

Lesson 1: How to Study the Bible¹

1. What is the Bible and why should we care to understand it?²

- God's inspired, inerrant, authoritative word by which we know him

Jeremiah 9:23–24 Thus says the LORD, "Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; ²⁴ but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things," declares the LORD.

John 8:31–32 So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, *then* you are truly disciples of Mine; ³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."

- God's word by which humanity is saved and sanctified:

Romans 10:17 So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

John 17:17 Sanctify them by the truth; Your word is truth.

- God's word, profitable for all things humanity needs:

2 Timothy 3:16-17 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

- The Bible is "the light to our paths, the key of the kingdom of heaven, our comfort in affliction, our shield and sword against Satan, the school of all wisdom, the glass wherein we behold God's face, the testimony of his favor, and the only food and nourishment of our souls." (Preface to the 1560 Geneva Bible)

Charles Spurgeon: "Nobody ever outgrows Scripture: the book widens and deepens with our years."

¹ See *Bibliology* and *Hermeneutics* from Entrust for a more detailed study.

² We are indebted to Crossroads Ministry, of Grace Community Church, for their course, "Cutting it Straight."

- Benefiting from this immense gift of God requires a proper understanding. A proper understanding results from proper interpretation. We are constantly engaged in interpretation. We ought to ensure that our interpretation is accurate.

2 Timothy 2:15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who doesn't need to be ashamed, correctly teaching the word of truth.

2. By what principles should we approach Bible interpretation and why?³

- Before we seek to correctly understand any writing we must understand what it is that we are handling. *See Entrust notes from Bibliology and Hermeneutics for a fuller understanding of this material.*
 - a. The principles for interpreting the Bible are simply descriptions of the way people think and read when they seek to understand the meaning of any writing. They are not inventions, they are discoveries. Rather than being created, they are observed.
 - b. These principles are not special rules applicable only for studying the Bible, but principles by which humanity, by their God-given nature, approach comprehension in general.
 - c. The principles of interpretation are not invented or learned but are part of the image of God. Man, as a communicator, has always sought to address other human beings in ways that would enable them to comprehend what the speaker was saying.
 - d. The Bible is both a human book and a divine book

1. God used chosen instruments:

2 Peter 1:20-21 But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is *a matter* of one's own interpretation, ²¹ for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

2. All the content recorded is the very word of God:

³ Bible Interpretation Presuppositions adapted from chapter 3, *Basic Bible Interpretation*, by Roy B. Zuck.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

3. Therefore:

- i. God inspired the text, meaning, the Holy Spirit guided and superintended the writers of Scripture so that what they wrote is the word of God.
 - ii. The Holy Spirit directed the choice of words (verbal) which extends to every portion of the Bible (plenary).
- e. The Bible is a **human book**. Consequently, there are 6 resulting truths and questions:

6 Interpretation Truths

1. The Bible (every word, sentence, and book) was written in a language which followed normal, grammatical meanings, including figurative language.
 - i. God is a God of sense, not nonsense, and rationality, not irrationality.
 - ii. Scripture is recorded in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek (intelligible languages) means the Bible need not be decoded or deciphered; there is no “insider,” mystical data available.
 - iii. Nothing in Scripture indicates a hidden code. Bible writers and speakers themselves followed normal principles of interpretation.
 - iv. When we read anything, we assume the literal sense of interpretation until the nature of that reading forces us elsewhere.
 - v. Therefore, the goal of Bible interpretation is to determine the original meaning of the text (exegesis), not reading an arbitrary meaning into it (eisegesis), nor impose human reasoning upon the text, regardless of how difficult a doctrine appears to embrace.

2. Each biblical writing was written by someone to specific hearers or readers in a specific historical, geographical, situation for a specific purpose.
 - Therefore, there exists an authorial intent to each text. The authorial intent reveals the meaning of the text.
3. The Bible is influenced by the cultural environment from which each human writer wrote.
4. Each biblical writing was accepted or understood in the light of its context.
5. Each biblical writing has a specific literary form.
 - The Bible includes literary forms such as narrative, poetry, prophecy, letters/epistles, proverbs, wisdom literature, and discourses.
6. Each biblical writing was understood by its initial readers in accord with the basic principles of logic and communication.

