

THE GIFT OF TONGUES

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INTRODUCTION

The spiritual gift of speaking in tongues has long been perhaps the most controversial of all the gifts of the Holy Spirit. This may well be because it is something obviously out of the ordinary, and which apparently serves no purpose as far as the natural man is concerned. By contrast, gifts like healing have an obvious value, while gifts like prophecy are often not perceived to be supernatural in origin.

Some Christians seek to prevent tongues being used at all (certainly not in church), whilst others elevate tongues to be **the** test of true spirituality. As usual the truth lies between these extremes. The object of this paper is to reveal the true scriptural balance concerning tongues. It should be noted that the words used for "tongues" in Greek are the words ordinarily used for languages.

An appendix deals with modern errors and other subsidiary matters.

Tongues confined to the New Covenant

Unlike all other spiritual gifts, the gift of tongues appears never to have been given to anyone during the period of the Old Covenant. This is itself highly significant, since it shows that the Church was given something entirely new, a special sign, at the Pentecost following the resurrection of Jesus Christ when the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the church.

There is a possible Old Testament reference to tongues in Isaiah 28:11, though it would be unwise to say that this was intended to be the primary meaning of this scripture. Certainly 1 Corinthians 14:21 clearly refers to this verse in order to show that the use of tongues (without interpretation) is a judgement on unbelief.

Tongues, a sign which follows those who believe (Mark 16:17)

In Mark 16:17, tongues is one of five signs which follow those who believe (casting out devils in the name of Jesus, speaking in new tongues, taking up serpents, drinking deadly things without hurt, healing the sick by laying on of hands). Manifestation of these signs appears to depend upon believing and being baptised (Mark 16:16), tying up with Acts 2.38-42.

Mark 16:17-18 clearly cannot merely be a promise that Christians will be good at learning foreign languages. There is no empirical evidence that Christians (in general) find it any easier than anyone else to learn foreign languages when they

have to learn them in the usual way. Nor is it plausible that the ability to learn languages in the usual way would be regarded by anyone as a "sign" of belief in Christ. The word "new" (rather than "different" or "many") may be significant, suggesting that the languages may not be merely new to the speaker but could be entirely new, for the purpose of uttering mysteries (see 1 Corinthians 14:2).

Because the list of signs given in Mark 16:17-18 seem a curious mixture, including the ability to take up serpents and drink deadly poison, some people suppose that this justifies rejecting these scriptures. (These verses at the end of Mark 16 are sometimes regarded as not part of the original text because they are omitted from some of the earliest (though not necessarily the most reliable) manuscripts. However most scholars now accept the validity of these verses.) Such a dismissive attitude may lead those who take this line often go on to reject other biblical teachings elsewhere which they find hard to understand.

In favour of this text being genuine, and that Jesus had told his disciples to expect to speak in new tongues, is that when the believers were baptised in the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and spoke in other tongues, they do not themselves seem surprised by what was happening to them, and Peter was confident about explaining it all to the crowds (Acts 2).

Finally we note that these signs are to follow those who **believe**, so that these signs are definitely unlimited in scope of time. There is no evidence here to suggest that such signs will ever cease from following those who believe. If such signs do fail, it simply reveals unbelief.

Tongues on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-42).

The speaking in tongues on the day of Pentecost is different in many ways from all the other cases of speaking in tongues recorded in scripture. Not only did they speak in languages which were known to the people who heard them, but it was accompanied by two other signs: the sound as of a violent wind, and the tongues as of fire which descended upon each disciple (Acts 2:2-3). These features are absent from all subsequent recorded instances of being filled with the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues. They are said here to speak in **other** (i.e. different) languages (Acts 2:4), contrasting with the "new" tongues of Mark 16:17.

Acts 2:6 says that the people were attracted by "the happening of the sound". Although a different word for sound is used in Acts 2:2, it seems more probable that the people were initially attracted by the sound as of violent wind (Acts 2:2), rather than by the sound of the disciples speaking in tongues (Acts 2:4).

