages?

REFLECT: How do you use your spiritual gift(s) to build others up? Do you know any foreign languages? Have you traveled to other countries where you had a difficult time communicating with the people who lived there? How did you compensate? Aside from the shofar, how does the Ruach remind you of the need to repent and correct your ways?

In order to benefit others, a person must communicate clearly and effectively.

Paul's second major truth about the secondary position of **tongues** is that, in **themselves**, **they** can't be understood. To strengthen **his** point, **he** uses **himself** as an illustration, saying: **Brothers, suppose I come to you. Paul** uses the rhetorical "**I**" to help **his** critique of **tongues** go down easier. Even as **an apostle, speaking in tongues** would be **of** no **benefit** apart from interpretation, through which the **revelation or knowledge** (internal), **or prophecy or teaching** (external) is made plain to those who hear it (**14:6**). It's as if **Paul** was saying, "If **I** don't make any sense when **I** come to talk to you, what is the use of me coming?" Any message is useless if it cannot be comprehended. Again, the private use of **the gift of tongues** is excluded. **It** is useless if **it** is not edifying the whole congregation.

It is incredible that some believers put a premium on private or public unintelligible utterances that no one, including the speaker, can even attempt to understand. In some instances, what is claimed to be an interpretation has proved to have no relationship with what was spoken. Persons who have tested an interpreter by speaking in Hebrew, or another **language** known to them but unknown by the interpreter, have had their words "translated" into messages that had absolutely no relationship to what was spoken. Like some **the Corinthians** such abuses not only put self-glorification above the edification of

the church but add deception to the abuse.⁴⁴⁵

Paul used **three simple analogies** to prove **his** point that there must be understanding if the congregation is to be built up (**to see link click [DI](#) - The Word that Builds Up**): **musical instruments, the trumpet**, and **daily conversation**. The analogies seem self-evident and all point out that in order to benefit others, a person must communicate clearly and effectively. **Paul** applied this principle to **the Corinthian** situation.

Musical instruments: Even with lifeless musical instruments, such as a flute or a harp, how will anyone recognize the melody if one note can't be distinguished from another (14:7)? Presumably ancient people learned to sing music by listening to a tune being played, just as a worship team today might play an unfamiliar song once before the congregation sings it. But if the worship team does not give a clear **distinction** between the notes on their instruments, the people will be unable to learn the tune.⁴⁴⁶ The analogy is clear. Speaking in **ecstatic utterance** (see **[Ce](#) - The Pagan Background of Counterfeit Spiritual Gifts**) during public worship is like the harpist running his fingers all over the strings making strange sounds, but not playing a tune anyone could recognize. Aimless sounds mean nothing.



The trumpet: Changing the analogy **somewhat**, **Paul** points out that **if the trumpet** (see the commentary on **Leviticus [Ee](#) - Rosh ha'Shanah**) **gives an unclear sound, who will get ready for battle (14:8)?** If the soldier blowing **the trumpet** is not sure whether he is calling "Retreat!" or "Charge!" you can be sure none of the soldiers will know what to do either. Half of them will rush forward, while the other half will retreat! The call must be a clear one if it is to be understood.⁴⁴⁷ A soldier gets no message from a bunch of random **sounds**. Here **Paul** raises the idea of war and spiritual war, linking the idea of spiritual war with **Rosh Ha'Shanah**, which is a day of blowing **the trumpets**. In a time of physical war, when the enemy approaches, we must blow **the trumpets (Numbers 10:9)**. This verse emphasizes that during tribulations, **Isra'el** does not stand alone, **ADONAI** is standing by

her side. But **God's** help is not "automatic". **She** must blow **the trumpet**, and as a result, it is as if **she** is brought to **Ha'Shem's** attention, and then **YHVH** will save **Isra'el** from **her** enemies that rise up against **her**. During the Great Tribulation, the righteous of the TaNaKh will turn to **God** (see the commentary on **Revelation Ev - The Basis for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ**), and **all Isra'el will be saved** (see the commentary on **Romans Da - The Redemption of Isra'el**).

As believers, we encounter two different kinds of dangers: physical war and spiritual war. And ten days before Yom Kippur, we blow **the shofar** and ask **God** to come and deliver us spiritually. And here we see the aspect of repentance, and mental preparation before **the Day of Atonement** (see the commentary on **Leviticus Ej - Yom Kippur**). The blowing of **the shofar** reminds us of the need to repent, the need to correct our ways, and in addition, the blowing of **the shofar** brings us up before **God** for help, for salvation. The Torah teaches us that without this combination of repentance and sacrifice there is no **forgiveness** of **sins**. **Yeshua** is our sacrifice, but the responsibility of repentance rests on our own shoulders. The **shofar** also alerts us, those who believe in **Yeshua** as **the Messiah** of **Isra'el** and the world, to repent, to return to our **Messiah**, to return to security in our salvation. During **Rosh Ha'Shanah** it is customary to read "The Binding of Isaac". It is as if we do this to remind **God** that, in the end, **He** took pity on Isaac, and at the last moment, **God** saved him. So is the hope that at the last moment, on the Day of Judgment, **God** will have mercy on us. But more than that, we, the people of **God**, remember that Isaac was not sacrificed. Instead, **a ram** was sacrificed. In our case, it was **Yeshua** who was sacrificed in our place, **He** paid the price in full. Therefore, in **Yeshua**, we can stand with confidence on Judgment Day (see the commentary on **Revelation Fo - The Great White Throne Judgment**).⁴⁴⁸

