The Spiritual Gift of Tongues  
Part 1

"we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" Acts 2:11b

Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers… 1 Corinthians 14:22a

Tongues - γλώσσα glossa {gloe-sah'}

Meaning: 1) the tongue - a member of the body, an organ of speech

2) a tongue - the language or dialect used by a particular people distinct from that of other nations

(Strong's Greek Dictionary)

γλώσσα, γλωσσα, ἡ τον γλωσσα; (1) literally, the organ of speech and taste tongue (MK 7.33); figuratively, as a means of verbal communication tongue, language (AC 2.11); (2) by metonymy tribe, people, or nation that speaks a common language (RV 5.9); (3) as a religious technical term for glossalalia [???] tongue(speaking), understood variously to be unintelligible ecstatic utterance (1C 14.2), heavenly language (1C 13.1), or foreign languages not learned through natural means by the speaker (AC 2.4); (4) as the shape of fire forked flames (AC 2.3) (Friberg Greek Lexicon)

The Friberg Lexicon goes beyond the Biblical usage to add a present day understanding or religious technical term and then describes how it is variously understood by different groups. But this has not basis in the Biblical text!

Wayne Grudem: We may define this gift as follows: Speaking in tongues is a prayer or praise spoken in syllables not understood by the speaker. [Grudem, Wayne, Systematic Theology, An Introduction To Biblical Doctrine, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, USA pg.1070]

Is this definition legitimate? How did the sentences, phrases and words of “tongues/languages” get dissected into “syllables”? Well since it can and has been irrefutably established that the majority of the ‘tongues phenomenon” does not fit the word, phrase and speech patterns of languages in order to maintain credibility for gibberish, prattle and babble a new definition, not requiring speech or words must be invented. But should we base our definition or observation and experience or should we base it on the Scriptures? Not only this, but the Word of God is to be used to test and evaluate our experience to ascertain if they are true, correct and God honoring.

Language Study: In the New Testament? passages where speaking in tongues is discussed the meaning is languages and not the organ or the tongue. It is regrettable and has been very misleading that English translations have used the term ‘speaking in tongues’ instead of the more understandable translation "speaking in languages". All of the words used for ‘tongues’ come from exactly the same root. Therefore the argument that ‘glossa’ in Acts was languages and "glossalalia” in 1 Corinthians was ecstatic utterances is not only impossible linguistically, but purely imagination because there is no such word (“glossalalia”) anywhere in the Greek New Testament. The exact same word and form are found in:


\[ \text{Γλωσσαί} -- \text{glossais} \]

Likewise the other primary word form in 1 Corinthians 14: \text{γλωσση} -- glossay is found in vss. 2, 4, 13, 14, 19, 27. These are mere variants depending on the tense (like "speak", "spoke", "speaking"). To attempt to find different meanings in Acts and 1 Corinthians is impossible based on the language. The myth of "glossalalia" has been created by combining the two Greek root words that mean speak (\text{laleω}) and tongues (\text{γλώσσα}). Though both of these words often appear in the same sentence, they are never combined into one newly created word. Additionally, both of these words are also in the same sentence in Acts 2:4; 11; 10:46 etc.. Thus any attempt to isolate Acts as other languages and 1 Corinthians as ecstatic tongues finds no foundation in the language of the text. In the Hellenistic pagan religious cults of the day, in places like Ephesus, Corinth and other cities the practice of 'ecstatic utterances' was common, when the practitioner would empty their minds and enter trance like states and unintelligible random sounds and syllables would pour forth from their mouths. This was supposed to be special communication from or with their false pagan gods. What we have to consider is whether Paul is saying that instead of the undeniable gift of languages (tongues) given on the day of Pentecost is there supposed to be some completely different and even unrelated gift with the very same name (a very doubtful possibility unless you have drawn your conclusion before your study!)

We know that 1 Corinthians was written to address ‘wrong’ practices, misunderstandings and false teaching in the church at Corinth. Paul is responding to specific problems and issues such as marriage, the resurrection, food offered to Idols, abuses of the Lords Supper and confusion about spiritual gifts. This included a syncretistic tendency that exalted tongues too highly, misunderstood tongues completely and threatening to lead the church down a mystical and mythical path of deception.