Although the text gives the impression that the disciples were all speaking at much the same time, their speaking must have been sufficiently separate and

distinct for each hearer to pick out his own language and hear it properly and clearly, and to hear its full content and meaning: the declaration of "the great deeds of God" (Acts 2:4-11).

What people heard was in their own native **dialect** (Acts 2:6). The word here, which I have translated as "dialect" is a different word from the word for languages used in Acts 2:4, and signifies correctness of accent as well of the words, so that each hearer heard the language just as they learned it from their mothers (Acts 2:8). This explains the hearers' surprise that all the speakers were Galileans (Acts 2:7), because when people learn languages naturally the accent is always "foreign", and explains why the hearers felt the phenomenon required some explanation (Acts 2:12). Between them, the disciples spoke a wide variety of dialects: some of these dialects were of people close by (Judea) as well as people far away (Acts 2:9-11).

Some commentators suggest that the tongues at Pentecost were not really understandable languages, and that the hearers' understanding of these tongues was a miracle of hearing rather than of speaking. They say that while some of the people (those with hearts open to God) heard the tongues as comprehensible languages, others were mocking unbelievers who thought them merely drunk (Acts 2:13). Although it may be true that mocking unbelievers may only hear "gabble" (an application of "He who has ears, let him hear", and a fulfilment of Isaiah 28:11), Acts 2:4 makes clear that the disciples **were** speaking in real languages which the Holy Spirit gave "them to speak out". Acts 2:4 shows that the language and its content were given by the Holy Spirit, but, as in 1 Corinthians 14:28, it was up to the speaker whether he spoke out or remained silent. Miraculous hearing is therefore not an adequate explanation of the fact that the tongues at Pentecost were understandable.

Acts 2:14 onwards shows that all these people were perfectly capable of understanding Peter when he spoke to them in his normal Galilean accent, so the purpose of the miracle of tongues was not (as is sometimes claimed) to enable the people to be evangelised. The tongues were a sign (compare Mark 16:17). Peter points out that these people were not drunk - it was only 9am - but were fulfilling prophecy.

By his quotation from Joel 2 (Acts 2:17-21) Peter equates these tongues with prophecy (Acts 2:17), which is not surprising since they were declarations about God's mighty works in languages which the hearers could understand. (This is in significant and clear contrast with the tongues mentioned in 1 Corinthians 14 which Paul says are equivalent to prophecy only when interpreted (1 Corinthians 14:5). The Corinthian tongues were not in languages known to those present, but were for the utterance of mysteries towards God and not men (1 Corinthians 14:2).)

Peter goes on to preach powerfully concerning the prophecies concerning the death and resurrection of the Messiah, that they were witnesses of the fulfilment of these prophecies, and that in consequence they had received the promised Holy Spirit. Peter says they (the devout men present (Acts 2:5), Jews and proselytes (possibly even Gentiles in view of "the temporarily residing Romans" Acts 2:10) there present, their children, and all far away - everyone that our God calls) can receive the same promise on condition of repentance and baptism (Acts 2:38-40).

Although nothing is said specifically about exactly what the 3000 added that day received when they repented and were baptised (Acts 2:41) they must have received the fulfilment of Peter's promise. It is inconceivable that they received any less, since in Acts 8:14-17 the deficiencies of the experiences of the Samaritans were considered a serious problem which had to be remedied by an Apostolic visitation.

The significance of Tongues as a sign of the New Covenant

Pentecost was an unusual feast as it used leavened bread (unlike the others which used unleavened bread), so it was appropriate that it was at this particular time that the Holy Spirit should be poured out on ordinary sinful people.

