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Sign Language in the Assembly

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SIGN LANGUAGE IN THE ASSEMBLY: HOW ARE TONGUES A SIGN TO THE UNBELIEVER IN 1 COR 14:20-25?[1]

Robert J. Gladstone

In this paper I consider a passage of scripture notorious for being difficult to interpret and apply. In 1 Cor 14:22 Paul makes the curious claim that "tongues" constitute a "sign" to unbelievers, while prophecy is a sign to believers. But the meaning of his statement is not clear in its context. Paul illustrates his assertions in vv. 23-25 by saying that unbelievers visiting the Christian assembly will think those speaking in tongues are mad. The question is: How is "tongues" a "sign," if it prevents understanding and thus conversion? Paul's next illustration describes unbelievers hearing prophecy and confessing God's presence. How, then, is prophecy a sign to *believers*, if Paul only depicts its impact on unbelievers? Though several answers to these questions have been offered, none maintains the structural integrity of the entire passage in its context. One way or another, v. 22 does not seem to match the illustrations or Paul's broader argument. Like a tightly tied knot of many strands, different solutions have loosed some strands while leaving others tied. My goal is to untie every strand, that is, to offer one solution that explains every part of the passage.

Here are two assumptions I will work from. Though space prevents me from explaining fully how I arrived at these positions, it is necessary to mention them at the outset. First, 1 Cor 14:20-25 incorporates a deliberate rhetorical structure which we must maintain in order to arrive

[1] An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 28th Annual Meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies, Springfield, MO, U.S.A. in March 1999.

at a legitimate solution. This is typically recognized.[2] We can outline the passage as follows:

1. Introductory exhortation (v. 20) [3]
2. Argument (vv. 21-25)
   a. Exemplar OT text (v. 21)
   b. Two interpretive assertions (v. 22)
   c. Two corresponding illustrations (vv. 23-25) [4]

Paul's word "so then" (wste) draws the assertions from the Isaiah text. The first assertion follows naturally, but the second does not. It says that prophecy is a "sign" to believers, yet Isaiah text never mentions prophecy (though it is itself a prophecy), nor its effect on believers. Further, then, it is unclear to whom "this people" refers in the Isaiah passage. In any case, Paul saw in Isaiah and the Corinthian situation an important, parallel contrast between tongues and prophecy as signs, and between their "recipients."

Next, Paul's word "therefore" (oun) draws the illustrations from the assertions. We rightly expect each illustration to correspond to each assertion. But the contrast between tongues, prophecy, and their respective recipients does *not* carry over to the illustrations. Instead both

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[2] Three recent commentators who properly stress the importance of this passage's rhetorical structure for its interpretation, and who agree on its basic arrangement are Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), p. 677; B. C. Johanson, "Tongues, a Sign for Unbelievers?: A Structural and Exegetical Study of I Corinthians XIV. 20-25," *New Testament Studies* 25 (1979), pp. 180-203 (186-90); and Joop F. M. Smit, "Tongues and Prophecy: Deciphering 1 Cor 14,22," *Biblica* 75 (1994), pp. 175-90 (178-80).

[3] Smit, "Tongues and Prophecy," p. 178 rightly points out that Paul's address to the Corinthians in v. 20 as "brothers," followed by a series of imperatives, demarcates the beginning of a new section in his present discourse, closing at v. 25 before the next (interrogative) "brothers" in v. 26. Keeping with his view that the text's solution necessitates a rhetorical analysis, Smit, pp. 178-79 labels Paul's introductory admonition in v. 20 as *exhortatio*, the exemplar *iudicium*, the assertions *propositio*, and the illustrations *exempla*.

[4] For a detailed discussion of the rhetorical parallelisms within the sentences as well as the paragraph as a whole, see Johanson, "Tongues, a Sign for Unbelievers?" pp. 186-92.

illustrations contrast the *effect* of each "sign" on the *same* category of persons: novices or unbelievers (idiwtai h apistoi, v. 23),[5] not the two different categories from the (directly preceding!) assertions. This inconsistency ties the most stubborn, and most consequential, loop in our interpretive knot. Why does Paul first refer to one sign given to one group (the quotation), then two signs to two groups (the assertions), then two signs to *one* group (the illustrations)? The knot tightens with one last twist: From where does Paul abruptly add idiwtai to the illustrations, even mentioning them first in v. 23, since neither the quotation or assertions mention them?