**Textual Studies:**

**Real Intelligible Languages**

*Acts 2:4* All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. 5 Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. 6 When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language.

Tongues on the day of Pentecost: An amazing array of real existing understandable languages. They spoke in real languages understood by those who were in Jerusalem from various countries and regions. Filled with the Spirit they spoke, praising and declaring the mighty works of God in real intelligible languages that they had never learned but others who were present knew.

*Acts 2:7* Utterly amazed, they asked: "Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? 8 Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language?" 11 both Jews and
proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—*we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.*"

**Organized and Orderly Speech**

Additionally it should be noted that though they were filled with tremendous joy and a sense of excitement, amazement, awe and wonder, their experience was *not ecstatic* (they knew what they were doing, they were "declaring the wonders (mighty works) of God" but their declaration were coming out of them in various languages). Also, it was *orderly* "*as the Spirit enabled them*" (vs. 4) This denotes a specific order and arrangement. It must be noted that since each language group listed in Acts 2 distinctly heard their own *language* and also what was being said in their *language* we know that the speaking in tongues/languages was not a mad group of people all speaking in loud voices and simultaneously (at the same time), but each in his own turn, one by one, as the Spirit gave them utterance and following the pattern of the Spirit disclosed further in 1 Cor. 14…

*1 Corinthians 14:23* So if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and some who do not understand or some unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind? …27 If anyone speaks in a tongue (language), two—or at the most three—should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret.

Often many will argue that on the day of Pentecost it was about 120 (Acts 1:15) who were doing this speaking. There are three contextual reasons why this is not likely.

1. Acts 1:14 the phrase "All of these" or "They all" is reference to the Apostles and then speaks of others who joined the "all" of the Apostles for prayer etc.

2. Acts 1:26 ends by stating that Matthias was added to the eleven apostles and then it says "they were all together in one place" (Acts 2:1).

3. Acts 2:14 says “But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted his voice and addressed them” This address was in the common language (Aramaic). It was not Peter standing in the midst of a large group of people speaking wildly, but Peter standing with the eleven.

The immediate context makes it clear that it is most likely a reference to the Apostles, who were speaking one by one in the languages of those gather there. So it appears what we have in Acts 2 is *specific and select men standing and sequentially proclaiming the wonders of God*, one by one, in a startling display of the Spirit of God who is moving among his people to take the Gospel beyond the "Jews" to the peoples of every tongue, tribe and nation. Even if it was a larger group speaking (which no one can say with absolute certainty and it is difficult to maintain contextually), it was not an event that caused outsiders to claim that these people are mad (1 Cor 14:23), but each hearing in their own native languages. They were not just distinguishing something in their language from a group of people shouting in over 17 different languages (probably more because it says regions not just languages, which could refer to a number of languages within a particular region or country), but hearing as in a Spirit directed order each would speak as he gave them the ability until the languages of all of those present had been
spoken. Note: they did not accuse them of being crazy, but some thought they might be drunk, this seems to be the result of both their boldness and exuberance, not chaos and confusion and/or more likely the local Jews who did not know foreign languages thought these men were not making sense.

After Peter then shared the gospel with these "God-fearing Jews from every nation" about three thousand were added to their number that day (2:21), but interestingly enough there is no mention of them speaking or receiving this gift of languages.

The next mention of the gift appears in Acts 10.

Acts 10:44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. 45 The circumcision believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. 46 For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. Then Peter said, 47 "Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have."

Acts 11:15 "As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning... 17 So if God gave them the same gift as he gave us.

This speaking in tongues is also undeniable and accepted by all groups (including Pentecostals and Charismatics) as real languages. They were not babbling, but understood to be 'praising God'. It is not merely Peter who accepts this, but "circumcised believers" who were very reluctant to admit the possibility of equality between Jews and non-Jews. But, now they hear these people praising God in languages they had not learned. Peter clarifies that this is not something new or different, but "just as we have" and the "same gift as he gave us." Therefore the gift of tongues given by the Spirit of God is the overwhelming wonders of God being expressed in languages unlearned by the speaker, but known to the hearers.

