Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Truth About Tongues, Part 2
Scripture: 1 Corinthians 14:6-19
Code: 1872

We come to the 14th chapter again in our study of ICorinthians. We have been in this book for many, many, many months now and we are in what has to be the most difficult chapter of the book, if not the most difficult chapter in the Bible, in many ways. And I want to speak to you very carefully this morning to give you as clear an understanding of the difficulties of the text as I possibly can.

I want to begin by saying that I do not approach this text with any ulterior motive, but rather to try the best I can to understand what it is saying. I am not attempting to make it a message to speak against the current Charismatic movement as we have been discussing it in the last few months, but rather to simply teach you what the text is saying. We will draw some application as we go.

And I want to emphasize again that I know it's difficult for some folks, because we have been talking about this subject so much, recently, to hold in their minds the fact that I am not personally attacking individuals who believe as the Charismatics believe, but rather, I am endeavoring as…as best as I possibly can to give a clear understanding of the things that are in the Word of God that speak to this particular phenomena going on today. And so it is from the Word of God that I speak, endeavoring to understand God's truth, rather than some counter-attack against some who would have attacked me at this point. I have no ulterior motive other than the motive that you would understand the truth of the Word of God.

And with that in mind, we want to go again to the 14th chapter. Now, as I remember, this chapter brings us to the issue of tongues in the Corinthian church. Paul deals here with another manifestation of Corinthian carnality. As we have seen in past studies, the true biblical presentation of the gift of languages, or tongues as it's called, can be seen in Acts chapter 2, where you see in Acts 2 that it is a known language. The people heard it spoken in their own languages. That is the true gift of tongues, the ability to speak a foreign language, a language unknown to the speaker. He has given them the miraculous ability to speak that language in order that he might communicate the truth of God in the language of someone present.

It also acted as a sign, by virtue of its miraculous element, that is the fact that someone who didn't know the language spoke it, it acted as a sign that that God was present, and it authenticated the message that was being proclaimed. We've learned that these were genuine languages understood by Jews visiting from many lands for the feasts in Jerusalem, as it occurred in Acts 2. This was then…and this is important for you to remember, an intelligible expression of the wonderful works of

God in their own languages. And you'll find that as you look at the second chapter of Acts.

God was speaking; this was the beginning of the new age. The New Testament was to be written; many of the old things regarding Judaism, and things that God had revealed in the past, were going to be added to, were going to be altered somewhat in the marvelous new era of the New Testament. And God was about to speak again, and what He was going to say would be hard for many of the Jews to understand. And in order for God to authenticate that it was really Him speaking, He gave attendant signs and wonders to those who were His messengers, such as the ability to speak a foreign language they did not know in a miraculous way.

Now, there is no reason to think that this clear definition and purpose for the gift of languages ever changed. The terms that are used in I Corinthians, the words that are used in the Greek, are the very same words that are used in Acts 2. There is no new definition given. So that when we come to the time of the Corinthian church, the gift of languages is no different than it ever was. It is still the Holy Spirit-given, miraculous ability to speak a foreign language that you don't know, but that someone present does know, in order to show them that God is there and that God is authenticating the message.

The confusion comes because the Corinthians had corrupted this very simple and clear gift by misusing it and, secondly, by mixing with it the heathen concept of speaking in the ecstatic gibberish which was so common to their culture. It was relatively easy for Satan to counterfeit the reality because of this cultural, pagan ecstasy that was common to the Corinthian times. But keep in mind that the true gift was uniquely of God, living languages to be understood by the people who were present when they were used.

On the other hand, ecstatic speech was much different. It was based on heathen superstition, ecstasy, eroticism, and sensualism, as we saw last time. It was speaking in a jargon unknown to anyone, supposedly believed to be the language of a god. And they said that when you are speaking in that gibberish, you are having private communion with your god. Its meaning was never known to the devotee who spoke, because he didn't understand what he was saying. It was never known to the people who might have heard, because they had no idea what he was saying. And so Paul says they speak mysteries. They speak some kind of sacred secrets with their god.

And that is the problem that entered the Corinthian church. They had corrupted the true gift into this counterfeit ecstasy. And even those who had the true gift…and, incidentally, there were some in Corinth who had the true gift, no doubt, because chapter 1, verse 7 says, "You come behind in no gift." But even those with the true gift were using the true gift in the wrong way, and then the rest of the congregation was using the counterfeit gift. And you have to keep those two things in mind as we study the 14th chapter. Sometimes Paul is referring to the wrong, or the counterfeit gift, and sometimes he is referring to the wrong use of the true gift. And that is something you must distinct as

you go through the chapter.

