



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

1 Corinthians 14: 26-40

"Order in Worship"

1 Corinthians

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you, Mark, and it's very good to be back with all of you. It's a long lost study in 1 Corinthians, so if you remember, we were in that section of the book, chapters 12, 13, and 14, where Paul is dealing with some specific problems. Book of 1 Corinthians is really a series of answers to questions that the Corinthians had, and Paul correcting certain problems that the Corinthians had. And here, he's correcting problems, specifically the misuse and abuse of certain spiritual gifts. We've been in that for a while, and we're going to conclude this section of the book with verses 26 through 40, and then next week we begin a new section, that great chapter, chapter 15, definitive chapter in the New Testament on the resurrection. But this morning, we begin with chapter 14 verse 26.

"What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. If anyone speaks in a tongue, it should be by two or at the most three, and each in turn, and one must interpret; but if there is no interpreter, he must keep silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God. Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment. But if a revelation is made to another who is seated, the first one must keep silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted; and the spirits of prophets are subject to ; for God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.

"The women are to keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but are to subject themselves, just as the Law also says. If they desire to learn

anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church. Was it from you that the word of God first went forth? Or has it come to you only?

"If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment. But if anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized.

"Therefore, my brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak in tongues. But all things must be done properly and in an orderly manner." May the Lord bless this reading of His word and our time of study in it together. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do pray Your blessing upon what we've read. Rather difficult passage. Straightforward passage. I don't think it's a passage that's difficult to understand. But for many, I do know that it's difficult to accept. And so, we pray that all of us would be made subject to Your word and to the things we've read, and that You would impress upon us the very thing that Paul was impressing upon those Corinthians: that what he wrote is Your word. It's Your revelation. It's Your law to us. So, we must understand that. We are not dealing this morning with just any book. We're not dealing with an interesting book with wisdom and interesting stories. We are opening and reading and studying the unique book, the Bible, which is Your revelation. It's inerrant. It's for us. It's for all the ages, and it is only as we listen to it and submit to it that there will be order in our own lives, peace, and real happiness.

So Lord, we pray that for us. I pray that for every individual here. I pray that for this church. I pray that we'll never depart from this book, even when it's hard and difficult, and when it's not politically acceptable, or the kind of thing we want to hear in our day. Nevertheless, this is inerrant. This is the standard for the church in every age. So Father, give us that conviction and help us to be men and women who yield to it in honor of You to Your glory, but also for our own personal good. Build us up in the faith in this hour, Father.

And we pray for the material things that we need, and we're always dependent on You for that. We always need material things. We need employment in order to provide for ourselves. We have been told by our Lord that we're to pray to You for our daily bread. That, I take, means many things. That means pray for work, pray

that we'll do well in our work, pray that we will be able to support ourselves in our labors, and that You will provide employment. And so, we thank You that we have it. We thank You that we have work to do and yet we know some don't, and we pray for them, that those who are without work would be given doors of opportunity that would open for them, and that they would be able to be employed, and You would give them that, and that ability to provide for themselves and their family. So, look after them.

And those who are sick, Father, we pray that You'd give them healing. We can look at our prayer requests in the bulletin. We're reminded by it of how frail we are, of how prone we are to get sick, and it's going to happen to us. It's going to happen to everyone at some point. The healthiest of people someday come to the end of it. And we need to be prepared for that, but we're reminded that we are a weak people. We are just dust. So we look to You to provide the gift of health. And in the midst of illness and recovery, we pray that You'd give encouragement to those who are Your people, and they would look to You, and they would learn, and they would rest in You. We give You thanks for everything we have in Christ. We have much. We have the inheritance of eternity. We have a kingdom to come. We have a new heavens and a new earth to come. We have a life that is unending and glorious beyond our comprehension. That should put the trials of this temporal life in perspective. So, help us to have that perspective, and bless us as we study Your word. Build us up in the faith. Encourage us with it. We pray in Christ's name, Amen.

