

# What is the Scriptural View of Speaking in Tongues? #3

Acts 2:6-8

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The discussion of speaking in tongues at time generates great emotion (whether one is an opponent or a proponent). My intention (by God's grace) in teaching on this gift of the Holy Spirit is to generate more light than heat—to drive us all to a careful inspection of Scripture in considering what the biblical gift of tongues was, and to speak the truth in love.

Dear ones, only as we submit our mind, will, emotions, and experiences to the Holy Spirit speaking in Scripture will we ever be able to come to an accurate knowledge of the truth in this matter (and in other truths revealed in Scripture). We must lean not unto our own understanding, but in all our ways and experiences trust in and acknowledge the supreme authority of God, and He promises that He shall direct our paths and our understanding (Proverbs 3:5-6). This was the process that the Lord used in my life (gradually leading me to submit myself to the absolute authority of His Word over my own experience of speaking in what I believed at the time to be the gift of tongues).

In previous sermons, we have noted two characteristics of the biblical gift of speaking in tongues: (1) **Biblical speaking in tongues was the miraculous ability to speak in foreign languages of the world that one had never learned;** (2) **Biblical speaking in tongues was primarily for the edification of others (as is true of all gifts of the Holy Spirit), rather than merely for the edification of oneself.** This Lord's Day we add a third characteristic of the biblical gift of speaking in tongues: **Biblical speaking in tongues was not to be used in a disorderly manner, but was under the control of the speaker so as to promote order within the assembly**

**of Christians** (1 Corinthians 14:40). Why? “For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace” (1 Corinthians 14:33). God’s very nature is one of peace and order, rather than one of confusion and disorder. Where confusion reigns in worship there will not be edification—only where there is order will there be edification within worship.

Let us turn now our attention to this third characteristic of the biblical gift of tongues: Order—not Confusion—in the Use of Speaking in Tongues.

## **I. Acts 2.**

A. Was the gift of tongues in Acts 2 a simultaneous outpouring in foreign languages, each person competing to be heard above the next person? Or was there an orderliness in speaking that allowed each speaker to be heard and to be understood. Note that those speaking in tongues were HEARD in the native languages of the Jews and proselytes from many different foreign countries gathered in Jerusalem (Acts 2:6-8).

1. If you were standing off from a crowd of 15 people speaking in 15 different languages simultaneously (with one of them speaking English), you may in such a situation be able to pick out a word here and there to know that one of the speakers was speaking in your language, but there would certainly be no understanding or edification, because of the confusion of all speaking at the same time.

2. We know in Acts 2 that the Jews and proselytes HEARD these Galileans speaking in their own language and dialects (Acts 2:6-8).

B. But we also know from the text in Acts 2 that the Jews and proselytes UNDERSTOOD what was being spoken to them by these Galileans in their own particular language and dialect: they heard and understood them to declare the wonderful works of God (Acts 2:11).

1. Now this is not simply a case of picking out a word or two

in their own language, but this is clearly a case of HEARING and UNDERSTANDING what was being spoken.

2. I submit to you that this could only happen if the apostles and the other believers were not all speaking in tongues at the same time, but rather were speaking in some orderly way—one speaking to the Parthians, another speaking to the Medes, the next speaking to the Elamites, etc. (Acts 2:9-11). Otherwise, mere chaos and confusion would have reigned over that setting without understanding and without edification.

C. Let's make the point here using an illustration that is far less difficult than using 15 different languages.

1. Imagine a teacher asking for questions at the end of a lecture, and 15 different people stand and begin voicing their questions all at the same time and all in English. How much understanding would there likely be? Very little if any. Why? Because there was no orderliness (even though they were all speaking in English). What do you parents say to your children when they all begin talking to you at the same time? "One at a time! I can't understand what you are saying." Right?

2. How much more confusion there would be where a group of people were all speaking in 15 different languages at the same time. Dear ones, when there is no orderliness, there will be no understanding and no edification. Thus, it must be assumed that speaking in tongues in Acts 2 was not a mass exercise in confusion, but an orderly exercise in edification.

3. Sadly, this type of mass confusion often reigns in many Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches when the leader exhorts the congregation to praise the Lord and many begin simultaneously to speak in what they claim to be the gift of tongues. Beloved, this does not manifest the orderliness of the Holy Spirit, but rather the confusion of the flesh of man.

## II. 1 Corinthians 14.

A. That which we have deduced concerning the orderliness in speaking in tongues in Acts 2 is expressly spelled out for us by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 14.

