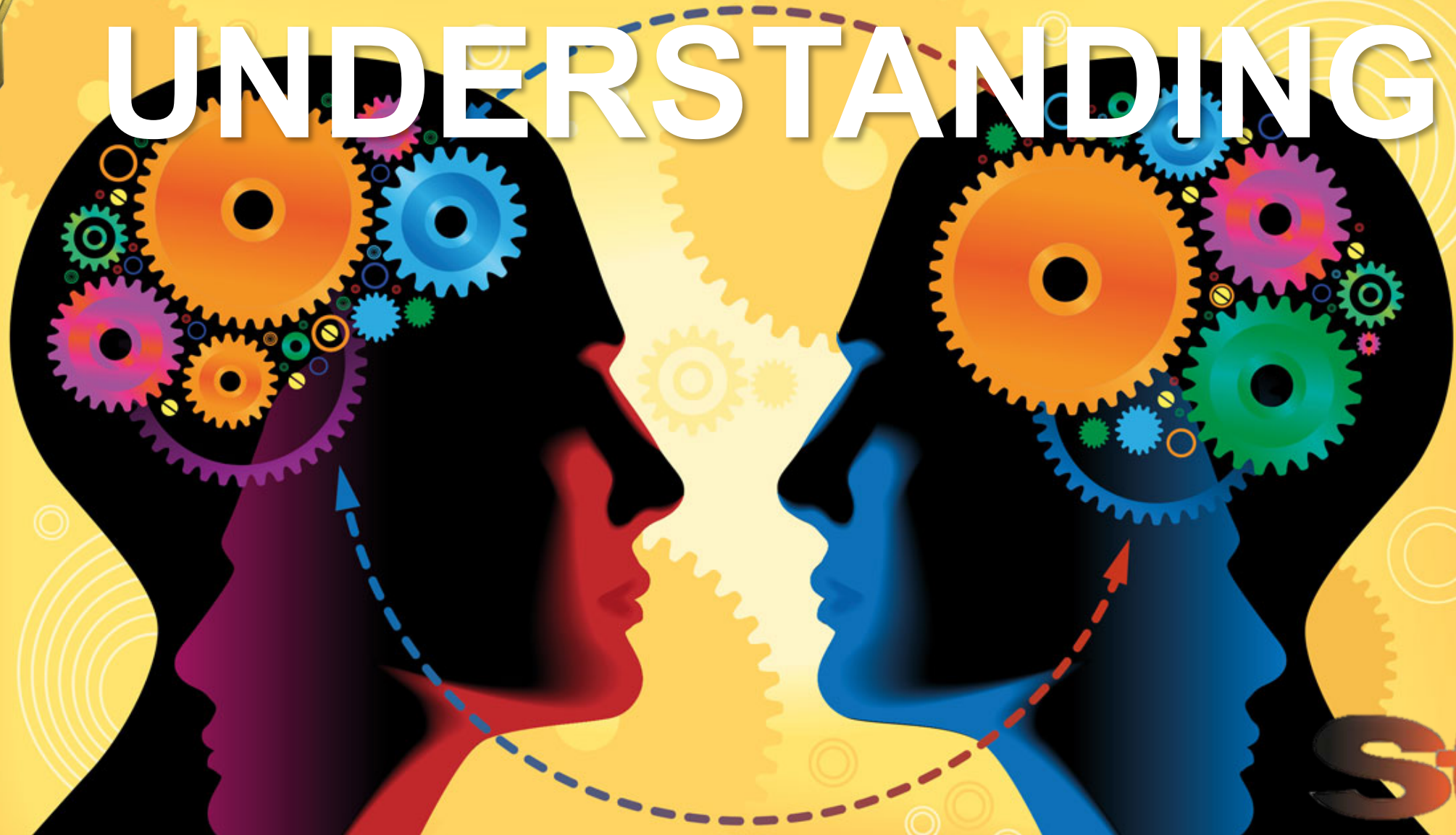




UNDERSTANDING



Warren W. Wiersbe, [The Bible Exposition Commentary](#), vol. 1
(Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 613–614.

1 Corinthians 14:6–11 (NKJV)

6 But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you unless I speak to you either by revelation, by knowledge, by prophesying, or by teaching?

7 Even things without life, whether flute or harp, when they make a sound, unless they make a distinction in the sounds, how will it be known what is piped or played?

8 For if the trumpet makes an uncertain sound, who will prepare for battle?

9 So likewise you, unless you utter by the tongue words easy to understand, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air.

