

The Truth About Tongues, Part 1

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 14:1–5

Code: 1871

The chapter is dedicated to the truth about tongues, which was not only a major issue in the Corinthian assembly, but is, to put it mildly, a major issue today; and so we speak to the times, as well as interpreting the Bible. Let me begin by saying at the Tower of Babel, God confused the languages of men. And the only other biblical incident that can rival the confusion of language at Babel is the confusion of tongues at Corinth. They had so confused this issue of languages that God had given as a gift, they had so counterfeited it, they had so substituted the reality for the satanic counterfeit that Paul had to write an entire chapter just to deal with that issue.

Now if you've been with us in the past, you will remember that there is a true gift of languages. And when God gave the gifts to the early church, He gave them some miraculous gifts which were designed to be signs that authenticated the validity of the message of the new age. You see, God had spoken in the past by the fathers through the prophets; but in these last days, He has spoken in His Son, and there was a new message; and to let, particularly, the Jewish world know that this was a new era, and there was new revelation, and God was speaking again. There were attendant signs and wonders, and one of those was the ability that the apostles and some who worked with them had, to speak a language they did not know, under divine inspiration. That was the gift of languages.

We learned also that it was always a language, that it was the ability to speak a foreign language. In Acts 2, "Everybody understood in their own language," it says. But as we come to the Corinthian situation – incidentally, the only time that the gift is ever mentioned after the book of Acts is in Corinth, and there because it was so confused and chaotic. But as we come to the Corinthian situation, we find that they had counterfeited the real gift and substituted a pagan, ecstatic kind of speech. The true gift had been confused with ecstatic tongues, which was the counterfeit.

Now such ecstasies and ecstatic speech is very common in pagan religion. And I'm not going to take the time this morning to go from one end of the world and one end of history to the present to prove that to you, I want you to understand that, that this is a very common thing in pagan religion. I was reading an article this week about how common it is among the Zulus in Africa, this kind of ecstatic, gibberish speech; and we've discussed that in the past.

But let me give you a little background on the Corinthian situation. Remember that, for the most part, the Corinthians had allowed the entire world system in which they existed to infiltrate their assembly. For example, they were all hung up with human philosophies, the first four chapters say. They had a hero worship cult just like their society did; chapter 3 talks about that. They were involved in terrible, gross, sexual immorality; chapters 5 and 6 talks about that. They were suing each other in the court; chapter 6 talks about that. They had fouled up the home and marriage, and misevaluated that whole thing; chapter 7 talks about that.

They were all confused about pagan feasts and idolatry and things offered to idols; chapters 8, 9 and 10 talks about that. They had goofed up the proper place of women in the church; chapter 11 talks

about that. They had misconstrued the whole dimension of spiritual gifts; chapter 12 talks about that. And they had lost hold of the one great thing, love; chapter 13 talks about that.

They had let the entire mass of the satanic system that existed in their society infiltrate the church. And once it all came in, in with it came pagan-style of religion, with all of the ecstasies, and all of its eroticisms, and all of its sensualities; they bought the whole bag. And so the whole thing is a confused amalgamation of truth and error. A modern parallelism would be that of Roman Catholicism, which is a combination of Christianity out of the Bible and ancient Baal worship, and the Mother and Child cult that was originally known as Ashtoreth and Tammuz. And the same thing occurred in the Corinthian church. It was Christianity in part and paganism in part, all wedded together.

Now if you study the Greco-Roman world the time of the Corinthian church, you would know that they had various priests and priestesses; and people who were devotees of the gods would go to these great temples, and they would worship these priests and priestesses. And it was very common for a devotee would go into an ecstasy. An ecstasy means to go out of yourself. That's the literal meaning of the word, to go out of yourself. They would literally flip out, and they would go into an unconscious state, in which they would have all kinds of phenomena occur, a psychic kind of phenomena. They would believe that when they went out of themselves, they literally left the body, and they ascended into space, and they connected to deity, whatever deity they were worshiping, and they began to commune with the deity; and once they began to commune with that deity, they would begin to speak the language of the gods.

