

Counterfeit Gift of Tongues 2

Teaching of 1 Corinthians

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Bible Text: 1 Corinthians 14:1-28

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We are turning this evening to 1 Corinthians chapter 14, 1 Corinthians chapter 14. We are going to read what, to many, is a very mysterious passage and yet I hope to be able to show that most, if not all, of the mystery can be fairly simply removed. It is not meant to be mysterious and incomprehensible and I think it has become so only because of the way in which has been treated as people have come to impose their views upon it. They are guilty of what technically is called isogesis instead of exegesis. In other words they are reading into rather than reading out from the text.

So we will read it first and then, as the Lord enables, we will come to look at it.

1 Corinthians 14 verse one.

Follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy. For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries. But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort. He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church. I would that ye all spake with tongues, but rather that ye prophesied: for greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying.

Now, brethren, if I come unto you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you, except I shall speak to you either by revelation, or by knowledge, or by prophesying, or by doctrine? And even things without life giving sound, whether pipe or harp, except they give a distinction in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped? For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle? 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. There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world, and none of them is without signification. Therefore if I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh shall be a barbarian unto me. Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual

gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church. Wherefore let him that speaketh in an unknown tongue pray that he may interpret. For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful.

What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also. Else when thou shalt bless with the spirit, how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say Amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest? For thou verily givest thanks well, but the other is not edified. I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all: Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue. Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men.

In the law it is written, With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that will they not hear me, saith the Lord. 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. 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? But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all: And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth.

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. 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. But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God.¹

Verse 39 and 40:

Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues. Let all things be done decently and in order.²

The Lord will add his blessing to this rather lengthy reading of his Word, but I wanted us to get the entire reading.

¹ 1 Corinthians 14:1-28

² 1 Corinthians 14:39-40

The passage we are looking at tonight is, in many ways, the all important passage on the subject of speaking with tongues. My subject this part two of one that I started a couple of sabbath evenings ago and that is the gift of tongues and the modern counterfeits of it.

Let me quickly sort of go over what we have done thus far so that we will slip right into 1 Corinthians 14, some preliminary considerations that you should keep in mind. There was a gift of tongues in the apostolic church. The tongues given were actual human languages that God miraculously gave to his people so that they could—as they did in the day of Pentecost—preach his Word to foreigners in their own language.

This gift of tongues was one of a number of sign miracles or sign gifts in the New Testament Church. These sign miracles and sign gifts were—by divine declaration in the Word—they were for a particular purpose and they were given for a limited time.

According to Paul in 1 Corinthians 13 verse eight, these sign gifts and miracles would be done away with. And what does away with them is called that which is perfect, the coming of that which is perfect.³ That is a very, very important statement. It is not exactly to my point tonight so, since Dr. Barrett has already warned you this is a long study, I had better not spend time going into that. That will be for another time.

It is interesting, however, that it does not say the gift of tongues will be done away with by something else happening. A different expression is used and it says that they will cease of themselves. I think Dr. Barrett's translation of the Greek text there is as good as any. "They will peter out." That is what he says about the gift of tongues. These tongues will peter out.

So the genuine gift of tongues was never intended to be permanent in the Church throughout all ages.

Now in a nutshell this is what the Word of God teaches regarding the genuine gift of tongues. What modern Pentecostalists and Charismatics claim doesn't even remotely resemble the gift of tongues as it is described in the Bible so that even if the true gift were still available today, if it had not long ago petered out, it still wouldn't lend any credibility whatsoever to what is happening in the modern tongues speaking movement. It is far removed from what is called, generally, the Pentecostal Experience.

Now, Pentecostalists usually reply and I will hear—quote—the document of one of the largest Pentecostal organizations in the world and they are better than most in that they do recognize that the gift of tongues is a gift of foreign languages and not gibberish, but they say that the speaking of tongues in this instance—that is in the experience of God's people throughout the ages—is the same in essence as the gift given in Acts chapter two so that the gift in 1 Corinthians 14 is, they say, exactly the same as the gift in Acts chapter two, but different in purpose and use. And we will, of course, to remember that in a little while.