[Message] It's not uncommon to hear someone quote what has been called an ancient Chinese curse, which is "may you live in interesting times." Well, maybe someone has wished that on us, because we certainly live in interesting times. But so did Paul. In fact, he lived in times very much like our own. The church in his day faced issues that are similar to those that we face. Two in particular. The question of tongues, and the role of women.

I just read an article this week which stated that Pentecostalism is the world's fastest growing religion. So these are relevant issues for us. And those are the two issues that Paul writes about in the last part of 1 Corinthians 14. They are, as Dr. Johnson once described them, "very prickly subjects." So, this is an interesting passage for our interesting times. But, our text is also interesting because it gives us a

window on the early church and how it worshiped. The meeting of the church was very different from most modern church services. The early church enjoyed great freedom.

But freedom always had to be guarded, or it could become, and can become a pretext or an opportunity for abuse. And unfortunately, the Corinthians abused their freedom. They were doing things that were out of step with the rest of the churches and contrary to the law of God. And as a result, there was confusion and people were not being edified.

So Paul now corrects that in the final verses of chapter 14. God, he says, is not a God of confusion but of peace. And the counsel to them is to do things properly and do them in an orderly way. But he begins with a description of a church service that shows how the problem he has been correcting from chapters 12 through 14 could occur. It was an active church. Verse 26. "What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification."

The Princeton theologian and Presbyterian Charles Hodge wrote this passage, and indeed the whole chapter presents a lively image of an early Christian assembly. And it was lively. The contemporary commentator Don Carson wrote: "It is clear that the Corinthian service was not boring." And not just the Corinthian service, but church services all around the Mediterranean and throughout the ancient world. This was a typical meeting of the church. It was made up of all kinds of people, men and women, slaves and free, rich and poor. They gathered in someone's home on a Sunday evening where they would take the Lord's supper every Sunday evening. Baptize new converts when that was the opportunity, and minister to one another using their spiritual gifts. The meeting would usually end with a hymn. It was patterned after the synagogue of the first century. It wasn't one teacher or single pastor. There were elders to oversee the meeting, but it was open to various men to teach and use their gifts.

Everyone came prepared. Each one, Paul says, notice that. Each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation. That means that someone composed a New Testament psalm to be sung in the meeting, someone came prepared to teach a passage, and so on. It operated on the principle of the priesthood of all believers. That is a very important doctrine in the New Testament, and it was a doctrine that was

rediscovered by the reformers during the reformation. The priesthood of all believers. It's one that we find in the writings of Paul, we find it in the writings of Peter. In fact, Peter in 1 Peter 2:9 calls us a "royal priesthood."

So, when Paul says "each one," he means every person is a priest and has a ministry. There's not one little circle of men who are the priests of the church and to whom we come for counsel, and teaching, and confession, and all of that. We're all priests, men and women alike, we are priests in the Body of Christ, and we are to minister according to our gifts and our calling under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 5:19: "Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophetic utterances." In other words, don't tell people not to prophesy. The Holy Spirit is the one who guides the church. He's the one who leads the meeting. And this is what we attempt to do here on a Sunday evening.

I can remember, I think it must've been 40 years ago back in the east parlor where we used to meet on a Sunday night. Dr. Johnson talking to some first year seminary students. I was sort of standing on the periphery, and he read 1 Corinthians 14:26 to them to explain the basis for that meeting, why it takes place as it does. And he was explaining that to them because I think it seemed a little odd, and it does to people who haven't grown up here, aren't used to it. People who are new members or visitors are a little taken back by this meeting we have on Sunday evening where various people can speak. And the reason for that is people aren't used to that. They are used to passive services where they sit, they listen, and they leave.

That's different from what Paul describes here. Somehow, the church got away from this form of worship. Charles Hodge suggested that the freedom and the spontaneity of the early church ended when the miraculous gifts of prophecy and tongues ceased after the first generation. That's really not a satisfying explanation because the spontaneity that we see here applies to everything. It applies to composing hymns, composing psalms, teaching as well.

