

## A Biblical Catechism for Speaking in Tongues

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### Acts 2:1-2

*“And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.  
And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind,  
and it filled all the house where they were sitting.”*

# 1 Corinthians 14

## Introduction

The church of Corinth was not a spiritual minded congregation. It was filled with many problems.

- There were many divisions and contentions among the people. *1 Corinthians 1:11-13 For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. 12 Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. 13 Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?*
- The church members were carnal and not spiritual. *1 Corinthians 3:1-14 And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. 2 I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. 3 For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? 4 For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?*
- The members were like children unable to eat solid food but had to survive on the milk of the gospel. *1 Corinthians 3:2 I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able.*
- Some of the church members were puffed up with pride and were offended with Paul. *1 Corinthians 4:18 Now some are puffed up, as though I would not come to you.*
- Sexual sins were openly practiced and supported by others within the church. *1 Corinthians 5:1-2 It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife. 2 And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you.*
- Church members sued one another in the courts of the world. *1 Corinthians 6:1-8 Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints?*
- Some church members ate food that had been offered to idols which upset others. *1 Corinthians 8:1 Now as touching things offered unto idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth.*

- Some church members came to the Lord's Supper drunk. *1 Corinthians 11:17 Now in this that I declare unto you I praise you not, that ye come together not for the better, but for the worse. 18 For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it. 19 For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you. 20 When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's Supper. 21 For in eating every one taketh before other his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken.* With so many problems is it any wonder that spiritual gifts would also be abused creating unnecessary controversy?

1 Follow after charity, and desire spiritual *gifts*, but rather that ye may prophesy.

14:1 In this verse Christians are to ask God for more spirituality, not gifts per se for the word is not in the original. While it is not wrong to seek additional spiritual gifts it must be remembered the Spirit will dispense them as He sees fit. Therefore, those who do not speak in tongues should not be ashamed or made to feel less spiritual or less gifted if the Spirit says no to such a request. Of particular concern to the believer is to love and to seek to receive the gift of prophecy. The greatest need in the church of Corinth and the greatest need in the church today is for God's people to be more loving and to witness for Christ with power by His revelation.

2 For he that speaketh in an *unknown* tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth *him*; howbeit in the [Holy] Spirit he speaketh mysteries [divine truths].

14:2 *unknown*. The word "*unknown*" is correctly put in italics, not for emphasis but to recognize the word as an insertion into the text. The word is not found in the original text. There is no such thing as an "*unknown*" tongue or language in the Bible.

14:2 speaketh unto God. If Paul is using sanctified humor when referring to individuals who are expressing themselves in unintelligent ecstatic utterances, then he is saying that only God knows what the person is saying. That is the reason for verse 28. *But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God.*

14:2 in the spirit. The phrase "*in the Spirit*" refers to Holy Spirit who gives gifts to men. The word "*mysteries*" means divine truths or things that God has revealed. In Acts 2:11 they are called "*the wonderful things of God.*" To make the word mean, "*things not understood by the hearer*" is contrary to the usage of the word. A secret disclosed, is no longer a secret; and a mystery revealed ceases to be a mystery, for a mystery is something hidden. When a person speaks in a foreign language in a congregation that does not understand that language, he speaks to God: for no man understands him (14:2). "*The Scriptures recognize no unintelligent worship of God, or any spiritual edification (in the case of adults) disconnected from the truth; whether that edification be sought by sounds or signs, whether by prayers or sacraments*" (Charles Hodge).

3 But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men *to* edification, and exhortation, and comfort.

14:3 prophesieth. Three positive results occur when the gospel is communicated in a known language. First, others are edified or instructed in spiritual matters. Second, individuals are exhorted to live out the ethics of the Christian faith. Third, some will be comforted and blessed by the gospel. No such blessings are associated with those who insist in speaking in ecstatic utterances that are incomprehensible even if it is called a heavenly language. Such an exhibition is self centered and unprofitable to others.

4 He that speaketh in an *unknown* tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth [builds up] the church.

14:4 edifieth himself. A person who thinks and speaks in a known language can certainly be blessed by that ability for that is how everyone learns. However, the focus of attention in corporate worship is to benefit others by using spiritual gifts, not to benefit self. Therefore a tongue or a language is contrasted with prophecy which is what Paul exhorts individuals to actively seek to do. The only way the tongue gift can be useful is if there is an interpreter present so that all may be blessed. When I speak in foreign nations I sometimes must have an interpreter present or I would have had no right to speak in the local assembly for no one could understand what I am saying.

