

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

ἐὰν G1437	οὖν Therefore G3767	μὴ G3361	εἶδῶ I know G1492	τὴν G3588	δύναμιν the meaning G1411	τῆς G3588	φωνῆς of the voice G5456	ἔσομαι I shall be G2071
τῷ G3588	λαλῶν he that speaketh G2980	βάρβαρος a barbarian G915	καὶ and G2532	ὁ G3588	λαλῶν he that speaketh G2980	ἐν unto G1722	ἐμοὶ me 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.