Gift of tongues - sign of the end of Babel

The gift of tongues was a new feature of the New Covenant (Acts 2:7-11). It was a sign that through the Church, God is lifting the curse of the confusion of language at Babel (Genesis 11:7-8). God had dispersed the peoples and given them different languages so that they would no longer be able to undertake vast projects of which God disapproves. The confusion of language at Babel was a merciful act of judgement. Until the Anti-Christ once again brings all humanity back under a single political authority, God can avoid having to judge all the human population at once because different cultures become ripe for judgement at different times (e.g. Genesis 15:16). The sign of tongues at Pentecost revealed that, in Christ, there is now a united people who understand one another, the first fruits of God's task of bringing all things under Christ's authority (Ephesians 1).

Gift of tongues - sign of God's control of the believer

The gift of tongues is a sign to the believer that God by the Holy Spirit has gained full control of his entire personality to obey God. The heart is filled with gladness when the Holy Spirit takes control (Acts 2:26), and out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks (Matthew 12:34; Luke 6:45).

James tells us that no human being can control the tongue (James 3:8) and that those who think themselves religious but cannot control their tongues are

deceived, and their religion is not real (James 1:26). Everyone makes mistakes, and someone who makes no mistakes in what he says is a perfect man, who can control his whole body (James 3:2). None of us reach this standard, but the gift of tongues is like the bridle which controls a horse (James 3:3), or a rudder on a ship (James 3:4-5). But apart from God, this control is impossible (James 3:6-10): the control of the tongue that the Holy Spirit achieves in the gift of tongues shows that God has got hold of the entire personality. This control exceeds anything available in the Old Covenant (compare Jeremiah 31:31-34). Could the widespread objection to this gift of the Holy Spirit be the result of the total death of self-will which the exercise of the gift represents?

Gentiles receive the Spirit (Acts 10)

When the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the Gentiles at Cornelius' house (Acts 10:45-46) the Jews present regarded this as proved by their speaking in tongues and magnifying God. Although in some ways similar to Pentecost, Acts 10 provides no evidence to suggest that the tongues were in languages known to anyone present. Presumably by this time the 1 Corinthians 14:2 type of unknown tongue was well known.

The disciples at Ephesus (Acts 19:1-7)

When Paul laid hands on these former disciples of John they spoke in tongues and prophesied (Acts 19:6). The form of the text suggests that the speaking in tongues and prophesying were two distinct activities.

Tongues in the regular life of the church

All the occasions of the use of tongues so far mentioned were one-off events, and did not form part of the regular life of the church. The main teaching on the use of tongues in normal church life is given in 1 Corinthians Chapters 12 to 14.

Tongues is supernatural, not enhanced normal linguistic ability

1 Corinthians 12:10,28,30 mention the gift of different sorts of tongues, and the gift of the interpretation of tongues. The distinction drawn between being able to speak in tongues and being able to interpret them (1 Corinthians 10,30) shows that these abilities bear no relationship to normal natural linguistic ability where speaking a language and understanding it are simply different aspects of the same ability. 1 Corinthians 12:28 emphasises that these gifts are gifts to the church (rather than to individuals).

Attitudes will determine how useful the gifts will be to the church

1 Corinthians 13 is sometimes misinterpreted as saying that all that matters is love and that the gifts can therefore be ignored as being of no consequence. This is not however Paul's intention: he is making clear that attitudes will determine how beneficial to the church those gifts will actually be. Gifts will eventually pass away, not because they lack value, but because they will have fulfilled their purpose (of building the church).

Tongues may be those of angels

1 Corinthians 13:1 refers to tongues of men **and of angels**: thus the tongues spoken are not necessarily the languages of men, but may be, in a real sense, languages of heaven.

Gifts, including tongues, to be used with love

Paul's emphasis in 1 Corinthians 13:1 is on the right use of tongues - with love - otherwise whatever we say will be a distracting clashing noise. This description of a clashing noise may possibly suggest that without love the tongue becomes meaningless (compare 1 Corinthians 14:7-9). Certainly it suggests that the tongue, being prayer, is only as good as the quality of our love towards God. Similar considerations apply to other gifts (1 Corinthians 13:2-3).