This was a very common thing in their culture. So that term used in Corinthians, *glōssais lalein*, to speak in tongues, was not invented by Bible writers, but was a term used commonly in the Greco-Roman culture to speak of pagan ecstasy, and going out of the body, connecting with the deity, and in a mystical way beginning to speak the language of the gods, which came out as some kind of gobbledygook and gibberish.

Now the Greeks even had a word for this ecstatic religious experience. You'll be interested to know what the word was. It was the word *eros*. Remember that word? We sometimes translate it as sensual love. But the word is a bigger word than that; it has a broader meaning. The word *eros* simply means the desire for the sensual, or the desire for the erotic, or the desire for the ecstasy, or the desire for the ultimate experience or the feeling.

And the kind of religion they had was erotic religion. It was religion designed to be felt. It was sensual, ecstatic kind of religion. And you'll remember, if you studied those religions, that when they went to those temples and to those priestesses they actually entered into orgies, didn't they. And that whole idea of erotic and sexual and sensual and ecstatic and the gibberish that went on with divine utterances, all was rolled into one big ball under the mystery religions that had spawned in Babylon and had come into the Corinthian society. And I'm not going to take the time to read you all of the information on that, but there is tremendous historical information that tells us that this did occur.

Now I'm afraid that what has happened today in the Charismatic movement is just a reproduction of exactly what happened in Corinth. The church, because of a deadness, and because of years of ignorance of the true work of the Holy Spirit, and because of a lack of really fine Bible teaching in many places, and because of just the dearth of anything really significant going on, people in the church began to reach out, and to want to feel God, and to sense reality, and Satan's counterfeit

came flooding in the door. And what happened now in the Charismatic Movement is simply Corinth revisited. The church has married the system of pagan religion again, and we have developed a sensual, feeling, experiential, erotic kind of approach to religion, only we call it the work of the Holy Spirit, when in fact it is the counterfeit of Satan. If you were to find time to talk with various people who've been involved in it, you would find that some of their experiences are very much in that way – very sensual, very feeling-oriented.

I have a letter in my hand – which I won't take time to read, but probably will incorporate in the book – which is from a lady in our church who was sharing with me the amazing experience that she had when they tried to get her to speak in tongues. And there was the lying on the floor, and all kinds of various things that occurred that were very much oriented toward the emotion and stimulating the feeling, and not the thinking and the mind, as the Word of God would indicate.

Now, to give you another illustration, there's a pamphlet written by a former leader of the Pentecostal Movement in which he gives a testimony, and this is what he says: "Finally, I went to the mission at 328 West 63rd Street, Chicago, and asked only one question: 'Why do I not receive the baptism? What is the matter with me?' The good friends prayed with me and said nothing was wrong, I only needed to wait. Praise the Lord they were right.

"For the first time I knelt at the altar on Sunday afternoon, March 17th. The power began to seize me, and I laughed all through the following communion service. In the evening about 11:00 p.m., I knelt with a few of the friends praying for me. Elder So-and-So placed his hands on my head for a short time, several times during the afternoon and evening. And after some little waiting I began to laugh, or rather my body was used to laugh with increasing power until I was flat on my back laughing at the top of my voice for over half an hour.

"On raising, I found that I was drunk on the new wine, acting just like a drunken man in many ways and full of joy. On kneeling to meet the Lord again, I was suddenly seized with irresistible power of beseechings with groanings that could not be uttered, asking the Lord to have mercy on me a sinner, and telling Him that I wanted to go all the way with Him. The power of this praying was too great for me to endure, and suddenly my eyes opened to see Elder So-and-So, who had been standing a few feet away, fall as though he had been struck. I was relieved, then in a few seconds was straight up in the air screaming 'Glory!' at the top of my voice.

"Again kneeling, my eyes grew dark, and I was rolled over to the floor, lying there for some time nearly unconscious. Then coming to and kneeling, I felt my jaws and mouth being worked by a strange force. In a few seconds, some baby gibberish was uttered, then a few words in Chinese that I understood, and then several sentences in a strange tongue. This turned into singing, and I did not again speak in tongues until Wednesday, three days later."