Beyond this, one might be surprised to note that the ‘tongues’ for Peter and apparently most if not all, of the other Apostles (except Paul in his traveling ministry) was an experience "at the beginning". Peter does not speak of these Gentiles as exercising the same gift that they also exercised, but as manifesting something that they had also done on only one occasion "at the beginning". Some would dispute this point by arguing that Peter does not say that it happened only once, but his language is very specific. If he and the other Apostles were regularly practicing the gift of tongues he would have said "since" the beginning or "from" the beginning and not "at" (ἐν) a preposition giving a very specific link to the day of Pentecost. Thus, it would have been quite a surprise for them to have heard about the modern notion of a "prayer language", because they continued to pray devotedly, and experience repeated fillings of the Spirit leading them to speak "the word of God boldly" not tongues (Acts 4:31). They, Peter and most of the Apostles, experienced the gift of tongues on only the one occasion on Pentecost and possibly later as they traveled to foreign language regions). The gift of tongues was not a normal, ordinary or regular experience in the early church or the lives of the Apostles (except in Paul’s traveling ministry), but served as a sign to unbelievers. (1 Cor. 14:22).
One last event in Acts 19:2-7 is recorded for us, and specifically mentions twelve men who also received this gift. The important point in this passage is that they did not receive it in baptism. In these accounts we have the Apostles begin to speak in languages after praying, those in Caesarea before baptism while the Word was being spoken, and here after. This is to keep us from thinking that there is a special method or activity that you do in order to receive the gift. This also reminds us that it came in accordance to the Spirit as a sign. This last mention of the sign would be important to the Jews (19:8-9) accepting these disciples as also part of the same work of God.

In Acts 8:14-17 you will find Peter and John go down to Samaria and lay hands on some new believers and they "received the Holy Spirit" but there is no mention of tongues here. As a matter of fact when you set out to study the gift of tongues in detail you will find that it is only mentioned in Acts, 1 Corinthians and in the doubtful ending of Mark 16 (we have now learned that Mark ended at verse 8 for as the NIV footnote states “The most reliable early manuscripts and other ancient witnesses do not have Mark 16:9-20”. If a section is not in the earliest manuscripts then we know that it was added later. Before this became a real controversy for the church, God providentially directed the discovery of more ancient and reliable manuscripts. Also you should note that those who argue from Mark 16:17-18 demand that all should speak in tongues while refusing to pick up serpents or drink deadly poison. It also claims they lay their hands on the sick and they recover, no requirement of faith is stated for the sick. But this would lead us to believe that all speak in tongues and all heal which would directly contradict the indisputable passage in God’s Word [1 Cor. 12:29-30]. God’s Word never contradicts itself and we note that this passage – Mark 16:9-20 – is not authentic). This being said, since there are just a few verses in the Bible that actually teach about tongues it is quite easy to study every single passage concerned in a short period of time and clear up many modern misunderstandings.

Note again that there are numerous other fillings of the Spirit mentioned in Acts but few were in display of various languages. Most often and effectively the Spirit stirred the people to speak the Word of God with boldness in their own language (Acts 2:8; 4:8, 31). We must also remember that the passage commanding us to be filled with the Spirit (Eph 5:18-20) speaks of songs and praises but there is no mention of tongues/languages! Further we have no biblical precedent, statement or teaching in Scripture that would hint or indicate that there were two distinctly different gifts of tongues. We can certainly notice that there is a problem or faulty understanding, emphasis and exercise of the ‘tongues’ issue at Corinth. And though Paul addresses these new aberrations, he in no way endorses them. Such a teaching of two differing spiritual gifts of tongues, has been "created" in order to prove certain teachings and because of the complexity of Paul's linguistic structures. (Which even Peter finds hard to understand at times 2 Pet. 3:15-16. Nonetheless we must not twist them to our own destruction.)

