

1 Corinthians 14:23

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad?

Analysis

If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues—Paul imagines a corporate gathering where *pantes glōssais lalōsin* (πάντες γλώσσαις λαλῶσιν, "all speak in tongues"). **And there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers**—*idiōtai* (ἰδιῶται, "uninitiated, outsiders") or *apistoi* (ἄπιστοι, "unbelievers") enter. **Will they not say that ye are mad?** The rhetorical question expects "Yes"—*maineste* (μαίνεσθε, "you are insane, raving").

This is devastating to the Corinthians' view: far from being a positive sign (v. 22), uninterpreted tongues make Christianity look like insanity to outsiders. The word *mainomai* describes ecstatic religious mania (Acts 26:24, Festus tells Paul "you are mad"). Pagan mystery religions featured ecstatic glossolalia; to outsiders, Christian tongues without interpretation looked identical—religious frenzy, not divine revelation.

Historical Context

Corinthian worship apparently featured simultaneous, uninterpreted tongues-speaking. To outsiders familiar with pagan ecstatic cults, this would confirm suspicions that Christianity was another irrational mystery religion.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How would a visitor perceive a worship service dominated by uninterpreted tongues?
2. Why is the charge of insanity ('ye are mad') particularly damaging to Christian witness?
3. What modern worship practices might similarly confuse or repel outsiders?

Interlinear Text

Ἐὰν	οὖν	συνέλθῃ	ἡ	ἐκκλησία	ὅλη	ἐπὶ	τὸ
If	therefore	be come together	G3588	church	the whole	into	G3588
G1437	G3767	G4905		G1577	G3650	G1909	
αὐτὸ	καὶ	πάντες	γλώσσαις	λαλῶσιν	εἰσέλθωσιν	δὲ	
one place	and	all	with tongues	speak	there come in	and	
G846	G2532	G3956	G1100	G2980	G1525	G1161	
ἰδιῶται	ἢ	ἄπιστοι	οὐκ	ἐροῦσιν	ὅτι	μαίνεσθε	
those that are unlearned	or	unbelievers	not	say	that	ye are mad	
G2399	G2228	G571	G3756	G2046	G3754	G3105	

Additional Cross-References

Acts 2:13 (Parallel theme): Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine.