Now what is going on there? All kinds of feeling experiences, all kinds of emotionalism, all kinds of sensual things in the broadest term of sensual, that is, apprehended by the senses rather than the mind. This was very common to pagan religion. Plato, in his dialogues – and, incidentally, Plato lived from 429 to 347 B.C. before Christ, and in his dialogues, he has page, after page, after page describing these pagan ecstasies of speech.

This was not anything that belonged to Christianity. In Christianity, it was the true gift of languages,

used only when someone who spoke the language was present in order that it might be a sign that God was there, and that God's people were speaking God's truth. Never was it intended to be confused with paganism. But as always, whenever God does something, Satan counterfeits it, doesn't he? And that confuses the issue.

And so Satan's smokescreen to cloud the true revelatory work of the Holy Spirit in the early church were phony revelations and phony visions and phony tongues. And that's why in 1 John, John says, "When somebody comes along and starts telling you they speak for God, you'd better test the spirits." It's easy to fall prey to the phony. And the Corinthians, because they had decided to marry the spirit of the age, were victims.

Now remember, Satan is called the god of this age, Satan is called the spirit who energizes the children of disobedience. Satan is the one who wants to be like God, and Satan appears transformed as an angel of light. He wants to counterfeit reality, he wants the church to buy a phony; that's his business. And so we see in heathenism all that fake; and here in Corinth, it had engulfed the church.

And I'm afraid it's doing the same today. There are no ecstasies, no sensualities, no eroticisms, no going out of yourself ever associated in the New Testament with the true work of the Holy Spirit – never, never. In fact, in 14:32 it says, "The spirits of the prophets must be subject to the prophets." Nobody ever gives up his spirit. Nobody ever loses control. Nobody ever goes out of himself in terms of that which God has designed. And that's why, at the end of the fourteenth chapter, the final word of the apostle Paul is, "Let everything be done decently and" – what? – "in order." This is not the Holy Spirit's way. It is not the Holy Spirit's way to have everybody jumping up, "and everybody has a psalm" – verse 26 – "and everybody a doctrine, and everybody a revelation, and everybody an interpretation, and everybody wanting to speak in ecstasy, and everybody wanting to have a vision," and so forth. That's the confusion of paganism that has engulfed the church.

And I mean it was sophisticated stuff. The mystery religions of Babylon that had dominated the time of the Corinthian culture, they had developed all kinds of rites, and rituals, and vows, and baptisms, and animal sacrifices, and feasts, and fasts, and ablutions for sin, like dunking in a frozen river, or crawling on your knees for miles. They had all kinds of things that were phony religious things, and ecstatic speeches and visions and prophecies were all a part of it. And it had all come to Corinth, and when you went to assemble with the Corinthian Christians, you entered into a situation of absolute chaos, total chaos.

Do you know that twelfth chapter says the people were actually standing up and cursing Jesus in tongues, and people were saying, "Oh, it must be the Holy Spirit"? That's why he says, "The Holy Spirit doesn't call Jesus accursed." Just confusion. The wild frenzy of the Greek paganism became madness in the Corinthian church. And one writer says, "They, like the pagans no doubt, uttered their ecstatic speech with foaming lips and streaming hair."

And, beloved, as much as I wish it weren't true, I'm convinced that today what we see in the Charismatic Movement is the same kind of engulfing of the church in pagan religion. A counterfeit has been accepted, because it impacts the emotions of people who, for a long time, have sat in a church where they never got anything that changed their lives. And so Paul writes the fourteenth chapter to correct it.

Well, let's study the fourteen chapter. Now I want to divide it into three parts. Number one, the position of the gift of tongues, the position of the gift. Number two, the purpose of the gift. Number three, the procedure for the gift. The position is in the first 19 verses. The purpose of the gift is in verses 20 to 25. The procedure for the gift is in 26 to 40. The position, the purpose, and the procedure.

Now watch this one. The position is secondary, the purpose is sign, the procedure is systematic – and those are the three great things that this chapter says: the position, secondary; the purpose, a sign; the procedure, systematic. Now we're only going to have time just to look at the first part of the first point.