10 There are, it may be, so many kinds of languages in the world, and none of them is without significance.

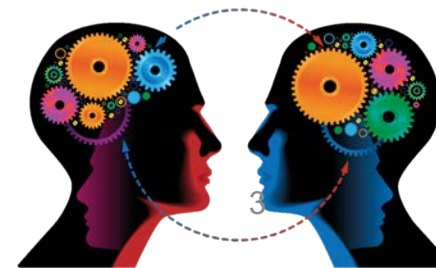
11 Therefore, if I do not know the meaning of the language, I shall be a foreigner to him who speaks, and he who speaks will be a foreigner to me.



UNDERSTANDING

1 Corinthians 14:6–25

- Eight times in this section, Paul used the word *understanding*.
- It is not enough for the minister to impart information to people; the people must *receive* it if it is to do them any good.
- The seed that is received in good ground is the seed that bears fruit, but this means that there must be an understanding of the Word of God.



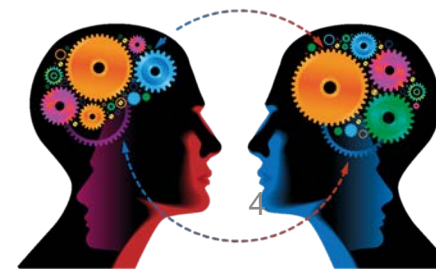
If a believer wants to be edified, he must prepare his heart to receive the Word.

Matthew 13:23 (NKJV)

But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.”

1 Thessalonians 2:13 (NKJV)

For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.



ILLUSTRATIONS (vv. 6–11)

- Paul used three simple illustrations to prove his point that there must be understanding if there is to be an edifying spiritual ministry: musical instruments, a bugle call in battle and daily conversation.
- Nobody will recognize the music being played if a musical instrument does not give a clear and distinct sound.

Psalm 33:2 (NKJV)

Praise the LORD with the harp; Make melody to Him with an instrument of ten strings.



We Need Clarity - Not Confusion

- If the bugler is unsure whether he is calling “Retreat!” or “Charge!”, you can be sure none of the soldiers will know what to do either.
- Half of them will rush forward, while the other half will run back! The call must be a clear one if it is to be understood.

Isaiah 24:10 (NKJV)

The city of confusion is broken down;
Every house is shut up, so that none may go in.



Confusion - [tohuw /to-hoo/] n m. It is formlessness, confusion, unreality, emptiness, and nothingness. It is that which is empty or unreal (of idols). It is a wasteland, wilderness (of solitary places), place of chaos and vanity.

Our goal is to build others up, and not tear them down. Confusion tears down when it is our goal to build the body of Christ up.



1 Corinthians 14:10 (NKJV)

There are, it may be, so many kinds of languages in the world, and none of them is without significance.

- This scripture gives us good reason to believe that, when Paul wrote about tongues, he referred to known languages and not some “heavenly” language.
- Each language is different, and yet each language has its meaning. No matter how sincere a speaker maybe, he cannot communicate with me if I do not understand his language.



- The musician, the bugler, and the everyday conversationalist cannot be understood unless their messages are communicated in a meaningful manner to the listener.
- Having illustrated the principle of understanding, Paul then applied it to three different persons.



APPLICATION (vv. 12–25)

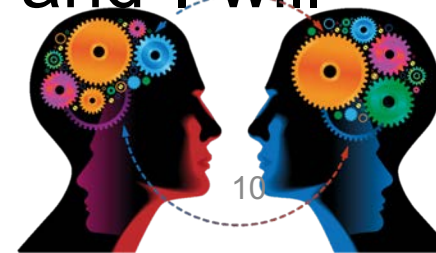
1 Corinthians 14:12–15 (NKJV)

12 Even so you, since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, let it be for the edification of the church that you seek to excel.

13 Therefore let him who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret.

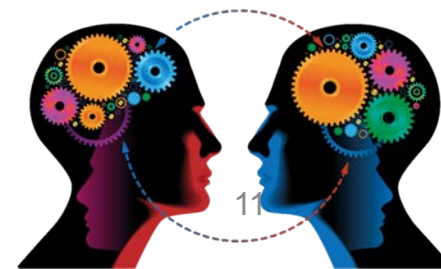
14 For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, **but my understanding is unfruitful.**

15 What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding.



APPLICATION (vv. 12–25)

- Paul first applied the principle of understanding to the speaker himself.
- Again, he reminded the Corinthians that it is better to be a blessing to the church than to experience some personal “spiritual excitement.”
- If the believer speaks in a tongue, his spirit (inner person) may share in the experience, but his mind is not a part of the experience. It is not wrong to pray or sing “in the spirit”, but it is better to include the mind and understand what you are praying or singing.

