

“What Is It Then, Brethren? ...”

“... each one hath a psalm, hath a teaching, hath a revelation, hath a tongue, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying” (1 Cor. 14:26).

We now pass from definition and regulation of the “tongue gift” specifically, to the regulation of other gifts in general. From the instructions which follow one could conclude that just as the Corinthians had abused the “tongue gift,” so their exercising of all gifts were inappropriate because of the chaos and confusion which existed in their assemblies. Thus the apostle enjoined: *“If any man speaketh in a tongue, let it be by two, or at the most three, and that in turn; and let one interpret: but if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself; and to God. And let the prophets speak by two or three, and let the other discern. But if a revelation be made to another sitting by, let the first keep silence. For ye all can prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be exhorted; and the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets, for God is not a God of confusion, but of peace” (1 Cor. 14:27-33).*

These verses, particularly verses 27-31, have been the focus of sharp disagreement among brethren in past decades. From these verses some have concluded that because the Corinthians were to prophesy “one by one” that simultaneous classes were sinful. Those who opposed the class system of teaching were called “anti-Sunday School” and for years the division has been bitter and hurtful. Another group of brethren appeal to these verses to argue that “located preachers” are wrong; that churches shall be “mutually edified.” Our purpose is not to extensively argue the error of these two opposing views to what is commonly practiced by brethren; suffice it to say it is a tragic mistake to conclude that from Paul’s instructions to regulate Corinthian assemblies from being disorderly and unruly into assemblies free of confusion. That necessarily would result with all speaking at the same time, whether “tongue speakers” or “prophets.” Notice his instructions. A tongue speaker was not to speak while another was; no more than two or three were to speak in any assembly and interpretation was to be given for each statement tongue speakers gave; if there was no interpreter present, the tongue speaker was to be silent. Prophets were also to speak in turn, not at the same time; and if a revelation was made to one not speaking, the one speaking was to give place to him to whom new revelations were given. However, both the present speaker and he who sought to speak were to remember that their revelation was to be orderly. They could wait. The prophet controlled his tongue. And all of these instructions were to be observed for *“God is not the author of confusion” (vs. 40)*. It is true that in a

congregation when periods for classes are transpiring, several teachers may be speaking at once, yet they do not violate Paul's command in 1 Corinthians 14. There is no confusion. Learning is possible for each class is listening to one teacher.

When Paul regulated an assembly so that individuals spoke one by one, he did not make any other method of teaching unscriptural. There are methods as to how we may teach: by radio, T.V., tracts, newspapers, etc. There are methods as to different groups. Paul taught "*publicly and from house to house*" (Acts 20:20). Philip taught "one on one" (Acts 8:30ff). Peter taught a multitude of more than 3,000 folk (Acts 2). Yet all these were conducted orderly. None of these constituted an addition, they were only methods of fulfilling the Lord's instruction: "*Go there and teach all nations ...*" (Matt. 28:18f). It is a tragic mistake; one for which the church has suffered greatly, to conclude that nothing which is not expressly mentioned in the scriptures is sinful. It is true that we must not "go beyond the things which are written" (1 Cor. 4:6); that we must not add to his words; but wise men recognize there is a difference between a thing commanded and the method that implements that command. God's commands us to teach His gospel, but He has left to us the judgment as to what method we will use. In all things we must remember "*God is not the author of confusion but of peace.*" Any violation of this is wrong and contrary to the will of our Lord.

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