³ See 1 Corinthians 13:8-10

So the answer when we say to Charismatics, “What you are pushing doesn’t line up with what the Bible says,” they say, “1 Corinthians speaks of other tongues, ecstatic utterances, not just actual languages,” but sometimes they will say, “prayer tongues or angel tongues or heavenly tongues,” different kinds of tongues. They are ecstatic utterances. And these folk today will claim that the tongues are given for a different purpose than those in Acts chapter two. They are intended to for us devotionally, not, as Acts two, evangelistically. They are intended for devotional, personal use in the Church or in private, not a proclamation to the world anymore that people may hear in their own language, but now a private speaking—usually in an ecstatic tongue—though, as I have said, some would say in an actual foreign language a private use of that in personal or corporate worship.

Now the great text that is chosen in support of that is 1 Corinthians chapters 12 through 14, but especially chapter 14 and that is why we are paying so much attention to that tonight.

When we examine 1 Corinthians 14 we discover that it is not a friend at all of what is going on in the modern tongues movement. When we get through 1 Corinthians 14 we will find that the modern—quote—gift of tongues is not an evidence of the working of the Holy Ghost. It is not a sign of the fulness of the Holy Ghost. I still continue to be amazed that Charismatics are forever saying, “This is the sign to the believer that he is filled with Holy Spirit,” when, as we have just read tonight, tongues are a sign not to them that believe, but to them that believe not. Nothing could be more clear or definitive. Nothing could be a declaration intended to get the message over to us more clearly than that. And yet despite it we are constantly being told this is the sign to the believer that he is filled with the Holy Spirit. This is not a sign of God’s fulness. This modern so-called gift is not a genuine gift of God at all. But, as I think we will see, it is a counterfeit of a gift that by God’s design long ago fulfilled its purpose and petered out in the Church. The true gift petered out as Paul said. Yet we have this claim of its continuing presence. But when we examine what the Bible says about the true gift and what is happening, today we find that they do not line up at all.

So tonight we are going to look at 1 Corinthians 14, Paul’s argument against the counterfeits of the gift of tongues.

Now this is the difficult part. Well, it is all going to be difficult because I am going to ask you, again, to do what preachers don’t often ask their people to do and that is to think. Most people come to church to anything but think. Somehow or other the notion has got around that church is a place where you go to laugh, carouse, have entertainment, but don’t think. Well, this is something that is going to cause you to think.

We start off with some principles of interpretation. You see anywhere in the Bible, *anywhere* in the Bible, when you go to explain a particular text or a particular statement or sometimes just an expression or a Word you have got to understand that phrase or that verse or that statement didn’t drop down out of heaven in a little box of its own with a

pink ribbon, that it is there in perfect isolation from everything else. That is part of an argument. In other words, it is with in a context. And the first principle of interpretation is this: That context is vital to our understanding of the details.

Now when we look at 1 Corinthians 14 the context is absolutely vital. I am not going to go down the line that many preachers have gone down simply because most people have done it. You will not need me to prove it. It is amazing that 1 Corinthians is the only epistle that deals with the gift of tongues. And yet this is the most backslidden and carnal of the churches. You look at the list of sins going through this church and then you see them in operation even as they are speaking in their tongues here and you will realize there is something radically wrong. So you could actually mount a strong argument that because it is in Corinthians—and, say, not Ephesians or Philippians or Colossians or the Thessalonians—that Paul is dealing with the gift of tongues. He never mentions it to them. You could mount a strong argument that the very presence of this is actually a mark of carnality and not of advanced spirituality.

But I want to deal with it in a different way. This is written to the Corinthians. Now some people in Corinth did possess the genuine gift of tongues. Let me explain. The gift of tongues was not God clicking his fingers and saying, “You can now speak French and that is it. You speak French for the rest of your life,” as if you have just gone to heaven’s university and you have graduated in a second of time and you speak French. No, no. There is no warrant to believe that a person who got the gift of tongues could just speak one other language. You will notice it is in the plural. It is the gift of tongues. And the gift was that by a miracle of God and the working of his Spirit in the speaker, that person could go and facing people of a foreign language or different foreign languages, he went from place to place, he could preach to them in their own tongue without ever having learned it.

It is not that he suddenly became an expert in some singular foreign language. He had the ability to go and speak the gospel. What Acts two says, “The wonderful works of God to people in their own tongue.”⁴

And people in Corinth had that gift. We know that because chapter one verse seven says that this church comes behind in no spiritual gift. They were not behind in the gifts that were active in the Church. So let’s admit right away. There were people there with a genuine gift of tongues.

Others, however, seemed to have something else. Most commentators come to this passage and they find evidence of ecstatic utterances. Now that is just a nice way of talking and saying there were people who were speaking gibberish. Ecstatic utterances are people who are worked into an ecstasy and they are making sounds, but they are not of any language on earth, ecstatic utterances or ecstatic gibberish.