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Thank **You** for the joy of **Your** accepting our **repentance**. What a comfort it is to know that **You forgive** when there is heartfelt sorrow over the wrong that was done. **If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness (First John 1:9). Your forgiveness** lifts the burden of **sin** and shame from our shoulders. Praise **Your** omniscience that knows the heart attitude and can clearly see if **the grief** is a true godly sorrow leading to **repentance** or merely sorrow for the consequences of our **sin**. **You were grieved to the point of repentance. For you were grieved according to God's will, so that you might in no way suffer loss from us. For the grief that God wills brings a repentance that leads to salvation, leaving no regret. But the world's grief brings death (Second Corinthians 7:9b-10).***

You** are all knowing and **You** hear beyond the mere words. Sometimes the word “sorry” is said so casually and flippantly. **You** put emphasis on actions that show a heart-felt **grief** over **sin** and not on mere hollow words (**Matthew 7:21-23**). Godly **grief** will not focus the consequences of our **sin**, but will always focus **repentance**. **For see what this very thing - this grieving that God wills - has brought you! What diligence, what defense, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what rendering of justice! In everything you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter (Second Cor 7:11). Please help us to have genuine repentance when we are wrong and actions to show it.

*I rejoice in how complete **Your forgiveness** is when the **repentance** is genuine and has brought a desire to turn from the wrong and to follow **Your** path for their life. **For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His mercy for those who fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. (Psalms 103:11-12).** I am grateful that **You** accept our heartfelt **repentance**. I choose to live in a way that my thoughts and actions will bring **You** glory. In **Your** holy **Son’s** name and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*

Daily conversation: **Paul** connects the analogies to the situation in **Corinth**. **They** were so carnally self-centered that they could not have cared less about communication. They were interested in impressing others, not communicating with them, much less edifying them. Paul compares them to musical instruments blown into by one who is not a musician or a trumpet played so poorly that what comes out is unrecognizable. From such incompetence, produced by pride and lovelessness, **the Corinthian** congregation could not have been anything else than what it was: confused, disorderly and unproductive. **It’s the same with you: how will anyone know what you are saying unless you use your tongue to produce intelligible speech?** To which **Paul** adds the biting words: **You will be talking to the air (14:9)!⁴⁴⁹**

Paul continues to hammer away at the same point. **There are undoubtedly all kinds of languages in the world, and none is altogether meaningless (14:10).** He simply mentions the obvious. A **language** without **meaning** is pointless. In fact, a **language** without **meaning** is not really a **language** at all. It is the meaning that makes a **language** a **language**. The many **kinds of languages in the world** all sound different. This gives us good reason to believe that when **Paul** wrote about the true **gift of tongues**, he was referring to known **languages** and not some “heavenly” **language**.⁴⁵⁰ The purpose of the genuine **gift of tongues**, just as the purpose of all **languages**, was to communicate. From its first occurrence at **Shavu’ot**, **the Lord** intended it to be a means of communication. The

very miracle of **tongues** at **Shavu'ot** was in the fact that everyone in present, though from many different countries, heard all of the righteous of the TaNaKh **speak in his own language (Acts 2:6 and 8-11)**.

That has always been a characteristic of the genuine **gift of tongues**. The **tongues** spoken at **Shavu'ot**, and every true manifestation of **tongues** after that time until **their cessation (13:8)**, *were understandable* - either directly (**Acts 2:6**) or through an **interpreter (14:27)**. **ADONAI** did not give two kinds of **tongues**, one intelligible and the other unintelligible. The Bible speaks of only one **gift**, whose characteristics and purpose did not change.⁴⁵¹

Not only must a legitimate **language** be used in order to communicate, but both the speaker and the hearer must understand **it**. By definition, communication is a two-way street. Otherwise, **if I don't know what a person's sounds mean, I will be a foreigner to the speaker and the speaker will be a foreigner to me (14:11)**. Anyone who has ever lived in or visited a **foreign** country knows the frustration created by the inability to understand or to communicate except by primitive sign **language**. **Paul's** critique of **tongues** implies that it does more than simply create frustration; it erects barriers of alienation - the sick feeling that one does not belong. What is worse, these feelings are awakened in a place where one is supposed to feel at home: the community of believers. **Paul's** fear is that if people are chatting away in **ecstatic utterance** without interpretation which dominate public worship, then the church will become like Babel, people merely speaking gibberish.

Likewise with you: since you eagerly seek the things of the Spirit, seek especially what will help in edifying the congregation (14:12). **Paul's** concern is that **their** ambition for **spiritual powers** or phenomena needed some constraint, without putting the breaks on **it** entirely. **He** would redirect **their** zeal to those things that **build up the entire church**. That ruled out **tongues** since they only **built up the person** who was **speaking (14:4)**. The most important **spiritual gifts** are those that **build others up**.⁴⁵²