Clearly the assertions, at least on the surface, disrupt the continuity between the exemplar and the illustrations. Without v. 22, 1 Cor 14:20-25 unravels consistently and logically. For the sake of argument, if v. 22 were removed from the passage, we could explain it like this. First we would be able to assume that the Corinthians felt glossolalia would convince visitors that God's holy presence was among the Christian assembly and convert them. Paul would then argue against such a childish notion based on (his version of) Isa 28:11 which states that "this people" in fact will *not* respond obediently to foreign languages. The ensuing illustrations would illustrate this point, matching the "this people" of the ancient text to the "novices and unbelievers" who happened to visit a Corinthian worship service. During such a visit, if they heard all the Corinthians speak in tongues, the outsiders would speculate, not that those gathered worshipped the true God, but that they were mad (possibly possessed by a mantic spirit). Thus Isaiah's prophetic word concerning glossolalia would be fulfilled. However, Paul would offer the alternative illustration that if the Corinthians were to prophesy, those visiting – now confronted with the public declaration of their own thoughts – would fall prostrate, being forced to admit that "God is truly among you."

Most commentators in fact still see the preceding hypothetical explanation as the passage's essential meaning. It is difficult to miss both in view of the illustrations in vv. 24-25 and the previous discourse in chapter 14. There, Paul had to dispel the Corinthian notion that the manifestation of other tongues, without interpretation, had value for the community.[6] Paul's line of argument is consistent throughout: an

[5] Or the singular ti" apisto" h idiwth" in v. 24.

[6] Cf. 14:16-17.

unintelligible language cannot edify or convert. Granting that most writers capture the basic connotation of 1 Cor 14:20-25, they still do not satisfactorily resolve the problem of v. 22's relationship to its context.[7] Solving this problem will unravel our interpretive knot and give us a comprehensive understanding of 1 Cor 14:20-25.

My second assumption regards the term "sign" (shmeion). It is most natural and consistent with Paul's parallel rhetoric to understand both tongues and prophecy as "signs." I take the second half of v. 22 to be an ellipsis assuming the predicate of the first half. As tongues "are a sign," so is prophecy. By definition, in the present context a "sign" is a supernatural, perceptible manifestation of God's power that signifies His presence among His people, proving the truth of their message and implicitly demanding a response from outside observers. The present context leads to this narrow definition. Paul is not concerned here with the outsiders' "demand" for a sign (which was generally perceived as an evil request when uninitiated by the Lord, cf., 1 Cor 1:22; Matt 12:38-41), but with the offering of a sign to provoke faith. Thus, Paul assumes the Corinthians' ability to provide signs in public, and insists they avoid the one that has proven ineffective (indeed judgmental) in the past (Isa 28:11) and employ the one that would bring about the desired results. Though much more could be said about this important term, space requires my working definition to suffice.

SOLVING THE PROBLEM

Interpreters of v. 22 have tended in one of three directions. They either overlook v. 22 in favor of its context, force it into its context, or re-interpret it in light of its context. Conzelmann exemplifies the first tendency, actually disregarding the believers mentioned in v. 22. He says that the parallelism's wording is "overdone for the sake of rhetoric."[8] He

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[7] Fee, *The First Epistle*, p. 678 admits that, "Although [my] analysis does not resolve all the difficulties with the language of v. 22, it does point out the direction in which the resolution must lie."

[8] Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, trans. James W. Leitch, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), p. 242.

even states that Paul means the opposite of what he actually says.[9] But his view ignores the force of and reason for Paul's deliberate rhetoric. Barrett and Fee slip into the second tendency by forcing v. 22 into its context. They suggest that the second illustration portrays public prophecy as a sign to the *believers* even though it actually says prophecy's effect is on an unbeliever or novice. Such a solution attempts to square the illustration with the assertion while bypassing Paul's actual vocabulary. In my opinion, interpreters of 1 Cor 14:20-25 must deal with the fact that the "believers" in Paul's second assertion are not mentioned in his second illustration. Yet Fee and Barrett contend that we must infer implicitly the application of the second illustration to the second assertion. But if Paul intends for these illustrations to demonstrate his assertions, a search for implicit inferences in order to make them work is unnatural and digressive.[10]

Any solution that unravels 1 Cor 14:20-25 without compromising v. 22's rhetorical parallelisms must avoid falling into one of the first two tendencies. Only the third presents the opportunity to untie the knot. The assertions in v. 22 must be re-interpreted and re-translated in light of their context; the present reading of the text is simply misleading.