6 Interpretation Questions

1. What did the words convey in the grammar of the original readers?

The OT foretold that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2), that he would be presented by riding on a donkey (Zech. 9:9), and he would be punished as a substitute for our sins (Isa. 53:4-8). The NT record demonstrates a literal fulfillment. As NT writers quoted these OT passages, they treated the OT as a normal, human instrument of communication.

2. What was being conveyed by those words to the initial readers?

God instructed Israel to slaughter unblemished animals in their place as a substitute punishment for sin (cf. Lev. 4:27-31). Does that mean God's people today should do likewise each time they sin? If so, why? If not, why not?

3. How did the cultural setting influence and affect what was written?

What is significant, for example, about NT texts mentioning Samaria (i.e. John 4) and why?

4. What is the meaning of the words in their context?

To what/whom is Jesus referring in Matthew 24:34 when he says, "Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place"?

5. In what literary form is the material written and how does that affect what is said?

How does understanding the book of Proverbs differ from an Epistle since it is wisdom literature? The Proverbs are not always inflexible, absolute promises. God does not guarantee uniform outcome or application for each proverb, but in studying and applying them, one may grow in the knowledge of God and wisdom (*MacArthur Study Bible*, 876).

6. How do the principles of logic (e.g. non-contradiction) and normal communication affect the meaning?

If there seems to be a contradiction, we must continue to discover the meaning which is consistent with the rest of Scripture. For example, how can James say, "a man is justified by works and not by faith alone," but Paul says, "we maintain that man is justified by faith apart from works"?

- f. The Bible is a **divine book**. Consequently, there are 4 resulting truths:

1. Being inspired by God, the Bible is **inerrant**.

The Holy Spirit's work of inspiration ensured that everything written was free from error.

2. Being inspired by God, the Bible is **authoritative**.

Christ viewed the Bible as from God and therefore, authoritative (i.e. Matt 4:4-10).

3. Being inspired by God, the Bible has **unity**.

Therefore, the Bible will not contradict itself, is sufficient to interpret itself, and tells the story of God's work in redemption for his glory.

4. Being inspired by God, the Bible contains things **not always easy to understand**.

g. Since the Bible is both a human and divine book, one must interpret it as any other book while simultaneously affirming its uniqueness as a book of absolute truth from God.

3. What are some examples of interpretation "issues"?

a. Are the days in Genesis 1 referring to 24-hour periods or some other long period of time?

b. If Abraham and David were so godly, how come they were polygamists? Should we commit polygamy today, then?

c. Should we continue the commands in the Pentateuch? The Sabbath, the food, dietary, ceremonial, and civil laws? Why not, if not? "Because it was the OT" is not a sufficient answer. We continue many things from the OT in NT times. What specifically in the NT indicates how the OT laws should be treated?

d. And what about all the supposed translations of the Bible? Is the meaning lost?

e. In Luke 15, is the prodigal son a back-slidden believer or unbeliever?

f. What is the gift of "tongues" in Acts 2? What is Paul talking about in 1 Corinthians 14? How do we arrive at a correct understanding?

g. And what about head coverings in 1 Corinthians 11?

h. What is Paul talking about with reference to baptizing the dead in 1 Corinthians 15:29?

i. When Paul says that Christ is "the firstborn of all creation" in Colossians 1:15, are the Jehovah Witnesses correct in concluding that he was created? Why or why not?

➤ Using proper, logical interpretive principles, we can discern the meaning and authorial intent of each of these questions.

4. What are the steps of Bible interpretation?

a. 1st: **Observation**

What does the text say? What has God put there? What does it not say? What emphases are there? What difficulties?

b. 2nd: **Interpretation**

What does the text mean? What is the authorial intent? What would the original audience have understood of the text? What is the explanation based upon the observation?

c. 3rd: **Application**

What bearing does this have on our present audience? What are the implications for us? What should we do in light of the meaning?