This still applies. It still continues. There's nothing in the text to suggest that this kind of meeting ever stopped. So what happened? Well, I think a difficulty with this kind of meeting is that it requires maturity to work, at least to work well. It requires preparation from everyone and vigilance. I think you can tell the kind of week that the congregation has had by the kind of service we have on a Sunday night. Have we been preparing ourselves? It's not a meeting that relies on a few trained men

to carry it along, and that can seem a little dangerous to people. This kind of freedom seems to invite anarchy, and it can. It can. As I say, it requires that people come prepared, prepared to use their gift if they're qualified, and that doesn't mean that everybody who comes is expected to stand and speak.

If we read this chapter, we see there are lots of people that aren't supposed to speak. Some are called to speak, to have a public ministry. Others aren't, but everyone, everyone is to be prepared spiritually. Men and women alike. And we do that through prayer, through study, through watchfulness.

They were not watchful in Corinth. I suspect they were a little lazy. And, there was some anarchy in the church. They were interesting times. So Paul now tries to bring order back to the meeting by giving guidelines on the proper use of gifts, specifically the gift of tongues and the gift of prophecy, and on the role of women in the church.

On the face of it, I suppose, laying down rules may seem to stifle freedom and curb the liveliness of the meeting. But imagine trying to play a round of golf without a set course or a game of tennis without lines and a net. It wouldn't be much of a game; couldn't play. Well that's true of anything. We need guidelines. We need parameters to effectively function. And Paul gives those here. If anyone speaks in a tongue, he writes in verse 27, it should be by two or at the most three, and each in turn, and one must interpret. So, no more than three people could speak in tongues in a meeting, and each one must be interpreted. And he says in verse 28, if there's not an interpreter, then he is to remain silent. Paul also says when they speak, they are to do it in turn. That is, one at a time, which may suggest that they weren't doing that, that two or three were standing at the same time and speaking at the same time, which only caused confusion.

So, Paul required that things be done in an orderly and intelligible way. One at a time, and when they spoke, the tongue must be interpreted. It would be pointless to listen to an unlearned language, something that no one understands. The point is to be instructed. The point is to be built up in the faith. The point is to have the gift used effectively.

It gives a similar rule for the use of prophecy in verse 29. "Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment." Now, the others, I take it here, to be the whole church. All were to think critically. Not judgmentally, but analytically,

which may result in a judgment. That's not particularly flattering to the person who spoke, but nevertheless, that's how we are to come together. We are to think analytically, critically. There were false prophets in that day, just as there are false teachers in our day. So we are to be discerning. You need to listen to sermons with discernment. The preacher and the teacher are not the final authority. Hopefully we have sound teaching from this pulpit.

But it's not infallible teaching. We make mistakes and you need to judge the things that we teach, whether here or in another room, in a Sunday school class or a Wednesday meeting. Judge it by the Scriptures. Analyze everything by the Bible. It is our authority, not the teacher, but the Bible. Everything must be weighted and analyzed by it.

One of the problems in the church at Corinth was a lack of discernment among the people. I can understand that somewhat because remember, this is not an old church. It hasn't been around for decades. It's a relatively young church, and many of those in the church were saved out of paganism. There were some who'd come out of the synagogue, some had been trained in the law and the prophets. They knew the bible, but so many didn't. They were Greeks, they had been pagans, they were saved out of that. And so, they were still learning. But regardless of what the circumstances were, they lacked discernment because they lacked an understanding of Scripture, and so they had problems. And we will too, if we lack an understanding of the Bible.

Well then, Paul says if a prophet stands up bet a revelation is made to another who is seated, the one standing, the first one, is to sit down. It's not altogether clear what he's describing here. In fact, this is one of the problems we have in studying 1 Corinthians. Paul deals with questions and issues. He doesn't explain the whole circumstance around the particular issue. He's writing to people. He's writing a real letter to real people. They knew the issue, and he knew the issue. He didn't need to explain it to you, so we're not fully aware of everything that he's describing here, but it seems the situation that he's addressing here is one in which one person was speaking, giving a prophecy when the Holy Spirit communicated for fresh truth to another. The Spirit guides the meeting. In such a case, we would assume it was an urgent revelation, and so the first speaker was to defer to the second, and sit down.