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[9] Fee, *The First Epistle*, p. 242 argues "...naturally, speaking with tongues is a sign *also* for believers, though not, of course, in the sense that it is unintelligible to them as a *process*.…And prophecy has an effect *also* on unbelievers..." (italics are author's). I prefer to look for a solution which assumes Paul's words as they stand, especially in this case where Paul's rhetoric *explicitly excludes* possibilities that Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, p. 242 expressly includes.

[10] Interestingly, both commentators come up with opposite inferences. Fee, *The First Epistle*, p. 683 presumes the second illustration portrays prophecy as a positive sign to believers: its convincing effect on unbelievers proves that God's favor is on the believers. C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 324 says the second illustration portrays prophecy as a negative sign to believers: Corinthian believers incur judgment because they prefer to listen to unintelligible tongues than to hear "their faults exposed and their duties pointed out in plain rational language." Barrett, p. 324 neglects the newly convicted unbeliever's positive announcement to believers that "God is among you." Both try to make the second illustration align with the second assertion when there is a blatant verbal inconsistency. They do not own up to the fact that *the second illustration simply does not refer to believers.*

By suggesting different renderings of v. 22, Johanson and Smit both approach viable solutions, but ultimately fall short by failing to make all the components of the passage work together coherently. Johanson proposes that the clauses in v. 22 express a rhetorical *question* which represents the Corinthians' view about tongues, to which Paul counters with his illustrations.[11] But this thesis overlooks what is clearly a monologue with each segment in the argument building upon the last, connected logically by "so then" (wste) and "therefore" (oun).[12]

Smit subtly changes the perspective of the whole passage. He suggests Paul is not so much concerned about the effect the community's worship etiquette has on potential converts. Instead, Smit says Paul is concerned about the visitors' opinion of the community, that is, how it appears to the outside world.[13] Smit reflects this proposal in his translation of the dative phrases in v. 22. He proposes that tongues are not "meant for" or "to" (directed toward) the visiting unbelievers, as typically translated. Instead tongues "belong to" or are "proper to" worshipping unbelievers. In other words, Paul uses the dative case to define the kind of worshippers tongues usually distinguish. So for Smit, Paul is saying that tongues indicate pagans at worship. In the meantime, prophecy is proper to – indicates – believers.[14] Smit re-translates the

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[11] Johanson, "Tongues, a Sign for Unbelievers?" pp. 193-94.

[12] Only in Gal 4:16 does Paul begin a rhetorical question with wste, which Johanson, "Tongues, a Sign for Unbelievers?" p. 193 cites. But the contexts are entirely different. In Galatians 4, Paul is not engaged in a diatribe (which he must be in 1 Cor 14:20-25, if Johanson is correct). Paul's question to the Galatians is sarcastic in light of (wste) an obvious foil. But in 1 Cor 14:20-25, Paul has just quoted an exemplary text which he now (wste) explains. Further, oun is an inferential conjunction which introduces the illustrations as elaborations on the assertions, not as their rebuttal. Finally, Paul has already established an assertion-illustration pattern in the immediate context, using the subjunctive particle oun to introduce hypothetical situations which support his points (e.g., 14:5-6, 13-14, as in 20-25). Therefore, we should not expect oun to begin a diatribal retort here.

[13] The shift is subtle, but crucial. Hypothetically, Smit, "Tongues and Prophecy," pp. 184-85 suggests that Paul is answering not the question, "What sign will most effectively prompt obedience from the visitor?" but the question, "Who will the visitor think we are, if we speak in tongues and not prophesy?"

[14] Smit, "Tongues and Prophecy," pp. 184-85.

traditional understanding of the dative case in this passage[15] to reflect the way *glossolalia* and prophecy identify the worshippers to the world. If visitors hear tongues, according to Smit, they will recognize an ecstatic state appropriate only for unbelievers and will mistake the Christian group for a pagan group. If they hear prophecy, they will know the group is distinctly Christian. The ensuing illustrations follow this translation naturally.

Smit's proposal is attractive because it re-translates the dative cases in v. 22 and thereby accounts for the believers' absence in the illustrations. If the assertions address the utterances from only the visitors' point of view, the illustrations correspond to them. *Thus the entire passage ultimately deals with the signs' impact only on visitors.* Yet, as with most solutions to date, this proposal leaves at least one portion of this passage's argument tied by inconsistency. In Smit's case the neglected portion is the exemplar text.