5 I would [wish] that ye all spake with tongues, but rather that ye prophesied: for greater *is* he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying [building up].

14:5 The apostle does not command anyone to seek to speak in tongues. Paul does say that he wished everyone could speak in tongues in the sense that it would be a wonderful gift of divine grace if there were a universal language to communicate the gospel. For one brief shining moment at Pentecost the Tower of Babel was reversed. Perhaps that will happen again at the Second Advent. It is one thing to express a wish, it is something far different to give an apostolic command. Nowhere in *Scripture* are believers commanded to speak in tongues or even to seek to speak in tongues. Rather, the better gift of divine grace is the gift of prophecy or the ability to communicate by the power of God's Holy Spirit the revelations of God.

6 Now, brethren, if I come unto you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you, except I shall speak to you either by revelation, or by knowledge, or by prophesying, or by doctrine [teaching]?

14: 6 what shall I profit? Paul's rhetorical question demands a negative answer apart from a manifestation of the four ways to profit in worship: by revelation, by knowledge, by prophesy, or by doctrine. When divine truth (revelation) is disclosed, when spiritual knowledge is imparted, when the prophesies of Scripture are explained, when doctrine is taught, then those who have gathered for worship find benefit from the words of the speaker.

7 And even things without life giving sound, whether pipe or harp, except they give a distinction in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped?

8 For if the trumpets give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle [war]?

14:7-8 a distinction. Paul presents the foolishness of speaking in languages which people present cannot understand. As the sound of a trumpet blast must be clear in order to be understood by those who hear it, so they will know whether to advance or retreat in battle, so there must be a clear presentation of the gospel in a worship service.

9 So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? For ye shall speak into the air [to no point].

14:9 easy to be understood. No one who speaks in tongues speaks in a way easy to be understood. It just does not happen. In the chaos of Charismatic meetings individuals simply speak into the air. Some may strain to listen but most are satisfied to pray silently in a language they know, enjoy the music, or engage in self centered utterances of their own.

10 There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices [speech] in the world, and none of them is without signification [meaning].

11 Therefore if I know not the meaning [language] of the voice, I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh *shall* be a barbarian unto me.

12 Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual *gifts*, seek that ye may excel to the edifying [building up] of the church.

13 Wherefore let him that speaketh in an *unknown* tongue pray that he may interpret.

14 For if I pray in an *unknown* tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful.

14:13-14 1 Corinthians 14 regulates the use of tongues and places definite restrictions to help eliminate the abuses and abominations and confusions that had grown up in Corinth. If the modern day Pentecostal / Charismatic movement would honor the biblical restrictions the cause of Christ would be enhanced.

- ❖ Regulatory Principle One. God the Holy Spirit assigns His gifts to believers. 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 teaches the Holy Spirit sovereignly bestows upon individuals different gifts.
- ❖ Regulatory Principle Two. Christians are to seek the best of spiritual gifts and the gift of prophecy in particular. No Christian will have all the gifts of the Holy Spirit for He dispenses them according to His own sovereign will. 1 Corinthians 12:28-31
- ❖ Regulatory Principle Three. Those who speak in a tongue or foreign language are to pray for an interpretation. 1 Corinthians 14:13-14

15 What is it then? I will pray with the [human] spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the [human] spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.

14:14-15 It is instructive to note that in 1900 Charles F. Parham opened the Bethel Bible School in Topeka, Kansas. Under his teaching and ministry, Miss Agnes Ozman was influenced to speak in tongues. The objective was to receive the gift of languages in order to preach the gospel. Parham defined the nature of tongues as *xenoglossae* (literally, "foreign tongues"), the God-given ability to speak a foreign language one has never learned. This ability, he thought, would enable Pentecostal believers to go forth as missionaries and evangelize the world within a short time.

The problem for Parham and the Pentecostal movement came when linguistic experts declared the tongues phoneme to be something other than that of any known language on earth. To date no one has documented that a foreign language has suddenly been spoken that has not been learned.

Undeterred by the objective judgment of linguists the Pentecostal teachers shifted their position to teach that what is happening is that a *heavenly* language is being spoken. Support for this belief is said to be found in

- *1 Corinthians 14:2 For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries.*
- *1 Corinthians 14:13-14 Wherefore let him that speaketh in an unknown tongue pray that he may interpret. 14 For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful.*

The context of 1 Corinthians 14 does not allow for a heavenly language to be spoken in a public assembly.

