

# *A Short Exegesis of I Corinthians 13:8-14:40*

By

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Following is an exegesis of I Cor. 13:8-14:40 using the NASB translation. To understand the "tongues" discussion in chapter 14 you must start back in chapter 13, and also understand the situation at Corinth. Paul had been there and had bestowed many with spiritual gifts (by the way, the only way ANYONE obtained spiritual gifts was to have an apostle lay hands upon them, including tongues). The Church at Corinth became very arrogant and puffed up thinking their gifts made them better than other Christians, and it, caused factions (see chap 1) within the Church. Paul wrote this letter to scold them for everything they were doing wrong. Corinth is not the Church we want to look to for orthodoxy. My comments will be in bold.

**The one thing the Corinthians were not doing was loving one another.**

(1 Cor 13:8-13) Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, will be done away.

**Paul has emphasized love. Love is more important than the spiritual gifts, which he will now elaborate. Love never fails BUT prophecy and knowledge will be "done away" and tongues shall just "Cease." The KJV and NIV are both very inconsistent in this verse. The Greek word Paul uses that means "done away" has the connotation of "to be replaced." It is the same word he uses in verse 11 (did away). It means it will be replaced with something better, just as Paul "did away" with childish things and replaced them with adult things. Tongues however, would simply cease. The Greek word is "pauo" and means to stop, cease. Tongues would not be replaced, just stopped.**

**When he speaks of prophecy, he does not mean foretelling the future. A prophet was someone who spoke in God's behalf. Only occasionally did that mean future telling. Prophecy would be replaced. Knowledge would also be replaced. He does not mean everybody will be stupid, he is referring to directly revealed knowledge. These would be replaced when "the perfect comes" (v. 10).**

{9} For we know in part and we prophesy in part; {10} but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away.

**Knowledge and prophecy was incomplete. It was only given in specific places to individual Churches, which meant (1) no Church had a complete revelation and (2) the revelations given were not widely distributed, even with their best efforts. However, when this perfect comes that will replace the incomplete stuff. The word "perfect" is the Greek word "teleon" which more accurately means "complete." It is also neuter in gender, so it is not referring to a person. A better translation would be "when the complete thing comes, the partial shall be done away."**

{11} When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things.

**Paul now uses an illustration to show that this process of replacing incomplete things is only natural**

{12} For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.

**Mirrors in ancient times were not exactly the best at reflecting. They were usually a polished metal and the images were usually somewhat distorted. He says that now, i.e., the time he is writing, revelation was like looking in a mirror in a poor light. But when the complete thing comes it will be like looking at someone's face rather than a poor reflection. At the time of his writing, he only knew in parts, but when the complete thing comes it will be like having someone there to tell all there is.**

{13} But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.

**The only things that they had that would continue on after the complete thing is faith, hope and love. Love is the greatest because it will never be replaced. When Jesus returns to restore all things hope and faith will be replaced. As Paul says in Rom 8:24 "For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees?" So it is certain the complete thing is not the 2nd coming. But love will last throughout eternity.**

(1 Cor 14) Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy.

**They had been prideful over unimportant things. Paul admonishes them to desire the better gifts. It seems the gift of tongues was pretty common and many of them had this gift, but Paul is about to begin letting them know that tongues did not make them all that special and they had nothing to boast about.**

{2} For one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God; for no one understands, but in his spirit he speaks mysteries.

**This is not what tongues were for, this is how they were using the gift. In other words, they were speaking in tongues but no one was interpreting and it was a mystery. The only one who knew what was being said was God Himself. This was wrong as will be pointed out later.**

{3} But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation. {4} One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; but one who prophesies edifies the church. {5} Now I wish that you all spoke in tongues, but even more that you would prophesy; and greater is one who prophesies than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may receive edifying.

**All gifts were to edify the Church. They were trying to use the gift of tongues selfishly, for their own glory.**

{6} But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking in 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?

**Their gift of tongues was of no profit because no one was understanding, so Paul uses the analogies of vv. 7 & 8.**

{7} Yet 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? {8} For if the bugle produces an indistinct sound, who will prepare himself for battle? {9} So 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.

**If no one interprets tongues, no one knows what's being said, which is the same as speaking to the air. Once again, he is not telling them what to do, he is scolding them for what they were already doing.**

{10} There are, perhaps, a great many kinds of languages in the world, and no kind is without meaning. {11} If 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. {12} So also you, since you are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek to abound for the edification of the church.

**The word "glossa" means "tongue" or "language." The word that has been translated as tongues throughout this passage is the same word translated as languages in v. 10. Tongues, his point is, were to be translated and for edification. THAT is what they should be seeking for. Not their own pride.**

{13} Therefore let one who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret. {14} For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful.