And then, Paul explains in verse 31, you can all prophesy. In other words, everyone's going to have the opportunity to speak when this other, when this person

finishes, then that first person can stand and complete the revelation that he was giving. But to avoid conflict. The first person was to sit and let the other person speak. Defer to others. Now, that keeps things orderly, and everything would work out, all would learn and be exhorted. And they could do that. These prophets could do that. They could control their involvement in the meeting because as Paul says in verse 32, "the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets." In other words, a prophet had control of his spirit. Not the Holy Spirit of course, but his own spirit, his inner spirit, his mind, which I think tells us a lot about the gifts of prophecy and tongues. They were not uncontrolled. They were not ecstatic experiences in which a person speaking in a tongue was suddenly overwhelmed by an uncontrolled impulse, taken over.

Not at all. Those with the gift of tongues and prophecy controlled their gift. They knew when to use it and when not to use it. They used them deliberately, just as those with the other gifts: the gift of teaching, the gift of exhortation, the gift of evangelism. Consciously used their gifts. The person with the gift of evangelism would think: how can I best present the gospel to this person? Should I present the gospel to this person? If this person's closed to it, then I'm not going to do that. They have to use discernment in that, and then how is the best way to present it? Well, it's the same with the gift of tongues, the gift of prophecy. Their spirit was under their control, their mind. They could use it in a proper way. That's why Paul could give them this instruction. If it's something that they had no control over, then you couldn't instruct them in that. So, Paul was telling them to use their gifts wisely and orderly for, he explains, "God is not a God of confusion, but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints."

This was the norm for the early church. The assemblies functioned according to general guidelines to avoid disorder and confusion so that there would be edification, so that people would be built up in the faith. That's the goal in all of this. Paul said in verse 26, "Let all things be done for edification." Many of the Corinthians were using their gifts out of self-interest. Maybe for self-development or self-display, to make a show of this very impressive gift that they had of speaking in languages. But, they weren't using them for the common good. That's what Paul speaks of back in chapter 12 and verse 7. It sort of gives us a governing principle for

what Paul is concerned about, and that is the common good, and the common good is building up the people in the faith, and we do that through understandable instruction.

All of that that they were doing, this misuse of the gifts, this seeking to impress others with what they had, was contrary to the law of love that regulates Christian behavior, as Paul explained in chapter 13. We're to seek the common good of others and the thing that governs us in doing it, that guides us in doing it is love. We're to put the other person first, and we're to be patient with one another. And equally, we are to follow God's instruction. It governs what we do. He knows best. His word is our authority, and that really underlies so much. In fact, everything that he says here, later he will say.

The things I write to you, this is in verse 37, "the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment." In other words, this is not just Paul's opinions or an expression of his first century prejudices. What he's telling us here is: this is more than just my counsel to you. This is the Lord's commandment. He understood the inspiration of God, the inspiration of Scripture, that this is Scripture. And then he goes on to say, "But if anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized." In other words, this is the authority. This is not something to debate. And if you don't recognize that, then you cannot be correct. So, this must govern our thinking. The Word of God, the Bible, the 66 books of it are our authority. That's why Paul emphasizes intelligible instruction. We need the instruction of God's word. It's God's wisdom. And we'll not be happy or orderly or productive in our lives if we ignore it.

Now, in verse 34, he turns to another issue, that of women and their participation in the meeting of the church. He tells them very simply, they are to be silent. The women are to keep silent in the churches. And notice, it's the churches. This isn't a rule that he's developed for the Corinthians because they've been a little disorderly. This is for all the churches. This is the common practice. "The women are to keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but they are to subject themselves just as the Law also says."

Now, to some, that sounds very chauvinistic of Paul. He obviously is an old bachelor who had a low view of women, but nothing could be farther from the truth. We don't know, first of all, that Paul was a bachelor. There's good reason, as we considered earlier, for thinking that he may have been a widower. So he understood marriage from personal experience, but regardless of that, whether he was or was not,

he didn't have a low view of women. He had a high view of women. He served with women in the ministry, like Euodia and Syntyche in Philippi. He told husbands in Ephesians 5 to love their wives as Christ loves the church. Men are to sacrifice for women. They are to put them first in that relationship. He elevated women in marriage. And he did so in the church, as spiritual equals. In Galatians 3:28, he taught that men and women are equal before Christ.