Please be aware that what we are doing is earnestly and carefully exegeting the Scriptures. We are carefully considering what God’s Word teaches so that our beliefs and practices are faithful. Whether someone characterizes our conclusions as Anti-Charismatic or Anti-Pentecostal they must ask themselves if we are against such or if an accurate understanding of Scripture is incompatible with their position. We are Anti-Error and Pro-Truth. We are ready to change our traditions and positions whenever and wherever a faithful handling of God’s Word demands it.
The Spiritual Gift of Tongues

Part 2

“There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destructions, as they do the other Scriptures. You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability.” (2 Peter 3:16-17)

In order to follow Paul’s reasoning in 1 Corinthians 14 and not be confused by some of the things he writes that are hard to understand, we need to remind ourselves of the consistent revelation concerning the purpose of Spiritual Gifts…

If we carefully follow the flow of thought in this passage in 1 Corinthians without drawing premature and ultimately wrong conclusions, we’ll find that by the end of the chapter Paul has remarkably and graciously introduced parameters, correctives and constraints that would eliminate abuses, misunderstandings and the misuse of the spiritual gift of tongues.

Good men, faithful theologians and usually skilled exegetes have, in my estimation, allowed themselves in this passage to oversimplify Paul’s arguments and correctives. As a result they have precipitately established points and principles by isolating and connecting sentences and incomplete phrases without connecting the complete phrases and fuller thoughts of the greater context.

Remember the words of Peter relating to the writings of Paul … “There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destructions, as they do the other Scriptures. You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability.” (2 Peter 3:16-17)

Consider the next chapter has this verse: ESV 1 Corinthians 15:29 Otherwise, what do people mean by being baptized on behalf of the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized on their behalf?

No Protestant / Evangelical Christian churches practice “baptism on behalf of the dead”. [Mormons practice this]

Based on this verse alone someone could conclude
1. Some ‘believers’ practiced baptism on behalf of the dead
2. Paul was aware of this practice
3. Paul did not speak negatively or condemningly about this practice
4. Paul actually uses it as a positive example with no correction at all

Conclusion: So... This practice in the church at Corinth was known and approved by Paul the Apostle and ought to be a part of our church practice today [WRONG!]
Why is it wrong? It is wrong, not because of what it appears to say, but because of the full and clear teaching of Paul and the New Testament about baptism, its significance, and application. That some in Corinth had done this is certain, that Paul wanted them to continue or even approved is NOT stated – he wanted them to continue or return to the belief in resurrection from the dead that was foundational to this faulty practice (a practice that in all likelihood he had already corrected and thus drew attention to it to establish his present argument on resurrection).

This same oversimplifying used by the Mormons in 1 Cor. 15:29 is used by much more faithful and generally earnest men in 1 Corinthians 14.

Like the study of baptism where we consider its purpose, meaning and proper application to get a faithful and true biblical teaching [doctrine], let’s consider the purpose, meaning and use of spiritual gifts.

The mistake looks like this –

1. Tongues is speaking to God not men, thus prayer (vs. 2)
2. It is not understood by man including the one praying (vs. 2)
3. It is mysteries in the Spirit (vs. 2)
4. It builds up the speaker/prayer (vs. 4)
5. It is a prayer in the spirit by bypasses entirely the mind (vs. 14)
   a. It might be celestial languages or tongues that are unintelligible, transcendent and without natural counterpart – ineffable languages.
   b. Thus the spiritual gift of tongues can be mindless and as far as man is concerned and a meaningless, to the speaker, prayer language whereby the one praying in tongues, to God, and is build up in the faith.

[WRONG]

Just like with baptism we need to consider the whole counsel of Scripture and the greater context of these passages applying a more consistent hermeneutic so that we don’t fall into this premature oversimplification.

The Bible teaches that the giving of spiritual gifts are for the building up of others and not ourselves (though we are built up during the exercise of spiritual gifts, but this would be at the same time as others, not all alone).

1 Peter 4:10 As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace:

Ephesians 4:7 But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift. Therefore it says, “When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men...” And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.