- *1 Corinthians 14:14-15 For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful. 15 What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.*

Rather than to pray without understanding Paul says he will pray with the human spirit and with the understanding. He will pray with the rational soul. This point brings up the most dangerous aspect of the tongues experience—those who engage in this experience do not know what they are saying. It is dangerous not to know what one is saying to God. The biblical exhortation is always to "*come now and let us reason together saith the Lord*" (*Isa. 1:18*).

16 Else when thou shalt bless with the spirit, how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say Amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest?

17 For thou verily givest thanks well, but the other is not edified.

18 I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all:

14:18 I speak with tongues. Paul did speak with tongues. He was versed in Latin, Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic.

19 Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that *by my voice* I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an *unknown* tongue.

20 Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice [injurious behavior] be ye children, but in understanding be men.

21 In the law it is written, With *men of* other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that will they not hear me, saith the Lord.

14:21 it is written. *Isaiah 28:11 For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people.*

22 Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not: but prophesying *serveth* not for them that believe not, but for them which believe.

14:22 Those who seek to speak in tongues for personal pleasure or private devotions abuse the purpose of the gift, which is to win souls to Christ. Tongues were a sign of God's judicial judgment upon the Jews. "*Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not.*" Having failed in their responsibility to disseminate the gospel God took that privilege from the Jews and gave it to the Gentiles. Tongues are a sign to Israel of that Divine judgment. Rather than encourage Christians to seek to speak in tongues let the Church encourage Christians to seek to prophesy or speak forth the gospel in simple terms and beyond that to love according to the gospel terms of 1 Corinthians 13.

23 If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in *those that are* unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad?

24 But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or *one* unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all:

14:24 The use of the word "*unlearned*" in verse 23 and verse 24 refers to a person who is "ignorant" [*idiotes* (id-ee-o'-tace) an ignoramus (compare "idiot")] or not formally educated in various languages, all of which can be learned. Paul's larger point is that it is preferable to speak in a known language during the church service rather than in a variety of different unknown voices or languages so that the gospel can convict a person even if he is an "ignoramus" or not formally educated and multilingual.

25 And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on *his* face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth.

26 How is it then, brethren? When ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying.

14:26 Eastern mysticism and occult practice invites people to suspend their mind in order to allow their spirit freedom to roam. The *Bible* commands Christians to engage their minds for “*God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth*” (John 4:24). Some seek to find freedom to speak in tongues, not in public but in private as part of a devotional life. However, there is a problem. The gift of tongues was never designed to be used for personal and private devotions. What would have happened if Billy Graham decided he would use his gift of evangelism only in private? The church would not have been blessed. What would happen if any of the spiritual gifts were withdrawn from the body life of the church and used for personal devotions only? The church as a body would cease to function properly. *1 Corinthians 14:26 How is it then, brethren? When ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying.*

27 If any man speak in an *unknown* tongue, *let it be* by two, or at the most by three, and *that* by course; and let one interpret.

28 But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God.

14:27-28

- ❖ Regulatory Principle Four. No tongues or foreign languages are to be used in the assembly except when people present understand what is said. 1 Corinthians 14:27-28. The widespread practice of people speaking in tongues in a church service at random and all at once without interpretation is prohibited.
- ❖ Regulatory Principle Five. During any given service only two or at the most three people can speak in tongues and then in a decent order. 1 Corinthians 14:27-28.

29 Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge.

30 If *any thing* be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace.

31 For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted [encouraged].

32 And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.

14:32 subject to. The idea that ecstatic utterances are beyond the control of the speaker and cannot be stopped is not true. The Holy Spirit never violates the will of a person. Every individual who speaks in an assembly must be in control of the mental and emotional faculties.

33 For God is not *the author* of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.

14:29-33 Pastors must not allow general indiscriminate articulation of sounds assuming that several people are speaking one and the same time another language. God is not the author of confusion.

34 Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but *they are commanded* to be under obedience, as also saith the law.

35 And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.

14:34-45 Regulatory Principle Six. Women are to keep silent in services where foreign languages or tongues are spoken. 1 Corinthians 14:34-35

36 What? Came the word of God out from you? Or came it unto you only?

37 If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.

38 But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant.

39 Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues.

40 Let all things be done decently [properly] and in order.

14:39-40 Regulatory Principle Seven. Speaking in tongues is not to be forbidden. 1 Corinthians 14:39-40.

No one should forbid anyone to speak with the miraculous gift of tongues which the Holy Spirit Himself puts on someone during special times of need.

