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Pagan Gibberish is Unproductive

14: 13-19

Pagan gibberish is unproductive DIG: What part does the mind play in worship? What were the values and limits of tongues? How does Paul illustrate his point? Since Paul was specifically gifted with the true gift of tongues, why didn't he talk about it more? Why wasn't Paul giving instructions for governing the use of tongues in the Church today?

REFLECT: What experience, if any, have you had with someone supposedly speaking in tongues? Were you built up by what you heard? Was there an interpretation? Things that were flashy, exciting, and powerful attracted the Corinthians. They knew the "love of power" more than the "power of love." In what ways do you see that tendency in your congregation?

Spirituality involves more than the mind, but it never excludes the mind.

The charismatic tendency to suspend the intellect and let emotion run amok is the essence of what **Paul** wrote against in this chapter. In condemning **the Corinthians'** misuse of **ecstatic utterance** in the church (**to see link click [Ce](#) - The Pagan Background of Counterfeit Spiritual Gifts**), **the apostle** argued that all ministry of **the spiritual gifts** in **the congregation** should be aimed at people's **minds**. **For God is not a God of confusion (14:33).**⁴⁵³

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise **You** for being a **God** of perfect order, down to the exact number of protons, neutrons and electrons in each atom. Our planet is exactly the precise distance from the sun and the precise tilt for life to occur. Praise **You** that though **You** are a **God** with emotions, great love and **wrath**, **Your** emotions do not rule over **Your** wisdom. **He who trusts in the Son has eternal life. He who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him (John 3:36). Your wrath** is in control and will play out in the exact timing of punishment. Sin is entirely awful, yet **You** patiently wait till the sin is complete before punishing (**Genesis 15:16c**).*

*There is never any **confusion** or rushing in anything that **You** do. Every word **You** speak is*

*precise and exact. Each and every action **You** take is wisely planned and done in an orderly manner. Even when you come from heaven **riding on a white horse** to conquer with **the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17)**. **You** are in complete control (**Revelation 19:15**). How emotional is a **wedding**, yet **You** do not rush events, even when the next event on the calendar is **the wedding of the Lamb, and His bride has made herself ready (Revelation 19:7c)**. **You** know that **the wedding** supper of **the Lamb** is coming, yet **You** never miss a beat in orchestrating the events of history exactly in the precise and planned order. I thank **You** for being such a reliable **Father** with strong emotions of love for good and hatred of evil, yet **You** rule not by **Your** emotions but it is **Your** wisdom that guides **Your** heart. **You** are wonderful in **Your** love, wrath and orderliness and I worship **You!** In **Your** holy **Son's** name and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*

Nowhere does the Bible teach that **the true gift of tongues** is anything other than human languages. Nor is there any suggestion that the true gift (see [Dk - The Priority of God's Word over Tongues](#)) was any different than the miraculous languages described in Acts 2 (see the commentary on [Acts 2 - The Ruach Ha'Kodesh Comes at Shavu'ot](#)). The Greek word in both places is *glossa*. In Acts, it is clear that **the disciples** were speaking in known languages. Unbelieving Jews who were in Jerusalem for the festival were confused, because each one heard the believers speaking in their own language (Acts 2:6b). Then Luke went on to name some fifteen different countries and areas whose languages were being spoken (Acts 2:8-11). This point cannot be overlooked or minimized.⁴⁵⁴

Regarding a private prayer, or “heavenly” language in one’s prayer closet, this violates the solid, bedrock principle, that **spiritual gifts** are for others, not for self-gratification. Neither Luke nor Paul refer to any heavenly language. In fact, **tongues** are plural for many languages, not singular. And if **tongues** are for unbelievers, when one is in their prayer closet speaking in tongues, alone with God, where is the unbeliever?