First point is the position of the gift. Now Paul wants to talk about tongues, and he wants us to understand, first of all, its position relative to the other gifts. Its position is – what did I just say? – secondary. It's position is secondary. Now he gives us a reason. The first reason is in the first five verses, and there are two others that we'll consider next week.

Reason number one: Why is the gift of tongues secondary? Why is it less than the gift of prophecy? Because that's his comparison. Reason one is that prophecy edifies the whole congregation. Tongues is useless to edify, okay. That's principle one. Prophecy is superior to tongues because prophecy edifies and tongues does not.

Tongues – now mark this – cannot edify; that's what he's saying. That's what he's saying in 14:1 through 5. And there are two other reasons why the position is secondary, and we'll see those next week; and I don't want to confuse you with them today, so wait until next time. All right, number one then, the first nineteen verses deals with the fact that the position of tongues is secondary; and the first five verses out of that, that it is secondary, because tongues cannot edify, and prophecy can.

Now let me add a footnote. What is the purpose of the church when it meets together? What is its purpose? It is very simple: edification, edification.

Verse 26 of chapter 14 tells us at the end, "Let all things be done unto" – what? – "edification. Let all things be done unto edification," – the end of verse 12, look at that – "that you may excel to the edifying of the church." In other words, the point is edify. The end of verse 4: "He that prophesies edifies the church." End of verse 5, "that the church may receive edifying."

Now all through the chapter, folks, you have the same thing repeated again and again. Verse 31: "You should prophesy that all may learn, and all may be comforted." It's just the same thing over and over and over again, "that you all be edified, that you all learn, that you all be built up." That's the whole point. The church comes together for edification, or to be built up. And Paul says, "Look, tongues cannot edify, especially your kind, which aren't even the real ones," see. That's the basic proposition of the first five verses.

All right, here we go, verse 1: "Follow after love, and desire spirituals, but rather that you may prophesy." Now "follow after love" is really the end of chapter 13, isn't it? He's really saying, "I've just given you the greatest thing, and that is love, and the thing you ought to chase is that."

Chapter 12, verse 31, you remember how it ended, 12:31? And I translated it as an indicative

because of the context. What he's really saying in 12:31, "But you coveting the showy gifts. But you are coveting the showy gifts; but I show you a more excellent way. You're busy chasing the showy gifts, the ego-building ones, the up-front ones, the dramatic ones. And I want to show you a better way; seek love." And he gives them a great statement on love in chapter 13, then he comes back to his same point.

Love, in chapter 13, is like a parenthesis. And in verse 1 of 14, he says, "Now if you're going to earnestly seek something, then earnestly seek love," see. He uses the word the *diōkō* in the Greek, which means to chase, or to run after, or to pursue. And it is often translated to persecute; to be so vehement, and so excited, and so energized, and so after something that you literally persecute that thing. You dog its steps. He says, "If you're going to chase something, if you're going to follow after something, if you're going to run after something, let it be love, let it be love. But continue desiring spiritual." And the word "gifts" is in italics; it just says, "Continue desiring spirituals."

Now this word "desire" could be translated many ways, because it's a kind of a form that could go a lot of ways. But when you study the context, it comes out as an imperative; and it comes out, I believe, as kind of a continuous imperative, so that it would translate this way – now watch: "Pursue love," and then there is a *de* in the Greek, and *de* is like "but." It is not equating equals; that would be *kai*. It's adversative; there is a change here.

So he is saying, "Follow after love, but continue desiring spirituals." In other words, "I'm not telling you to quit desiring gifts." And then go back to 12:31, "You are pursuing the showy things. You should pursue love, but don't stop pursuing gifts," or the spiritual realm literally. In other words, "I don't want you to quit, because you should want the ministry of the Holy Spirit through the gifts of the Spirit. I'm not saying don't have anything to do with gifts. But rather pursue love and continue to seek the spiritual realm, the realm of the operation of the Holy Spirit, the true things that the Spirit of God is doing. But" – now look at the end of the verse – "most of all, most of all, *mallon*, most of all that you should prophesy." You see, tongues are secondary. "When you come together, instead of the chaos, and the confusion, and the gibberish of tongues, should be the clarity of prophecy."