Romans 12:6 Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. Let love be genuine. Abhor what is
evil; hold fast to what is good. 10 Love (φιλόστοργο – be devoted to, tenderly loving) **one another** with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. *(all gifts again noted as services rendered to the Lord and to one another)*

1 Corinthians 12:7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit **for the common good**.

1 Corinthians 14:5 Now I would like all of you to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. One who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, *so that the church may be built up* ...12 So with yourselves; since you are eager for spiritual gifts, **strive to excel in them for building up the church** ...17 For you may give thanks well enough, *but the other person is not built up* ... 26 What should be done then, my friends? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. **Let all things be done for building up**.

1 Corinthians 14:5-26 Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, **so that the church may be built up** ... 12 So with yourselves; since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, **strive to excel in building up the church** ...17 For you may be giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not being built up ... 26 What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. **Let all things be done for building up**.

Therefore when you see

1 Corinthians 14:4 The one who speaks in a tongue **builds up himself**, but the one who prophesies **builds up the church**.

You should immediately note the sarcasm Paul is using. Every passage pertaining to Spiritual Gifts clearly speaks of them as being distributed by the Spirit for the benefit of others and the body at large. Especially Paul's own "purpose" of Spirit given gifts statement in 1 Cor. 12:7. Consequently, when he talks about using a Spiritual Gift for building up yourself in 1 Cor. 14:4 while at all other times in the same chapter he says that the purpose of spiritual gifts is for others and the church, we should understand his point. **He is not encouraging the use of the gift for self-edification, but most likely responding directly to those who claimed that the value of this gift (which was creating confusion to the group) was personal. His response is to remind them that they are to exercise spiritual gifts for the edification of all, yet some of them are doing it to ‘edify themselves’ which is not the use, purpose or goal of spiritual gifts (remember Paul had been given a details report of the activities, abuses and excuses that plagued the church at Corinth and writes with awareness the claims they may make in their own ‘defense’). How ridiculous, how contrary and even embarrassing, for some, to hear this read aloud to the church in this letter a 'self' use of Spirit given gifts. He is saying in effect – some practice a supposed spiritual gift of tongues for you self, but their purpose, indeed the purpose of all spiritual gifts is "for the common good" (1 Cor. 12:7). [This is not to say that Paul is wrong. If someone is really speaking in the biblically taught gift of tongues, then they are praising and declaring the excellencies, majesty and mighty works of God in Spirit directed worship and adoration. Such an act will definitely edify both the one speaking as well as those hearing. Paul is not here endorsing gibberish. Also – we are to but built up in the faith and prayer**
in the Holy Spirit accompanies this (Jude 1:20) but all true prayer is in the Spirit, Eph. 6:18 it is not something special that would be found in a tongues prayer]

Paul uses sarcasm, redacto ad absurdum and a whole host of other rhetorical and literary forms when making arguments. To understand Paul you must not read only a portion of a verse or even a whole verse, but the entire phrase and section because these are letters written without chapters or verses. The flow of thought is not limited by the insertion of numbers. These have been put to help us quickly find and read the same passage. Some examples of Paul's sarcasm are "any man who prays or prophesies with something on his head disgraces his head" (1 Cor. 11:4); "if a woman will not veil herself, then she should cut off her hair." (1 Cor. 11:6); "what will those people do who receive baptism on behalf of the dead?"(1 Cor. 15:12); "But if through my falsehood God's truthfulness abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner?" (Rom. 3:5); \Look out for the dogs (Phil. 3:6) etc. Thus Paul often intentionally makes "absurd" sounding statements to get the attention of the people to listen to his main point. [Galatians 5:12 I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves!]

Some have even tried to say that we pray in angelic languages (or even prayer languages, something completely unknown to the Bible) by taking 1 Corinthians 13:1 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. Paul here is not saying that these things are possible or even exist. In verse 2 he says 2 "And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge..." Again here he is not saying that these things are possible because in verses 9 we read, For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; 10 but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. Thus, he us using the literary tool of hyperbolic expression (hyperbole - exaggerated language to convey an important point) to press upon us the importance of love. He is purposefully speaking in extreme impossibilities. And not only that, but every reference to angelic communication in the Scriptures does not give them a distinct language (or languages) Further since the multitude of earthly languages is the result of disobedience (Gen. 11:1-9) and since the elect angels have not sinned would they not have one language and if so why do not all tongues speakers speak the same “angelic” language (which by the way, Satan and demons know the “angelic” language too). Sometimes we use these kinds of figures of speech too saying things like "she sings like an angel" etc.