Paul's quotation of Isa 28:11 in v. 21 sets the pericope's tone as fixed on the outsider's *conversion*, not merely the outsider's intelligent identification of the worshippers. Paul's misgiving regarding tongues is not merely that visitors would not recognize the assembly's Christian distinction, but that they would not finally embrace its God. Although Paul is certainly concerned with the impression the worshipping body makes on its visitors, he is ultimately concerned with the active *result* that impression makes. The language in the passage is clearly aimed at conversion. Paul speaks not only of the visitor's cognizant declaration of the group's "identity" (v. 25b, "God is really among you"), but also of their action demonstrating a change of mind (v. 21b, obedience; v. 25a, falling prostrate).[16]

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[15] From a simple indirect object or dative of advantage to, possibly, a dative of possession or something like a "dative of relevance" (my expression).

[16] Smit, "Tongues and Prophecy," pp. 186-87 misconstrues Paul's perspective on conversion by making two important errors. First, he misunderstands the role of Isa 28:11. He somehow fails to recognize that the quotation depicts God speaking through glossolalia, not God condemning "ecstatic speakers, present everywhere in the Hellenistic surroundings...the many oracles as well as the Bacchantic frenzy.…" Paul's modifications of Isaiah only underline what is already plainly stated: "In other tongues and by foreigners' lips will I(!) speak to this people and not *thus* will they listen *to me says the Lord*" (italics mine, indicating words not found in any text known to us). Though the outcome of glossolalic speech in Paul's Isa 28:11 turns unfamiliar listeners away, the edited

A NEW SOLUTION

The strands of our interpretive knot described up to this point, along with the attempts to untie it, narrow the fundamental problem of 1 Cor 14:20-25 down to the translation of the dative phrases in v. 22 and how it affects the assertions' relationship to their context. I maintain that Paul's primary concern in the passage is the conversion of the unbeliever. But the traditional understanding of the assertions' dative, indirect objects divides the signs' interest in the unbeliever to include the believer as well. Translators and interpreters typically render the dative phrases as *existing* indirect objects. Such a translation of the assertions leads the reader to suppose that Paul is considering each

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text explicitly describes God as its origin. To say the exemplar depicts glossolalia as ineffective to lead unbelievers to a conversion is not to say it depicts it simply as a pagan phenomenon. Paul has already established that tongues is a gift from the "same Spirit" as the others (12:10); it is just *not useful in a public setting* without interpretation. What is true for believers in the previous section (14:1-19) is true for unbelievers in the present one.

Second, Smit, "Tongues and Prophecy," pp. 180-82 argues that Paul contrasts the rhetorical functions of tongues and prophecy. He claims that glossolalia is a "sign" (shmeion) which, according to the handbooks, is not a compelling proof by itself. Prophecy, on the other hand, is a "refutation" (elegco") which cannot be invalidated: it is irresistible proof. Paul is informing the Corinthians, apparently as a teacher of rhetoric, what kind of verbal manifestation will convince outsiders that the worshippers are not pagans, but Christians. In the same way handbooks like *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum* define for their pupils the differing values of technical proofs; namely, the "sign" (shmeion) and the "refutation" (elegco"). The problem with this analysis is that Paul never calls prophecy an elegco". Only the verb elegcetai appears in the illustration (v. 24). Further, the ellipsis in the second assertion calls us to repeat the predicate already mentioned in the first assertion (ei" shmeion eisin). The missing predicate in v. 22b necessitates we seek to fill it in with what precedes in a parallel statement, not with a noun which is merely inferred from a verb appearing later in the passage. It is too difficult to accept that Paul would leave out a new word and idea which he intends to contrast with a word he already used. Finally, the handbooks not withstanding, Paul is not describing a speech, he is describing a worship meeting. The difference between shmeion and elegco" in ancient rhetoric is irrelevant to the difference between tongues and prophecy during ancient worship. 1 Corinthians 14:20-25 calls both tongues and prophecy "signs."

sign's impact on existing believers and existing unbelievers, not their impact on visiting unbelievers, as do the exemplar text and illustrations.

Therefore, I propose a translation of v. 22 that keeps the unbeliever's conversion at the center of the text and preserves, indeed establishes, the coherency and flow of all the text's components.

> Therefore tongues are a sign,
> not resulting in believers,
> but resulting in unbelievers;
> But prophecy [is a sign],
> not resulting in unbelievers,
> but resulting in believers.