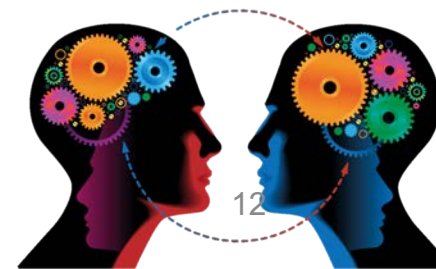


- The word *spirit* in 1 Cor. 14:14–15 does not refer to the Holy Spirit, but to the inner person, as in 1 Cor. 2:11.

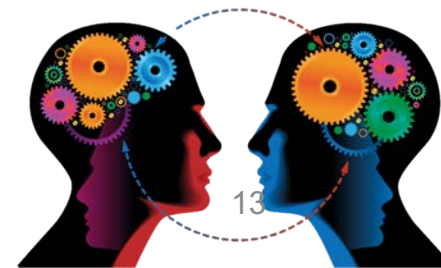
1 Corinthians 2:11 (NKJV)

For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.

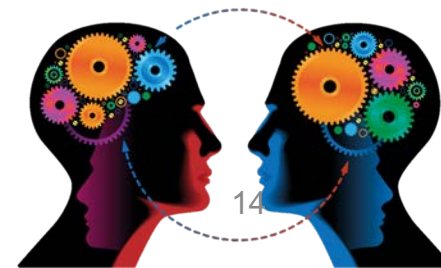
- If the speaker is to be edified, he must understand what he is saying.
- What, then, is the speaker to do? He must ask God for the interpretation of the message.



- Paul assumed that an interpreter would be present (1 Cor. 14:27–28) or that the speaker himself had the gift of interpreting.
- Of course, all of this discussion emphasized the superiority of prophecy over tongues: prophecy needs no interpretation and can therefore be a blessing to everybody.



**Paul then applied
the principle to
other believers in
the assembly.**



1 Corinthians 14:16–20 (NKJV)

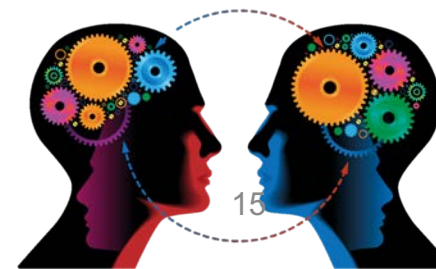
16 Otherwise, if you bless with the spirit, how will he who occupies the place of the uninformed say “Amen” at your giving of thanks, since he does not understand what you say?

17 For you indeed give thanks well, but the other is not edified.

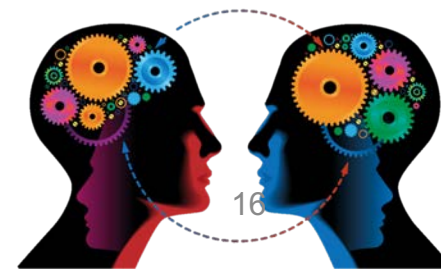
18 I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all;

19 yet in the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that I may teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue.

20 Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature.



- He assumed that they would listen to the message and respond to it.
- If they did not understand the message, how could they respond? (Apparently, saying Amen! in the church was not frowned on in those days.)
- The “unlearned” person was probably a new believer, or possibly an interested “seeker”. He could not be edified unless he understood what was being said.
- Again, it was a matter of priorities. While Paul did not oppose the ministry of tongues, he did try to put it into the proper perspective.
- The issue was not the quantity of words but the quality of communication.



The Corinthians were acting like children playing with toys.

When it came to knowing about sin, Paul wanted them to be “babes”;

but when it came to spiritual understanding, he wanted them to be mature men.



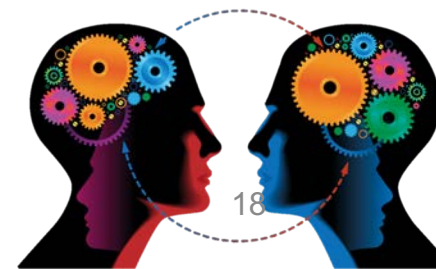
1 Corinthians 13:11–13 (NKJV)

11 When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

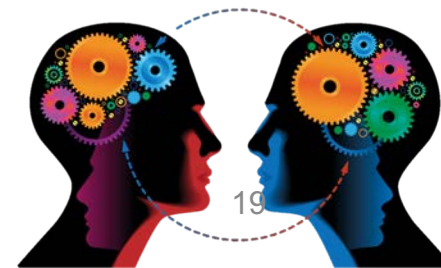
12 For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.

