

International Bible Lessons Commentary
1 Corinthians 14:13-19

New International Version

International Bible Lessons

Sunday, May 24, 2015

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The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, May 24, 2015**, is from **1 Corinthians 14:13-19**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** discusses *Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further* to help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the [International Bible Lessons Commentary](#) website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. A podcast for this commentary is also available at the [International Bible Lesson Forum](#).

International Bible Lesson Commentary

1 Corinthians 14:13-19

(1 Corinthians 14:13) For this reason the one who speaks in a tongue should pray that they may interpret what they say.

After Paul wrote that God gives Christians different spiritual gifts, he wrote that if a person had the gift of speaking in tongues that he should also pray for God to give him the gift of interpreting what he prayed in tongues. He should pray for this additional gift and give God the reason that he wants this additional gift “for building up the church.” Otherwise, no one (including the person speaking in tongues) will know what was said or meant except God alone. No one may know the source of the tongues either because they may be uttered by demons who can talk through people (see Mark 5).

(1 Corinthians 14:14) For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful.

Paul revealed in his letter that if someone prays in a tongue his mind (or his reason and understanding) is unproductive (perhaps bypassed or not involved in the speaking). The spirit of the person moves their mouths rather than their minds moving their mouths. If they prayed with their minds, they would speak words and sentences that could be understood by them and those who speak the same language. Paul did not write that when praying in a tongue only the Holy Spirit spoke or prayed through someone, which the Holy Spirit can do.

Demons can also bypass a person's mind and speak through someone, as in some of the cases when Jesus and Paul cast out demons that spoke words of understanding (see Mark 5 and Acts 16). Paul wrote that the person's spirit (a part of their psychological being as a person?) can pray using their tongue separate from the involvement of their reason and thinking processes. Those who speak in tongues should pray for the power to interpret so they and others can know if they are speaking words consistent with the teachings of the Bible or words that a demon has placed in their mouths. Words given by demons will not build up anyone, least of all the church.

(1 Corinthians 14:15) So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my understanding; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my understanding.

God had given Paul the gift of speaking in tongues. Others had received that gift and other gifts too. Some of those in the Corinthian church may have been tempted to pray only with their spirit in tongues without also engaging their minds and without any understanding of what they were actually praying to God. Therefore, Paul wanted those who prayed and praised God only with their spirit to pray and praise God with their mind as well, which would build up the church and also give meaning and purpose to them in their praying.

(1 Corinthians 14:16) Otherwise when you are praising God in the Spirit, how can someone else, who is now put in the position of an inquirer, say "Amen" to your thanksgiving, since they do not know what you are saying?

An outsider might be someone who is not a Christian or a Christian without the gift of tongues and without the gift of interpreting tongues. The Holy Spirit gives His gifts as He wills and He gives a variety of gifts (see 1 Corinthians 12). When any person cannot know or understand what another is saying, and especially when praying, they should not say, "Amen;" which means, "May it be so," because they may be saying "May it be so" about something that would do harm or destroy someone or the church or be contrary to the Bible rather than build up someone or the church. Paul never wrote that everyone should have the gift of speaking in tongues or the gift of interpreting tongues.

(1 Corinthians 14:17) You are giving thanks well enough, but no one else is edified.

With tongues that no one can interpret, a person might thank God for something wonderful that God has done or he might praise God for Who He is, and God would appreciate their thanks and praises. But, Christians can also thank God and praise God in ways that will also build up someone or build up the church. Christians can pray for

God to help everyone understand and give thanks to God for what God has done and for Who He is. A person and the church are best built up by engaging our minds as well as our spirits according to the Scriptures.

(1 Corinthians 14:18) I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you.

Paul had reason to thank God because his gift of speaking in tongues was a gift from God. He did not write this because he was arrogant or felt superior to others. He sincerely wanted to thank God. Some people are not better than other people or more favored by God than others because of the gifts God has given them. God gives gifts to benefit many people and for purposes that God alone may know until He reveals them.

(1 Corinthians 14:19) But in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue.

Paul wanted Christians to use their gifts properly. It would do little good in a church worship service for Christians to pray and praise God in words that no one could interpret or understand but God alone. True prayer and praise in tongues could be made by believers at home. Paul emphasized that in church a few understandable words of instruction given with a mind actively committed to God

for building up people in the church would be better than thousands of words that no one could understand.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. Why do you think Paul wrote so much about the gift of speaking in tongues?
2. Why should both the spirit and the mind be engaged and work together when believers preach, teach, and praise God?

See three additional questions in the Commentary on Acts 2:1-7, 12 that go with this Lesson.

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly *International Bible Lesson*.

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