No one should forbid the use of natural languages from being used in a service if there is a legitimate need for such usage.

Those who observe the Biblical restrictions should not be forbidden to speak in tongues.

## A Biblical Catechism for Speaking in Tongues

### 1. Define tongues.

#### *Biblical Answer.*

Tongues may be defined as “A spontaneous utterance of sounds in a language the speaker has never learned and does not understand.” – Anthony Hokema Acts 2:6 *Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language.*

### 2. What was the Biblical purpose of tongues?

#### *Biblical Answer.*

The gift of tongues was not a sign gift to the early church of a special blessing. Rather the presence of tongues in the church was a sign of judicial judgment upon national Israel. 1 Corinthians 14:21-22 *In the law it is written, With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that will they not hear me, saith the Lord. 22 Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not: but prophesying serveth not for them that believe not, but for them which believe.*

That God would judge Israel by bringing people into their midst of a different language was foretold by the prophets from Moses to Isaiah to Jeremiah. Deut 28:49 *The LORD shall bring a nation against thee from far, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flieth; a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand; Isaiah 28:11 For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people. Isaiah 33:19 Thou shalt not see a fierce people, a people of a deeper speech than thou canst perceive; of a stammering tongue, that thou canst not understand. Jeremiah 5:11, 15 For the house of Israel and the house of Judah have dealt very treacherously against me, saith the LORD. 15 Lo, I will bring a nation upon you from far, O house of Israel, saith the LORD: it is a mighty nation, it is an ancient nation, a nation whose language thou knowest not, neither understandest what they say.*

### 3. Why would a Christian want to speak in tongues?

#### *Biblical Answer.*

A Christian should not seek to speak in tongues but be pleased with the gift which the Holy Spirit has assigned for every gift is needed in the body of Christ. 1 Corinthians 12:14-18 *For the body is not one member, but many. 15 If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? 16 And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? 17 If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? 18 But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.*

#### **4. Are the gift of tongues for all believers to seek after?**

***Biblical Answer.***

No, if the secret motive is to show off. *1 Corinthians 12:7 But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.*

Yes, if the inner desire is to communicate the gospel in whatever language is needed in order to spread the message of redeeming grace. *1 Corinthians 14:5 I would that ye all spake with tongues, but rather that ye prophesied: for greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying.*

#### **5. Define the baptism of the Holy Spirit.**

***Biblical Answer.***

The baptism of the Spirit takes place at the moment of salvation whereby the new convert is placed into the body of Christ where he is secure and able to enjoy all the benefits of the death of Christ. *1 Corinthians 12:13 For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.*

#### **6. What are the boundaries for speaking in tongues?**

***Biblical Answer.***

- Only one, two, or at the most three should speak in any given meeting and then one at a time with an interpreter. *1 Corinthians 14:27 If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course; and let one interpret.*
- Only a known language is to be spoken, not infantile gibberish. *1 Corinthians 14:9 "...utter by the tongue words easy to be understood..."*
- An interpreter must be known to be present prior to speaking in tongues. *1 Corinthians 14:13 Wherefore let him that speaketh in an unknown tongue pray that he may interpret.*
- If there is no understanding there is to be silence in the assembly. *1 Corinthians 14:28 But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God.*
- Plain speech is to be preferred to speaking in tongues. This gift is not given pre-eminence by the apostle. *1 Corinthians 14:15 What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also. 1 Corinthians 14:19 Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue.*

**7. Are women allowed to speak in tongues in the local assembly?**

***Biblical Answer.***

The simple answer is no. Women can pray or prophesy as they communicate the gospel message and the goodness of God but they are expressively told not to speak in tongues. *1 Corinthians 11:5 But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven. 1 Corinthians 14:34 Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law.*

**8. Should a person be in control of his faculties prior to, during, and after tongues speaking?**

***Biblical Answer.***

At all times a person is to be in control of their mental faculties while worshipping God. In this way a true worshipper is distinguished from an idolater. *1 Corinthians 14:32 And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.*

**9. Should the mind always be engaged in worship?**

***Biblical Answer.***

The mind is central to worshipping the Lord. *Isaiah 1:18 Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. John 4:23 But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. 1 Corinthians 14:14 For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful. 15 What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.*

It is a dangerous doctrine to believe that the mind can be separated from the body in order to have access to God. *Matt. 6:7 But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.*

**10. Does God leave a sign gift after the need has passed for such a gift?**

***Biblical Answer.***

Once a spiritual gift has been properly utilized it is withdrawn. *1 Corinthians 13:8 Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.*