Most commentators believe—and this is true of Pentecostal commentators and non Pentecostal commentators—believe that there was the evidence of that in Corinth. Many of

⁴ See Acts 2:11

them, indeed, see nothing else but ecstatic utterances and there, I think, they are dead wrong. To make it the only thing that is in evidence in 1 Corinthians 14 is a mistake. But that it is there, I think, could well be granted.

Remember this is Corinth. Corinth was a seat of the mystery religions. In the mystery religions speaking in tongues—in the sense of ecstatic utterances—was commonplace. Those who were supposed to be vehicles of divine revelation to the heathen people would often speak in these so-called heavenly languages. It would be gibberish on earth, but they were thought—as they were caught up in an ecstasy in the mystery religions—they were thought by the people to be extra specially blessed and extra specially authoritative because of these ecstatic utterances.

It would appear that some people brought that from their heathen background with them into the Church and counted this the highest form of communication so that the fact that they couldn't understand them was not something that made them think less of it, but actually would make them think more of it.

It is not hard to see how that would happen. Actually, if you have ever been to a Pentecostal meeting you will know how it could happen. I spoke two weeks ago and I talked about how in Pentecostalist meetings people are brought into a room and they are taught how to start to speak with tongues. And I got an email from a man who had been watching on SermonAudio and he said, "I have been there. I was one of those people that they started to coach. These are the sounds you make."

In other words, there is this copycat thing. That happens in many, many places. And it is not difficult to see how it would happen in Corinth. The only thing is they couldn't speak the foreign languages so they end up speaking gibberish.

Then you had another thing happening in Corinth and I think there is very clear evidence of this as I will show as we go on. Remember Corinth was a city of many strangers. It was a seaport or it had a seaport nearby and many strangers would come in. It is certainly—think from the description of 1 Corinthians 14—evident that there were people of different language backgrounds coming in. And they would be in the main body. It would be, for example, if I could give you an example that would make it clear. When our Korean church was meeting here they met in the Sunday afternoon for their own church. Some of those folk, however, came here Sunday morning. Most of them could speak English, enough to pick me up. Others could not speak English.

Now if you could just imagine one of them coming into our meeting or coming into our prayer meeting and they start speaking Korean. It is a foreign language.

What does it mean to me? Absolutely nothing, not a thing in the world. I think I know two Korean words. Mrs. Lee, senior, was able to teach me those. And her son David hammered them into me and after many hours of trying I have got two Korean words. So if they said anything beyond that I am lost.

Now that is what you would have happening in Corinth. You have the three things. You have the genuine use of the gift of tongues to give the gospel to people who otherwise would not be able to understand it. You have got ecstatic utterance of people swept by emotion, seeking to get into the act as it were. And then you have got people using their own tongue. But practically nobody in the body would understand it.

So it is a complex situation that Paul is addressing. Think of the mixture that this kind of situation would have produced and the format of the meetings they had in Corinth where it is sort of an open brethren type of meeting where they would... you can stand up when you like. You want to announce a hymn, you do it. You want to lead in prayer, you do it. You want to read the Bible, you do it. You want to bring a message, you do it. Whatever you feel like doing at that time, it is an open format.

That is the kind of thing they were having. Now, if you imagine that kind of a format of a meeting and somebody getting up and he is speaking Greek. Somebody else speaks Latin. Somebody else will speak his own language. Somebody then will interject an ecstatic utterance. You can see that there was a very difficult situation that Paul was seeking to regulate.

Now regulation is the key word here because that leads me to the second principle of interpretation. Not only is the context vital to understand the details, but the second principle is this—and follow this carefully—the Holy Ghost does not need to be regulated. I think a moment's consideration will let you see how simply true that is bound to be. Men need to be regulated. Men's utterance needs to be regulated. Men's claims to be led by the Spirit need to be tested and regulated. But the Holy Ghost must not. He cannot be regulated.

Stop and think for a moment. Can the Holy Ghost ever say the wrong thing? Can the Holy Ghost ever speak at the wrong time? The very thought is absolutely ridiculous. And yet the true gift of tongues was a gift whereby the Holy Spirit was speaking and acting miraculously and directly through men. He was not using—as, for example, in inspiration—using their vocabulary. He was supplying something for which there was no foundation in their consciousness whatsoever. So the Holy Spirit was acting directly and miraculously.