Example: "The interpretation is whatever the passage means after laws of hermeneutics are used to arrive at its sense. David's five stones were physical stones plucked from the ground to fell the enemy as he used his sling. An application from this could be that when we, like David, go forth trusting God, God can cause the resources He permits us to utilize to work out for victory as He did for David. Another application could be that however small and inadequate our available supplies may be at the moment, our trust in God's help can be honored by success against seemingly insurmountable odds. The interpretation is one basic meaning; the applications may be many." (Jim Rosscup)

Conclusion:

- Observation is like looking at an individual's MRI to discover what is there. Explanation explains what is happening based upon what is observed. Application then takes action based upon that understanding (e.g. surgery, medication).
- Considering this illustration, if one were to jump from observation to application without careful interpretation, what might happen?

- “Without proper biblical interpretation, the theology of an individual or of an entire church may be misdirected or superficial and its ministry unbalanced.” (Roy B. Zuck)⁴

d. A 4th step: **Edification**

The transformation accomplished by the Holy Spirit as He acts upon the hearers such that they are transformed either in salvation or sanctification.

John 17:17 Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.

Romans 10:17 So faith *comes* from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

Colossians 1:28 We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.

5. What are the qualifications for rightly understanding and ascertaining the Bible?

a. Regeneration

1 Corinthians 2:14 But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

1. Salvation by faith in Jesus Christ, and thus indwelling of the Holy Spirit, is the prerequisite to properly ascertaining Scripture.
2. The Holy Spirit is our light and life into the mind of God.
3. The Holy Spirit does not help you see a deeper, mysterious meaning in the Bible, but the deep meaning of the Bible.
4. The Holy Spirit is not given to discover the secret meaning, but the single meaning.
5. Being saved and indwelt by the Holy Spirit does not guarantee personal infallibility. It is still possible to incorrectly interpret his word because we are not yet glorified.

⁴ Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation* (1991), 15.

6. Having the Spirit does not preclude hard work in Bible study. He enables hard work and fruit from doing so.
7. That all believers are indwelt by the Spirit indicates all can understand his word.

b. Reverence and Respect for God and His Word

Psalm 138:2 I will bow down toward Your holy temple and give thanks to Your name for Your lovingkindness and Your truth; for You have magnified Your word according to all Your name.

Isaiah 66:2 “For My hand made all these things, thus all these things came into being,” declares the LORD. “But to this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word.

2 Timothy 3:15 and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

c. Prayer

Psalm 119:18 Open my eyes, that I may behold Wonderful things from Your law.

Psalm 119:26 I have told of my ways, and You have answered me; Teach me Your statutes.

Psalm 119:33-36 ³³ Teach me, O LORD, the way of Your statutes, And I shall observe it to the end. ³⁴ Give me understanding, that I may observe Your law And keep it with all *my* heart. ³⁵ Make me walk in the path of Your commandments, For I delight in it. ³⁶ Incline my heart to Your testimonies And not to *dishonest* gain.

d. Willingness to Submit and Obey

Hebrews 5:11-14 Concerning him we have much to say, and *it is* hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. ¹² For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. ¹³ For everyone who partakes *only* of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. ¹⁴ But solid

food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

James 1:19-22 ¹⁹ *This* you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak *and* slow to anger; ²⁰ for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. ²¹ Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and *all* that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. ²² But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.

- Bible interpretation is not a morally neutral act. Idols and an unwillingness to submit can cloud understanding.
- Abner Chou: “A hermeneutic of surrender”

e. Interaction with the Church (local church and global)

- Local: Willingness to have my life and understanding of God checked by other believers in the local church.
- Global: Willingness to check interpretations with faithful, sound commentaries.

We should suspect ourselves and our understanding of Scripture if we have a lone-ranger Christian approach to the local church.

Committed, consistent, and candid relationships in the local church are God’s design to exercise his good care over us. This brings shape to our sanctification.

f. Willingness to Work Hard

- A.W. Tozer: “No verse of Scripture yields its meaning to a lazy people.”

g. Desire to Edify Others

Matthew 28:18-20 And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Romans 15:14 And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish one another.

- We are commanded to share God's word with the lost so that they are converted to Christ.
- We are commanded to share God's word with other believers so that they grow in Christlikeness.

6. What are the principles which govern Bible interpretation?

a. Context

1. The surrounding verses and passage (argument/flow). What is the topic addressed in that passage?
2. The book of the Bible. What is the historical context of the letter? What is the reason for which the book was written?
3. The NT/OT in the Bible. How does this passage fit into the OT/NT and redemptive history?
4. Historical (Political, Economical, Social).
5. Bridging the gaps
 - All Scripture should be received as normative for every person in all societies of all time unless the Bible itself limits the audience. (McQuilkin)
 - 1) Some situations, commands, or principles are repeatable, continuous, or not revoked, and/or pertain to moral and theological subjects, and/or are repeated elsewhere in Scripture, and therefore are permanent and transferable to the contemporary audience.