You say, "What's prophecy, John?" We've studied that; I'm not going to take time to do it again. It comes from the Greek word *prophēteuō*. Two words: *pro*, meaning before; *phēmi* meaning speak. It means to speak before. Prophecy is for somebody to speak before somebody else.

That's what I do every Sunday, I prophesy. You say, "I thought it meant to predict the future." No. No. You know the idea of predicting the future never came along until the Middle Ages when the English word took on that meaning. That's never its intention in the Greek. It simply means to speak before somebody. And he says, "Instead of everybody shouting at the same time in ecstatic gibberish, somebody ought to stand up before everybody else and speak the word of God," you see. That's what ought to be going on. Not the chaos and confusion of tongues, but the speaking of those who speak the voice of God.

Now, beloved, sometimes that was revelatory in those days; sometimes it was reiterating revelation already given. But the point that we want to make here is that it was simply that the church was to come together to hear the word of God spoken. Isn't that great? You know what we're doing this morning is right on that. I can promise you, if you come to Grace Community Church, you're going to hear that. You're not going to hear ecstasies, and emotional expressions, and any kind of free-for-all. But you are going to hear some folks speak the word of God, that all things might be done unto –

what? – edifying. We are to gather to hear God speak; and God will use men to speak in His place, men who have the gift of teaching, the gift of preaching, or prophecy.

And so he says, “Rather,” – or – “most of all,” – or – “more than tongues, you should seek that which is intelligible,” see. See, the obvious reason for the inferiority of tongues is nobody could understand what was being said. The only time that gift was ever to be used was when somebody would understand what was being said, like in Acts; or when there was a connection to be made to Pentecost, such as in the repeated occasions in Acts. That was a sign gift, never intended for edification; in fact, totally useless to edify.

How could you edify someone when they didn’t understand it? The only possible edification could come if someone understood, or if it was interpreted so that they could understand. But its purpose was not edifying, that was not it. The purpose was as a sign to show that God was speaking, and that the prophets of the New Testament and the apostles of the New Testament were truly representatives of the voice of God.

Now notice verse 2, and this is important. Here is why tongues is secondary. “For he that speaks in a tongue speaks not unto men, but unto God; for no man understands him; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries.” Now listen to what he said: “He that speaks in a tongue speaks not to men, but to God.” And the Greek literally says “but to a god.”

What you have Paul doing here is saying, “Look, you people, with your pagan ecstasies, are not doing what all spiritual gifts were given to do, that is to speak to men. But rather, your ecstasies are speaking to a God. Nobody understands what you’re saying; you are all wrapped up in speaking pagan mysteries.” Do you see what he’s saying? Those aren’t the mysteries of God; those aren’t the mysteries that Paul gave; those are the mysteries of paganism. He that speaks in a tongue speaks not unto men.

Now let me tell you something, folks. This is a basic, bottom-line truth: all spiritual gifts are given for the purpose of ministering or speaking to men – did you get that? – to men. No spiritual gift was ever given for God, but for men. All gifts are given to build the body of Christ; they are to minister to each other. God doesn’t need us to minister some gift to Him, He’s not incomplete, right? And Paul is saying, “You have fallen down on the very basic use of the gift, and that is that is for men. But what you are doing is not for men, but for a god.” And here you have the anarthrous construction, the absence of an article. Not the God or the true God, but better translated, I think, “a god.” In other words, “You are out of yourselves, connecting to some god, speaking your pagan mysteries, and you have violated principal number one of the spiritual gift, which that it is to be others: other people, other humans. God doesn’t need you to talk to Him in some ecstasy.

Listen. It’s amazing to me that the modern Charismatic Movement falls short at this very point. They repeat the Corinthian error, and they teach that the essential use of tongues is as a private prayer language to God. That is just what Paul is condemning here. He is saying, “You have missed the point. The point is that gifts are to speak to men. But yours are some kind of communion with a god, and nobody knows what you’re saying, and you’re speaking in pagan mysteries.”

God doesn’t want to be talked to like that. It was never God’s intention to be addressed in some speech incomprehensible to the speaker. Go through the Epistles and take out every prayer prayed

in the Epistles. And then when you're done, check every single prayer in the entire Bible, and then check every prayer that Jesus ever prayed, and then check every single thing Jesus ever said about prayer and see if you find any word, anywhere, anytime that suggests that it ever should be unintelligible. You'll never find it.