Now I put it to you again. In the genuine gift of tongues could the Holy Ghost ever speak at the wrong time? Could he ever speak out of turn? Could he ever say the wrong thing?

And I put it to you that that is impossible. Therefore the regulations of 1 Corinthians 14 were needed not because of the use of the gift of tongues, but because people were either talking gibberish in some ecstasy or they were misusing a foreign language naturally acquired.

Now, of course, I will be told, “Well, it is not the use of the gift of tongues he is regulating. It is the misuse.”

That leads me to the third principle of interpretation. The gift of tongues could not be misused and it could not be perverted. By definition, again, the gift of tongues is the Holy Ghost speaking directly through a man. How can that be perverted? How can a carnal, selfish, self promoting individual or some deluded soul, how can he induce the Holy Ghost to speak through him and pervert something that only God can do? It is, in itself, a ridiculous, almost a blasphemous idea that the true gift of tongues by the Spirit can be perverted. You see, the simple truth here is that Paul was not dealing with perversions of the gift of tongues. He was not dealing with the misuse of the true gift of tongues. What he was dealing with was a misuse of a naturally acquired language—either because you are born into it or you learned it—or a counterfeit of the spiritual gift as people simulated tongues in this ecstatic gibberish.

Now there is a fourth principle of interpretation. I want you to understand this for it is absolutely vital. And that is, we must understand and we must interpret the modern experience—Pentecostal, Charismatic—we must understand that in the light of the text of Scripture. We must not read the modern back into the text of Scripture.

Now when you get to the text of 1 Corinthians 14 you are going to make some very fundamental discoveries. You are going to discover, first, that the only languages Paul permits to be used in church are languages that are known to the body of people or will be translated for them.

Secondly, you are going to notice—and I hope you watched this as we read through—that there are verses in which Paul speaks of a tongue in the singular. And then he speaks of tongues in the plural. Any time the Holy Spirit speaks of the gift it is always the gift of tongues, plural. There are no exceptions to that. So when he is speaking of the tongue, in the singular, he is not speaking of the special miraculous gift, which, as I say, is always in the plural. But he is speaking of a language that was known to the speaker, but was not known to the body of the people. I want you to understand that. There is a very vital distinction there.

When you get to the text there is one thing that stands out. And, as I say, some Pentecostals like the Article VIII of the Assemblies of God, they recognize this. But most deny it. That is that the evidence is overwhelming that Paul was regulating the use of foreign languages.

For example the word “tongue” is just the word that is used in Acts two and it means a language. In fact, in Acts two it even speaks of a dialect of the language. You people don’t really understand it. You don’t speak English, for example. You speak a dialect of English, a very corrupted dialect at that. But nonetheless you speak a dialect of English. Do you want to know how English is spoken? You have to go Northern Ireland. And if you can understand them you are probably doing better than they are, but we will not get into that.

But you can’t speak of a dialect of gibberish or a dialect of ecstatic utterance. No, these are actual languages in Acts two.

Now the same word is consistently used in 1 Corinthians. Now understand the significance of that. The significance of that is that there is no new idea being introduced by the apostle in 1 Corinthians 14 in any favorable light.

Think again. When he speaks of tongues... In 1 Corinthians 12 verse 10 he speaks of different kinds of tongues. Now you can speak of differing kinds of language. Did you have a look at a tree of, say, the Indo European languages and how they all got to be here? It is fascinating, different kinds of languages and the relations between them.

But that can be said only of actual languages. There is no such thing as different kinds of gibberish. Gibberish is one. There are not many kinds of it. People simulate sounds. They make sounds. That is all they are doing. You can talk about different kinds of language, but not different kinds of so-called ecstatic utterance.

Something else. In both chapter 12 verse 10 and then chapter 14 in three occasions, at least, Paul speaks of interpreting or translating the tongues. Only language can be translated. You can't translate gibberish into language. Only genuine languages can be translated.

And then, of course, I suppose the simplest way of understanding what Paul is saying here is look at verse 16. He says, "When thou shalt bless with the spirit, how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say Amen?"⁵ Paul is saying, "If you are speaking in this tongue that nobody around you is understanding how shall somebody who is unlearned say Amen? The implication is if he had sufficient learning he could do it. In other words, this is a language that may be learned, but most people, of course, haven't done so.