B. As we come to 1 Corinthians 14:26, Paul begins to transition in his teaching and correction concerning speaking in tongues **from the characteristic of edification of others** in the use of speaking in tongues **to the characteristic of orderliness** in the use of speaking in tongues.

1. Paul asks the question in 1 Corinthians 14:26: “How is it then, brethren?” One commentator has captured the sense of Paul’s question in these words, “What then is the upshot of all this [i.e. of all that has been thus far said]?” (Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1 Corinthians 14:26, p.690). Here Paul is ready to draw out his conclusion from all that he has just stated about the necessity of edification in the use of speaking in tongues in 1 Corinthians 14:1-25, and this is his summary: “Let all things be done unto edifying.” That is where we ended last Lord’s Day in our brief investigation of 1 Corinthians 14. The edification of others was the primary thrust of Paul’s correction of those who spoke in tongues, rather than edification of one’s self. But before we continue in considering now Paul’s discussion as to how speaking in tongues is to be ordered within the Church if it is to be edifying, perhaps some further comments about 1 Corinthians 14:26 would be in order at this point.

a. Whatever one understands by this verse (and there are a number of various interpretations), what is not being approved by Paul is the idea that there is a free-for-all in the worship service with any and everyone who feels led to give a psalm, a doctrine, a tongue, a revelation, or an interpretation of tongues. This would be contrary to the order God has ordained and Paul has explained within the worship of the

Church.

b. There are some Reformed commentators who understand this verse to be descriptive of an abuse within the worship of the Corinthian Church (if this is true, Paul is censuring the Church of Corinth for this abuse). Everyone who has these stated gifts is using them in some self-centered way—perhaps using them to gain the center stage, or posturing one’s own gift to gain the limelight, or using them at the same time another is using his gift. If this is true, Paul is simply summarizing the abuses that he has already mentioned in 1 Corinthians 1-25, but he corrects these abuses with the principle at the end of the verse: “Let all things be done unto edifying.”

c. There are also some Reformed commentators who understand this verse to be the corrective to the abuse within the worship of the Corinthian Church, giving the antidote to the abuse of spiritual gifts in the Church of Corinth (if this is true, Paul is telling them this is what ought to be done in their worship services). Each of those who have these gifts of leadership is to use them for the edification of the whole Church. Clearly, these are all gifts that involve some public degree of leadership within the Church which would need to be tried, approved, and set apart for the ministry in Corinth (as would be true of a prophet, pastor, or teacher). If those with such gifts received prophetic and ministerial gifts, one would correctly assume they served in such a capacity as ordained officers in the Church (as in the case of Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:6).

d. However, the point that Paul is driving home is that what is of supreme importance is that these gifts be exercised for the benefit of the whole Church—for ultimately it is not the individual that has these gifts, but rather the Church collectively that has these gifts for its benefit (1 Corinthians 3:21-23).

2. At this point, we see the order that Paul establishes in the use of tongues and prophecy within the congregation.

a. **1 Corinthians 14:27.**

(1) First, there are to be a limited number of men who give a message or exhortation in tongues—two or at the most three. Tongues was not to be viewed by the Corinthian Church as being that which should primarily occupy their time in worship. There were others who were set apart with gifts of leadership as well that should likewise be involved in the ordained and appointed ministry of the Church—like those who led the singing of psalms (in instructing and applying them to the lives of the people), or those who taught doctrine (from what was already revealed in Scripture), or those who delivered immediate revelation from God (all in the language of the people), or those who interpreted the message in tongues. Paul does not want speaking in tongues to have some elevated importance over gifts that will edify more people in the congregation that speak the same language.

(2) Second, those who spoke in tongues were not to speak at the same time (which apparently was happening), but rather one at a time: “by course” or in turn, in order. This confirms that the miraculous gift of tongues in Acts 2 must have followed the same principle of order given here by Paul. For otherwise, dear ones, it is not edification, but confusion that befalls the congregation. Each speaker in tongues trying to speak louder to be heard or tempted to shed more tears, to have more emotion, or to sound more dynamic so as to be heard over the others who were speaking.

(3) Third, there is to be present in the congregation one who is already known to have been graciously given the miraculous gift of translating the message in tongues into the language of the people for the benefit of the entire congregation. One doesn't simply begin to speak in tongues (under some irresistible prompting) and hope someone will be present who is able to translate it. This clearly indicates that the gift of tongues was not some kind of uncontrollable gift that overwhelmed the one so gifted; for he could either exercise the gift if he

knew an interpreter to be present, or as we will see in the very next verse, he could be silent in the congregation.

b. **1 Corinthians 14:28.**

(1) There is a fourth principle of order given here by Paul. Paul states that when one with the gift of tongues looks around for one with the miraculous gift of interpretation (it implies such a one was known to the Church) and finds he is not present, the one with the gift of tongues is not to proceed with his message in tongues. He is not under some uncontrollable power or constraint to utter the message in tongues. To the contrary, he is to be silent in the Church and speak to himself and to God. This is the only time (as I indicated last Lord's Day) in which tongues is said to be used silently, and it is in the context of the Church (where the intention was to use it for the benefit and edification of the whole Church—rather than for one's own personal edification). This was, therefore, not a warrant to use the gift of speaking in tongues for one's own personal edification as a prayer language at home.