In fact, Jesus said the exact opposite. Matthew chapter 6 and verse 7. Listen to this: "When you pray, use not meaningless repetitions," – watch this – "as the pagans do." And you know what the phrase there, the word is? Meaningless repetition, battalogeō. Logeō is the word "to speak," from which we get the word logos, which means word. And the prefix is batta. And batta is not even a word, it is what we call in English – some of you English people remember this – onomatopoeia, remember that?

Do you know what an onomatopoeiatic thing is? Like we say a bee goes "bzzz," or a zipper goes "zip," or the plane goes "whoosh." That's not a word, that's what's called onomatopoeia. It's kind of a figure of speech.

Well, battah isn't a word either. What He's really saying – the literal Greek is, "When you pray," – He says – "when you pray" – in Matthew 6:7 – "don't say, 'Battah, battah, battah,' – or – "don't go to God with 'whoosh, bzzz, zip.'" That's the whole idea. That is not the kind of communication that God is interested in, that is what the pagans do. In other words, even in Jesus' time, Jesus recognized a sort of stammering, stuttering gibberish being offered by pagans to their gods, and He says, "That is exactly what I do not wish you to do when you pray to the Father."

"Always we are to pray intelligibly. Always we are to pray with the understanding," says Paul. "Always, we are to understand what we say and to speak clearly to God."

When Jesus went into the garden to pray to the Father, He didn't talk in some heavenly language. Why should you? When Deity communed with Deity, it was spoken in a language that was clear. When Jesus stood by the grave of Lazarus about to raise him from the dead, He prayed; and John heard every word he prayed and wrote it down in just the way He said it; it was clear. You study John 17, you listen to the private prayer between Jesus and the Father, it's all very clear, translated beautifully into English from the original language.

The carnal Corinthians, however, like current Charismatics, I'm afraid, with their desire for the showy, and the attention-getting, and the ego-building, and the emotionalistic gift of tongues were using it as a badge of spirituality, and they were saying, "Oh, I have reached such a spiritual plateau. I can now talk to the eternal God in my own private language."

Beloved, that is pure paganism, pure paganism. And so he says, "You have missed the whole point. You don't speak to men with the true gift, you're speaking to a god in some kind of mystery." And the mysteries that they believed were some secrets, some little hidden secrets that only the initiated would know. And you only got those when you got into your ecstasy, and you went out of your body and you connected up with your god, and then you got these secrets, see.

Beloved, you know something? Everybody in the church is initiated. Everybody in the church has all the mysteries – right? – no secrets. "So" – he says – "you missed the point. Tongues don't minister to people, not the way you do it – not your tongues, not your languages – because no one even knows

what you're saying. But" – verse 3 – "he that prophesies speaks to men." You see?

"That's what I want you to do, because you'll speak to men; and three things will happen: edification, exhortation, and consolation. You will speak the word of God. And you know what'll happen? Boy, things will take place in their lives. They will be built up, first of all. Secondly, they will be encouraged to a new kind of behavior; and, thirdly, people will be comforted in their agonies and their hurts. That's what I want you to do. When you come together, I want to hear the word of God proclaimed, not battah, battah, battah."

Verse 4: "He that speaks in an tongue edifies himself; but he that prophesies edifies the church." Which is better? Which is better? What's Paul trying to say? What's the point of the whole chapter? Edify – what? – the church. Edify the church. Edify the church.

Edifying yourself is not the point. Listen, beloved, you were never given any spiritual gift for yourself, never, never. And if a person takes a spiritual gift and turns it to himself, he has prostituted the gift – that's right – because it's for others. It's to build the body.

You say, "Well, it says right here, John, 'You speak in an unknown tongue you edify yourself.'" Yeah, but you don't edify the church, and that's the whole point: you don't edify the church.