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

- Some people believe that speaking in a tongue is evidence of spiritual maturity, but Paul taught that it is possible to exercise the gift in an unspiritual and immature manner.



**Paul's final application was to
the unsaved person who
happened to come into the
assembly during a time of
worship.**



1 Corinthians 14:21–25 (NKJV)

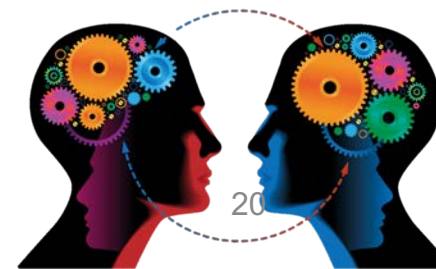
21 In the law it is written: “With men of other tongues and other lips I will speak to this people; And yet, for all that, they will not hear Me,” says the Lord.

22 Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophesying is not for unbelievers but for those who believe.

23 Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those who are uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say that you are out of your mind?

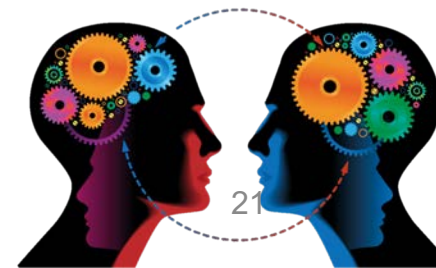
24 But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all.

25 And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you.



Reach the Lost!

- Paul made another point for the superiority of prophecy over tongues: a message in tongues (unless interpreted) could never bring conviction to the heart of a lost sinner.
- The unsaved person might leave the service before the interpretation was given, thinking that the whole assembly was crazy.
- Tongues were not used for evangelism, Pentecost, and nor in the meetings of the early church; however, tongues did have a “message” for the lost Jews in particular: they were a sign of God’s judgment.



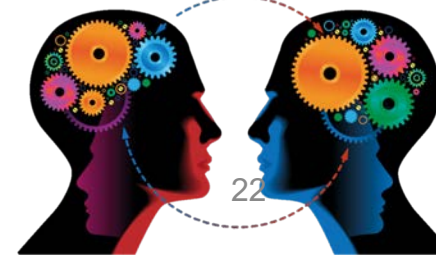
- Paul quoted Isaiah 28:11–12, a reference to the invading Assyrian army whose “barbaric” language the Jews would not understand.

Isaiah 28:11–12 (NKJV)

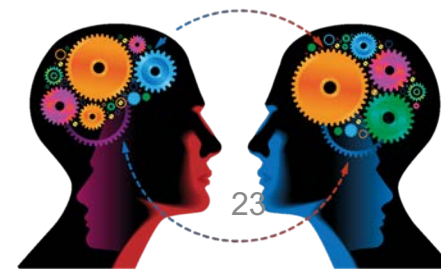
11 For with stammering lips and another tongue He will speak to this people,

12 To whom He said, “This is the rest with which You may cause the weary to rest,” And, “This is the refreshing”; Yet they would not hear. The presence of this “tongue” was evidence of God’s judgment on the nation. God would rather speak to His people in a clear language they could understand, but their repeated sins made this impossible.

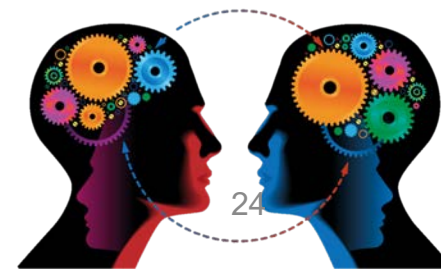
- He had spoken to them through His messengers in their own tongue, and the nation would not repent. Now He had to speak in a foreign tongue, and this meant judgment.



- As a nation, the Jews were always seeking a sign (Matt. 12:38; 1 Cor. 1:22).
- At Pentecost, the Apostles speaking in tongues was a sign to the unbelieving Jews who were there celebrating the feast.
- The miracle of tongues aroused their interest, but it did not convict their hearts.
- It took Peter's preaching (in Aramaic, which the people all understood) to bring them to the place of conviction and conversion.



- The principle of edification encourages us to be major in sharing the Word of God so that the church will be strengthened and grow.
- The principle of understanding reminds us that what we share must be understood in order to do any good.
- The private use of spiritual gifts may edify the user, but it will not edify the church, and Paul admonished us to “excel to the edifying of the church”.



1 Corinthians 14:12 (NKJV)

Even so you, since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, let it be for the edification of the church that you seek to excel.

- But a third principle must be applied: the principle of order