Immediately now someone says, "But, we are not talking to men, but talking to God!" and we are speaking mysteries in the spirit ...(1 Cor. 14:2), but before you build a theology of a prayer language you have to listen to all that Paul is saying here. Paul is not sure who in Corinth is really speaking in languages and praising God and who is just prattling nonsense (babbling) and wants to carefully lead people to evaluate which they are doing. He is not expecting that if nobody else understands then the speaker may be talking to God, but it is a mystery (its meaning is unknown or hidden) to others. But Paul expects that it is real word in a real language or it is not even talking to God!

1 Corinthians 14:9 So with yourselves, if with your tongue you utter speech that is not intelligible, how will anyone know what is said? For you will be speaking into the air.

This means that if the "tongue" that you are speaking is a real language in which you are communicating with God, very well, but if it is unintelligible babbling that you and others do not
understand then you are NOT communicating with God, but just sending sounds into the air, atmosphere, nothing! (to the air not to God, not to heaven…1 Corinthians 9:26 So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air.) Paul in vs. 2 and vs. 28 has no problem if someone wishes to personally or privately pray to God in a language that others don't know, but if even they don't know what they are saying and their supposed "tongue" is not a distinct, clear, intelligible and recognizable language (ένθεμον) then you are not praying or talking to God, but just throwing sound into the air (vs. 9)

Paul's expectation is always that tongues is real languages NOT gibberish note:

1 Corinthians 14:10 Undoubtedly there are all sorts of languages in the world, yet none of them is without meaning. 11 If then I do not grasp the meaning of what someone is saying, I am a foreigner to the speaker, and he is a foreigner to me... 20 Brothers, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults. 21 In the Law it is written: "Through men of strange tongues and through the lips of foreigners I will speak to this people, but even then they will not listen to me," says the Lord. (NIV)

Even the need for an interpreter denotes the validity of foreign languages:

27 If anyone speaks in a tongue, two-- or at the most three-- should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. 28 If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and God.

So should we ever use any words or languages we don't understand to speak to God?

No! Any form of praying that is unintelligible is unacceptable that is why Paul says:

1 Corinthians 14:13 For this reason anyone who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret what he says.

Paul is here indicating that a tongue would be completely useless even in private if you cannot grasp the meaning. If it is really the gift of tongues/languages the Spirit only grants this if someone is present to give the translation. If only you are there alone, you should pray for and expect the understanding of the language (or you will not be edified) otherwise you should pray in a language you understand else you may be just ‘speaking into the air’ when you should be praying.

True Prayer Engages the Mind (understanding) and the Spirit

Any prayer that does not engage your mind and understanding is the kind of prayer you will never find Paul praying. Prayer is an intelligent exercise of the mind and spirit.

1 Corinthians 14:14-15 14 For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful. 15 What am I to do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also; I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also.
So does Paul approve of, endorse or encourage a prayer language or praying in tongues? NO! The statement in vs. 14 is not an explanation, but it is a condemnation of a confused, convoluted and syncretistically compromised practice that has been influenced by the paganism of Corinth.

Sadly again some have twisted this passage to say that Paul will sometimes pray in his spirit with his mind unfruitful while at other times involving the mind. That he would do both kinds of prayer. One in a spirit language/tongue and the other with his our heart and mind [WRONG].

There are two reasons this kind of reasoning is faulty.
1) The word unfruitful that Paul uses with reference to the mind is not a term in Scripture for merely inert, uninvolved or passive, but is always used in the context of condemning barrenness or uselessness (7 times in N.T.).
2) Further in the original Greek you see the repetition of phrases in verse 15 but with the insertions of δὲ καλ. This insertion basically does not say there will be two ways, but answers the question “What am I to do?” with the answer “I will always pray with both my spirit and my mind”. The Greek philosophical division between mind and spirit (Greeks had a trichotomy view Body, Soul/Spirit, Mind) is discarded in favor of a fullness of our being giving itself to prayer. The Word of God repeatedly defies philosophical division by calling for true worship to involve the whole man i.e. “heart, soul, mind & strength” or “spirit and soul and body” connectives are used to link what is at times philosophically and religiously divided.