If I were to come here spouting Latin at you...I have to be honest. I don't want to mislead you. I don't think I could do that unless I memorized it. It is too many years ago. But I remember the school I went to they not only taught you Latin, but they wrote an original Latin play every year, I think it was, and the acting and everything was in Latin. It is not too long ago that in grammar schools that is how grammar schools got their name. You learned Latin grammar and when you went to university in the old days your teaching and your defense of everything that you were presenting to faculty had to be done in Latin.

Well, just for a moment let me live in fantasy land that I could remember enough to speak to you in Latin. You know, could you say Amen? No, you couldn't. I may be praying very eloquently, but you couldn't say Amen unless you had learned it. But the fact is you could learn it. And I could tell you if I could learn it anybody could learn it. You could learn it. That is the point that Paul is making. This is real language.

Now, so much for all the principles of interpretation. Once you have got those clear you are ready for the argument. And this is the main thesis. There is something that is missed

⁵ 1 Corinthians 14:16

here. I should really have put this in under context, but I have deliberately left it to here. When Paul was writing to the Corinthians his big theme was not tongues in themselves. I dare say it wasn't even spiritual gifts in themselves—though that was a major subject in his mind. What Paul was doing was setting things in order. He was setting the affairs of the church in order, especially as they related to their worship practices. In chapter 11 verse 34 he said, “And the rest will I set in order when I come.”⁶ In chapter 14 verse 40 he says, “Let all things be done decently and in order.”⁷ This is his big aim in this part of the epistle. He is setting the affairs of the church, especially its worship practices, in order. And in doing that his main argument is very simple, that the great aim of every believer in the Church should be the edification of the whole body and not the gratification of self. That is it in a nutshell.

“Your aim,” says Paul, “has to be the edification of the body, not just the edification of self.”

And he goes on to say that the only legitimate use of foreign languages—whether by divine gift or because you are a foreign language speaker—the only use of foreign languages in the church that is legitimate must serve the purpose of edifying the body. That is his argument.

Now the argument is stated—and I am not going to take time to go through the statement of it. In verse three he says, “He that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort.”⁸ In verse four he continues, “He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church.”⁹ Verse five, he says, “I would love you all to speak with the gift of tongues, but I would rather that you prophesy.” He said that the one who did that was greater than a tongue speaker except he interpret that the church may be edified.¹⁰ And so on verse 12, verse 17 and verse 26. At the end of it he says, “Let all things be done unto edifying.”¹¹ That is the rule. That is the argument.

Now let's see how he sustains it. And he does it in two ways, by instruction and by illustration.

We are going to take it up as we just quickly run through the chapter and these are some of the statements you will find mysterious and I hope we will be able to shed some light on them. Verse two he says, “He that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit,”¹² that is, his own spirit. There is no definite article. It is not the Holy Spirit. “For in spirit he speaketh mysteries.”¹³

⁶ 1 Corinthians 11:34

⁷ 1 Corinthians 14:40

⁸ 1 Corinthians 14:3

⁹ 1 Corinthians 14:4

¹⁰ See 1 Corinthians 14:5

¹¹ 1 Corinthians 14:26

¹² 1 Corinthians 14:2

¹³ Ibid.

What Paul is saying here is that a person speaking either in his own language or in a language he has learned—take my example, one of our Korean brethren coming in and speaking here in Korean, or when I go later this year, as I am supposed to go to Spain and the people there don't speak any English and I get up speaking English—if that is all that happens Paul says that I'm not speaking to men at all. They may hear me, but I am not speaking to them. I am speaking to God. I am speaking mysteries as far as they are concerned.

Now verse four he says, “He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself.”¹⁴ This has been misused by Pentecostals to say this is the meaning of the gift of tongues now. This is something to edify yourself. But Paul is condemning this, not commending it. Paul is condemning this. He is saying, “He that speaks in an unknown tongue...” notice the singular. So we are not dealing with the gift. We are not dealing with misusing the gift. What he is saying is, “You are ignoring proper order. You are forgetting about your place in the church and edifying the body.”

Verse five. He says, “I would that ye all spake with tongues.”¹⁵ How can he say that? Well, remember the gift of tongues was still operative in the Church and Paul was saying, “I would be glad if every one of you could actually speak with tongues. It would be great if every Christian were out there preaching to the heathens of every nation giving them the gospel and telling them the wonderful works of God.”

That is not what Paul was opposing. You have got to understand that. Paul was not opposing the genuine gift of tongues as it was used, say, the book of Acts, the only way it could be used.