So in the Corinthian assembly, they had counterfeited, for the most part, this real gift, turned it into the ecstatic speech of the pagans, and with its concomitant emotional excesses, it had begun to dominate the Corinthian assembly. So Paul is writing to separate the worship of false gods with the personal objective of self-satisfaction from the worship of the true God with an objective that reached out to others. In other words, we saw last time that the people doing this were very selfish and that the point that Paul wanted to get across was that they were to use whatever gift they had, if it was really a true gift, to minister to others, not as a selfish thing to minister to themselves some special, ecstatic blessing.

Alexander Hay says, “These believers, in their heathen days, had believed that when they spoke in a tongue not understood by men, not even by the worshiper, they were speaking secrets or mysteries with their god. They believed it was their spirit speaking. The benefit was received by the worshiper alone; no one else understood. The worshiper profited through the ecstasy of feeling aroused and the sense that he was really participating with the spirits in the inner circle. He had no thought for the building up of the other worshipers. Paul contrasts this selfish objective with the Christian objective. The purpose of the manifestations of God’s Spirit is that the whole congregation be edified.” End quote.

And that’s a summary of what we said last time. The purpose of true gifts is for others, never yourself. The whole body is to be built up. In chapter 12 of I Corinthians in verse 7, “the manifestation of the Spirit is given,” really, it says, “to profit all.” For the profit of all, for the benefit of all. And the gift of languages was for manifesting the truth of God to others; it was for speaking the truth of God in a language that an unbeliever would hear, and he would say, “My, this is amazing. That person doesn’t know my language, and yet he speaks it. God must be speaking through him.” And then, when the person went on to give the gospel, or to speak the truth, as Peter did on the Day of Pentecost, there would be belief in their heart because they had seen that God was speaking by virtue of the wonders that attended the message.

Now, the Charismatics, today, and Pentecostals realize that there is a difference…and this is important…between Acts 2 and ICorinthians 14. They recognize that there is a difference, and the way they explain the difference is usually this. They say there are two kinds of tongues. There are the tongues of Acts 2, which are real languages, and there are the tongues of ICorinthians 14, which is the ecstatic, private, devotional speech by which one speaks in an unknown tongue to God, personally and privately, for self-edification. They recognize a difference and they resolve the difference by saying there are two gifts of tongues.

I recognize a difference, and I resolve it by saying there was the true use of it in Acts 2, and there was the false use of it in I Corinthians 14, so that what you have in 14 another gift, but a perversion of the

intended gift and a mixture with the heathen counterfeit. The Scriptures nowhere teach that there are two kinds of tongues speaking, one a language and one an ecstasy. The reason we know that is because the same term describes the gift in Acts 2 that describes it in I Corinthians 14. And if God wanted to make a distinction, He would need to use another term, but He does not. It is the very same word. It is the normal Greek word for language.

So there is no reason to justify the selfish use of tongues as if it is some new, special gift. In fact, for…and I want you to hear this. In fact, I think for us to say that what the Corinthians had was a true gift being truly exercised is to counter-argue against the most basic truth of spirituality. The Corinthian church could never have been manifesting a true gift in the state in which they existed.

I'll put it this way. Can a group of Christians who are worldly, divisive, opinionated, cliquish, carnal, fleshly, envious, strife-ridden, argumentative, puffed up, self-glorying, smug, immoral, compromising with sin, defrauding each other, fornicating, depriving in marriage, offending weaker Christians, lusting after evil things, idolatrous, fellowshipping with demons, insubordinate, gluttonous, drunken, selfish toward the poor, desecrating the Lord's Table be expressing a true gift of the Holy Spirit?

Well, the answer is obvious. It would defy every single principle of spirituality if that were true. A believer either walks in the flesh or he walks in the Spirit. There is no argument about what the Corinthians were doing. They were walking in the flesh. And if you have a problem with that, read the third chapter, or read any chapter, for that matter. And when you are walking in the flesh, you are not manifesting a true gift in the true power of the Holy Spirit. That is a conundrum. That can't happen.

And so, as you come to 14th of I Corinthians, you must not conclude that what you have here is a true gift, or you will violate every basic truth about spirituality and how the gifts operate. The only possible thing that could have been happening here was wrong, because everything else was wrong in their lives. An so Paul is really writing, just like he did in the first 13 chapters, to correct an error in the Corinthian assembly. He is writing because there is a serious disorder. The selfish, pagan use of ecstatic speech was being justified as if it was the gift of languages given by the Holy Spirit.

And even those who had the true gift had, apparently, perverted it, and were using it to speak in their own little private way, and to use it in the assembly when unbelievers who…who weren't even there. And they were using it as a way to lift themselves up to a level of spiritual superiority. If there is one thing common to the Corinthian church, it is that they had let every system in the world engulf them and this is no different. All the rest of the stuff in their world had come into the church. Why would not the world's approach to religion?

So this is a gift then that was genuine in the Apostolic Era. Believe me, the gift of languages is genuine. I received a letter this week from someone that I wrote to, to ask permission to quote them in the book. They said, "We'll give you permission to quote if you're not against the gift of tongues." Of

course, I don't know how I'll handle that, because I'm not against it.