(2) Dear ones, even miraculous gifts are to be regulated and controlled for the benefit of the whole Church. It would seem that many today believe that if they claim to have some miraculous ability to speak in tongues or to prophesy, that this supposed miraculous ability grants to them the liberty to violate these rules of orderliness herein stated by Paul. However, Paul makes it clear that even those who did have these miraculous gifts were yet able to exercise self-control for the benefit of the Church (1 Corinthians 14:32).

(3) Fifthly, we also see that these miraculous gifts were not to be received without there being judges as to the legitimacy of these gifts and whether they met the biblical standards for those speaking in tongues and for those prophesying (whether by revelation or by foretelling a future event)—1 Corinthians 14:29. God's people were not to be gullible and simply accept whatever was passed along by means of these miraculous gifts—these gifts were to be judged by those who

had already sustained such a test and evaluation (1 John 4:1). So likewise, ordinary ministers are to be judged by other ministers in their doctrine and preaching and moral character and familial life before they are set apart to the ministry of gospel proclamation. Jesus said by their fruits you shall know false prophets: by the fruit of their doctrine; and by the fruit of their life (Matthew 7:20). This is so important because of the warning that Jesus then gives in Matthew 7:21-23.

c. **1 Corinthians 14:34.**

(1) Sixthly, women were to be silent in the gathered assembly of the Church. Dear ones, there are no qualifications to this silence on the part of women leading, teaching, or speaking as a voice of one within the assembly of the Church. Certainly, women are to join in the corporate worship with God's people in the congregational prayers, reading of God's Word, singing of the Psalms, and hearing and applying the preached Word to their lives. The women in Corinth seemed to have been prophesying in the Christian assembly (1 Corinthians 11:5-6), and though Paul does not directly forbid it at that point, he now directly tell women that they are to remain silent (1 Timothy 2:11-14). Certainly, there were women who possessed the miraculous gift of prophecy (like Philip's four daughters, Acts 21:9). But they used the gift privately with other women or in private contexts and not in the assembly of God's people for worship. This in no wise indicates an inferiority of nature or inferiority of grace between a man and a woman (Galatians 3:28).

(2) Now as we investigate what occurs in various churches (not only Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches), we see this Spirit-inspired regulation given by the Apostle Paul disregarded, which immediately tells us something about that church's view of the authority of Scripture. Dear one, it is not a woman's giftedness to exercise gifts of teaching, exhorting, or prophesying (according to Paul), it is a matter of God's divine order which He has established that is at issue.



C. The order that must prevail in the Church of Christ is summarized in the following two verses: 1 Corinthians 14:33,40—order not confusion, peace not chaos. But notice the reason why this is the case. It is the character of God Himself—He is not a God of confusion, but of peace and order. Dear ones, the very honor and moral character of God requires that matters in worship should be regulated decently and orderly. If, on the other hand, those in leadership are allowed to alter the orderliness of worship and usher in confusion, it will bring dishonor to the God of order and peace, and it will not edify God’s people regardless of the number of people who may be attracted and drawn to such confusion. To the contrary, it will bring shame upon the very character of God Himself.

Dear ones, as we consider the order God has established in the universe He has created; when we consider God’s order in salvation (decreed, accomplished, and applied); when we look at the order in God’s providence in which He works all things after the counsel of his own will (Ephesians 1:11), ought not God’s character of order to be present in His worship (just as He has ordered, not as we have ordered—Regulative Principle of Worship)?

Finally, I don’t know what you may be going through in your life right now, dear friend, by way of confusion, perplexity, tumult, and perhaps chaos, but I do know that the God who brings order, purpose, and peace is the one who calls upon you to trust alone in Christ alone. Sin brings disorder and chaos—God brings order and peace. He who brought order and peace to the stormy sea in which the disciples felt tumult and disorder is able to bring peace and order into your life as you look to Christ and His righteousness alone. And dear Christian, the world can be crumbling all around you in seeming disorder, but when your heart is stayed on Him, He will keep you in perfect peace (Isaiah 26:3-4).

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