

1 Corinthians 14:22

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not: but prophesying serveth not for them that believe not, but for them which believe.

Analysis

Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not—Greek *hōste hai glōssai eis sēmeion eisin* (ὥστε αἱ γλῶσσαι εἰς σημεῖον εἰσιν, "so tongues are for a sign"), but for *tois apistois* (τοῖς ἀπίστοις, "the unbelieving"), not *tois pisteuousin* (τοῖς πιστεύουσιν, "the believing"). **But prophesying serveth not for them that believe not, but for them which believe**—the chiastic reversal.

The "sign" is ambiguous (see v. 21's judgment context): tongues serve as a sign to unbelievers—but what kind? Verse 23 clarifies: unbelievers hearing tongues think Christians are mad, hardly a positive witness. Paul's point: tongues don't convert unbelievers (they confuse them), while prophecy edifies believers. The Corinthians had it backwards, prizing tongues in believer-gatherings where prophecy should dominate.

Historical Context

The Corinthians apparently thought tongues would impress unbelievers, demonstrating the Spirit's presence. Paul argues the opposite: tongues confuse outsiders, while prophecy convicts them (v. 24-25).

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. In what sense are tongues a 'sign' for unbelievers?
2. Why don't tongues serve evangelistic purposes according to Paul?
3. How should the distinction between believers and unbelievers shape our corporate worship?

Interlinear Text

ὥστε	αἱ	γλῶσσαι	εἰς	σημεῖον	εἰσιν	οὐ	τοῖς
Wherefore	G3588	tongues	for	a sign	are	not	G3588
G5620		G1100	G1519	G4592	G1526	G3756	
πιστεύουσιν	ἀλλὰ	τοῖς	ἀπίστοις	ἢ	δὲ		
for them which believe	but	G3588	for them that believe not	G3588	but		
G4100	G235		G571		G1161		
προφητεία	οὐ	τοῖς	ἀπίστοις	ἀλλὰ	τοῖς		
prophesying	not	G3588	for them that believe not	but	G3588		
G4394	G3756		G571	G235			
πιστεύουσιν							
for them which believe							
G4100							

Additional Cross-References

Mark 16:17 (Faith): And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues;