There is a true gift. I know what they mean. I know the spirit of what they say, but my question is that there is a true gift, and I'm not against that. God did give the gift of languages in the Apostolic Era. But as we saw, from 13:8-12, it has ceased. And that's why this chapter is so hard for us, folks, because for 2000 years, the real thing hasn't been around and it's very difficult to reconstruct all of the details concerning that thing. I daresay that I've probably read 50 books on this subject, at least, and I have yet to find any two of them that agree on all the details. That's amazing, and I mean even among Evangelicals.

So this morning, I offer you my guess. There are some things that we don't have to guess about, but there are some parts here that we just don't have enough information about. But one thing that we do know, the Corinthians were carnal. And another thing we do know, they had allowed this cultural ecstasy to infiltrate the congregation. And another thing we do know, the true gift was speaking in a true language to somebody who understood it, and that is not what they were doing. So there will be some absolutes as we go along.

Now, let's go to the text. I told you last time we'll divide the text into three parts; you can look at your outline for at least the initial element of it. And you will find that part one of the text is the position of the gift of languages, and the position is secondary. And the first 19 verses speak to this. The position of the gift of tongues or languages, it is secondary. The next section is the chapter is the purpose of the gift, and the next one is the procedure. So you have the position, the purpose, and the procedure, and we'll cover the whole chapter in looking at those.

But today, we want to look at the position of the gift of languages. And we told you, last time, that it is secondary, and the reason it is secondary is because of the fact that it is compared to prophecy, and prophecy can edify and tongues cannot. So it is a secondary gift. Notice verse 26, at the end of the verse. That really gives the key to the whole chapter. "Let all things be done unto edifying." In other words, the whole thrust of Paul's chapter is that "Whatever you do, make sure that it builds up the body." And that same phrase is repeated again and again. We saw it last time at the end of verse 4, "Edifieth the church." Verse 5, "The church may receive edifying." This is the point of everything. Verse 12, "To the edifying of the church."

In other words, he again and again emphasizes that whatever you do should be done for the edification of the church. All right, now, let's look at the position of tongues. And we reminded you last time that its position is secondary as compared to prophecy. And point one, which we covered last time in verses 1-5, was that prophesying edifies the whole congregation. That is why tongues is secondary to prophesying, because prophesying edifies the whole congregation.

So, in verse 1, he says, “Follow after love and continue to desire spiritual gifts, but most of all that you may prophesy.” Why? Because prophesying edifies the whole congregation. And if you are seeking a manifestation of a gift of the Spirit in your assembly, then seek that which will edify the whole congregation, the best gift.

Now, I want to point out one thing that you need to remember. In verse 1, he is not speaking about an individual Christian seeking an individual gift. He is talking about the assembly. He is saying, "That when the assembly meets, the assembly should seek the manifestation of the gift of prophesying from whoever has that gift.”

Now, you want to make this mental note. From chapter 11 through chapter 14, that entire section of chapters, deals with the meeting together of the assembly of the Corinthian church. None of it has reference to a private time. None of it has reference to a personal relationship with God. It is all speaking of how they behave in the assembly.

Chapter 11 talks about how women were to behave in the assembly. Chapter 11 also talks about how they were to take care of the Lord’s Supper and the love feast when they met together; chapter 12, how they minister their gifts when they meet together; chapter 13, how they were to manifest the love when they met together; chapter 14, how they used the gift of languages when they met together. The whole thing is in the assembly, from 11-14.

And when Charismatic and Pentecostal people want to take chapter 14 and have it relate to private devotional tongues, they are taking that totally out of the context in which it exists in the book, which is discussing totally the concept of meeting in the assembly, like we are this morning.

Now, Paul says, “When you come together, instead of wanting all this kind of ecstatic manifestations and seeking this gift, seek that you may see prophesying manifested. God may speak to you from His Word.” Then verse 2, we remember, said, “He that speaks in a tongue,” and here we saw that he most likely refers to their ecstatic speech, “speaks not unto men, but unto a god,” in the Greek. “Unto a god.” And we've mentioned to you an interesting possibility here, and I’m not going to be totally dogmatic on this, but the more I study it the more I like it. And that is that when you have the term “tongue” in the singular, Paul may well be referring to the ecstatic gift. And then when he uses it in the plural, he is referring to the true gift.

The reason I say that is because there can only be a plural in “languages.” There cannot be a plural in “gibberish.” There aren’t many kinds of gibberish. There's only one kind. Gibberish. You don’t say, “What kind of gibberish do you speak?” There aren’t many kinds; there's just one. And that may well be why the King James translators put the word “unknown” in when it is used in the singular. Perhaps they recognized this nuance in Paul’s writing.

