

1 Corinthians 14:27

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course; and let one interpret.

Analysis

If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course—Paul regulates tongues: kata dyo ē to pleiston treis (κατὰ δύο ἢ τὸ πλεῖστον τρεῖς, "by two or at most three"), and ana meros (ἀνὰ μέρος, "in turn, one at a time"). **And let one interpret** (kai heis diermēneuetō, καὶ εἷς διερμηνευέτω, "and let one interpret").

Paul's specificity is striking:

1. limit tongues to 2-3 per service
2. speak sequentially, not simultaneously
3. ensure one person interprets.

These rules prioritize order and intelligibility. Tongues aren't forbidden, but they're carefully regulated to serve edification. The present imperative diermēneuetō ("let him interpret") makes interpretation non-negotiable.

Historical Context

This suggests Corinthian worship featured multiple simultaneous tongues-speakers with no interpretation—chaos. Paul imposes order: few speakers, sequential turns, mandatory interpretation.

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. Why does Paul limit tongues to 2-3 per service?
2. What's the significance of speaking 'by course' (in turn) rather than simultaneously?
3. How do these regulations serve the edification principle?

Interlinear Text

εἴτε	γλώσση	τις	λαλεῖ	κατὰ	δύο	ἢ	τὸ
If	in an unknown tongue	any man	speak	let it be by	two	or	G3588
G1535	G1100	G5100	G2980	G2596	G1417	G2228	
πλεῖστον	τρεῖς	καὶ	ἀνὰ	μέρος	καὶ	εἰς	διερμηνευέτω·
at the most	by three	and	that by	course	and	one	interpret
G4118	G5140	G2532	G303	G3313	G2532	G1520	G1329

Additional Cross-References

1 Corinthians 14:26 (Parallel theme): How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying.