

## PROPHECY AND TONGUES

### **TEXT: I CORINTHIANS 14:1-40**

#### **INTRODUCTION:**

1. In chapter 14, the apostle Paul returns to the subject of spiritual gifts (cf. 12:1, 31; 13:8).
2. In particular, this chapter deals with the gift of prophecy and the gift of tongues (14:1-3).
3. Fundamental Christians have always opposed the tongues movement and have warned people of its dangers. G. Campbell Morgan described the new Pentecostal movement as “the last great vomit of Satan.”
4. R.A. Torrey declared the movement “emphatically not of God and founded by a sodomite.”
5. H. A. Ironside went to some of their meetings and described them as containing “disgusting delusions . . . pandemonium exhibitions worthy of a mad house...causing a heavy toll of lunacy and infidelity” (“Apostolic Faith Missions”).
6. This chapter has much to say about the importance of prophesying. When we think of a man prophesying, we usually think of someone predicting the future. But it has another meaning. In addition to foretelling, it could also mean forth-telling, or “telling forth God’s message.”
7. In other words, prophesying (preaching) is more important than speaking in tongues (14:1-5).
8. Warren Wiersbe says there are three principles in this chapter: edification (14:3), understanding (14:14, 15), and order (14:40), and I have organized my outline around these three principles.

#### **I. EDIFICATION (14:3)**

1. The Greek word translated “edification” literally means, “building up.” Today, we would say that good Bible preaching builds up the church.
2. Paul says in verse 5, “for greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying.”
3. Paul says in verse 12, “Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church.”
4. Paul says in verse 26, “Let all things be done unto edifying.”

5. Both prophecy and tongues were temporary gifts, and prophecy is far more important (14:1-5).
6. Tongues do not edify the church, but prophesying does (14:2-4).
7. Paul spoke in tongues, and did not deny the value of tongues. Paul even said, “I wish that ye all spake with tongues” (14:5).
8. Then Paul adds, “but rather that ye prophesied: for greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues” (14:5).
9. Prophesying was far more important (14:6-8).
10. In verse 5, Paul refers to the interpretation of tongues – “except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying” (cf. 12:10, 30; 14:26-28).
11. This emphasis on the interpretation of tongues is missing in modern-day Pentecostalism, and this is one of the ways we know that the tongues in Pentecostalism are fake.
12. We are hearing a lot of reports these days about “fake news.” There is also a big problem with “fake tongues” and “fake religion.”
13. Today much tongue-speaking, whether it is from the Pentecostals or Roman Catholic charismatics or Mormons or others, is gibberish. They defend it by saying they are speaking in an “unknown tongue” (14:2, 4, 13, 14, 19, 27). They say these tongues are supernatural ecstatic utterances, not known in any country on earth.
14. However, the word “unknown” is in italics. It was inserted by the KJV translators for clarity. It means, “unknown” to the speaker and to the audience, but unknown to the world.
15. Acts 2 plainly teaches that “tongues” are known languages.
16. “Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language” (Acts 2:6).
17. “And they were all amazed and marveled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?” (Acts 2:7, 8).
18. “Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God” (Acts 2:11).
19. When our Lord said, “And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name they shall cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues” (Mark 16:17), the adjective “new” means that they were going to speak in languages new to them, that is, languages they had not learned or used before.
20. The word “tongue” is used many times in the book of Revelation, and it always means “language.” Revelation 5:9 says, “Thou wast slain, and hast

redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation.”

21. Some tongues people say tongues are a “heavenly language,” but there is no Scripture to back that up. Some misuse I Corinthians 13:1 and Romans 8:26, but these Scriptures have nothing to do with the gift of tongues.
22. Tongues people today say that the gift of tongues enables them to reach lost sinners. The Bible teaches the very opposite (14:23).
23. It is preaching that brings genuine conviction and genuine conversions (14:24, 25). This brings us to my second point.