And so, perhaps what he is saying here in verse 2, it seems best to me, is, “That he speaks in gibberish,” literally. “He that speaks in this ecstatic speech, speaks not unto men, but unto a god.” In other words, he is simply characterizing their particular phenomenon. “For nobody understands him,” and that would include the true God in a sense. In other words, that’s not God’s kind of talk; but he’s basically referring to people. “However, in his spirit he is speaking mysteries.”

Now, you remember that in the mystery religions, the term “mystery” was a big word. So he saying to them…and I’m just reminding you from last week, he is saying, “When you speak in your ecstasies, you are not speaking to anybody.” And right there is the first perversion, because all gifts were intended to build up somebody other than yourself, and if they’re not used to speak to men, then they are perverted. And then he contrasts it with prophecy, in verse 3, by saying, “He that prophesies speaks to men. He edifies them, he exhorts them, he comforts them.”

And so he contrasts pagan ecstatic speech with prophesying, which truly speaks the truth of God to the hearts of people. That’s a tremendous contrast. He really then goes on to hit the issue of their selfishness in verse 4. We saw this. “He that speaks in gibberish,” he that speaks this ecstatic speech, “edifies himself,” and I don’t take that to be a good thing.

And I pointed out to you, last time, that in I Corinthians Chapter 8, in verse 10, you have an illustration of bad kind of edification, of building somebody up only into a position where he will fall. And then, I reminded you that in 10:23-24 of 1Corinthians, he says, “All things are lawful, all things are not expedient.” He says, “all things are lawful, but all things edify.” And the next verse, he says, “We should seek the edification of others, not ourselves.”

And self-edification and the wrong kind of edification are already in his vocabulary as negatives, and so I think it’s easy to fit it here. And that what he’s saying is somewhat caustic, somewhat sarcastic, pointing out their self-centeredness and saying, “He that speaks this gibberish is only building himself up,” as if it’s an ego-building thing, “But the one who prophesies truly builds up the church. So in the assembly, there’s no place for this kind of ecstatic speech.”

Now, verse 5. “I would that you all spoke with tongues.” Now, notice the change. He stops the singular and uses the plural. “I would that you all spoke with languages; I wish you all had the true gift. But even beyond the true gift, I rather that you prophesied; for greater is he that prophesies than he that speaks with languages, unless it’s interpreted so that the church can be edified.”

And the true gift is all right if it’s used in the right context, and somebody who speaks that language is there, and then it’s truly interpreted for the church to understand. But apart from that situation, it has no purpose. So prophesying edifies the whole church; consequently, tongues take a secondary place, even the true gift. And the false gift has no place at all.

Now, the second principal…you have it on your outline. The second reason that tongues are secondary is…and it follows the first…that tongues are unintelligible. Tongues are unintelligible. And we're going to fly a little bit here, so stay with us. Tongues are unintelligible, verse 6. "Now, brethren," and here, again, he's referring, no doubt, to the true gift if we take that use of the singular and plural. Now, brethren, if I come unto you speaking with languages, what shall I profit you?"

In other words, he says, "Even if I, the apostle Paul, with all the clout and all the godliness that I have, if I, the apostle Paul come to you and speak with the true gift of languages, what good will it do you? You speak Greek. You don't need me to do this." So he says, "Except I speak to you by revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching, it has no meaning to you. It isn't going to profit you. It isn't going to benefit you." And what he's really saying, is speaking must be intelligible to the hearers. And since they all spoke Greek, there was no sense in Paul coming and speaking some foreign language.

It's amazing to me today that we have seen this one segment of the church put such an incredible premium on unintelligible communication that nobody, not even the speaker, understands. It's also amazing to note that many, many times when the interpretation is so-called given as a true interpretation, it can be indicated that it is, in fact, not a true interpretation at all. There's many, many testimonies to the effect that people have experimented speaking in Hebrew and whatever, and somebody gives a translation that's in no way related to what they said.

And somehow, today, we have made some kind of sacred cow, some kind of great, spiritual hierarchy out of people who have been able to communicate to nobody. Paul says, "If I came and used the true gift, it wouldn't mean anything to you because you speak Greek." Now, in verse 7, he begins to illustrate this point. And he says, "And even things without life, giving sound, whether a flute or a harp, except they give a distinction in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped?"

The pipe here would be a flute, and the harp would be any kind of a stringed instrument. These were the most common instruments of that day. They were used at banquets and funerals and religious ceremonies, so the people would understand what he was referring to. But you'll notice, in verse7, he says, "things without life." Soulless, inanimate, without any life. Inanimate instruments, which were known for beautiful music and the moods of joy and the moods of sorrow that they would create.

These kinds of instruments, except they be played with a distinction in tone and rhythm, mean absolutely nothing. Notice in verse 7 the term "except they give a distinction." The Greek literally means, "unless there is a difference." In other words, there has to be variation in sound to make sense. There has to be a studied, calculated variation. A flute or a harp make sense only when there is meaningful variation in the sound.