In verse five he says that in the church, you know, you are better speaking that people can understand you. That is the meaning of prophesying, speaking that people can understand you, speaking in the language they can understand.

Now if you have got to speak with tongues—and here we are dealing with the gift even—if God in that church setting gives someone a message for those who are of a different language—and, remember, that would very easily happen in the melting pot of Corinth—even then pray that he will interpret. Why? Because the rest of the body needs to get the message. The rest of the body needs to be edified.

In verse six, “If I come unto you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you, except I shall speak to you either by revelation, or by knowledge, or by prophesying, or by doctrine?”¹⁶ What he is saying is in the church no language, not even a legitimate gift of tongues is worth anything if it can't be understood.

¹⁴ 1 Corinthians 14:4

¹⁵ 1 Corinthians 14:5

¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 14:6

Now in the genuine gift there will always be somebody there to whom God is directing it as in Acts two, they each heard in their own language.¹⁷

Again, let me give it in a modern setting. Say we had somebody here from Russia tonight. And the gift has already petered out. There are other ways that God has of reaching the Russian now. But, say this Corinthian situation were still operable today and that Russian came and I was given that gift to speak and address him in his own tongue. I think you could see, first of all, what an impact it would have on him. But all the rest of you speaking no Russian I would need to pray to interpret so that you may be edified as well. No language has any use if it is not to be received by the people and understood by them.

In verse seven through nine he gives an illustration from different instruments. We had all these instruments up here. I'm sure you can tell a trombone from a violin. If you can't you are even more musically challenged than I am. These things have different significations. You know a piano from an organ. But not only so, general sounds, if Mrs. Pinkston were to get here and just stick her hands down in the keyboard—I am laughing because I remember church organist who did that—we knew she had four fingers and a thumb on either hand and a foot at the end of her leg because when she sat down, bang, that was all you heard. I could never make out a tune. Hard to sing with that, but...

If Mrs. Pinkston came and did that or Dr. Dunbar did that you would say, "That's crazy." There has to be some meaning to it. There has to be some significance to it. And that is what Paul is arguing here. Meaningless sounds are just that and they have no place in the Church. Not only that, but he says they are dangerous. "If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?"¹⁸ There is a danger in the church when we sink into meaningless gibberish instead of the exposition of the pure word of God.

And so in verse nine he says you should speak words that are easy to be understood, words that have significance.

Now in verses 10 and 11 he takes another illustration from different kinds of voices. There are many kinds of voices in the world. The word "voices" here is a synonym for languages. There are many kinds of language in the world. And not one of them is without signification. That is very interesting word. The Greek word there is translated in chapter 12 verse two as "dumb idols," idols that do not have the faculty of speech. Paul is talking about speaking with signification. He is speaking about every language known to man has its own signification.

Now I have heard people...I was keeping our brother Edgard Traboulsi going the other day when he was with us saying to a friend of his and mine that, "Do you ever listen to these Arabs speaking? And Edgard was laughing at us as we said it. I said, "They always seem like they are angry, that they are about to chew your head off."

¹⁷ See Acts 2:6

¹⁸ 1 Corinthians 14:7

And he said...my friend said, "It is just because they are intense."

But there is a guttural sound and they are, man, they are getting into it. I haven't a clue in the world whether they are angry with me, mad at me, happy with me, whether they are about to give me a million dollars or hang me. I don't know what they are talking about, but they do, they do. There is significance to the language.

And this is what Paul is arguing in verses 10 and 11. Whatever the language that is used, it must be capable of being understood and it is foolish to do otherwise.

God down to verse 13. If your language is not the language that the people can understand, he says, "Let him that speaketh in an unknown tongue pray that he may interpret."¹⁹ In other words, if you are coming here as a...with a language that we don't understand, if you have come in amongst us with a foreign tongue you want to participate in the worship of the church, you better pray that you may interpret. Otherwise if your language is not that of the people you are not going to do any good. There must be an interpreter present.

Look at verse 14 to 18. This is a very controversial passage and a lot of people have talked a lot of rubbish on it and we have got to understand what Paul is saying. He is talking about praying with the Spirit and with the understanding. And the idea of many people is, "Well, if you are speaking this ecstatic utterance you are praying in the spirit. But your understanding is suspended."