## II. UNDERSTANDING (14:9, 14, 15)

1. The word “understanding” is used several times in this chapter (14:2, 9, 14-16, 19, 20).
2. It is very important that people understand the Word of God. Philip heard the Ethiopian eunuch read the prophet Isaiah, and he said to him, “Understandest thou what thou readest?” (Acts 8:30).
3. Our Lord said in Matthew 13:23, “But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.”
4. Verse 7 says, “And even things without life giving sound (that is, lifeless musical instruments), whether pipe or harp, except they give a distinction in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped?” The musical instrument must give a clear, distinct sound in order to be appreciated.
5. Likewise, the if the bugler on the battlefield makes an “uncertain sound,” the soldiers will be confused because there is clear difference between “Retreat” and “Charge” (14:8).
6. Therefore, we must be very clear and easy to be understood. Otherwise, we may as well be speaking “into the air” (14:9).
7. Verse 10 says, “There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices (languages) in the world...” We understand these “voices” only if we know the language.
8. That is why there had to be an interpreter at the meeting (14:26-28).
9. “Therefore if I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian...” (14:11). *Thayer’s Lexicon* says the word “barbarian” was “used by the Greeks of any foreigner ignorant of the Greek language.” The proud Greeks looked down on the barbarians.
10. When Luke referred to “the barbarous people” on the island of Malta, he did not use the word in a pejorative way (Acts 28:1-4). He simply meant that their speech was speech unintelligible to him and Paul and the others.

11. Later on, the word took on the meaning “of rudeness and brutality” (Thayer).
12. Paul stresses that for edification there must be understanding (14:12-14). A speaker must understand what he is saying and what he is praying and what he is singing (14:13-19).
13. An “unlearned” person in the congregation (perhaps a visitor or an unsaved person) could not say “Amen” if he does not understand what’s being said (14:16).
14. First Corinthians 14:20 says, “Brethren, be not children in understanding.” But when it comes to “malice” we should be as children, “but in understanding be men.”
15. Then in verse 21, Paul quotes from Deuteronomy 28:49 and Isaiah 28:11, 12. Paul is pointing out that men are not saved by anything so much as by the preaching of the Word of God in plain language.
16. Paul is saying that back in the Old Testament period, God had repeatedly spoken to the nation Israel through the prophets, but they rejected the prophets. They would not repent so God sent the strange tongue of the Assyrian conquerors as a judgment on the unbelieving Jews.
17. Therefore, tongues are not a sign to convert men, but rather to condemn those hardened in their unbelief (14:22).
18. So, Paul says it is better to prophesy than to speak in tongues (14:23-25).
19. To summarize: the church needs edification, and this is accomplished through Bible preaching. Secondly, the Bible preaching must be clearly understood (14:19).
20. Thirdly, there must be order (14:40).

### **III. ORDER (14:40)**

1. Years ago, in Virginia, I was in a Baptist church one Sunday morning when a woman (a first-time visitor) stood up while a lady was up on the platform singing a special.
2. Everyone was shocked. The woman started talking very loudly. The soloist kept singing but she obviously felt uncomfortable.
3. Next, the songleader, who was sitting on the platform, jumped up and told the woman to stop. But she wouldn’t stop talking.
4. Finally, some of the ushers had to force her to stop. Later on, the assistant to the pastor told me that the woman told him that she thought that what she was doing was right, and that this sort of thing happened regularly in her church (cf. 14:40).