For example, Mary Jane Duncan plays the piano beautifully. We have someone in our family who plays the piano, Melinda. She is three. She plays the same notes, hits the same keys, and you know what happens? After about 30 seconds, we tell her, “Melinda, mercy. Stop playing the piano!” Why? Because the lack of proper variation in the tones creates nothing but dissonance and chaos. And that's what Paul is saying here. “Sound alone, even from a beautiful instrument, means nothing unless there is significant variation in the tone so that somebody to understand the melody, so that somebody understands the tune.”

You say, “Well, what is the point of this analogy, John?” The point is, you can’t be benefited and you can't be edified when you hear somebody speak unless there is an understood variation in the tone that communicates meaning. And Paul says, “It doesn’t do any good to do it any other way.” Even the true gift of languages used with people who don’t understand it is useless, to say nothing of the gibberish, which is always useless. He goes further in verse 8. “For if the bugle,” or trumpet, “give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself for the battle?”

I mean, can you imagine if everybody gets ready for the war, and the guy just gets up and blows any old tune he want? And everybody goes, see, they don't know whether to get out of bed or go back to bed or put on their armor or what. It’s very obvious that the bugle has to have significant variation to have meaning. A military trumpet was the clearest and the loudest of all instruments, but no soldier would have any idea what to do if it didn’t blow something with significance.

Verse 9, he goes on to another illustration. “So ye likewise, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? The only thing that will hear you is the air; that's all.” So, you see, the point is there is absolutely no signification for gibberish ever, because to time ever does anybody ever understand it.

And the only significant time for the use of the true gift in the Apostolic Era was when somebody was there who understood the language. And if it occurred in the assembly of believers, then it would be translated in order that the believers might even also in addition be edified by it. It must be easy to be understood, or you're just blowing into the air.

So Paul is really drawing some pretty satirical, pretty sarcastic pictures for the Corinthians. Musical instruments so out of tune they can’t be recognized, and an army bugler so incompetent that the army has no idea what’s going on. And he says, “That’s about what’s going on in the Corinthian assembly. Pure confusion, pure chaos.” And Paul is trying to get these believers to recognize and realize that the purpose of the gifts of the Spirit are to proclaim the gospel to the unsaved and to teach the truth to God’s people, or to authenticate those who will do both of those things. And that can only be done through intelligible words.

And so with irony and some sarcasm and much patience and great illustration, he is trying to break through the barrier of ignorance, emotion, and superstition that exists in the Corinthian church. He goes on to an illustration in the realm of language in verse 10, following. “There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world, and none of them is without signification.” Now, he’s hammering the same point. You know he’s like a farmer plowing the same ground because it’s so hard. He just keeps saying the same thing again and again and again, hoping sooner or later, he’ll plow it up.

“There are so many languages.” They tell us today that there are probably 3,000. “There are so many languages in the world, so many kinds of voices.” Incidentally, that is a term, very general, and “voices” simply means “sounds.” The same word is used of instruments in verse 7, so it’s a very broad word. “There are all kinds of sounds,” he says, “but no sound is without meaning.” And here, he is applying it to language, as verse 11 makes very clear. He says in verse 11, “Therefore, if I know not the meaning of the sound,” or the voice, “I shall be unto him that speaks a *barbaros*, and he that speaketh shall be a *barbaros* unto me.”

Now he says, “If you don’t talk in something I can understand, we’re two barbarians trying to talk.” In case you don’t understand what a barbarian is, a barbarian is a term for a foreigner, and a barbarian was anybody who didn’t speak Greek. So he’s simply saying, “If you talk in that kind of stuff, we’re just going to be incommunicado.” He says, “It’s going to be like two barbarians, neither of whom have a common language.”

Interesting thing about the word. The word *barbaros* is, again, a word that is onomatopoetic. Remember that? A word that sounds…remember bzzz and zip and hiss, any of those kinds of words that simply repeat a sound. Well, this word, really, is the repetition of “bar, bar.” And what he’s saying is, “If you speak like that, and I don’t know the meaning of what you’re saying, it’s just ‘Bar, bar, bar, bar,’ to me. I don’t understand it and it doesn’t make any sense.”

So the whole point, you see, is the uselessness of unintelligible language and pagan gibberish. It had absolutely no signification whatsoever. It is contrary to all the laws of sound and meaning, according to verse 10. Everything has meaning but what you're doing. All languages communicate but your kind. And remember, folks, that they could even…they can even be indicted for the misuse of the true gift by speaking a language as if it were some great spiritual thing they were doing, when nobody there would understand it. It was only to be used when some were there who spoke that language. And he’ll get into that in detail later in the chapter.

