INTRODUCTION

At the Tower of Babel, God confused the languages of men. The only other biblical incident that can rival that confusion of languages is the confusion of tongues at Corinth. They had so confused their understanding of the gift of tongues, that they had substituted the reality for a satanic counterfeit. Because of this, Paul had to write an entire chapter just to deal with that issue.

Now, when we studied chapter 13, we saw that God did give a true gift of languages to the early church. It was only one of the miraculous sign gifts that God gave to the early church to authenticate the message of the new age. You see, the writer of Hebrews tells us that "God, who at sundry times and in diverse manners spoke in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son..." (1:1-2a). There was a new message, so to let the world know (particularly the Jewish world) that this was a new era and that God was speaking again, there were attendant signs and wonders. One of those signs was the ability that the Apostles, and some who worked with them, had to speak a language, under divine inspiration, that they did not know. That was the gift of languages or tongues.

In previous lessons, we have learned that the gift of tongues was the ability to speak a foreign language. It was always a known language! For example, when the disciples spoke in tongues on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2, verse 6 tells us that "every man heard them speak in his own language." But as we come to the Corinthian situation, we find that they had counterfeited the real gift of tongues and substituted an ecstatic kind of speech that was very common in pagan religions.

A. The Corinthian Background of Tongues

1. The Infiltration of Corinth into the Church

The Corinthian church had allowed the entire world system in which they existed to infiltrate their assembly. For example, they were emphasizing human philosophies (chapters 1-4), they had a hero worship cult (chapter 3), they were involved in terrible, gross, sexual immorality (chapters 5-6), they were suing each other in court (chapter 6), they had misevaluated their home and marriage relationships (chapter 7), they were confused about pagan feasts, idolatry, and things offered to idols (chapters 8-10), they had relinquished the proper place of women in the church (chapter 11), they had misunderstood the whole dimension of spiritual gifts (chapter 12), and they had lost hold of the one great thing--love (chapter 13).

You see, they had let the satanic system that existed in their society infiltrate the church. And with it came the pagan religious practices--with all of the ecstasies, eroticisms, and sensualities. The
Corinthians accepted it all, creating a confused amalgamation of truth and error.

2. The Involvement of Tongues in Paganism

a. The Ecstasy of the Greco-Roman World

At the time of the Corinthian church, the Greco-Roman world had a multitude of gods. In their worship of these gods, it was very common for a person to go into ecstasy, which literally means "to go out of oneself." They would go into an unconscious state where all kinds of psychic phenomena would occur. They believed that when they were in an ecstatic trance, they actually left their body, ascended into space, connected up to whatever deity they were worshiping, and would begin to commune with that deity. Once they began to commune with that deity, they would begin to speak the language of the gods. This was a very common practice in their culture. In fact, the term used in 1 Corinthians to refer to speaking in tongues (glossais lalein) was not invented by Bible writers. It was a term used commonly in the Greco-Roman culture to speak of the pagan language of the gods which occurred while the speaker was in an ecstatic trance. By the way, this language of the gods was always gibberish.

b. The Eros of the Greek World

The Greeks had a word for this ecstatic religious experience. It was the word eros. Sometimes translated as sensual love, the word eros had a broader meaning. It meant "the desire for the sensual," or "the desire for the erotic," or "the desire for ecstasy," or "the desire for the ultimate experience or feeling." Their religion, then, was an erotic, sensual, ecstatic religion--designed to be felt. In fact, when people went to their various temples to worship, they would actually enter into orgies with the temple priestesses. So the erotic, sexual, sensual, ecstatic religion was all rolled into one big ball along with the gibberish of divine utterances. And these mystery religions, which had been spawned in Babylon, had found their way into the Corinthian society...and the church.

B. The Charismatic Reproduction of Corinth

I'm afraid that what has happened today in the Charismatic movement is just a reproduction of exactly what happened in Corinth. Because of a deadness in the church, because of years of ignorance of the true work of the Holy Spirit, because of a lack of good Bible teaching, and because of the dearth of anything really significant going on in the church, people in the church began to reach out to feel God and to sense His reality. Well, that just paved the way for Satan's counterfeit to come flooding in. As in Corinth, the Charismatic movement has married the system of pagan religion with Christianity. They have developed a sensual, feeling-oriented, experiential, erotic kind of approach to Christianity, and call it the work of the Holy Spirit. However, it is most likely the counterfeit of Satan.

