

1 Corinthians 14:11

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Therefore if I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh shall be a barbarian unto me.

Analysis

Therefore if I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian—Greek barbaros (βάρβαρος) originally meant a non-Greek speaker (from "bar-bar," the sound of incomprehensible speech). **And he that speaketh shall be a barbarian unto me**—the mutual incomprehension makes both parties "barbarians" to each other.

Paul's point: uninterpreted tongues create the same alienation as a language barrier. The term barbaros isn't ethnic slur but linguistic description—without shared language, we're foreigners to each other. In the church, called to unity (12:13, "one body"), creating linguistic barriers through uninterpreted tongues contradicts the gospel's reconciling power. Pentecost gave intelligible speech (Acts 2:6, "every man heard them speak in his own language"); Corinth's tongues without interpretation creates Babel.

Historical Context

In the Roman Empire, language barriers were real obstacles. Paul uses this common experience to show how uninterpreted tongues fracture rather than build Christian community.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How does uninterpreted speech create 'barbarians' in the church?
2. What's the theological significance of contrasting Corinth's chaos with Pentecost's clarity?
3. What other practices might create barriers ('barbarians') rather than build community?

Interlinear Text

έδαν	οὖν	μὴ	εἰδῶ	τὴν	δύναμιν	τῆς	φωνῆς	ἔσομαι
G1437	Therefore	G3361	I know	G3588	the meaning	G3588	of the voice	I shall be
	G3767		G1492		G1411		G5456	G2071

τῷ	λαλῶν	βάρβαρος	καὶ	ό	λαλῶν	ἐν	ἐμοὶ
G3588	he that speaketh	a barbarian	and	G3588	he that speaketh	unto	me
	G2980		G915		G2980	G1722	G1698

βάρβαρος

a barbarian

G915

Additional Cross-References

Acts 28:2 (Parallel theme): And the barbarous people shewed us no little kindness: for they kindled a fire, and received us every one, because of the present rain, and because of the cold.