So no spiritual ministry can ever be accomplished with that kind of confusion. The unbelievers are going to come in, and they're going to look around and they're going to say, in verse 23, “These people are mad.” In other words, they're in a frenzy no different than that of the worshipers of Diana. They're going through the same kind of ecstasy that those people in the temple are, and they'll see no difference in the Christian church than they see in the temple of Diana. Now, the second sub-point,

then, that tongues are unintelligible, closes with the same point as the first. Look at verse 12.

“Even so ye, for as much as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that you may excel to the edifying of the church. You’re so zealous of the gift, you so want the spirituals, you so want the things of the Spirit, you so want the manifestation of the Spirit. Well, if you do, then speak that which will be the true manifestation to truly edify the church.”

Incidentally, that's how he ended the first section in verse 5. “Seek that the church may receive edifying.” That’s the way he ends each of these points. Seek that the church be edified. He’s really dealing with their selfishness. The Corinthians came together, they were all seeking this experience. They were all seeking this ecstasy. They wanted the sensual experience.

And we still have that today. And I think that’s part of what is going on in the Charismatic and Pentecostal movement is they all seek this personal experience, when Paul is saying “That’s the antithesis of the spiritual gifts, which are to seek to edify the body.” So, the position of tongues is secondary. Reason number one, because prophecy will edify the church. And number two, tongues are unintelligible and, consequently, have a very limited use. And, incidentally, that limited use was limited also to the Apostolic Era.

All right, the third point; the third point on your outline. Tongues is secondary, thirdly, because the effect of tongues is emotional rather than mental. The effect of tongues is emotional rather than mental. And that’s what he hits on in verse 13. Now watch. “Wherefore, let him that speaks,” and here we go with the singular again, “in gibberish, pray that he may interpret.” Now, this is a very difficult verse to interpret. I thought many times as I read this verse, I’m praying, “Lord, may I interpret this verse. It is difficult.” But “let him that speaks in gibberish pray that he may interpret?” What is he saying?

As we know from our study already, they were speaking in this private kind of ecstatic communication with their God, in the language of their god, thinking that they were praying to the true God and it was truly of the Spirit. But praying in gibberish was never the intention of the gift; it was always the perversion. And Paul is saying, “Look, you who or praying in gibberish,” or the one praying in gibberish, literally, “let him pray with the purpose of translating or with the purpose, literally, of interpreting.” In other words, I think it’s a little sarcastic. “Hey, you that's so busy praying in your gibberish, why don’t you pray for something that will have some meaning to somebody?”

And in case you think that’s forcing the issue, if you read through Corinthians carefully, you’ll find that such sarcasm and such irony is introduced on many, many occasions. In other words, “Let the one who is so anxious to pray in his private little language pray instead for the gift that’s intelligible. While you’re praying in your gibberish, ask God for something that some of the rest of the body can be benefited by, because what you’re doing is so very selfish.”

Now, somebody's probably saying, "Boy, John, you really pushed that into that verse." Well, there's another alternative. The other alternative is this. "Wherefore, let him that speaks in an unknown tongue pray that he may receive the gift of interpretation." Now, if we take it that way, then that means that we can seek certain gifts, right? That if we want the gift of interpretation, or the gift of anything, all we have to do is pray for it, right. Is that true?

Well, I Corinthians 12:11 says the Holy Spirit gives the gifts to whomever He wills. In I Corinthians 12:30…now watch this. 1 Corinthians 12:30 says, "Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?" And what is the answer implied by the Greek construction? No. No, God never said that we can pray for any gift we want, you can seek for any gift we want. This verse can't be saying that we ought to seek the gift of interpretation.

I'll show you another reason. Look at verse 28 of chapter 14, verse 28. Watch this. "If there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church." In other words, if somebody is going to even use the true gift, listen to that, that some pagan present would understand, he shouldn't even do it unless he knows that there is an interpreter present who will interpret it. And let me add this, folks. They must have known, then, who had the gift of interpretation, and to such the gift was limited, you see.

It was so limited that they couldn't even do it if that person wasn't present. So there's no way that verse can be teaching an individual to seek the gift of interpretation. The only other alternative is that Paul really riding them a little bit and saying, "While you're jabbering, why don't you pray something intelligent, like ask God for something that will mean something to us?" I hope that helps you understand the point.

Verse 14. He says "because if I pray in gibberish." Now, watch this. The word is *pneuma*. I like to think that it could be translated this way: "My breath or wind prays, but my mind is unfruitful." So you know what I'm doing; blowing air into the air, that's all. *Pneuma* can be translated "spirit," "breath," "wind." Some would even say it refers to feeling or inner feelings.

The Charismatic folks, for the most part, make it the Holy Spirit. That's really not fair, because it says, "My spirit prays." And they say, "But the Holy Spirit is my spirit." Yes, but it's compared with "my understanding." And if the human understanding as one end of the comparative, you've got to have the human breath or the human spirit as the other end of the comparison. You've got to be balanced and careful there.