Confessions of a Pentecostal

In his book Spirit Manifestations and the Gift of Tongues, Sir Robert Anderson quotes from a pamphlet written by a former leader of the Pentecostal movement in India:

"Finally, I went to the mission at 328 W. 63rd St., Chicago asking only one question, 'Why do I not receive the baptism? What is the matter with me?' The good friends prayed with me and said that nothing was wrong, I only needed to wait.

"Praise the Lord they were right. For the first time I knelt at the altar on Sunday afternoon, March 17, the power began to seize me and I laughed all through the following communion service. In the evening about 11 p.m., I knelt with a few of the friends praying for me (Elder S-- placed his hands on my head for a short time, several times during the afternoon and evening). After some little waiting I began to
laugh, or rather my body was used to laugh with increasing power until I was flat on my back laughing at the top of my voice for over half an hour. On rising, I found that I was drunk on the new wine, acting just like a drunken man in many ways and full of joy. On kneeling to meet the Lord again, I was suddenly seized with an irresistible power of beseechings with groanings that could not be uttered, asking the Lord to have mercy on me a sinner, and telling Him that I wanted to go all the way with Him. The power of this praying was too great for me to endure, and suddenly my eyes opened to see Elder S--, who had been standing a few feet distant, fall as though he had been struck. I was relieved, and in a few seconds was straight up in the air shouting, 'Glory!' at the top of my voice. Again kneeling, my eyes grew dark, and I was rolled over onto the floor, lying there for some time nearly unconscious. Then coming to and kneeling, I felt my jaws and mouth being worked by a strange force. In a few seconds, some baby gibberish was uttered, then a few words in Chinese that I understood, and then several sentences in a strange tongue. This turned into singing, and I did not again speak in tongues until Wednesday, three days later."

Now, what is going on there? All kinds of experiences that are based on feelings and emotion--experiences that are apprehended by the senses rather than the mind. Well, these kind of experiences were common to pagan religions--not Christianity! For example, Plato, who lived from 429-347 B.C., wrote page after page in his Dialogues describing pagan ecstasies of speech. This was not anything that belonged to Christianity. The true gift of languages in Christianity was only used when somebody who spoke the language was present in order that it might be a sign that God was there and that God's people were speaking God's truth. Never was it intended to be confused with paganism.

C. The Counterfeit Activity of Satan

Whenever God does something, Satan tries to counterfeit it, doesn't he? Well, to cloud the true revelatory work of the Holy Spirit in the early church, Satan put up a smokescreen that consisted of phony revelations, phony visions, and phony tongues. That's why the Apostle John said that when somebody comes along and starts telling you they speak for God, you'd better "test the spirits whether they are of God" (1 Jn. 4:1). It's easy to fall prey to the phony. And because the Corinthians had decided to marry the spirit of the age, they became victims.

Now remember, Satan is called "the god of this age" (2 Cor. 4:4) and "the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience" (Eph. 2:2b). Satan not only wants to be like God (Isa. 14:12-14), he appears "transformed into an angel of light" (2 Cor. 11:14). He wants to counterfeit reality and trick the church into accepting that which is phony. That's his business!

In Corinth, the counterfeit practices of heathenism had engulfed the church. I'm afraid the same thing is happening today. Those kind of ecstatic, sensual, feeling-oriented experiences, however, are never associated in the New Testament with the true work of the Holy Spirit...never! In fact, in 1 Corinthians 14:32, Paul says, "And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets." In other words, nobody is ever to give up his spirit or lose control of himself. At the end of chapter 14, Paul's final word on this subject was, "Let all things be done decently and in order." It's not the Holy Spirit's way to have a worship service where everybody jumps up with their own psalm, doctrine, tongue, revelation, and interpretation (1 Cor. 14:26). That's nothing more than the confusion of paganism that has engulfed the church.