We are all believer priests, though we are not equal in function or authority. Equal in person, but not in function. Paul taught that as well. Male leadership in marriage and in the church. And as far as I can tell, he made no exceptions for that. It is the man's responsibility to lead.

It's not merely Paul's opinion. When he instructs women to remain silent in the churches, he bases that on Scripture. That's his support. He said, "Just as the Law also says." He doesn't say where the Law says that, but probably he's referring to Genesis chapter 2 verse 7 and verse 22, and the order of creation, in which man was made first. The order suggests that because the man was made first and the woman was made for the man, to be his helper, that a pattern had been established for the roles that they would play. It was set before the fall. This is what has been called a creation ordinance. This isn't something that has come along because of sin and things have been adjusted in light of the fall. This is prior to that. This is a creation ordinance. So, it is God's model for leadership in marriage and in the church.

Evidently what was happening in Corinth was, on occasion, women would interrupt a teacher with a question, probably a valid question, but it was disruptive. So, Paul gives his solution in verse 35. "If they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church."

Now, that's interesting for a couple of reasons. First of all, you'll notice Paul doesn't say, "Wait, and after the meeting, go up to the pastor and ask a question." It doesn't say that because there was no single pastor in the early church. And what I mean by that is there's no office of pastor. There was, and is, the gift of pastor-teacher, but that's a function. That's not an office. The elders of the church are pastors. Mark, and Jim, and Larry, and others are pastors. They give guidance and they give direction. They give counsel. But they don't hold an office. One man does not hold the office of the pastor of the church. So, Paul instructs wives to speak to their husbands, which put a lot of responsibility on the men. Someone thinks well, he

gives all the power and the authority to the man, and they have it easy. No, they have it more difficult, really. They have the responsibilities laid upon their shoulders, and this is one example of that. They're to be able to answer these questions that their wives have from the Word of God.

What does it mean? What's it say? How many men can do that? How many men today can answer the questions that their wives have? The reality is, and I don't pretend to have just wide authoritative knowledge on what goes on in churches and even in this church for that matter, but it has been my observation that in many churches, that women often know more than men, that they study, they go to Bible studies, and often they have more interest than men do. Men are interested in things, but it usually is what's on the sports page or the business section of the paper. That's fine, but there's far more to be interested in and to devote ourselves to than that.

Now, in fairness, they work all day. They come home, they're tired, and study is demanding. Now, I said that in the first service, and one of the men came up and said, "You need to take that out of the sermon. Don't make it easy on men. We live in a passive age, and men are too passive, and they need to be more aggressive." And I agree with that, but the reality is: after a long day of work, it's difficult. Nevertheless, men have a responsibility to lead, and to know and understand. And if they can't find what they need to find in the Bible, they need to know how to find it and to do it. They need to be leaders, not just in the family, but in the church.

What's going to happen to this church 10, 20 years from now when the present group of elders are gone or on the way out? Who's going to replace them? If it's going to be a strong church, it's got to have strong leadership in that sense, which means men who know the word of God and are devoted to it. But this is a man's responsibility. He needs to be a leader. And as I said, or as Dr. Johnson said, there are some prickly subjects in this passage. Prickly for men, but especially for women. Principally for women, because of this statement by Paul, and that's really, he's discussing women here in this statement where he says, "It is improper for a woman to speak in church."

Now, this isn't the only place Paul teaches that. He gives the same instruction again in 1 Timothy chapter 2 verses 11 and 12 where he says "a woman is not to teach or exercise authority over a man." And, that's the real issue here. Authority. God has ordained the leadership of the church be male. That does not suggest that women are

inferior to men, that they are less intelligent than men or less daring or brave or capable than men.