Now let me stop there for a minute. I can't say that I am saying this from wide experience, but I am saying it from the experience that was common Northern Ireland in Pentecostal circles where people seeking the gift were told just to let your mind go blank. Clear your mind of all thought. Suspend all thought processes. And when the mind is clear and blank, then this is when it will happen.

I want to tell you God never—understand that—never calls upon a Christian to suspend thinking, never. And anything that is religious that proceeds upon a blank mind is by definition satanic. The command of Scripture is always think, reckon, get your mind at work on this, meditate. That is the command of Scripture.

So the idea here that Paul is talking about somebody speaking with the gift of tongues and his understanding is completely suspended, I have to say nobody knows the inner workings of the gift of tongues. Nobody knows just how far or in what way their minds were engaged. We can't say that because the Bible doesn't tell us. But what Paul is talking about here is an unfruitful understanding. He is not saying he didn't understand. He is saying an unfruitful understanding is speaking in such a way that the people hearing you don't understand. That is what he is making clear.

So somebody comes in and he is speaking with a language, again, take the example of Latin. He is coming in. It produces no fruit. I could come and read to you some of the

¹⁹ 1 Corinthians 14:13

greatest statements ever made concerning God's truth in Latin and for centuries the great theologians wrote exclusively in Latin. So some of the greatest theological literature in the history of the church is there in the Latin. So if I am to come and read that to you I may be reading the greatest exposition of truth that you could ever hear. But my understanding is unfruitful to you. It produces no fruit in you. And that is what Paul is talking about here in these verses.

So in verse 19 he says, "I had rather speak five words..."²⁰ Do you notice how big a discrepancy? Five words with [or through] my understanding..."²¹ I would rather be understood, speak five words that people could understand than 10,000 words that they couldn't understand.

I think that makes it very clear. Verse 19 and 20. If you use unintelligible speech in the church that is childish, just childish. He says, "In understanding, be men. Don't be children." It is childish. But it is not only childish. It is selfish and it is even possibly malicious. He says, "Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men."²²

Why does he introduce malice here? Because he is dealing with certain people who either through conceit, an ego trip or whatever are pumping up themselves and promoting themselves with their so-called use of tongues, not the gift, but their own particular use of language to pump themselves up. And Paul is saying, "It is not understood by the people. That is not only childish, that is malicious. That hurts the Church of Christ and you must not do it." That is what he is saying.

And then there is this amazing part that Pentecostals don't seem to get. Verse 21 and Verse 22 he refers to what is written in the law, "With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people."²³ And he says, "Yet... they will not hear me."²⁴ So tongues are not a sign to the believer, but to the unbeliever.

Do you know what Paul is saying is, "Don't be so impressed when somebody gets up and speaks and addresses the church in a language that most people don't understand. Don't be so impressed by that." And yet people are impressed. The Corinthians were impressed. The heathen Corinthians were impressed. The Christian Corinthians were impressed. And, listen. Let's be honest. If I were to get up here and speak away in French or Spanish or—well, many of you can speak Spanish—even Vicente would say, "Thank you." But if I were to speak in Chinese or something like that, you know, people would be so impressed.

And Paul said, "Don't be so impressed with that. It is not a sign of spiritual power. It is not a sign of superiority." This is the argument. And never forget it. He is saying,

²⁰ 1 Corinthians 14:19

²¹ Ibid.

²² 1 Corinthians 14:20

²³ 1 Corinthians 14:21

²⁴ Ibid.

“When God reduces his people to hearing his Word in a language they can’t understand, it is an evidence of his judgment on their unbelief.”

In the Old Testament, Isaiah 28:11, you have got the text that is here quoted with stammering lips “For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people.”²⁵ God was saying, “You wouldn’t listen to me when I was preaching to you in your own tongue. I am going to preach to you in another tongue. You will not understand the words, but you will feel the sword of judgment.”

And this was fulfilling Deuteronomy 28:49 when you have got that section where God promises judgment on unbelieving Israel and he said he would send people, “whose tongue thou shalt not understand.”²⁶ When God reduces his people to hearing his message in a language they don’t understand it is not spiritual progress, it is judgment on their sin.

Verse 23 to 28 he now comes to their church service and says, “People come in and you are all talking in tongues and gibberish, foreign languages. Nobody knows what is going on, will they not think you are mad?” In other words chaos will be judged as madness and therefore Paul instituted the regulations. Notice in verse 26a, “tongue.” “When ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue...”²⁷ Not the gift of tongues.

Now, again, it could be foreigners in the service. Take the form of service. Don’t let more than two or three speak and only then if there is a translator present. This is the regulation.