D. The Chaotic Worship of the Corinthians

The mystery religions of Babylon, which dominated the Corinthian culture during Paul's day, had developed all kinds of rites, rituals, vows, baptisms, animal sacrifices, feasts, fasts, ablutions for sin
(like dunking in a frozen river or crawling on bleeding knees for miles), ecstatic speeches, visions, and prophecies. And all of it had entered, to one degree or another, into the Corinthian church, causing absolute chaos. Do you know that people were actually standing up cursing Jesus in tongues, and people were saying, "Oh, it must be the Holy Spirit"? That's why Paul had to write and tell them that "no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed" (1 Cor. 12:3). Their worship was total confusion. "The wild frenzy of the Greek paganism became madness in the Corinthian church," says one writer. "And they, like the pagans, no doubt uttered their ecstatic speech with foaming lips and streaming hair."

Beloved, as much as I wish it weren't true, I'm convinced that what we see going on in today's Charismatic movement is the same kind of situation that occurred in the Corinthian church--an engulfing of the church in pagan religion. That which is counterfeit has been accepted as reality because it impacts the emotions of people who sat, for a long time, in churches where they never got anything that changed their lives.


I. THE POSITION OF THE GIFT OF TONGUES: SECONDARY (vv. 1-19)

In the first nineteen verses of 1 Corinthians 14, Paul establishes that the position of the gift of tongues is secondary relative to the other gifts--specifically, the gift of prophecy. He gives three reasons to support this. Let's look at the first one:

A. Prophecy Edifies The Entire Congregation (vv. 1-5)

The gift of tongues is secondary to the gift of prophecy because tongues cannot edify and prophecy can. You say, "So what!" Well, what is the purpose of the church when it meets together? Its purpose is edification. At the end of 14:26 Paul says, "...Let all things be done unto edifying." At the end of 14:12 Paul tells the Corinthians to "seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church." In other words, the purpose of the church when it meets together is edification. Throughout chapter 14 this same concept is repeated over and over again. For example, verse 4 says, "...he that prophesieth edifieth the church." Verse 5 says, "...that the church may receive edifying." Verse 31 says, "...all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted." The point is this: The church is to come together for edification--to be built up. So Paul says, "Look, tongues cannot edify--especially the counterfeit kind that you have. But prophecy edifies the whole congregation." That's the basic proposition of the first five verses.

1. The Pursuit of Prophecy (v. 1)

"Follow after love, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy."

a. "Follow after love..."

This phrase is really the end of chapter 13, isn't it? Paul's really saying, "I've just told you about love--the greatest thing there is. That's what you ought to chase." In 12:31, which is best translated as an indicative because of the context, Paul is actually saying to the Corinthians, "You're coveting the showy gifts, but I show you a more excellent way. You're busy chasing the ego-building, up-front, dramatic gifts, but I want to show you a better way--seek love." Then he gives them a great statement
on love in chapter 13, which is almost parenthetical. In 14:1, he picks up where he left off in chapter 12 and says, "Now, if you're going to earnestly seek something, then earnestly seek love."

The phrase "follow after" is the Greek word dioko, which means "to chase, to run after, to pursue." Oftentimes it is translated "to persecute." It is to be so vehement, so excited, and so energized, that you literally persecute it and dog its steps. So Paul says, "If you're going to chase, follow, or run after something, let it be love. But at the same time...

b. "...and desire spiritual gifts..."

Literally it says, "...but continue desiring spirituals...." The word "desire," because of the context, should be translated as a continuous imperative. And the word translated "and" (Gk. de), would be better translated "but," as a contrast rather than a statement of equivalent ideas. In other words, Paul is saying, "You are pursuing the showy gifts instead of pursuing love. But don't stop pursuing spiritual gifts, because you should want the ministry of the Holy Spirit through the gifts of the Spirit. I'm not saying don't have anything to do with gifts. I'm just saying to pursue love and continue to seek the spiritual realm, the realm of the operation of the Holy Spirit, the true things that the Spirit of God is doing."

c. "...but rather [lit. `most of all'] that ye may prophesy."

You see, tongues are secondary. Paul is saying, "When you come together to worship, instead of having the chaos, confusion, and gibberish of tongues, you should have the clarity of prophecy."