Tongues will cease, but this has not yet happened

1 Corinthians 13:8. Along with other gifts, tongues will eventually cease. Some people claim that this took place when the last of the twelve apostles died. Such people claim that the "perfect", (1 Corinthians 13:10) refers to the "completed canon of scripture", and that this represents the perfection of our knowledge. Such an interpretation (see also the appendix) cannot be sustained:

1. Firstly, scripture itself makes no reference to such a definitive "completion of the canon of scripture" (Note that Revelation 22:18-19 can be legitimately be applied **only** to the book of Revelation).
2. Secondly 1 Corinthians 13:12 shows how 1 Corinthians 13:9-10 are to be correctly interpreted - "when I know as I am known". This is certainly not true yet: it is obvious that when every Christian has this sort of knowledge, being told about it by others in prophecies will be redundant. He will need to know nothing more. Truly the perfect knowledge will have come and there will be no further need for prophecy.
3. Thirdly such a view fails to see that the gift of tongues has nothing to do with the definition of knowledge about God. Even if such people were right in saying that prophecies and knowledge had ended with the completion of the New Testament, this could not affect tongues. Tongues are prayer to God (1 Corinthians 14:2), and are not for the purpose of

providing men with propositional revelation about God. Clearly the time when tongues will pass away is when we shall see God face to face (1 Corinthians 13:12: who can claim this is true now?). With such perfected face to face knowledge we shall understand God Himself well enough not to have to express our prayers to God in the form of mysteries (1 Corinthians 14:2). Seeing God face to face, the limitations of language imposed by the confusion at Babel (Genesis 11) will have come to an end, communication with God will have been perfected. This clearly remains in the future, since we do not yet know how to pray as we ought (Romans 8:26), but still see in a mirror dimly (1 Corinthians 13:12).

Faith, hope and love will remain features for all eternity (1 Corinthians 13:13), because these provide the basis for our continuing relationship with God.

Instruction in handling spiritual gifts in the church

Paul having laid out the principles that the gifts are for the purpose of building the church, rather as scaffolding is used during the construction of a building, he then goes on to show how those gifts can be used properly and in safety. They constitute a statement of good building practice: the requirements are however mandatory (1 Corinthians 14:37-38). This is similar to the statutorily backed advice issued by the Health and Safety Executive in Britain for the conduct of building operations.

Genuineness of tongues never questioned

Throughout 1 Corinthians 14, the genuineness of non-understandable tongues is taken for granted, and Paul never suggests that the tongues being used at Corinth might not be genuine. Paul never even mentions the possibility of counterfeits! However, the code of practice laid down by Paul for the use of tongues is fully sufficient to ensure that any tongues which have an improper origin will be eliminated. Paul's approach should continue to be used in the church today: Paul specifically prohibits the prohibition of speaking in tongues (1 Corinthians 14:39). Many churches disobey scripture by prohibiting any use of tongues in their meetings: their purported reason, that the tongues are not genuine, cannot be justified from scripture.

Normal church tongues are not understandable

1 Corinthians 14:2 acknowledges that a person speaking in tongues is speaking to God, that he speaks mysteries that no-one understands. 1 Corinthians 14:16 amplifies this statement, showing also that the content is thanksgiving. The tongues used in the church differ from those at Pentecost. The tongues at Pentecost glorified God in an understandable way, were languages which could

be understood directly by men, and were spoken for men's benefit. By contrast, the speakers of tongues in the church are not directly understood by any one present, and they utter mysteries as prayer and thanksgiving towards God.