You say, "But if it's translated, you edify the church." All right, then it was the gift of interpretation that edified, not the gift of tongues. The gift of tongues is useless to edify the church – right? – because nobody knew what you're saying. That's what he says to the Corinthians. "With all of that going on, even if the real gift happened to be used, even if somebody popped up with the real thing, it wouldn't edify anybody in and of itself, it would have to be translated." That's what he says at the end of verse 5, "except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying."

And you know what's wonderful? When the true gift was used, and when it was used as a sign, and when God did want to use the true gift, and it happened to be used with some Christians there, God would always have somebody interpret so that it would not go without meaning to the church; because even when the true gift was used which couldn't edify, God had the gift of interpretation so that it would edify, because God didn't want anything going on in the church that didn't edify and build up. But the way the Corinthians were doing it was chaotic; and they had determined that just in and of itself, it would edify the church; and it won't. And when people do it for their own self sake, they are trying to edify themselves.

And you know something? That's a second perversion. Your gift was not only meant for men, not God; secondly, it was meant for men, not you, see, not you. And yet Donald Gee, a well-known Charismatic, says, "The revealed purpose of the gift of tongues is chiefly devotional, and we do well to emphasize the fact." And Larry Christenson says, "One speaks in tongues, for the most part, in his private devotions. This is by far its most important use and value." End quote.

We see that is the very opposite of what Paul is saying. Number one, he is saying, "Your gift is not to speak to God." And number two, "Your gift is not for you." You see, the whole point is it's for them, it's for them, it's for them. And so if you seek to edify God, you're out of line. If you seek to edify yourself, you're out of line. And there's almost sarcasm here: "He that speaks in an unknown tongue edifies himself."

You know, Paul has already kind of knocked down that self-edification thing. He's kind of dealt with that, I think, rather pointedly. If you go back with me for a minute to chapter 8, I'll show you what I mean, and verse 10.

And you remember, here we've got a situation of meat offered to idols, and Paul is saying, "Well, now, you know, it's not wrong to eat meat offered to idols. But there are some weak Christians who think it's wrong; so don't do it, or you'll make them stumble, see. You'll make them stumble because they feel this is wrong."

So verse 10: "For if any man sees you, you has knowledge," – you're mature; you're a big, strong Christian – "sit at a table in the idol's temple, and you eat the idol's meat," – and you're right there doing your whole thing – "the conscience of him that is weak is built up" – or edified, exactly the same word that is used in chapter 14 – "is edified to eat those things offered to idols; and through your knowledge," – when he does that – "the weaker brother perishes. In other words, you could edify somebody to their harm." Do you see the point?

He uses the same term. Edification can be for good, or edification can be for bad. If you use a gift to build up the church, it's for good. If you use a gift just to build yourself up, that's an act of selfishness, and that's bad. The word "edify" – I'm only trying to point out – can be good or bad, so you have to find some qualifying principles.

Now go over to 10, the tenth chapter, and further look at verse 23. "All things are lawful for me," – I had the gift of tongues, let's say, I could use it if I wanted – "but all things are not expedient; all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not." Edify who? Verse 24: "Let no man seek his own" – if you will, edification – "but every man another's edification." Do you see the point?

In other words, "All things might be okay for you. But don't do them because they're okay for you; do them because they're going to mean something to somebody else." That's the point of all spiritual gifts: "They're not for God, and they're not for you; they're for the church. So when you come together, instead of everybody seeking his own expression and his own edification, love does this." First Corinthians 13:5, "Love seeks not its own." See the point? That's what he's trying to say.

And so the gift is not supposed to be directed to God; it is not for self-edification. Tongues can't edify the church, though they may give you a little thrill. Even if those people had the true gift, and they would use the true gift on their own and get a sort of self-edification, Paul says, "You see, that's a misuse, that's a misuse. You use it for what God intended it to be used. Otherwise, you may speak with the tongues of men and angels; but since you seek your own edification, you have not love, and you've become as" – what? – "sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal."

Now finally in this section, Paul balances his strong words on the secondary nature, and the uselessness of tongues to edify by acknowledging that there was a true gift, and that it did have a true place, in verse 5: "I would that you all spoke with tongues." You say, "Paul, why did you say that?" Boy, there are so many good solid evangelicals who wish that wasn't in the Bible, because the Charismatics say, "See, I wish you all spoke in tongues."