The verb "to prophesy" in the Greek is propheteuo. It comes from the two words pro, which means "before," and phemi, which means "to speak." Literally, then, the verb propheteuo means "to speak before." To prophesy is to speak before somebody else. That's what I do every Sunday from the pulpit--prophesy. You say, "I thought to prophesy meant to predict the future." No. The idea of predicting the future never came along until the Middle Ages when the English word took on that meaning. That isn't its intention in the Greek. Propheteuo simply means "to speak before somebody." So Paul says, "Instead of everybody shouting at the same time in ecstatic gibberish, somebody ought to stand up before everybody else and speak the Word of God." You see, that's what ought to be going on. The speaking of those who speak the voice of God ought to take the place of the chaos and confusion of tongues.

Now, there were times in the early church when the gift of prophecy was revelatory. And there were also times when the gift involved reiterating revelation that had already been given. But the point that I want to make here is that the church is to come together to hear the Word of God spoken-- not to hear an ecstatic and emotional free-for-all. All things are to be done to edify. We are to gather to hear God speak to us through men who have been given the gift of preaching and teaching. So Paul says, "More than seeking tongues, you should seek that which is intelligible-- prophecy."

The obvious reason for the inferiority of tongues is that nobody could understand what was being said. The only time the gift of tongues was ever to be used was when there was somebody present who could understand what was being said, or when there was a connection to be made to Pentecost (such as in the repeated occasions in Acts). The gift of tongues was a sign gift, and was never intended for edification. In fact, tongues were useless to edify the church by themselves. Edification could only come when tongues were interpreted by someone who understood what was being said or by someone with the gift of interpretation. However, its purpose was not edification. Its purpose was as a sign to show that God was speaking and that the prophets and Apostles of the New Testament were truly representatives of the voice of God.

2. The Perversion of Tongues (v. 2)
"For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God [lit. `a god']; for no man understandeth him; however, in the spirit he speaketh mysteries."

a. The Principal Purpose Violated

What Paul is saying is this: "You people with your pagan ecstasies are not doing what all spiritual gifts were given to do--minister (or speak) to men. Rather, you are all wrapped up in speaking pagan mysteries in ecstatic speech to a god. Nobody can even understand what you're saying!" Paul's not referring to the mysteries (Gk. musterion) of God or the mysteries that he taught, he's referring to the mysteries of paganism.

Now let me give you a basic, bottom-line truth: All spiritual gifts are given for the purpose of ministering (or speaking) to men. No spiritual gift was ever given for the purpose of ministering to God. All spiritual gifts are given to build up the body of Christ by ministering to the members of the body. God doesn't need us to minister a spiritual gift to Him--He's not incomplete! So Paul is saying, "You have fallen down on the basic use of spiritual gifts--their use among men to build up the body. The tongues speaking that you are involved in, however, is not for men, it's for a god."

By the way, the word "God" does not have an article in the Greek (the anarthrous construction). And because of the context, I think it's better translated "a god" rather than referring to the true God. In other words, they were involved in ecstatic communication with some pagan god, and speaking in pagan mysteries. And they were violating the principal purpose of spiritual gifts--the fact that they are to be ministered to other people in the body of Christ. God certainly didn't need them to talk to Him in some ecstatic gibberish!

b. The Private Prayer Language Condemned

It's amazing to me that the modern Charismatic movement is simply repeating the same error that the Corinthian church was involved in. Charismatics teach that the essential use of tongues is as a private prayer language to God. Well, that is exactly what Paul is condemning here in this passage. Paul is saying, "You've missed the point of the true gift of tongues. This gift was designed to speak to men, like all the other gifts. But you are involved in some kind of communion with a pagan god speaking in pagan mysteries, and nobody knows what you're saying. God certainly doesn't want to be talked to like that."

Is there biblical evidence for a private prayer language?