So he says, "If I'm praying in gibberish, my wind may be praying, but my mind is unfruitful." In other words, there is nothing beneficial occurring. There is no fruit bearing. Tongue praying, then, or gibberish, is mindless. "If I pray in an unknown tongue, it's just my breath or my wind or my spirit or my inner feeling, whichever term you want. It is just blowing air into the air like the heathen. I don't

understand what I'm saying, you don't understand what I'm saying. I'm blowing air into air." So the counterfeit gift just set up an emotional experience; it had no mental benefit.

Beloved, you know as well as I do that there is never a time in the Word of God when God wants us to be mindless. Would you agree with that? There is never a premium set on your brain being turned off, never. There is never a time when God wants us to function on pure emotion without understanding, never. And here, what you have is a wrong thing. You have a mindless, emotional experiences that has no meaning, no meaning.

In fact, in Matthew 22 in verse 37, it says, "Love the Lord, your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with" what? "All your mind." To pray or sing in a tongue is useless, useless to you, useless to anybody else. It is mindless emotion. Verse 15,

Verse 15. "What is it, then?" What is my conclusion? Personally, for me, I will pray with the breath," the wind, the inner part of me, or whatever you want to say. "I will pray with the wind and I will also pray with," what? "Understanding. Well, when I talk to God, it's going to come from inside of me and I'm going to say things. I'm going to use my breath," or my wind, "but I'm also going to use my brain. And I am going to sing with my breath and my wind, and I'm going to sing with my mind as well."

Apparently, they used to sing in these ecstatic languages as well. We have that today among Charismatics who sings in tongues, too. Paul says, "I don't do that. What purpose is that, except to give off the idea to everybody that I have this private little prayer language between me and God that hooks me up in a special way?" Very selfish.

So Paul says, "I'll pray with my breath and my mind, and I'll sing with my breath and my mind, not mindlessly." Listen, you pray in English and God understands, and you sing in English and God understands. Let me tell you, that is far superior than talking to God in some kind of gibberish, no matter what anybody tells you. God doesn't need that.

Interesting footnote. The word "sing" originally meant "to play the harp." Then it came to mean…listen to this…"to sing to the accompaniment of the harp." There are some people who say today that the church shouldn't have musical instruments. The very word "sing" originally meant "to sing to the accompaniment of a harp." That's the way it was used in the Septuagint, and no doubt, that's the way it was understood in the New Testament. So we do use instruments.

Verse 16. We'll hurry till we're finished here. He says, "If I don't do it with my mind, else, when you shall bless," and he turns it over to the next guy now. "When thou shall bless with the breath," or your wind, or your spirit. In other words, when you get into your thing there, "and you don't do it with your mind, how shall he that occupies the place of the unlearned say, "Amen," at the giving of thanks, seeing he doesn't understand what you say?" You couldn't even have any "Amens" going on.

Notice the phrase “the place of the unlearned.” In the Greek the word is *idits*. The word means here, “ignorant,” and it simply means somebody ignorant of the language you're speaking. And if you go along and you say your thing, the person who occupies the place of ignorance about the meaning of what you said can’t even say, “Amen,” at the giving of your thanks because he doesn’t understand what you’re saying.

Now, beloved, “amen” simply is a Hebrew adjective that means “True, say it, brother,” okay. “So let it be.” “I’m with you,” whatever that might connote. And in the Jewish synagogue, do you know how important this was? It was so important that you could hardly get your lesson done because of all the amening.

Let me give you some quotes from the rabbis. “He who says amen is greater than he who blesses.” Here’s another one. “Whoever says amen, to him the gates of Paradise are opened.” Here’s another one. “Whoever says amen shortly, his days shall be shortened; whoever says amen distinctly and at length, his days shall be lengthened.” And do you know what happened in the synagogue? It was a contest to see who could amen the most to get into the Kingdom.

This was also common in the early church, though much more genuine. And he says, “Look, this is great to agree.” You know there are people in the church today that think if someone says, “Amen,” you say, “Who is that?” Amen? Amen, right. But he says, “If all you have got is a blind, emotional ecstasy going on, nobody can even agree because nobody knows what’s happening.” Don't you get the point? You see, when you come together, people, it’s for everybody’s benefit. And whatever you do that leaves out somebody else is wrong.

Verse 17. “For you verily give thanks well.” You might be do a great job, and if you happen to have the true gift, or whatever, you might in your own heart be thinking, “Boy, am I thankful to God.” But nobody else is edified, and that makes it wrong, because you’ve missed the point of the assembly. You’ve missed the point of the coming together.

Now somebody might say, “That’s just why we teach that this is to be done in private.” But, you see, that's the point, too, because it never was a private thing. It was always the gift of languages for somebody present who spoke the language. What good would it do to do it in private? And here he says, even in public it doesn't do any good unless somebody there understands what you’re saying.