I had a book at home that I read and I passed it on to someone who I thought would enjoy reading it. It's entertaining reading, and the title gives you a sense of that. It's titled "Living with Cannibals and Womens Adventures." And it's about women who were globetrotters, some in the 19th century when travel was not easy, it was very difficult. Others were explorers, pilots, alpinists, rock climbers. Some of them, contemporary. One climbed the north face of the Eiger solo in 17 hours. My palms in my hand begin to sweat when I just think of something like that. Another circled the globe three times. That was in the 19th century. As the title indicates, she lived with cannibals and headhunters. The book tells some amazing stories.

Now, I'm not recounting that to you to be patronizing to the women, but to recognize a reality. Paul and the Bible don't deny that women are the mental and moral equals of men. Deborah was a great judge in the Old Testament. Mary gave the Magnificat in Luke chapter 2. Read it. It's a splendid declaration of the Word of God. She knew, she was a teenager, probably, when she said that. She was a young woman, and she had a command of the Old Testament Scripture and knew how to apply it, and had great insight, spiritual insight. She was an amazing woman. Bible doesn't deny that women can do great things and think great thoughts, and it doesn't deny women a role in the ministry of the church; they have a vital role to play. I mentioned Euodia and Syntyche. Paul refers to them in Philippians chapter 4 verses 2 and 3 where he says that they "shared in his struggle in the cause of the gospel." Another close associate of his was Priscilla. Paul met Priscilla and her husband Aquila in Corinth. Both men were tent-makers and they worked and they ministered together. Later, they left Corinth, they traveled together to Ephesus where Paul left them after a short visit there and went onto Jerusalem. They remained behind. And while they were there, they heard a young man named Apollos speaking in church. They were very impressed with him. He was an eloquent man. He had a command of scripture, but they recognized that he lacked some crucial knowledge.

And so, Luke writes that both of them took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. Priscilla, as well as Aquila, gave Apollos instruction. She was very capable. In Titus 2 verse 4, Paul writes that older women are to train younger women. There are many responsibilities in the church that are more

appropriate for women than men, such as visiting women who were sick, or in need of personal attention. Women have a wide sphere of ministry from hosting social gatherings in the home, to being a verbal witness for Christ in the neighborhood, or at work. They're far more effective with children than men are. We tend to scare children. Women have a natural ability to connect and be warm with children. That's one reason that we have women Sunday school teachers for the younger ages. They're more effective than men. Doesn't mean we exclude men from that, but that's a work that women are far more effective in, I think. I'm speaking my opinions in that, but I think that's correct.

Two of the most influential people in Timothy's life were his mother and grandmother. They taught him the Word of God. The mothers of John Newton and John and Charles Wesley were instrumental in their conversions later in their lives.

Women, like men, are gifted. They are equal with men in person, but not in authority, and Paul's instruction here is clear: women are not to take the place of men in the church. I suspect many in the church of Corinth were not happy with that answer. They may have bristled at this statement as it was read to the congregation, just as people today don't like what Paul is saying here. I don't think I'm departing from Paul at all. So, they may not like what I say. But this is what Paul teaches. The Corinthians, I don't doubt, were not completely happy with it because they liked doing things their own way, as of course we all do.

So, with some irony, or perhaps sarcasm, Paul asks them in verse 36 if the Word of God originated with them. You don't like what I'm saying? Well are you the author of the Word of God? Do you know it all? Did it all originate with you? Are you the mother church? Are you the only church? This is the kind of thing that he's asking, then. Their disregard of the apostle's teaching and the practice of other churches showed what we've seen all through this book, which is at the heart of the problem of the Corinthians, and with so many of us, and that is pride.

None of us is a law unto ourselves. That's what Paul is telling them. We are under authority, and we are under the authority of Scripture. In verse 37, Paul reminds them of his authority, and that what he wrote to them is Scripture, and they were to recognize that. "The things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment."