It was never God's intention to be addressed in a language that is incomprehensible to the speaker. I believe the Bible supports this. If you were to examine every prayer prayed in the Bible, and if you were to study every passage in the Bible which taught about prayer, you would not find anything, anywhere, anytime that even suggests that prayer should ever be unintelligible. You'll never find it. In fact, Jesus said the exact opposite. In Matthew 6:7 Jesus said, "But when ye pray, use not vain [or `meaningless'] repetitions, as the pagans do...." The phrase "vain repetitions" is the Greek word battalogeo. The verb logeo means "to speak," and the prefix batta is not even a word. It is a figure of speech that in English we call an onomatopoeia--the naming of something by a vocal imitation of the sound it makes. For example, we say that a bee goes buzz, or a zipper goes zip, or a plane goes whish. Those aren't words, they're onomatopoetic figures of speech. Well, batta isn't a word either. What Jesus is literally saying in Matthew 6:7 is, "When you pray, don't say batta, batta, batta--the sound of the stammering, stuttering gibberish that the pagans offer to their gods. The Father isn't interested in that kind of communication." So, we are to pray intelligibly and "with the understanding" (1 Cor. 14:15).
When Jesus went into the Garden to pray to the Father, He didn't talk in some heavenly language. Why should you? When deity communed with deity, it was in a language that was clear. When Jesus stood by the grave of Lazarus, He prayed before He raised him from the dead. John heard every word of that prayer and wrote it down just the way He said it—clear and intelligible. John 17 is the intimate prayer between Jesus and the Father. It's all very clear—translated beautifully into English from the original language. The point is this: There is no biblical evidence whatsoever of a private prayer language! We are to pray in an intelligible, understandable way.

The carnal Corinthians (like current Charismatics, I'm afraid), with their desire for the showy, attention-getting, ego-building, emotionalistic gift of tongues, were using it as a badge of spirituality and saying, "Oh, I have reached such a spiritual plateau that I can now talk to the eternal God in my own private language." That is pure paganism! So Paul writes to them and says, "You have missed the whole point of the use of the true gift of tongues. You're supposed to speak to men with the true gift, but you're speaking to a god in mysteries." By the way, it was believed that these "mysteries" were hidden secrets that only the initiated could know. It was also believed that these mysteries were received from the god that they connected up with when they went into an ecstatic trance. They had really missed the point of the true gift of tongues!

3. The Products of Prophecy (v. 3)

"But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort."

Paul says, "When you come together, don't seek to speak in an unknown tongue that no one even understands. Rather, seek to prophesy." Then he lists three things that will happen when the Word of God is spoken: People will be built up, people will be encouraged to a new kind of behavior, and people will be comforted in their agonies and their hurts. Instead of coming together and saying, "Batta, batta, batta," they were to hear the proclamation of the Word of God.

4. The Prostitution of Tongues (v. 4)

"He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself, but he that prophesieth edifieth the church."

Now, which is better? To edify oneself, or to edify the church? Well, what's the point of the whole chapter? The point of the entire chapter is the edification of the church, not edifying yourself! Listen, beloved, we were not given spiritual gifts for ourselves. If a person takes a spiritual gift, however, and uses it to edify himself, he has prostituted the gift. Why? Because it's for others. It's only to be used to build up the body of Christ.

a. The Inability of Tongues to Edify the Church

You say, "John, it says in verse 4 that you can speak in an unknown tongue and edify yourself." Well, the point is that it doesn't edify the church. You say, "But if the tongues are translated, they edify the church, don't they?" Yes, but it was the gift of interpretation that edified, not the gift of tongues. The gift of tongues was useless to edify the church, because nobody knew what was being said. You see, even if the real gift was used, it wouldn't edify anybody by itself. It would always have to be translated first. That's what he says at the end of verse 5: "...except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying."

It's wonderful to know that when the true gift of tongues was used as a sign and other Christians were present, God would always have somebody there with the gift of interpretation to interpret what was being said. Why? So that it would not go without meaning to the church. God gave the gift of
interpretation so that the church would be edified. You see, God never wanted anything going on in the church that didn't edify and build up. The Corinthians, however, were using the gift in a very chaotic way. Not only that, they had determined that it would edify the church all by itself. Well, it won't!

b. The Issue of Tongues Edifying Oneself

The Corinthians' use of the gift of tongues for personal edification was a second perversion. First of all, they had perverted the fact that spiritual gifts are meant for men, not God. Second, they had perverted the fact that spiritual gifts are meant for others, not for yourself. This same perversion is still going on today in the Charismatic movement.

Donald Gee, a well-known Charismatic, wrote the following statement: "...the revealed purposes of the gift of tongues are chiefly devotional, and we do well to emphasize the fact" (Concerning Spiritual Gifts [Springfield: Gospel Publishing House, 1937], p. 59). Another Charismatic, Larry Christenson, wrote, "One speaks in tongues, for the most part, in his private devotions. This is by far its most important use and value" (Speaking in Tongues and Its Significance for the Church [Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1968], p. 28). Now that is the very opposite of what Paul is saying here in 1 Corinthians. He is saying, "Your gift is not to speak to God, and it's not for you. Your gift is for others in the body. So, if you seek to edify God, or yourself, you're out of line."