Verse 18. Now, Paul does what he does earlier in the chapter. He says, “I’ve been kind of hard on this thing, and I don’t want you to get the wrong idea about tongues,” or languages. “I believe it is a true gift.” So he says, “I thank my God, I speak with languages,” Notice this in the plural again, and here he’s referring to the true gift, I think. I think my God that I speak with languages more than all of you.” Now, he says, “If you’re wondering if I’m a little on the outside and don’t quite understand all of

this phenomena, I just want you to know that I've probably done this more than any of you."

He had the true gift. He was an apostle, he had the gifts of an apostle according to II Corinthians 12:12. He exercised those gifts, and no doubt, as he traveled around, he used this gift. "How did he use this gift?" Well, number one, I'm sure he didn't use it as a private prayer language. Number two, I'm sure he didn't use it in Christian meetings to show he was spiritual. Number three, I'm sure he didn't use it for his own benefit.

I'll tell you how he used it. He used it in occasions where he traveled to a place where there were people who spoke a foreign language. And he was given the ability by God to speak that language, that they might know God was present and a miracle had happened. And then he would speak to them the truth of God and they would be converted. He was a missionary to the Gentiles. And no doubt in the case of many times in his missionary travels, he could have used this gift. But it's interesting to me that he ranked it so very low, that never any time in his entire ministry and in his writings, does he ever refer to using it, except here, and gives no illustration.

But he says, "Even though I have that gift – " verse 19 " - yet in the church…I mean it's fine for out there evangelizing, it's fine when you've got to speak to those pagans in a language they understand, and show them that God is present and God is speaking. But in the church," now, watch this, "I would rather speak five words with my understanding, than ten thousand words in gibberish that my voice, that by my voice, I might teach others also. That's really the end of the text. That's the purpose.

Now I want you to see something interesting. Five to ten thousand is not the ratio. Do you know what ten thousand is? It's the Greek word, *murioi*, and it is the word that is used here because it is the…it is the largest number in Greek mathematics for which there was a word. Do you get that? For example, in Revelation, remember when it talked about the angels and says, "And there were ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands."

It just keeps repeating *murioi* and *murioi* and still *murioi* and still *murioi*, because that's the biggest word there was for a number. And so you're saying…literally, in the English, we would say it this way. "I would rather say five words with my understanding than quintillion words in gibberish." It's there isn't even a comparison. I would rather say, "I have something to say" and sit down, than say a quintillion things in gibberish. That's his point. Why? "Because nobody is going to learn, and I want to use my voice to teach others also."

So he concludes in verse 20. "Brothers, stop being children in understanding; grow up." We'll stop right there. Grow up, grow up. I Corinthians 13:11, he said, "When I was a child, I spake like a child. When I became a man," I what? "Put away childish things," same idea. Now, let me tell you something, and this is very important as I conclude. What are the lessons here? Now listen. Does this passage tell us how to govern tongues in the church today? No, not really, because they ceased.

What does it show us? Number one, it shows us that the modern Charismatic movement is…now, watch this. And I say this with great love and great concern. But I believe this in my heart, that the Charismatic movement today is the same old Corinthian problem all over again. Listen. Why? They use them in their assemblies today. They speak in gibberish. They do it for private self-edification.

They seek the emotional experience rather than the intellectual understanding. They sing in tongues; they are absorbed in their own experiences. They glory in the unintelligible as if it were some secret communion with God. They do it among believers, and their missionaries do not have the true gift to reach people with different languages. And so what I see there is a mirror of this problem.

What do we learn from this? Here we go. Learn, one, to exalt the proclamation and teaching of the Word of God, to come together to hear God's Word so that we can understand it, to do whatever we do with whatever gift we have to build up somebody else, to never seek a selfish spiritual experience, to never relish the emotional but knowledge, to watch out for Satan's counterfeits, to do all things with a clear mind open to God's truth. And, beloved, the greatest tragedy arising from the modern tongues movement is that they miss the true work of the Holy Spirit.

Remember the dog in the ancient fable who, while crossing a bridge with a bone in his mouth, looked over the edge and saw in the water the reflection? And the bone in the reflection looked so good, better than the one in his mouth, that he dropped the substance for the shadow and went hungry. And I'm afraid that many of our dear friends in this movement have dropped the substance and the reality of Ephesians 5:18 for the shadow of a Charismatic experience, and they're going to go hungry. Let's pray.

Thank You, our Father, for our time this morning in Your Word. Thank You for every person here. Father, we know that many of our friends that are here this morning with us probably came with anticipation of a different message than this. I pray that they'll understand that, as we study through the Scripture, You have a purpose in teaching us everything You teach us.

Father, I pray that You would minister to them, especially, Father, through our fellowship, in spite of, perhaps, not giving the message that was just needed in their hearts. Thank You for the love of the fellowship that we enjoy. We pray that as we dismiss, it will be with a renewed heart to love and serve You and to seek Your will for Your glory. In Jesus' name, amen.

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