Translated in this way the assertions follow cleanly from the preceding OT exemplar. There "other-tongues" and "lips of others" comprise a method the Lord used vainly to rouse obedience from "this people." For not *thus* did they listen. Consequently Paul asserts that, in contrast to the Corinthians' opinion, tongues will not lead its hearers to faith; it will in fact lead to unbelievers. Prophecy, on the other hand, will not lead to unbelievers (like tongues will), but believers. Paul's ensuing illustrations envision a typical Corinthian worship scenario with visitors present. Of course the results forecasted by the exemplar and assertions now occur in accordance with each utterance. Tongues confound the visiting outsiders; prophecy convinces them and they reply accordingly. So the present translation unravels the knot because the focal point remains the same throughout the entire passage: the conversion of the outsider. I base my translation on the following grounds.

Context

I believe the immediate context demands we see the whole passage addressing the relationship of tongues and prophecy to the conversion of visiting unbelievers. The Isaiah quotation deals with glossolalia's effect exclusively on unbelievers. The illustrations deal with the effects of glossolalia and prophecy exclusively on those visiting the Christian worship meeting.[17] Obviously this exhibits a specific inclination only

[17] With the implication that they are outsiders either because they are not believers in Kurio" !Ihsou" (12:3, thus apisto") or not familiar with the meaning of the pneumatiko" known as glwssai (14:16, idiwth"). Note that the

toward the unconverted before and after v. 22. Therefore, we should seek to reconcile the assertions to their immediate context, not *vice versa*. Stated a bit differently, the absence of a believer from the illustrations (and exemplar) should strongly insinuate that the assertions *which they illustrate* might somehow not deal with believers either. In addition, the illustrations define those who provide the signs as existing members of the worshipping body and those who hear them only as those who are not yet a part of the *whole* church.[18]

Therefore, the appearance of idiwth" in the illustrations is not a sudden, new, unrelated addition to the apisto" of the assertions. The assertions, according to my translation, speak of *potential* believers or unbelievers, not existing ones. The assertions deal with two possible terms in use for visitors confronted with tongues or prophecy: unbeliever (apisto") or believer (o pisteuwn). The visitors themselves, before the confrontation, fall into one of two existing categories: unbeliever or novice. So the present translation accounts for the apparently inexplicable addition of "novice" (idiwth") to the passage's equation.

The broader context also suggests that 1 Cor 14:20-25 deals exclusively with the conversion of visitors. Chapters 12-14 form a section which "concerns the spirituals" (12:1) within community worship. As is commonly recognized, these chapters argue for the Spirit's gifts as sources for and expressions of the unity of the Christian community dictated by love and aimed at edification. Having established the unity of the body and Spirit (ch. 12) and the superiority of love (ch. 13), Paul now applies these principles to the use of tongues and prophecy during worship (ch. 14). Only the gift which is intelligible to the assembled worshippers will edify them. So glossolalia without interpretation does not come from love. It is incomprehensible to its hearers and cannot build the body. The Corinthians must prefer prophecy "in the church" to tongues so they can "instruct others" (14:19). Paul argues this very point till v. 19.

At v. 20 he makes a definite transition. By now Paul has established the *maturity* of those who live according to love within the community,

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scope of this paper does not include a study of the meaning of these terms. It is enough to say that each has the potential, in Paul's mind, to be turned away by glossolalia or to be converted with the help of prophecy.

[18] !Ean oun sunelqh h ekklhsia olh epi to auto kai pante" lalwsin glwssai", eiselqwsin de idiwtai h apistoi....

seeking the edification of "the other person."[19] Now at vv. 20-21, he calls on them to make a mature decision in relation to yet another group. In my words, the thrust of vv. 20-21 exhorts that "your fondness for tongues is immature; it will not make outsiders listen in the sense of obeying." For 1 Cor 14:20-25 the principle of intelligibility founded on love remains the same as the preceding verses of chap 14, though Paul has now turned to consider those visiting the community. The remaining verses of ch. 14, in light of what edifies the believer and converts the unbeliever, give specific instructions on how to organize their worship "so that *all* may learn and *all* might be exhorted" (14:31), insider and visitor alike.

The Nature of toi" pisteuousin

Is it legitimate to translate this dative phrase as "resulting in believers?" I already argued that the context demands such a rendering, and will add to that below. But here it will help to approach the translation issue from the standpoint of Paul's general use of the substantive participle o pisteuwn or oi pisteuonte". For usually when Paul refers to "the believer(s)" in the present tense he does not simply mean "a Christian(s),"[20] but also includes in the term those who *might or will become* believers.