But, you see, you've got to take it in the light of other Scriptures – the end of chapter 12, for example,

in verse 30: “Do all the gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?” And what’s the answer implied by the Greek construction? “No.” And verse 11 of 12, “But all these gifts work in the one and the very same Spirit, who gives them to every man severally as He wills.” You say, “Well, why does Paul say, ‘I wish you did,’ if he knows they can’t?” Well, that’s hyperbole. For example, go back to chapter 7 of 1 Corinthians, I’ll show you an interesting thing.

Chapter 7, verse 7, 1 Corinthians. He’s talking about marriage here, and he says, “Marriage is great, a good thing.” In verse 7, he says, “But I would that all men were even as I myself.” In other words, “I wish you were all single.” Now is that an actual statement or an actual divine mandate? No. That’s wishing the impossible for the sake of emphasis, isn’t it.

And that’s exactly what he is doing in 1 Corinthians 14. He’s saying, “Hey, I’m not downplaying this thing. There are some ways I wish that everybody had the real gift.” Boy, wouldn’t that be great. We’d all have that real...

But he knows that’s not true, that’s not going to come to pass. It’s hyperbole to emphasize against his strong words denying the primacy of tongues, to emphasize there is a true gift. “But, oh,” – he says – “much more that you prophesied. If I had my way, it would be fine if everybody spoke in tongues. But, wow, if everybody was a proclaimer with the gift of prophecy.”

But that, too, isn’t going to happen either, is it? He’s just sort of saying, “If I had my way, I’d wish everybody had that gift; for greater is he that prophesies than he that speaks with tongues.” Why? Because unless it’s interpreted, the church can’t be edified. Unless it’s interpreted, it doesn’t do any good to the church.

And, in fact, I’ll tell you something else: those people who think they have some great thing going in their private prayer language with a god, that doesn’t do anything good for them either, because there’s no knowledge of what their saying; consequently, there’s no learning in the mind; consequently, all it is is sensual ecstasy. It’s a feeling, it’s an emotion; and Christianity, beloved, has never been predicated on a feeling, never.

So Paul says, “There is a true gift,” which, as we saw from 13:8 has since passed away. Remember that? “Tongues shall cease.” And if you have the true gift, that’s fine. And it has its purpose, as we will see later in the chapter, as a sign. But when the church comes together, let it be to prophesy and to proclaim the word of God.

What does it say to us? Two things. You ready? Number one: When the church comes together, what does it come together to do? To hear the word of God. Hey, we’re right on target, aren’t we? Secondly, we need to be careful, beloved, to prevent religious pagan forms to infiltrate the truth of God’s pure church – right? – like they had.

There’s an interesting little footnote here, just kind of snuck in there. Do you notice in verse 2 and in verse 4 where it says “tongues,” that the King James people have stuck the word “unknown” in there. Do you notice that? But down in verse 5 where it says “tongues,” they don’t. Do you know why? It seems as though they put the “unknown” in there with the singular and left it out with the plural. And some Bible scholars believe that that’s because when Paul was using the singular, he was referring to their ecstatic gibberish, which all was one kind: a tongue, a gibberish. But when he refers to the

true gift, it is languages, like in Acts, when every man heard him in his own language. And so in verses 1 to 4, he's saying, "Your false gift is all wrong." But in verse 5, "The right thing is all right when it's interpreted in its place."

Beloved, let's be sure of these two things: one, that we come together to hear the Word; and two, that we are on guard. Satan hasn't changed his tactics at all, and he always seeks to infiltrate the church. And, listen, beloved; it's so dangerous to seek something that God is not giving, because you're wide open to Satan's counterfeit. Let's pray.

Father, thank You for our time this morning, as we've just shared from this text. And we pray somehow, Lord, that these thoughts would find lodging in our hearts and bear fruit. Help us to deal with those who might disagree with us with great love and affection, and admonish them as brothers, as Paul said. Help us to hold fast to what we know is true. Help us to seek, beyond all things, to keep the church pure and focused around the Word of God; and we'll give you the glory in Jesus' name. Amen.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2024 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<https://www.gty.org/about#copyright>).