Tongues is prayer, and spiritually strengthens the tongue-speaker

Paul expresses his preference for prophecy over tongues because prophecy has the power to edify more people (1 Corinthians 14:1-5). 1 Corinthians 14:3-4 shows that the purpose of prophecy is to edify the church, while the purpose of tongues is to edify (= build up, strengthen) the speaker himself. Clearly, unlike those at Pentecost, these tongues have nothing whatever to do with communication with men. Rather, the purpose of tongues, being prayer (1 Corinthians 14:2), is to strengthen the spirit of the believer, and so equip him for spiritual work. Just as is the case when praying in normal language, it is vitally important that the praying should be inspired by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 6:18; Jude 1:20), and not be mechanical or the heaping up of empty phrases (Matthew 6:7). Ideally, in a church context, the use of the tongue should ultimately lead to revelation which can be made known to all (1 Corinthians 14:13-16).

Prophecy better than tongues for building the church, unless interpreted (1 Corinthians 14:5-12)

As far as the church is concerned, prophecy is more use for edifying unless the tongue is interpreted (1 Corinthians 14:5), when it then has equivalent edification value to a prophecy. It should be noted that given that tongues are prayers (1 Corinthians 14:2) or thanksgivings (1 Corinthians 14:16), it would normally be expected that the interpretation would be in the same form, not a prophecy directed towards men.

As far as church edification is concerned, 1 Corinthians 14:9 shows that the tongue without interpretation simply runs uselessly into the air. (The reader should note in passing the parallel uselessness of lifeless mechanical music which does not clearly convey a pre-defined meaning 1 Corinthians 14:7-8: this is relevant for "church music".) There are many sorts of sounds (1 Corinthians 14:10: a different word from "languages" used elsewhere), and none is without meaning but unless the language (1 Corinthians 14:11) is understood by the hearer it is of no help to him. Hence, Paul says, if believers are zealous for spiritual gifts, the exercise of prophecy is preferable as it builds up the church (1 Corinthians 14:12).

Tongue-speakers should seek the gift of interpreting their own tongues

Because the edification value is increased by interpretation, 1 Corinthians 14:13 commands tongue speakers to pray for the power to interpret. The Greek implies that he should pray to be able to interpret it himself. Thus an obligation is being placed upon the tongue speaker to seek to be able to interpret his own utterances. A tongue-speaker's spirit prays but his mind remains fallow while he speaks in tongues (1 Corinthians 14:14).

Paul clearly does not regard it as desirable that this unfruitfulness of mind in the tongue-speaker should continue (1 Corinthians 14:15). The reason for a tongue speaker to seek self-interpretation is in order that the tongue-speaker's own mind should not remain fallow. Tongues should never be used as a means to develop or enhance the potentially dangerous mind shut-off, which provides the devil with an opportunity for implanting delusive visions. Rather, if tongues are being used properly and the person is able to interpret, the person's mind will be receiving from God the interpretation of his tongue while his spirit prays in tongues, so that both the spirit and mind of the speaker become edified (1 Corinthians 14:15). (It would seem desirable that this way of using the gift should be the norm for the speaker, whether he uses his tongues in public or only privately.)

Then the speaker can follow his tongue by its interpretation and so edify the other hearers, who otherwise cannot join in their Amens to back up the tongue-speaker's prayer (1 Corinthians 14:16-17).

Paul's own extensive use of tongues, privately (1 Corinthians 14:18-19)

Paul says that he speaks more in tongues than anybody at Corinth - but much prefers to use understood language in church (1 Corinthians 14:18-19). This is not, as sometimes claimed, a reference his natural linguistic ability, being used in evangelism. The immediately preceding context, especially his use of the personal pronoun I in 1 Corinthians 14:14-15, shows that he writing about his own use of unknown languages, which he used with the associated interpretation, in the manner he commended to the Corinthians. In 1 Corinthians 14:19 Paul is quite specific that the ten thousand words he might speak in a tongue would not be understood by anybody present.

