1 Corinthians 14:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

> So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the air.

Analysis

Except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood—Greek eusēmos logos (εὔσημος λόγος, "intelligible word/clear speech") makes the principle explicit. **How shall it be known what is spoken?** The rhetorical question repeats the pattern (vv. 7, 8), driving home the point. **For ye shall speak into the air**—speaking eis aera (εἰς ἀέρα, "into the air") means speaking to no one, achieving nothing.

Paul's cumulative argument: music without distinction (v. 7), trumpets without clarity (v. 8), speech without intelligibility (v. 9)—all fail their purpose. The phrase "into the air" is withering: uninterpreted tongues accomplish exactly nothing in corporate worship. The edification principle demands intelligibility.

Historical Context

In a culture valuing rhetoric and persuasion, Paul's charge that unclear speech is literally pointless would resonate. Corinthian Christians were wasting their breath—and the church's time—with unintelligible speech.

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. What does it mean to 'speak into the air' in modern worship contexts?
2. How does Paul's three-fold analogy (music, military, speech) build his case?
3. Why is intelligibility so central to Paul's vision of Spirit-filled worship?

Interlinear Text

οὕτως	καὶ	ὑμεῖς	διὰ	τῆς	γλώσσης	ἐὰν	μὴ
So	**likewise**	**ye**	**by**	G3588	**the tongue**	G1437	G3361
G3779	G2532	G5210	G1223		G1100		

εὔσημον	λόγον	δῶτε	πῶς	γνωσθήσεται	τὸ
easy to be understood	**words**	**ye utter**	**how**	**shall it be known**	G3588
G2154	G3056	G1325	G4459	G1097	

λαλοῦντες	ἔσεσθε	γὰρ	εἰς	ἀέρα	λαλοῦντες
speak	**ye shall**	**for**	**into**	**the air**	**speak**
G2980	G2071	G1063	G1519	G109	G2980

Additional Cross-References

1 Corinthians 9:26 (Parallel theme): I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: