

"He That Speaking In A Tongue" #2

"... edifieth himself, but he that prophesieth, edifieth the whole church" (1 Cor. 14:4).

Our study continues regarding the "unknown tongue" as the KJV translates it and examine a seemingly contraction: Paul's words that no one understood the tongues spoken in Corinth, yet Acts 2:8 tells that people in Jerusalem at Pentecost understood what the apostles (who spoke with tongues) were saying. Let us examine 1 Corinthians 14:4 and its implications to the "two-tongue" doctrine of the charismatic fellowship: a human tongue and a heavenly one. The verse reads, *"For he that speaketh in a tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God, for no man understandeth, but in the spirit he speaketh mysteries."*

It is important, if we would understand the passage, to look at the broader picture of the apostle's letter. The Corinthian church had multiple problems and questions. Some of the questions they posed to the apostle, several equally important ones they did not ask. Paul answers BOTH the questions asked and those not asked in his letter. One of the fascinating features of 1 Corinthians is that the apostle deals with an issue first by introducing it, then addressing it. In chapter one he tells brethren he has heard of their divisions, then he shows the sin of that division and makes a grand appeal for unity. He dealt with the tolerated immorality in the church by stating he had heard of the lamentable relationship that a man had with his father's wife. He then dictated what must be done to correct the matter. In short, the apostle's pattern of dealing with issues at Corinth was first to introduce the problem, then deal with it. We believe the apostle did not deviate from that pattern in 1 Corinthians 14; that he has but introduced as the problem Corinthians had by declaring *"speaking in a tongue which no man understood"* and then he deals with the problem. That the apostle was stating the way things were in Corinth rather than the way God intended for them to be can be discerned from the following facts:

First, the Corinthian tongue speakers were edifying only themselves; those who prophesied edified others. Was this God's purpose for spiritual gifts? It was not. The purpose of all gifts, whichever gift it might be, was designed to profit or edify the whole body. *"But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit to profit withal"* (1 Cor. 12:7). Thus, a "red flag" should immediately appear when Paul said *"he that speaketh in a tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God, for no man understandeth ..."* Add to that Paul's words in vs. 4: *"He that speaketh in a tongue edifieth himself: but he that*

prophesieth edifieth the church." According to 1 Cor. 12:7, every gift, including tongue speaking, was to *"profit withal."*

Second, the whole tenor of this section in 1 Corinthians 14 is to show that God intended that others (not just God) understand what was spoken. Lifeless objects which give sounds can be understood — a musical instrument, a warning trumpet. If the proper notes are sounded, hearers understand or are edified. Furthermore, living creatures utter sounds, designed to be understood: birds, beasts, and man. No creature utters a sound for itself alone, but sounds are uttered to communicate with others of like nature. The tongues God gave first century Christians were designed to be understood by other fellow humans ... that those being might thereby be edified.

Third, consider that each of the nine gifts had both a general and specific purpose. The general purpose for every gift was the same: to edify the body. The specific purpose of each gift could and did differ. *"Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to the unbelieving: but prophesying is for a sign, not to the unbelieving, but to them that believe"* (1 Cor. 14:22). The purpose of tongues is thereby shown to differ from that of prophesying: tongues were a sign to unbelievers.

How astonishing then is the statement following the declared purpose of tongues! *"If therefore the whole church be assembled together and all speak with tongues and there come in men unlearned or unbelieving, will they not say ye are mad"* (1 Cor. 14:23). The exact reverse would be the result for unbelievers to come into an assembly where all spake with tongues, a sign to unbelievers! Why? The answer is evident. If the church, the whole church, spoke with a tongue no one present understood, the unbeliever would conclude the church was a group of deranged individuals — mad! Yet, if the tongue was used properly, as it was at Pentecost and at Cornelius's house (people who spoke in a language the individual had not learned to those who did understand that language, but who realized the tongue speaker had not learned it, Acts 2:1-4; Acts 10-11) then "tongue speaking" would truly be a *"sign to the unbeliever."*

These three preceding observations from 1 Corinthians 14 should be sufficient to show that when Paul wrote *"he that speaketh in a tongue speaketh not to man but unto God,"* he was not stating the proper use of tongues, but how those tongues were used in Corinth!

Jim McDonald