Now we come down to the bottom of the chapter, verse 39. This is not a prohibition of speaking in tongues in Corinth. Why? I hear this all the time, “The Bible says, ‘Do not forbid to speak in tongues’ and yet you people don’t believe in tongues speaking.” Well, because in those days the tongues had not yet petered out, but Paul said they would peter out. They hadn’t yet. So he says, “The real gift...don’t let the counterfeit in any way sully your view of the real gift. And, furthermore, if a foreigner comes in, yes, he may participate.” I mean, if the Bible said, “Ban all use of foreign languages,” I couldn’t go to Spain and preach, could I unless I suddenly got better at Spanish. But I couldn’t go and speak in English as I always do.

So he said, “I am not banning people using their own language as long as there is an interpreter.”

You see, there are only three things that Paul was banning here and this really brings us toward the very end. He was banning confusion. “God is not the author of confusion.”²⁸ He was banning counterfeits and he was banning conceit. Those are the three things that Paul was banning.

²⁵ Isaiah 28:11

²⁶ Deuteronomy 28:49

²⁷ 1 Corinthians 14:26

²⁸ 1 Corinthians 14:33

Now the conclusion of the whole matter, verse 40, “Let all things be done decently and in order.”²⁹

I am going to make a statement that I hope you will never forget. Christian worship is not chaotic. It is not riotous. It is not uproarious. It is not uncontrolled. It is not indecent and it is not irregular. That is what the Holy Ghost is teaching. The Word decently means in a becoming or an appropriate manner. Let all things be done appropriately. Appropriately to what? To God, his Christ, his gospel.

Let them be done in order. He is talking about the order of church service here.

The interesting thing here that the word that is used and translated “in order,” a perfect translation, but it originally was a military term. It described the ranks of soldiers drawn up in formation. That is the word that Paul is using. Let things be done decently. Let everything be in its proper formation. This is Paul’s aim for the Corinthian church. And it is Paul’s aim for this church, a well regulated worship.

Now have you ever watched a Charismatic service on television? I don’t see many of them. My wife cannot stick me even dropping by for five minutes to see what they are up to. But have you ever seen it? They take chaos as if it were spiritual. They take the riotous, the uproarious, the uncontrolled, they take the indecent, sometimes the openly sensuous as if it were spiritual.

1Corinthians 14:40 is a blast from an apostolic trumpet against the counterfeit charisma of our day. In the worship of God, he says, “Seek the best gift.” What does he mean? Speak in power to evangelize the lost and to edify the saints.

While it lasted, the gift of tongues fulfilled that purpose. But in Corinth conceit and counterfeit began to threaten that purpose. And that is what is happening with the modern counterfeit tongues movement today.

You know people say how great they feel when they have spoken with tongues. I don’t mean to be irreverent, but I have talked to people who have said the same thing after they have taken illicit drugs. They feel great. What does that prove? It just proves that they feel great. It doesn’t prove anything else.

These ecstatic experiences may make individuals feel good for a while. They may create in a church an aura of great excitement. They may make some preacher gain some inflated reputation. But they fly in the face of Scripture. And these so-called tongues can never fulfill the basic functions that the Lord has set out in his Word, the evangelism of the lost and the edification of the saints.

²⁹ 1 Corinthians 14:40

Bottom line. We therefore reject them as unscriptural in nature, in purpose and in use and indict them as a distraction of believers from pursuing the real power of the Holy Ghost for the work of Christ in the gospel.

We have taken a quick skip through 1 Corinthians chapter 14. I trust the Lord has given you some insight. Never forget the principles by which you interpret the passage and never forget the lessons you learn when you do interpret it.

Let me finish by saying this. The counterfeit only gains popularity because there is something real from which the devil wishes to distract our attention. The Holy Ghost is real. The gift of tongues has petered out, but the power of the Spirit of God is real. And that is what we need in our lives, in our church in our witness. The mark of the fulness of the Spirit is not tongues. It is power, power. What does that mean?

We are ordinary people. Speak the Word of truth and God carries it home with sledge hammer force, where the results are out of all proportion, apparently, to the means employed. Where you speak a word and God uses it for his purpose, that is the mark of the Holy Ghost. And, men and women, that is the power that God has never let peter out in the Church.

May God, indeed, give us a passion to know that power and in that power to go out and serve him acceptably.

Let's bow together in prayer. Let us all pray.