

"He That Speaketh In A Tongue" #1

"Follow after love, yet desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy. For he that speaketh in a tongue speaketh not unto men but unto God; for no man understanding: but in the spirit he speaketh mysteries" (1 Cor. 14:1f).

First Corinthians 14 is a battleground among professed Bible believers — many and varied are conflicting views which appeal to this chapter to support their assertions. Tongue speakers appeal to the chapter to "explain" their senseless chatter; brethren who reject divided Bible classes turn to this passage to "prove" their objections; "Mutual edification" brethren appeal to the chapter to sustain their "no-located preacher" contentions. Still, despite the great misunderstanding many have regarding the chapter, it was written by Paul by the direction of the Holy Spirit with the aim of regulating spiritual gifts during the era of their existence; designed with that to promote understanding of the gifts. While we may not cover all the varied views entertained by many, it is our purpose to make the passage understandable — for that is God's wish regarding His Word.

First, a grievous error which arose from a word which translators of the King James Version of the Bible supplied to their version needs to be examined. Bible students know that when a word appears in italic letters, that signifies the word was not in the original language, but was "supplied" — added by translators to help to understanding the text. More often than not, such words do aid, but in 1 Corinthians 14 the supplied word gave rise to a false understanding. That reading in 1 Corinthians 14 has it "*he that speaketh in an unknown tongue ...*" The intent of the translators was to aid understanding. They intended the word "*unknown*" to convey the thought that the tongue was "unknown" to the speaker: that miraculously he was allowed to speak in a language unknown to him, yet understood by his audience. But modern-day "tongue speakers" press the passage to mean that the speaker spoke a tongue no one anywhere spoke nor understood; that it was a different tongue than speakers on Pentecost or at the house of Cornelius — an "angelic" tongue. In both these instances the "tongue speaker" was understood by those who heard him (Acts 2:6, 8; 10:46). All passages which relate to tongues (unless it is this passage) indicate that the languages spoken were human languages, but not previously learned by the speaker.

There is another factor which also contributes to the misapprehension of "the unknown tongue." That is Paul's words that "*he speaketh not unto men, but unto God, for no man understandeth*" (1 Cor. 14:2). This statement,

coupled with other similar statements in the chapter could be so understood unless one studies the apostle's argument and perceives the style in which his epistle is written.

One principle which Bible students must always remember is that "truth never contradicts itself" and in the event of an apparent contradiction, the student must set about to reach a conclusion that is harmonious with the whole text. Now with this premise we will look at what appears as a contradiction if the apostle is saying, as tongue speakers affirm, that some first century Christians spoke in a tongue that no man, anywhere understood. But, that will be the substance of our next article.

Jim McDonald