Some believe that Mark 16:18 indicates “a heavenly language” where it says: **they will speak with new tongues** (Greek: *kainos glossai*). There are a couple of problems with this interpretation. First, it is doubtful that Mark 16:9-20 was an original part of the Greek text and there are several reasons for omitting these verses. The Greek text does not appear in the oldest and most reliable manuscripts of the gospel (It does appear, however, in some early manuscripts), many of the Greek words in this section are different from the vocabulary Mark uses throughout the rest of his gospel, and the Greek style is much different from that used elsewhere in Mark. Secondly, *kainos* never means “new” in the

sense of “unheard of,” and is never applied to **the gift of tongues**. *Kainos* always means “new” compared with what is “old,” as differing from the “old.” **The Corinthians** had **their** own **language**, which was “old” to **them**; and when **they** heard **their** members speak in **the** true **gift of tongues**, **they** were “new” to **them** because **they** were foreign **languages**, other than the one they were accustomed to hearing. Instead of proving that **Paul** has in mind “the language of heaven” when **he** uses *kainos*, the term, in fact, proves just the opposite.⁴⁵⁵

Therefore, someone who speaks in a tongue should pray for the power to interpret (4:13). In this section **Paul** continues to teach about **counterfeit tongues**, and therefore continues to speak sarcastically **(4:8-10)**. This is indicated in the first place by the fact that **he** uses the singular **tongue** (see **DI - The Word that Builds Up: the interpretive key to this chapter**), which refers to **pagan gibberish**. In the second place, what **he** says here cannot apply to **the** true **gift of tongues**. If **Paul** were not speaking sarcastically of **ecstatic utterance**, **he** would be asking **the Corinthians** to **interpret pagan gibberish**, which would be impossible. **Paul** sarcastically rebukes **the** carnal **Corinthian believers** for **their** immaturity **(14:20)**. It’s as if **Paul** were saying, “While **you** are jabbering away in **your unintelligible gibberish**, **you** could at least ask **God** to give **you** some way of making **it** beneficial to the church. Because as you now play around with **ecstatic utterance**, **you** need to realize that **it’s** both **pagan** and pointless.”

In the **pagan** rites with which **the Corinthians** were so familiar, speaking in **ecstatic utterances** was considered to be communing with the gods **spirit-to-spirit**. The experience tended to bypass **the mind** and normal understanding. **For if I pray in ecstatic utterance, my [breath] does pray, but my mind is unproductive (14:14).** Here, **Paul** uses the Greek word *pneuma*, which can be translated *spirit*, *wind*, or *breath*, in the sense of **[breath]**. It is impossible that *pneuma* here refers to **the Holy Spirit**, as most charismatics believe – **His Spirit** being revealed through our spirits. All believers are indwelt by **the Holy Spirit**, but if **Paul** was speaking of **the Holy Spirit** in relation to “my spirit,” then grammatically and theologically **he** would also be speaking of **the Holy Spirit** in relation to **my mind**. **The Holy Spirit** cannot be **praying** through a person while bypassing his or her **mind**. What **the carnal Corinthians** were **praying** was as empty and mindless as **the ecstasies** they used in **their pagan** temples. **They** were merely **talking to the air (14:9)!**⁴⁵⁶

From the earliest days of Pentecostalism, the quest for ever more unusual and spectacular manifestations of **spiritual gifts** has sabotaged rationality in the movement. Reports of inexplicable, even implausible, mystical phenomena are rife in the charismatic and

Pentecostal tradition. No tale, it seems, is too fantastic to gain an eager following. Many appear to believe that **God's** power can be displayed only in ways that are unearthly, eerie, or preposterous. As a result, some charismatics disdain logic, reason, and common sense in their eagerness to embrace such reports.