Now, he comes to the end of this subject, and in the last verses, he sums up his instruction. He does so with reference to all of this he's been saying in these three chapters about gifts. He writes in verse 39, "Therefore, my brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak in tongues." Do not forbid to speak in tongues. Does that mean that the gift of tongues is extant? That is, that it still exists today? It's still in use today? I don't think so. It's referred to as one of the sign gifts like prophecy and healing. They had a special but limited function: to confirm the message, this message of the gospel that was going out to people who had never heard of anything like this, or to the Jewish people who were grounded in another point of view. And so, these miraculous gifts accompanied the message to affirm the truth of the message.

That's been done. In chapter 13 and verse 8, Paul says that tongues will cease. Well, have they ceased? I think so, but to be honest with you, I can't prove that. I can't point to a verse that says tongues will cease, and they have ceased. I can't prove that, and I'm not really interested in trying to prove that. If people speak in tongues today as the claim is so often made, then that's fine. That's wonderful. The Spirit of God is in it and he's doing it. I don't want to oppose that. But if what they are doing is the genuine gift, the gift that Paul speaks of here, the gift that Luke speaks of in the Book of Acts. If it's that gift, then it will fit the description that Paul and Luke give in these passages. That means it must be a human language, not mere melodic sounds. Gibberish is not biblical tongues.

It's for public use. It's not given for private use. It's for public use. Tongues is a sign to unbelievers. That's the purpose that's ascribed to it, and it must be done with an interpreter. Anything different from that is not the real thing. And, it may be an experience, and no doubt people have an experience, and they may be buoyed by it emotionally. They may be affected by it. And no doubt, they are. I don't doubt, we shouldn't doubt people have experiences, but I would deny that their experience is the experience that's described here in the Bible. Not if it doesn't meet every criterion of the tongues that Paul speaks of.

Look, there were ancient pagans that had ecstatic experiences. The sibyls at the shrines would lose control and have experiences, but it wasn't prophecy. It wasn't tongues. We are to measure everything by the Word of God. It alone is our authority. It is a lamp to our feet. It guides us in the right places. Only it can build us up. And

that's really the point in all of this. That's what we do: to edify, to be edified. It is: give our attention to, our study to, our teaching of the Word of God. It builds us up.

That has been Paul's concern all through this portion of the book from chapters 12 through 14, and he ends the chapter with that, verse 40. " But all things must be done properly and in an orderly manner." In other words, our activities are to be biblical and edify. If they're biblical, they will be edifying. We can't avoid living in interesting times, but we can protect the church from having interesting times. I don't want an interesting church. I don't want to hear people leave and say, well, that was interesting. I want an exciting church where there's learning and growth and worship where there's healing, and I don't mean necessarily physical healing. We pray for that. But what we can be assured of is: if we're teaching the Word of God, and you're obedient to the Word of God, there will be spiritual healing, emotional healing, broken lives will be put together, and lived to the glory of God. Broken marriages will be put together and function to the glory of God. That's exciting. We can have that. We should have that. We can have that only as we follow the Word of God, knowing it, and yielding to its authority.

And one of the first great truths that we yield to is Christ, that He is the eternal Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, and head of the church. Head of the church and Savior of the world. He became a man in order to die for sinners so that all who believe in Him would not perish but have everlasting life. What a great promise that is, and what an understatement that is. What adjective, what accolade could I give that reaches the truth and the significance of the gift of eternal life? That's what we have in Christ and in Christ alone. That's glorious truth. If you're here without Christ, if you've not believed in Him, your life is short. It will end, and eternity stretches out before you, which is unending, and it will not be pleasant. But in Christ, that life to come is unending and it is glorious beyond comprehension. Look to Him, trust in Him. He's made provision for you in the cross. Put your faith in Jesus Christ and may the rest of us who have done that live to His glory. We can only do that by putting ourselves in submission, subjection to His word, and living in obedience. We'll do that by God's grace. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we give You thanks for Your goodness to us. We give You thanks for this text of Scripture. It's a prickly passage. It's not a passage that I guess

is well-received in many quarters today, but it's Your word. It's Your revelation. Give us the ability to submit to this, and to everything in Your word, to be discerning, to be wise in our understanding of Your truth and obedient. We can know, whether we understand it at all, whether it makes perfectly good sense to us or not, if it's Your word and Your revelation, then it's for our good. And it'll be for –