The exceptions to this point appear in the Thessalonian correspondence where the four occurrences of the phrase undeniably refer to existing "Christians." But note that two qualifying expressions limit the two occurrences in 1 Thessalonians to indicate specific local communities (1:7, "...pasin toi" pisteuousin *en th Makedonia kai en th !Acaia*") or specifically the Thessalonian community itself (2:10, "...*umin* toi" pisteuousin egenhqhmen..."). The participial phrases in 2 Thessalonians are aorist, technically disqualifying them from my consideration of the present tense participles. The references to believers in Romans and 1 Corinthians include any hypothetical believer(s), including potential ones.

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[19] See 13:11. Cf. 3:1-9 and chs. 8-9.

[20] So Gerhard Barth, "pisti", pisteuw," *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, eds. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider, trans. John W. Medendorp and Douglas W. Stott (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), III, pp. 91-97 (92).

Besides 14:22, the only instance where Paul mentions "believer(s)" is in 1 Corinthians is 1:21. Clearly in this instance Paul cannot refer exclusively to existing members of the Christian community. First, nothing grammatically or syntactically narrows the phrase to refer to believers already within the parameters of a certain group or location as in 1 Thess. Second, Paul's stated mission "not...to baptize but to proclaim the gospel" (v. 17) in order "to save"[21] those Jews and Greeks who believe require us to understand "the believers" as inclusive of those who have not yet even heard Paul's kerygma. In 1 Cor 1:21 Paul uses the substantive, present tense participle to define what *kind* of person is saved. If the believer is simply the kind of person who is saved, whether Jew or Greek, then the time – present or future – is irrelevant. The expression is comprehensive and hypothetical; it embraces anyone who already believes or will believe.

Paul's use of the participial phrase in Romans substantiates the present claims. With one exception, each instance of o pisteuwn or oi pisteuonte" in Romans applies to the hypothetical believer(s), not only the existing believers. Rom 4:24 is the only example where the phrase probably refers only to Christians. It is part of a relative clause which ultimately has "us" (hma") as its antecedent, explicitly limiting it only to those whom Paul is addressing.[22] But where hma" narrows the field of believers down in this one example in Romans, pa" or panta broadens it in every other example – still within the context of Paul's proclamation like 1 Cor 1:21 – to include those who might believe.[23]

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[21] swsai is an aorist infinitive of purpose.

[22] ...alla kai di! *hma", oi"* mellei logizesqai, *toi" pisteuousin* epi ton egeiranta !Ihsoun ton kurion hmwn ek nekrwn....

[23] Romans 1:16 is somewhat parallel to 1 Cor 1:17-23 in several aspects, but specifically for my purposes since it speaks both actually and hypothetically of "every believer, first Jew then Greek." See also 3:22; 4:11; 9:33 (in this case pa" is not mentioned since it's not part of the OT reference Paul quotes; however, Paul *adds* pa" to the reference when he quotes it again in 10:11); 10:4; 10:11. The latter verses especially illustrate my point since they speak of believing in the subjunctive mood as a future possibility dependent on the reaction of the one who hears the gospel: "...*if* you believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you *will* (future) be saved...for the scripture says, 'each one believing (pa" o pisteuwn) in him will not be ashamed...'." See also Gal 3:22.

Therefore, according to Paul's usage of the substantive "the believer(s)" when mentioned without an identifying qualifier, we should view it in 1 Cor 14:22 as at least *including* those who might believe. This seems especially true since his only other mention of it in 1 Cor, according to my argument, is inclusive. I have already concluded that the immediate context of 1 Cor 14:20-25 – the Isaiah quotation and illustrations – points exclusively toward the outsider's conversion. So with this certain constraint imposed on v. 22 by its context, added to the potential nature of "the believer(s)" in Paul, it is legitimate to translate the dative phrases in v. 22 as referring, not to existing believers or unbelievers, but potential ones labeled according to the way each sign will affect them.[24]

Concerning the substantive adjective unbeliever (apisto"): Each time Paul uses it outside of 1 Cor 14:22 it refers exclusively to someone outside the community without faith in Jesus as Lord.[25] In fact, the illustrations of vv. 24-25 use "unbeliever" to refer to one who has no faith, not one who *might* not have faith. However, the illustrations actually make the potentiality of "unbeliever" in v. 22 a real possibility. The visiting unbelievers or novices – both potential believers – will respond with or without faith contingent upon the intelligibility of the sign they hear. If they respond to glossolalia by saying the worshippers are mad, they both become "unbelievers" (apistoi). If they respond to prophecy by worshipping and confessing God's presence, they both become "believers" (oi pisteuonte"). The illustrations, coupled with the OT quotation (as we will see below), make the entry of the visitor a critical moment. The impact of the sign on the unbeliever or novice will