When Paul says, "He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself," it's possible that he's being sarcastic. So far in this epistle, Paul has already dealt with the whole idea of self-edification in a rather pointed way. For example:

1) 1 Corinthians 8:10-11--In this chapter, Paul is telling the Corinthians, "It's not wrong to eat meat offered to idols. But because there are some weak Christians who think it's wrong, don't do it--or you'll make them stumble." In verses 10-11 he says, "For if any man see thee, who hast knowledge [i.e., you're a mature Christian], sitting at the table in the idol's temple [eating the idol's meat], shall not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened [Gk. oikodomeo= built up, edified'] to eat those things which are offered to idols, and through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish...?" In other words, it is possible to edify someone to his harm. In this case, edification would cause a weaker brother ruin.

So, edification can be for good or for bad. In chapter 14, the point is that if you use a gift to build up the church, it's for good. If you use the gift just to build yourself up, it's an act of selfishness...and that's bad. The word edify, then, can be for good or for bad, so you have to find some qualifying principles.

2) 1 Corinthians 10:23-24--Paul says, "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient; all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not." Edify who? Well, look at verse 24, "Let no man seek his own [edification], but every man another's [edification]." Do you see the point? Paul is saying, "All things might be okay for you, but don't do them because they're okay for you-- do them because they're going to mean something to somebody else." That's the point of all spiritual gifts. They're not for God and they're not for you, they're for the church. So Paul says, "When you come together, instead of everybody seeking his own edification, seek to love one another." Why? Because love "seeketh not its own" (1 Cor. 13:5). Gifts are not supposed to be directed to God, and they are not for self-edification.

What is Paul saying here in 1 Corinthians 14? He's telling them, "Tongues can't edify the church. Furthermore, if you have the true gift of tongues and you use it on your own for self-edification, you're misusing the gift. Use it for what God intended. Otherwise, even if you were able to speak with the tongues of men and of angels, if you are seeking your own edification, you don't have love. And without love, you're nothing more than sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal."

5. The Place of Tongues (v. 5)
Now finally in this section, Paul balances his strong words on the secondary nature and the uselessness of tongues to edify, by acknowledging that there was a true gift of tongues and that it did have a true place.

a. The Emphasis of Hyperbole (v. 5a)

"I would that ye all spoke with tongues..."

You say, "Why did Paul say that?" Well, the Charismatics interpret it to say that Paul wanted everyone to speak in tongues. However, we have to take this statement of Paul's in light of other passages here in 1 Corinthians. For example, in 12:30 Paul says, "Have all the gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?" What's the answer implied by the Greek construction? No! And in 12:11 he says, "But all these [gifts] worketh that one and the very same Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He will." You say, "Why does Paul say, 'I wish you all spoke in tongues,' if he knows they can't?"

Well, I believe that he is talking in hyperbole. Let me show you why.

In 1 Corinthians 7:1-6, Paul talks about marriage as a good thing. Then in verse 7 he says, "For I would that all men were even as I myself...." In other words, "I wish you were all single." Now is that an actual divine mandate? No. That's wishing the impossible for the sake of emphasis-- which is exactly what Paul is doing in 1 Corinthians 14. He's saying, "Hey, I'm not downplaying the gift of tongues. I wish that everybody could have the real gift. But we know, of course, that that isn't possible." You see, Paul is using hyperbole as an emphasis. He's balancing off his strong words denying the primacy of tongues to emphasize the fact that there is a true gift.

b. The Excellence of Prophecy (v. 5b)

"...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."

Paul says, "If I had my way it would be fine if everybody spoke in tongues; but if everybody was a proclaimer with the gift of prophecy, that would be even better!" But that isn't going to happen either, is it? Now, why does Paul say that prophesying is greater than speaking in tongues? Because unless tongues are interpreted, they don't do any good to the church.

In fact, those people who think they have a great thing going with a private prayer language, are severely mistaken. A private prayer language won't do anybody any good for the same reason that it won't do the church any good--there's no knowledge of what's being said. Consequently there's no learning in the mind, and it's nothing more than sensual ecstasy, a feeling, an emotion. Christianity, beloved, has never been predicated on a feeling...never!