**They were "showing off" their gift of tongues by using it to pray with. Again, he is not telling them what to do, he is scolding them for what they were already doing. If you would pray in a tongue, you may be using your spiritual gift but you don't know what you're saying, i.e., the spirit prays but the mind is unfruitful.**

{15} What 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.

**The point is, DO NOT PRAY IN TONGUES! It is unprofitable if no one knows what is being said. What they were doing (which many modern tongues claimants are claiming) is being used of God to talk to Himself. God gives them the utterance, they do not know what they're saying, and only God knows. God becomes the "Great Ventriloquist" speaking only to Himself.**

{16} Otherwise 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? {17} For you are giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not edified.

**Once again, if the Church is not edified, it is useless.**

{18} I thank God, I speak in tongues more than you all; {19} however, 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 tongue.

**Tongues were not the great gift they thought it was.**

{20} Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking be mature.

**Grow up!**

{21} In 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.

**For this part I am going to copy something I've already written. It is from my Article the Baptism of the Holy Spirit:**

**So far in chapter 14 we've seen how tongues were supposed to be used and how the Corinthians abused this gift but we have yet to see a judgmental aspect to speaking in tongues. In verse 21 it reads: "'In 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.'" This is a quotation of Isaiah 28:11. As we turn back to Isaiah 28 lets' begin with verse 9:**

To whom would He teach knowledge? And to whom would He interpret the message? Those just weaned from milk? Those just taken from the breast? For He says "*Order on order, order on order, line on line, line on line, a little here, a little there.* Indeed, He will speak to this people through stammering lips and a foreign tongue, He who said to them "Here is rest, give rest to the weary," and, "Here is repose," but they would not listen. So the word of the Lord to them will be "*Order on order, order on order, line on line, line on line, a little here a little there,*" that they may go and stumble backward, be broken, snared, and taken captive. Therefore hear the word of the Lord, O scoffers, who rule this people who are in Jerusalem, because you have said, "We have made a covenant with death, and with Sheol we have made a pact. The overwhelming scourge will not reach us when it passes by, for we have made falsehood our refuge and we have concealed ourselves with deception.

The words in italics should not be translated. The words in Hebrew read "Sav lasav, sav lasav, kav lakav, Kav lakav, Ze'er sham, ze'er sham." These are sounds imitating the sounds a baby would make. The English equivalent would be "goo goo gah gah." God is telling Israel that because they would not listen to His commands, He would use people of stammering lips and a foreign tongue to proclaim His message of judgement.

When the Baptism of the Holy Spirit took place, it was not in Hebrew that the terms of the new covenant were spoken, it was through about every other language except Hebrew (Acts 2:5-11). Just as the Baptism of the Holy Spirit was a sign of judgement upon national Israel, speaking in tongues was a constant reminder that (1) the new covenant was for all, not only for the fleshly descendants of Abraham and (2) judgement is coming upon national Israel.

Paul then says in verse 22: "So then 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." Who were the unbelievers? Primarily the Jews. Signs were always for unbelievers (Acts 8:6; 14:1-3; Heb. 2:1-4).

In 70 A.D. God brought forth His judgments against Israel by using Rome to come and utterly destroy the city of Jerusalem. Israel had committed the ultimate national sin: They crucified the Son of God. The Baptism of the Holy Spirit as well as the gift of speaking in tongues were a call to repentance for the nation Israel. When Jerusalem fell there was no longer a need for this sign of judgement therefore it simply ceased to exist just as Paul said it would in I Cor. 13:8.

{22} So then 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.

**Signs were always for unbelievers. See Acts 8:6; 14:1-3; Heb 2:1-4. The desire for signs demonstrates a lack of faith, not a mature faith**

{23} Therefore if the whole church assembles together and all speak in tongues, and ungifted men or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are mad? {24} But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an ungifted man enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all; {25} the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so he will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you. {26} What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. {27} If anyone speaks in a tongue, it should be by two or at the most three, and each in turn, and one must interpret; {28} but if there is no interpreter, he must keep silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God.

**There are four rules of tongues speaking: (1) 3 at the most may speak (27), (2) They must take turns, not all speak at once (27), (3) Make sure it is translated (27), else shut up (28), and (4) women are not to do it (v. 34)**

{29} Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment. {30} But if a revelation is made to another who is seated, the first one must keep silent. {31} For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted; {32} and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets; {33} for God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints. {34} The 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.

**By the way, this verse does not mean women may not speak at all in the assembly. We know they were to pray and prophecy (11:1-16). The prophecy that women did were always related to singing, not in a teaching position.**

{35} If they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church. {36} Was it from you that the word of God first went forth? Or has it come to you only? {37} If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment.

**This teaching was not Paul's opinion, it was of God, therefore they had better get their act together.**

{38} But if anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized. {39} Therefore, my brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak in tongues. {40} But all things must be done properly and in an orderly manner.