[24] Cf. also John 17:20-21a reads: Ou peri toutwn de erwtw monon, alla kai peri twn pisteuoutwn dia tou logou autwn ei" eme, ina pante" en wsin …. Here the participle clearly refers to "believers" who are not yet actual believers. In fact, the NRSV translates in the future tense, "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one." We may also note the use of pante" here is similar to that in Romans. Acts employs the participle in the same way for actual believers by either limiting the present tense form (2:44, epi to auto; 22:19, kata ta" sunagwga") or using an aorist or perfect tense (4:32; 19:18; 21:20, 25). For inclusive "believers" Acts uses the present tense with pa" (10:43; 13:39).

[25] 1 Cor 6:6; 7:12; 10:27; 2 Cor 4:4; 6:14-15.

determine the outcome defined in v. 22 and illustrated in vv. 24-25: believer or unbeliever. Either is a possibility.

Paul's Version of Isaiah 28:11

Paul does not quote the LXX or MT for his version of Isa 28:11 in 1 Cor 14:21, though he appears closest to the MT. In any case, he (or a text unknown to us) subtracts and adds elements which align the quotation with Paul's objective in the passage. Regardless of the extent to which Paul intends to carry any of Isaiah's original context over to First Corinthians, his variations determine the relationship Isa 28:11 has with 1 Cor 14:20-25.

Paul actually quotes Isa 28:11-12, but omits most of v. 12 and picks up the stated consequence at its end.[26] This modification eliminates the reference to the prophet's previous, intelligible message and gives "other tongues" and "lips of others" prominence. In Isa 28 the conclusion that "they would not hear" refers to the prophet's intelligible message of rest. The people did not listen to the prophet in their native language so now they will hear foreign tongues (Assyrian). But Paul recasts their refusal to listen to the prophetic message into some contemporary visitors' *inability* to listen to a glossolalic one and, perhaps, the Corinthians' failure to provide the prophecy that Israel got a chance to hear. He does this by removing the prophetic words and adding "thus" (outw") to point directly back to the tongues, not the prophet's words, as the unheard message. So Paul does not use Isa 28:11(12b) by itself to contrast the strange languages with the intelligible language of the prophet. Instead he uses it to say only, and emphatically, that "other tongues" will not produce listening.

"Thus" (outw"), a demonstrative adverb, describes manner in specific reference to what precedes it.[27] In this case the manner described previously is speaking in other tongues and the action

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[26] NRSV: [(11)]Truly, with stammering lip and with alien tongue he will speak to this people, [(12)][to whom he has said, "This is rest; give rest to the weary; and this is repose";] yet they would not hear.

[27] "outw"," *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, eds. Walter Bauer, William Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), pp. 597-98 (597).

resulting from this method is "this people's" not listening. Its absence from any extant text makes outw" conspicuous here. Either Paul added it as his own gloss, or chose a text that would suit his purpose, to quote an exemplar which pronounces that *the specific manner* of glossolalia will fail to make "this people" listen and obey.

These very differences between Paul's and our versions characterize exactly how Isa 28:11 works in 1 Cor 14:20-25. In 14:20 glossolalia's result of dissuading obedience from "this people" follows (the inserted) outw" directly. Likewise, prophecy's result of evoking a response of faith from the visitor follows outw" directly in 14:25. Both applications of outw" seem to be in apposition to one another, paralleling the two results in the two different signs. This could help explain Paul's omission of Isa 28:12a in 1 Cor 14:20 and why he did not explicitly contrast prophecy with tongues at that point. Furthermore, the second outw" precedes another quotation of the OT from Isa 45:14. Not only does Paul draw a parallel between the two results introduced each time by outw" in reference to the respective signs, but he also draws a parallel through the use of two different quotations from Isaiah.[28] They form an exemplary framework for Paul's argument. We should see the passage, then, a bit differently than the outline at the beginning of this study suggests. I propose the following outline:

1. Introductory exhortation (v. 20)
2. Argument (vv. 21-25)
    a. Exemplar text from OT (v. 21)
    b. Two interpretative assertions (v. 22)
    c. Two illustrations (vv. 23-25a)
    d. Exemplary text from OT (v. 25b)

CONCLUSION

1 Corinthians 14:20-25 consistently addresses one main issue within the argument of chs. 12-14: the value tongues and prophecy have for the conversion of the visiting outsider. Once we re-translate v. 22 to fit its context and the potential nature of the terms "believer" and "unbeliever," we remove the inconsistency between the assertions and illustrations, untying the interpretive knot described above.