5. Apparently, things like this were happening in the church at Corinth, so Paul gave them instructions to correct the problem (14:26-28).
6. “Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge” (14:29). To “judge” means, to discern, to see if what is being said is right. All preaching and teaching must be tested by the Bible.
7. This was particularly important in Paul’s day because the New Testament canon was not yet complete.
8. Today, any extra biblical “revelation,” whether it is in tongues or visions or so-called “word of knowledge” is highly suspect.
9. Tongues can easily be counterfeited. Speaking in tongues can be self-induced, and speaking in tongues can be group-induced.
10. Furthermore, speaking in tongues can be satanically-induced.
11. John Phillips said, “If what is spoken is indeed by inspiration it is already in the Bible and we do not need it; if it is not in the Bible we don’t want it” (*Exploring 1 Corinthians*).
12. If while a man was speaking, God gave a revelation “to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace” (14:30).
13. “One by one” (14:31). God is a God of order. I was preaching in a missions conference in the Philippines, and the speaker before me went way over his allotted time. He kept telling stories and jokes, etc. When it was my time, I could only preach a short, condensed version of my message because he stole most of my time (cf. 14:31).
14. Albert Barnes said verse 32 “gives confirmation to the supposition, that the extraordinary endowments of the Holy Spirit were subjected to substantially the same laws as a man’s natural endowments. They were conferred by the Holy Ghost; but they were conferred on free agents, and did not interfere with their free agency. And as a man, though of the most splendid talents and commanding eloquence, has *control* over his own mind, and is not *compelled* to speak, so it was with those who are here called prophets. The immediate reference of the passage is to those who are called prophets in the New Testament; and the interpretation should be confined to them. It is not improbable, however, that the same thing was true of the prophets of the Old Testament; and that it is really true as a general declaration of *all* the prophets whom God has inspired, that they *had* control over their own minds, and could speak or be silent at pleasure. In this the spirit of true inspiration differed essentially from the views of the heathen, who regarded themselves as driven on by a wild, controlling influence, that *compelled* them to speak even when they were unconscious of what they said. Universally, in the heathen world, the priests and priestesses supposed or reigned that they were under an influence which was uncontrollable;

which took away their powers of self-command, and which made them the mere organs or unconscious instruments of communicating the will of the gods. The Scripture account of inspiration is, however, a very different thing. In whatever way the mind was influenced, or whatever was the mode in which the truth was conveyed, yet it was not such as to destroy the conscious powers of free agency, nor such as to destroy the individuality of the inspired person, or to annihilate what was peculiar in his mode of thinking, his style, or his customary manner of expression.”

15. Therefore, when people rant and rave uncontrollably, it is not the Holy Spirit, it is either emotionalism or possibly demonic influence.
16. Anything which produces chaos and confusion is not from God (14:33).
17. There is no doubt about it. If women were to “keep silence” in the tongues churches, they’d soon have to close down (14:34, 35).
18. This doesn’t mean women cannot speak in church or teach a Sunday School class, etc. The context is tongues-speaking (cf. 14:27, 39).
19. “What? came the word of God out from you? Or came it unto you only?” (14:36). Paul rebuked them because they had permitted women to speak in a manner unknown to other churches, and this led to confusion.
20. “If any man think himself to be a prophet” (14:37), that is, if any man professes to be a prophet, or spiritual (regarding himself as under the influence of the Holy Spirit), he should acknowledge that what Paul has written are “the commandments of the Lord.”
21. “But if any man be ignorant...” (14:38), and doubts whether Paul’s writings are inspired, and that they are in accordance with the will of God, then “let him be ignorant” at his own peril.
22. He will remain ignorant and have to suffer the consequences.
23. “Covet to prophesy” (14:39) because prophesying is the most important spiritual gift (cf. 14:1, 3, 4, 5). This is the summing up of all that Paul has said in I Corinthians 14.
24. Furthermore, “forbid not to speak with tongues” (14:39b). Tongues were an important gift in the apostolic church, but Paul said in I Corinthians 13:8, “whether there be tongues, they shall cease.”

## **CONCLUSION:**

1. George Gardiner grew up in a Pentecostal home, but as he studied his Bible he had doubts and questions about Pentecostal doctrines and practices.
2. Whenever he asked questions, he would be rebuked. His fellow Pentecostals warned him to be careful lest he be guilty of committing “the sin against the Holy Ghost.”

3. Finally, God brought him out of Pentecostalism and he became a fundamental preacher. He wrote a good little book called *The Corinthian Catastrophe*.
4. What helped George Gardiner is what helped many others that have been mixed up in error, and that is a serious study of God's Word.
5. Gardiner served in the US Air Force during WWII and this allowed him much time to study the Bible. God opened his eyes and he got his doctrine straight.
6. As a pastor, I am always coming into contact with people who have been mixed up with the tongues movement. I have been able to help some of them, and others I could not help because they were stubborn and unteachable.