Unless you understand that language, and even then, you are better off praying in the language that you are most capable of expressing yourself completely with. He insists that the mind be engaged, and upon the activation of the MIND babbling stops and sensible words and sincere prayer begins. The word νοῦς is sometimes translated mind and understanding (KJV) in French “mon intelligence” (LSG).

When people are "taught" how to speak or pray in tongues they are instructed to do the opposite of what Paul instructs. They are told to clear their minds and open them up and just let uninhibited and uncontrolled sounds pour out. They are usually directed specifically not to think about what is happening, but just to let it happen. If you follow the instructions of Paul in detail, all of the so called "tongues" of the modern church would disappear as it did in the early church. Believers are never taught in Scripture to open or clear our minds, but to fix them on Christ (Hebrews 3:1; 12:2), to meditate on his word (Psalm 119; Colossians 3:16), to think about things that are true, pure, noble and excellent (Philippians 4:8), and to set our minds on things above (Colossians 3:2).

Now Paul says that he speaks in tongues more than all of them (14:18), and why not, he was being used of God to proclaim his wondrous grace among many different language groups and peoples. The gift, a sign to unbelievers (14:22), would be extremely beneficial in such circumstances. And this is just that case, the Spirit distributes his gifts to us where and when they are needed.

The gift of tongues given by the Spirit was always languages. In Corinth, the local temple dedicated to the goddess Dianna was a place of extreme excess, sinfulness and a practice of
indistinguishable speech, chants, babbling and singing that was said to be the spirits working in the people. This pagan practice was being adapted into the church by some of the converts who were not well informed about the Spiritual Gift of languages (tongues). Thus Paul does not say that you cannot pray in a variety of languages, but if you are in a public gathering, use the common language or have someone interpret. Paul knows that as in other occasions, since the Spirit is the one who gives the gift that there should never be an occasion that it happens if there is not someone who understands and can give the translation. It is even useless in personal practice if you don't understand the language.

When Paul says:

\[1 \text{ Corinthians 14:13 For this reason anyone who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret what he says.}\]

He is communicating to the people that if you cannot understand what you are saying for yourself or others, don't speak in a tongue. The reason he would say this is because ultimately they are not practicing in these cases the Spiritual Gift, but a psychological and unbiblical practice.

Paul one by one destroys every excuse of those who misunderstood the gift in both the ancient and modern tongues movements. Look at the following possible excuses to introduce the Pagan practice into Christianity followed by a Corrective response taken from Paul’s teaching.

**Excuse 1)** I am praying with my spirit.
**Answer 1)** I will pray with my spirit and mind (intelligence) (vs.15)

**Excuse 2)** I am singing praises in my spirit.
**Answer 2)** I will sing with my mind also (vs. 15)

**Excuse 3)** I am using my prayer language.
**Answer 3)** If you don't understand the meaning you should pray, apparently not in a tongue, but to understand/interpret. (vs.13)

**Excuse 4)** Even if I don't understand God does.
**Answer 4)** Not if it is a non-language admixture of sounds, its just sound in the air. (vs.9)

**Excuse 5)** I am building myself up.
**Answer 5)** You're supposed to be building others up. (vs.4) and if it is not really tongues then you may experience a psychological ‘high’, ‘release’ or ‘peace’ but it is not spiritual edification which does not need tongues at all. (Jude 1:20)
Paul is demanding that the mind, intellect or understanding be fully engaged and when this happens, wonderfully, the babbling stops to true prayer and praise from our whole self is offered unto God.