[28] Cf. also 1 Kings 18:39 and Zech 8:23.

We may assume that the Corinthians indulged the use of tongues with unbelieving or novice visitors present. Such visitors could have been commonplace during those times when the whole church gathered in one place.[29] In any case, their infatuation with tongues certainly created confusion among outsiders who could not understand. The Corinthians likely felt that a high-powered, ecstatic utterance like glossolalia created an unmistakable sign that would impress non-christians and lead them to a declaration of faith. That is, they felt that "tongues are a sign resulting in believers" (ai glwssai ei" shmeion eisin toi" pisteuousin). In the same spirit of his previous argument Paul replies that such an opinion is immature since it does not truly consider the perspective of the other person, in this case, the visitor from outside the Christian community. If a fellow believer cannot understand glossolalia to say "amen," than outsiders certainly will not know that their thoughts are being revealed and judged. "Tongues indeed are a sign," Paul says, "but not resulting in believers, as you say, but in *un*believers. Prophecy, on the other hand, is the sign that will lead to believers, not unbelievers."

SOME FINAL REFLECTIONS

In conclusion, let me briefly reflect on two matters drawn from 1 Cor 14:20-25 that are relevant to and important for Pentecostals today (or any age). The first concerns the use of spiritual gifts to attract outsiders to the gospel and its family. One thing that strikes me about this passage – indeed, all of chapters 12-14 – is that Paul assumes the supernatural reality of the Corinthians' manifest gifts. Even with their abuses, Paul never questions the validity even of unintelligible, divinely inspired speech. His corrective posture takes the divine origin of the Corinthians' exercise of the gifts for granted as he instructs them how to use the gifts lovingly and effectively to build and convert. Paul's mandate is not to curb spontaneous, supernatural speech, but to employ that form of divine utterance that is more readily understood by insider and outsider alike. Again, it should be heeded that Paul actually assumes that if these zealous, selfish, competitive, carnally-minded and -motivated Christians would just seek to use prophecy more often in love,

[29] Did they have their own "place" in the worship setting (1 Cor 14:17)?

they would have direct and convincing access to other people's thoughts. In other words, Paul respects the resident *power* of the Corinthian congregation and encourages their proper use of it for empowerment and evangelization.

So, in a modern, computer-literate, technologically advanced, media-soaked, and consumer-oriented society in which the worshipping church has become more sensitive to "seekers" than to the Spirit, where is the raw, supernatural power of the "Pentecostal" church? Remember, in our text, Paul did not remove tongues in favor of a more docile, "user-friendly" form of ministerial communication. He appealed for a gift just as "spiritual" and even more extraordinary – the immediate, revelatory prophetic word! When does prophecy really occur among meeting believers that pointedly identifies the hidden thoughts and motives *of visiting outsiders* to the point of their heart-piercing conviction and public conversion? Is it any wonder that our proclamation of the cross and righteousness does not bring about deep transformation in people's lives (if it exists at all)? Is it any wonder that we have now sought to rely on "earthly" ministry methods to perform a "heavenly" mission (e.g., the marketing techniques of popular culture, the mindless continuation of Pentecostal traditions that tame the Holy Spirit more than they rouse Him, or the attention to academia as an idolatrous replacement for power rather than a precious tool). Finally, what can we do as serious scholars within the so-called "Pentecostal tradition" to instruct and inspire our students toward a fresh move of the Holy Spirit – in terms of the revitalization of gifts and power – among our lifeless churches?

The second matter of reflection concerns the proper use and role of glossolalia. In no uncertain terms does Paul insist on the abrogation of uninterpreted tongues as a form of public communication. What then is the point of speaking in tongues? The restraint Paul put on the Corinthians was a narrow one. In fact, he confidently claimed he spoke in tongues more than the Corinthians (of all people). (By the way, how could he have known that?) I suggest that Paul's suppression of uninterpreted public tongues in no way undercuts the great, personal value he placed on the gift. In fact, its consistent private use surely gave rise to more significant public demonstrations in other areas. In any case, do we as Pentecostals, while following Paul's advice in public (at least halfway), assume what he assumed in private? To be consistent with these passages, we must embrace them all and practice what we teach. Has our tradition as a whole – *in practice* – thrown the proverbial baby out with the bath water? Or, are we as "Pentecostal" teachers,

pastors, and leaders leading the way into the vital, largely untapped resources of what we call Pentecost by our own practice and example, like Paul?