Proverbs 3:5-6 Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding. ⁶ In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight.

- The truths in Proverbs 3 are permanent and transferable to every audience.

- 2) Some situations, commands, or principles pertain to an individual's specific, nonrepeatable circumstances, and/or have been revoked, and are therefore not transferable to today.
- Leviticus 20:10 states that adultery was punishable by stoning to death. Should we still practice this? This is not carried into the NT (evidenced by 1 Cor 5:1-5, for example). Passages such as Matt 5:17, Gal 3:24, Heb 7:12; 8:1, 7, 13; and 10:1 indicate that Christ fulfilled the Mosaic Covenant, which was that covenant to which Leviticus 20:10 belonged. Christ is the Mediator of a new and better covenant (Heb 8:1, 13). Therefore, the Law is fulfilled in the Person of Christ who we trust by faith as our provision of righteousness which the Law could not produce for us. Some situations or commands pertain to cultural settings with little or no similarity to ours and in which only the principles are transferable.

1 Corinthians 8:1-9 Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies. ²If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know; ³but if anyone loves God, he is known by Him. ⁴Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one. ⁵For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, ⁶yet for us there is *but* one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we *exist* for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we *exist* through Him. ⁷However not all men have this knowledge; but some, being accustomed to the idol until now, eat *food* as if it were sacrificed to an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled. ⁸But food will not commend us to God; we are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor the better if we do eat. ⁹But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.

- Though we are not usually dealing with problems related to eating meat sacrificed to idols in our day, we often have issues of conscience to consider when it comes to serving one another and considering others' consciences.

b. Necessity of Literal Interpretation

Unless otherwise indicated by the text, the passage should be understood in a normal, literal sense.

c. Word Study

Discover the meaning of the word in the respective language and context. Greek and Hebrew lexicons are helpful for this.

d. Single Meaning

This principle means that a biblical text has one basic meaning or interpretation, not two or three. There is one correct interpretation in accordance with the authorial intent, but after it is ascertained we may make several legitimate applications of its relevance to our own lives or the lives of other people.

e. Harmony of Scripture

“Scripture interprets Scripture”

- An obscure text should not be interpreted in such a way as to make it contradict a plain one. The more clear ought to be used to interpret the less clear.
- When there is an apparent contradiction, additional work is necessary to discover the meaning which harmonizes with all of Scripture.

f. Checking Principle

- Check reputable sources would give the most reliable information on a passage or point. That is, we consult reference sources, whichever ones are relevant to the point we are studying, and seek to use the most trusted and accurate books in a given area of information.

7. Additional Study Helps

- a. Instead of asking, “What does this text mean to me?” ask, “What does this text mean to God?”

- Since Scripture is God's word, what it means to God is what it means. That meaning is determined according to the aforementioned principles and qualifications.
- b. Instead of asking, "What does this text mean to me?" ask, "What is the authorial intent of the passage?"
- c. Instead of asking, "What kind of plans and things can I get for me here?" ask, "What kind of me is necessary for God's plan?"
- d. Instead of asking, "How can the meaning of such-and-such difficult text make sense to my understanding of my ideas?" ask, "How might I need to submit to the clear meaning of the text despite my difficulty embracing it?"

8. Sample Study

- a. Colossians 1:15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

Issue: *Does Colossians 1:15 mean that Jesus is created?*

Interpretation principles:

Harmony of Scripture: Would this interpretation contradict any other passages? The Jehovah Witness interpretation contradicts numerous passages.

For example:

John 8:58 Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am."

Jesus says that he was existing prior to Abraham, who lived about 2000 years prior. More than that, this is one of his "I am" statements whereby he identifies himself as the Yahweh of the OT ("I AM," cf. Ex 3:14), and, therefore, the eternally, self-existent God of the universe. Based upon this alone, the idea that Jesus was "created" is invalid.