Many who "speak in tongues" will reply that they feel spiritually uplifted or strengthened or peaceful afterwards. Of course, this feeling is real, this is the same feeling that the Hindus at the Osho Ashram and other South Indian temples feel after they have cleared their minds and let their unconscious mind blow out in ecstatic utterances. This experience take place in some strains of Buddhism, New Age Cults, Mormonism, Catholicism and a host of other psychological, cultic and occult teachings. This phenomena is relatively new to "Christians", but is not new to the world (and its religions) and has been a part of many pagan religions throughout history because of its positive psychological and emotional impact as well as the openness to the influence of spirits (demons). Additionally, to the unbeliever, this openness and clearing of the mind makes room not only for the flow of the sub-conscious mind, but for the influence of evil spirits.

What most call “tongues” today is a real experience that produces positive real emotions and sensations (especially since we have the added suggestion of it being prayer or the work or the Spirit, but this serves similar to suggestions in self-hypnosis). Similarly like laughter produces positive feelings or smiling more often will generally make you feel better, the random repetition of mindless syllables (even mantras) has a psychological release of emotion which gives a sense of peace and joy (and other times different emotions). But, just because this experience feels good and seems to have a good effect does not mean that it is spiritual. Rather, Paul, under the inspiration of the Spirit expressly says not to engage in banter or chatter that is meaningless, but engage your spirit and mind in full unison and focus in the prayer, praise and thanks directed toward our great God. We do not need to find joy, comfort and emotional release in such psychological devices, but as we fix our minds upon Christ and worship him we will experience a greater peace and joy than this false representation of the Spiritual Gift of tongues brings. Remember the words of Christ:

Matthew 6:7 7 “And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases (babbling NIV) as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words.(ESV)

Now, please note that I am not saying that there is no gift of tongues today. A few months ago, I was speaking with someone who told me that as they were attempting to share the Gospel with someone in French (their native language was English) they found themselves using words, terms and phrases that they had not known or learned and were able to communicate the Gospel and the wonders of God more effectively as a result. Praise God, for the gift of tongues as a sign to unbelievers and a service to our Saviour. The gifts of the Spirit are alive and active as the Spirit himself is and we desperately need more of His fruit and gifts in our lives, relationships and churches. We know that in the Scriptures the gift was of languages not previously known to the speaker, but there is no indication that what they are communicating is bypassing their understanding, rather all that Paul attempts to do is to lead us to a practice that demands the use of all of our God given faculties of intellect and understanding in the expression of all of our gifts for the greater good or His people and His name.
1 Corinthians 14:39 Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues.

We should never forbid biblical tongues, yet we should also never forget what it truly is as told to us in the Sword of the Spirit (the Word of God) and its function, purpose and guidelines also given to us by the Spirit inspired word. How can we take what the Spirit gives as a "sign, not for believers but for unbelievers" (14:22) and change it to a special form of spiritual communication? Please pray that you will not be misled. If tongues were really a key to spirit filled living etc. then in 1 Cor. 14:22 Paul would have given in the purpose statement that “it is a sign for unbelievers” AND “a tool for spiritual growth or is a special mysterious ‘hotline to God’ prayer”. But, the Scriptures only give the first, human imaginations have added the second.

I have known a number of good and godly people who, used to practice the modern phenomena of "tongues" and, have now (since stopping) risen to new heights in their spiritual lives and experience since they stopped substituting a "psychological boost" for the real power of the Spirit working in their lives through the Word (Sword of the Spirit, given by the Spirit of Truth) and Prayer (in the Spirit at all times with intentional and intelligent thanks giving and praise). I pray the same blessing upon all those who read this lesson. I pray that the Holy Spirit will open the understanding of your minds and illumine your hearts to see the great realities and power that He brings not in conflict with His inspired word but in cooperation with it.

2 Timothy 4:2-4 2 Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage-- with great patience and careful instruction. 3 For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. 4 They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. (NIV)

2 Peter 2:2-3 2 Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. 3 In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.

If it is the Spirit that moves people to speak in tongues (languages) will He really lead His people to behave in ways that violate His own Word and Will (many speaking at the same time)? And will He approve of a form of tongues that is randomly generated sounds with a disengaged mind? No, let those who worship the Lord do so in Spirit and Truth guided by the Spirit of Truth! There is no competition between the Spirit and knowledge or understanding, they work in harmony to produce a glorious symphony of faith and joy in the lives of those filled with and led by the Spirit through the Word.