Worse, the entire movement has absorbed the erroneous notion that whatever is truly **spiritual** must transcend or bypass people's rational senses. **Spiritual gifts** supposedly operate by suspending the faculties of human reason. One might think that the strongest evidence of **the Spirit's** power is when someone lapses into a stupor. As a result, the folklore of the charismatic movement is filled with outrageous accounts of behavior that resembles trances, seizures, subliminal messaging, hypnosis, suspended animation, frenzy, and hysteria. These are often cited as proof that **God** is at work in the movement.⁴⁵⁷

So, what about it? The answer is that there is no place for mindless, **ecstatic prayer**. **Paul** declares that **praying and singing with his spirit** must be accompanied by **praying and singing with his mind** also (14:15). It is obvious that building the church up cannot exist apart from **the mind**. **Spirituality** involves more than **the mind**, but it never excludes **the mind** (Romans 12:1-2; Ephesians 4:23; Colossians 3:10). In Scripture, and certainly in the writings of **Paul**, no premium is placed on ignorance. Quoting **Deuteronomy 6:5**, **Yeshua** reinforced the command in the TaNaKh that we should **love ADONAI with all [our] heart and with all [our] soul and with all [our] mind** (Matthew 22:37).



Praying or singing in pagan gibberish would serve no purpose, and **Paul** would have none of it. **Otherwise, if you are giving thanks with your spirit, how will someone who** is ignorant of what was being spoken possibly understand what **he** hears. In the worship service, for example, **he** would not know when **to say, "Amen," when you have finished giving thanks, since he doesn't know what you are saying?** The person **uttering mysteries in the spirit** would **undoubtedly** think that **he** was **giving thanks**

very nicely, but no one else would be able to understand **him**. **It** would merely be noise to **them**. **No one** would be **built up** as **they** should have been when **the** true **gift** was used properly (**14:16-17**). In other words, **the believers** speaking in **ecstatic utterance** was being selfish, ignoring the rest of the people **in the congregation**, muddying the message **the gift** was designed to communicate, and doing it all just to gratify **their** own egos, to show off, and to supposedly demonstrate **their spiritual** superiority over others.⁴⁵⁸

In case **the Corinthians** would think **he** no longer recognized **the** true **gift** of **tongues** after reading this, **Paul** said: **I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you (14:18)**. **He** made it clear that **he** was not condemning **the** genuine **gift of tongues**, or enviously criticizing **a gift** that **he himself** did not possess. Here, **Paul** uses the plural **tongues**. **He** is no longer speaking hypothetically; **he** had had more experience than any of **the Corinthians** in speaking in **tongues**. **He** knew what the proper use of **the** true **gift** involved and did not involve. We can be sure that **he** didn't use **the gift** in any perverted way for personal gratification. **He** used it the same way **it** was used at **Shavu'ot**, to bring a supernatural message to those **ADONAI** wanted to reach, and as **a** miraculous **sign** (see [Do - Tongues are a Sign](#)) verifying the gospel and **his** apostolic authority. Yet, **he** considered that **gift** so low in value as compared to **his** other **gifts** and ministries that **he** never mentioned a specific use of **it** in all **his** writings.⁴⁵⁹

The gift of languages (*glossa*) had a proper place for a fixed time as a miraculous confirming **sign to unbelievers (14:22a)**, with the accompanying purpose of **building up** the church through **interpretation**. **But Paul** continues to say that **in a congregation meeting he would rather say five words with my mind in order to instruct others than ten thousand words in a counterfeit tongue (14:19)**! Using the singular (**tongue**) again to refer to **pagan gibberish**, **he** emphasizes that an uncountable number of sounds in unintelligible tones has no place in the church because it's useless. To speak a very short sentence of **five words** with **his mind**, giving a message that would instruct or encourage **his hearers**, was far more valuable to **Paul** than a limitless number of words **in ecstatic utterances** that was incomprehensible.

Because **Paul** knew that **the** true **gift of tongues** would cease in a few years, **he** was not giving instructions for governing **tongues** in the Church today. **He** was not even giving such instruction to **the Corinthians**, because **he** was speaking of **the counterfeit** use of **the** genuine **gift**, which was based in self-centered emotionalism that did not originate with **the Ruach Ha'Kodesh**. **Paul** was giving **them**, as well as believers of all ages, a warning against using self-serving, worldly, ineffective, and **God** dishonoring substitutes for **the** true **spiritual gifts** that **God** has ordained to be ministered in the power and in the fruit of **the**



Spirit, and for the blessing and the **building up** of **His** Church.⁴⁶⁰