Well, what does all of this say to us in our day? Basically, two things. First of all, when the church comes together it is to come together to hear the Word of God. Second, we need to be careful to prevent pagan religious forms to infiltrate the truth of God's pure church.

There's an interesting little footnote here. Notice in verse 2 and in verse 4 where it says "tongue," that the King James translators put the word "unknown" preceding it. However, notice that in verse 5 where it says "tongues," the word unknown isn't there. Do you know why? It seems that the translators put the word unknown in with the singular word tongue and left it out with the plural word tongues. It's possible that they did this because they believed that Paul was using the singular to refer to the ecstatic gibberish (which was all one kind--gibberish) and the plural to refer to the true gift (which would have been responsible for many languages [cf. Ac. 2:6]). So in verses 1-4 he's saying, "Your false gift is all wrong." But in verse 5 he's saying, "The true gift is all right when it's used properly and interpreted."
Beloved, let's be sure that when we come together, we come to hear the Word. Also, be constantly on guard against the infiltration of paganism into the church, because Satan hasn't changed his tactics. And remember, it's a dangerous thing to seek something that God is not giving, because then you're wide open to Satan's counterfeit.

**Focusing on the Facts**

1. What were some of the effects of the satanic system of Corinth on the church at Corinth?

2. Describe the pagan worship of the Greco-Roman world of Paul's day, and the role that speaking in tongues played in their worship.

3. What word did the Greeks use to refer to their ecstatic religious experiences?

4. Why have many people in the church been drawn to the kind of feeling-oriented, experiential approach to Christianity that is characteristic of the Charismatic movement?

5. Why would Satan want to counterfeit the work of the Holy Spirit? Is he capable of accomplishing this? How can we guard against it?

6. How do we know that the chaotic worship of the pagans had entered into the Corinthian church?

7. In the first nineteen verses of 1 Corinthians 14, Paul establishes that the position of tongues is ________ to that of the other gifts.

8. What is the purpose of the church when it meets together? Does the gift of tongues contribute to this purpose? Explain.

9. According to 1 Corinthians 14:1, what does Paul tell the Corinthians to earnestly pursue? What had they been pursuing? What change did Paul want them to make in their perspective of what they were to consider important?

10. When the Corinthians came together to worship, what spiritual gift was to have priority? Why?

11. The literal meaning of the Greek word which is translated "to prophesy" is "__ _______ ________.

12. Why were tongues useless to edify the church by themselves?

13. Is 1 Corinthians 14:2 a commendation of the Corinthians' practice of speaking in tongues, or is it a condemnation? Explain.

14. What primary principle of spiritual gifts was being violated by the Corinthians in their use of tongues?

15. Why is the word "God," in 1 Corinthians 14:2, better translated "a god"?

16. What is the biblical evidence either for or against the use of a private prayer language?

17. What three things happen when the gift of prophecy is exercised?

18. Why was it a prostitution of the gift of tongues to use it to edify oneself?

19. Why did God give the temporary gift of interpretation to the early church?
20. According to most Charismatics, what is the primary use of the gift of tongues today? How does this conflict with the proper use of any spiritual gift?

21. Is it possible to edify someone to his harm? Explain.

22. In light of 1 Corinthians 12:11 and 30, what is Paul saying in the first part of 14:5?

23. If the Corinthians had the ability to choose their spiritual gifts (which they didn't), what gift would Paul have wanted them to choose? Why?

24. In 1 Corinthians 14, the King James translators inserted the word unknown in front of the singular word tongue and not in front of the plural word tongues. Why would they have done this?

**Pondering the Principles**

1. What are some of the philosophies and practices of the world that are infiltrating the church today? Why is this happening? What can be done to prevent it? What will you do to maintain the purity of the church?

2. How do you know whether or not something is of the Spirit or a counterfeit of Satan? What is the danger of making experience the basis of what is true? (see Jn. 17:17; 2 Cor. 11:13-15; 2 Tim. 3:13-17; 1 Jn. 4:1) What is the best way to guard against being seduced by that which is counterfeit?

Available online at: http://www.gty.org/Resources/studyguides/367

COPYRIGHT (C) 2007 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (http://www.gty.org/MeetGTY/Copyright).