Context: The purpose of the passage is to demonstrate, not Christ being a product of creation, but *superior* to all creation (cf. 1:16-17). Something which is "firstborn," as in created first, cannot be a part of that which he created. Jehovah's Witnesses wrongly add the word "other" six times in this passage

in their *New World Translation*. Thus, they suggest that Christ created all other things after He was created. But the word “other” is not in the Greek.⁵

Word Study: What does the Greek word translated, “firstborn,” mean? The word can refer to one who chronologically preceded another, or highest in rank and supremacy. Context will help determine which meaning fits. From the above discussion, the meaning is clearly “highest in rank” or “supremacy.”

Checking Principle: The overwhelming witness of sound, Christian scholarship takes the view that “firstborn” refers to “highest in rank” and “supremacy.” See above reference to the Bible Knowledge Commentary. Also: “If the expression refers to the mediation of creation through Christ, it cannot be saying at the same time that He was created as the first creature” (TDNT, 6:878).

- Therefore, “firstborn” does not refer to the idea that the 2nd Person of the Trinity was created. Rather, it speaks to Christ’s exclusive, exalted status above all creation.

- b. 1 Corinthians 14:1-5 Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual *gifts*, but especially that you may prophesy. ²For 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. ³But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation. ⁴One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; but one who prophesies edifies the church. ⁵Now 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.

Issue: Is this passage teaching that there exists a spiritual gift called, “tongues,” which is a private prayer language? If not, is the passage teaching that this gift of “tongues,” whatever it is/was, still exists?

Word Study: The Greek word, which is often translated, “tongues,” simply means “languages.” Thus, the gift is more properly called, “the gift of languages.”

Context (surrounding verses, book of the Bible, NT, redemptive history):

Context of 1 Corinthians:

⁵John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck and Dallas Theological Seminary, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985), 2:672.

Overall, the book of Corinthians is written to answer several questions about biblical issues, while offering correction of spiritual pride and error rampant in that church. Many in the Corinthian church were overly fascinated and influenced by the culture. One way in which they were negatively influenced was with respect to spiritual gifts, which were being abused and manufactured/faked by some in the church.

Furthermore, Paul is correcting error with respect to what a spiritual gift is and how things ought to operate in the corporate gathering. In the Corinthian congregation there appears to have been a frenzy surrounding this spiritual gift of “languages.”

The Corinthians seemed to be erring by: 1) using the spiritual gift of languages in a disorderly, unedifying fashion, with no translation happening and 2) were engaging in the popular Greek pagan practice of the day of non-language ecstatic frenzied utterances which were meaningless noises. Though these experiences gave a spiritual high to the individual, a feeling of elevated spirituality, and a feeling of superiority in the culture and above others, Paul rebukes them because it was disorderly and absent of edification (1 Cor. 14:12, 26). He will argue for intelligibility and order in the worship service, since that is the prerequisite to edification, which is the goal of gathering (1 Cor. 14:12, 40).

Taking the view of a private prayer language requires building a belief on a few verses in 1 Corinthians 14 while ignoring Acts 2. Additionally, a doctrine should not be built on a verse from a passage which is corrective in nature.

A closer look at the context of 1 Corinthians 14 is also revealing. Verse 4 says, “One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself...” This statement is corrective, not instructive. Edifying self is not to be the focus of serving and spiritual gifts. If Paul were teaching that there were such a spiritual gift to be exercised for self-edification, that would contradict everything said in the previous 2 chapters on spiritual gifts.

In chapter 12, Paul taught that the purposes of spiritual gifts are: 1) To shine the light on Christ. 2) To build up other people in tangible ways. Or, we could say, spiritual gifts are: 1) Jesus-centered, not me-centered. 2) Community-benefitting, not self-serving.

Paul gives additional insight on spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 13 which rule out the idea of a private gift exercised for self-edification. He exhorts the

church in a corrective way, explaining that spiritual gifts are to be used in love. Among other things, love “does not seek its own” (v. 5).

Furthermore, the validity of a spiritual gift is based upon falling in the category of building up others (12:7; 14:3-6, 12-13, 19, 26-28). Spiritual gifts are to put Christ in lights and accomplish the common good, which is the opposite of serving myself. We are built up when others use their spiritual gifts while we are the recipients. Paul explained this idea with “the body of Christ” metaphor in chapter 12. A body part does not exist for itself (to edify self) but for the benefit of the other parts. This rules out the possibility of a Holy Spirit-given gift or ability which is a private practice used for self-edification.

Also, when teaching about prayer, Jesus prohibited using “meaningless repetition” in prayer (Matt. 6:7). The Greek word for “meaningless repetition” has the idea of thoughtless chatter or babbling. This, too, rules out the idea of a private prayer language composed of sounds that have no intelligible meaning to hearers.

If someone did have the legitimate first-century gift of languages, Paul is correcting the presence of untranslated languages (and possibly out-of-control ecstatic utterances) in the gathering. While some in Corinth manufactured the gift by out of control ecstatic utterances, some likely had the first-century gift. To these he gives corrective instruction on ensuring that an interpreter is there, because, again, if others cannot understand (if it is not a real, human language) it edifies no one and is not a spiritual gift (vv. 6-12).

Therefore, Paul is saying to the Corinthians that: 1) if anyone is getting into pagan Greek spirituality of ecstatic utterances, it is not a gift of the Holy Spirit. 2) The true gift of languages is to be used when translation occurs, so that edification results.

Context of the NT:

Scripture does not teach on anything about a private prayer language, as such. The other place we see “tongues” spoken of in detail is specifically described as a language (Acts 2). All of the intelligible, human languages are listed: (Acts 2:6-11 And when this sound occurred, the crowd came together, and were bewildered because each one of them was hearing them speak in his own language. ⁷They were amazed and astonished, saying, “Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans? ⁸”And how is it that we each hear *them* in our own language to which we were born? ⁹”Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and

Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹ Cretans and Arabs – we hear them in our *own* tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God.”).

The idea of a private prayer language contradicts the more full description of the gift of languages in Acts 2 and violates the natural sense of the text.

Context of the Bible/Redemptive History:

The language gift appears at a specific time in redemptive/salvation history for a specific reason. First, it appears on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2), which is the day the church was born by the power of the Holy Spirit. God demonstrates in a wonderful way that he is doing a new work. Second, the gift is a judgment on Israel for failing her purpose (1 Cor. 14:21).

Harmony of Scripture: An obscure text should not be interpreted in such a way as to make it contradict a plain one.

The miraculous language gift appears in Acts 2. Because of the clear nature of the language miracle in Acts 2, 1 Corinthians 12-14 should be understood also in light of Acts 2, not the opposite. A natural reading of the text reveals that it is the miraculous ability to speak a previously unlearned foreign language for the purpose of exalting Christ and building up others in a foundational way during the early, first-century church.

Furthermore, in later NT epistles, the gift of languages is never seen or mentioned. As the gift of miracles and healing, it ended when the foundation of the NT church was established (God finishing Scripture).

Checking Principle: A large number of sound Christian scholars have held this “cessationist” position, dating back several centuries: John Chrysostom (4th century), Augustine (4th), Theodoret of Cyrus (5th), Martin Luther (16th), John Calvin (16th), John Owen (17th), Thomas Watson (17th), Matthew Henry (17-18th), John Gill (18th), Jonathan Edwards (18th), David Brainerd (18th), R.C. Sproul (20-21st), Ian Hamilton, Iaian Murray, Sinclair Ferguson, and John MacArthur (contemporary).

- Therefore, as demonstrated in Acts 2, the gift of languages was the miraculous ability to speak an unlearned language that is known by others for the purpose of exalting Christ and building up others. It served as a loud statement at the birth and foundational time of the church to declare that God’s plan of redemption is not restricted to one nation, but

all nations (hence the miraculous ability to speak many languages by the disciples in Acts 2 on Pentecost). It served as a statement of judgment by God on Israel for failing their mission to be a light to the nations. This gift ceased with the Apostolic era in the first century as the NT church foundation was established.

9. Recommended Resources:

Basic Bible Interpretation (Roy B. Zuck)

The Expositor's Bible Commentary (72 different writers)

Taking God at His Word (Kevin DeYoung)

Grasping God's Word (J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays)

The MacArthur New Testament Commentary (John MacArthur)

The MacArthur Study Bible (Notes by the Master's Seminary Faculty)

Commentaries for Biblical Expositors (Jim Rosscup)