If Paul used tongues so extensively, where did Paul use his extensive gift of tongues? If it is not in church (1 Corinthians 14:19), and we have proved that they cannot have been used evangelistically, it must be that Paul uses this gift in his private praying. This is probably what empowered Paul's extensive prayer life and intercessory ministry, to which he repeatedly makes reference in his correspondence (Romans 1:9; Romans 10:1; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 2 Corinthians 13:7; Ephesians 1:6; Philippians 1:4,9; Colossians 1:3,9; 1 Thessalonians 1:2; 3:10; 5:23; 2 Thessalonians 1:11; 2 Timothy 1:3; 4:16; Philemon 1:4). Paul has made it clear that tongues strengthens the one who prays

(1 Corinthians 14:2), and that through praying in tongues he receives the understanding of how to pray with his mind (1 Corinthians 14:13-15). The effectiveness of Paul's ministry shows that the gift of tongues is certainly not to be despised, as it is an important component in the prayer life of the believer.

The need for mature thinking: spiritual gifts are to build church

The Corinthians were not mature in their thinking about using spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 14:20), as the gifts were not being used in a way that will build the church, but rather destroy it.

As strange tongues are a sign to unbelievers of their rejection by God (1 Corinthians 14:21-22), if everyone speaks in tongues at once (clearly this was a problem at Corinth) unbelievers and outsiders will be put off becoming Christians because they will say that Christians are mad (1 Corinthians 14:23). These verses therefore clearly prohibit the public use of tongues by everybody simultaneously.

By contrast the use of prophecy discloses the heart of the unbeliever (1 Corinthians 14:24-25). Three stages are identified: he is convicted by all he hears, judged or called to account by all he hears, and the hidden things of his heart are disclosed (at least to himself). Just how explicit these revelations are is not stated, but they are sufficient to bring the unbeliever to worship God and declare that God is really in His church. But it should be noted that biblical prophecy is rarely explicit as regards "background" items used to identify the person addressed. (This contrasts with the high detail of mediumistic revelations.) The reason for this is that if background items are given too explicitly (and are correct), then it becomes very difficult for the hearer to test objectively the "unknown" part of the prophecy. Moreover the Holy Spirit can bring true conviction without such pressure.

Managing the church meeting

Everyone should bring something to the meeting, those things which will build up other people (1 Corinthians 14:26).

Managing tongues

1 Corinthians 14:27 regulates the use of tongues in a meeting. There are to be only two or three tongues, in turn, apparently then to be followed by a single interpretation. On the face of it this appears to limit the total number of tongues in the meeting as a whole, but this is not the only possibility. It may be rather saying that once at most two or three tongues have been given, then an interpretation of those tongues must be given before the meeting continues. This

latter interpretation of the injunction is much more probable, since Paul's objective is not to limit the use of spiritual gifts (as is clear from 1 Corinthians 14:26,31), but to ensure that every manifestation of tongues is properly interpreted. (A similar question arises in connection with the limitation on prophecies (1 Corinthians 14:29).)

In the absence of someone able to interpret, tongues are not to be used aloud (1 Corinthians 14:28). Clearly Paul envisaged that people would know which people in the meeting could do this. Thus some people were known to be able to interpret tongues, and to be able to do it on every occasion that tongues is used.

Managing prophecies

In a similar way to the management of tongues, the number of consecutive prophecies is to be limited to two or three, and those prophecies are then to be tested (1 Corinthians 14:29). 1 Corinthians 14:31 says that all may prophesy one by one in the meeting, which makes it improbable that Paul is making a limitation on the total number of prophecies in a meeting.

What seems to be in view is that two or three prophecies are given one after another, all of which relate to the same topic. This makes sense of 1 Corinthians 14:30: if someone else gets an amplifying or modifying revelation while the first prophet is speaking, the first speaker must give way to him. (The general atmosphere of orderliness in the meeting is emphasised by the phrase "sitting by".) The meeting must then pause while this group of prophecies have then to be weighed (i.e. tested) before the meeting continues. Further prophecies (1 Corinthians 14:31) can be given later in the same meeting, but after each group of prophecies, the same assessment process must take place. This ensures that everybody is allowed to make their God-given contribution, but in a way which allows the church to assess each contribution while they still remember the details, and each person to be built up by them.

Testing prophecy

Weighing prophecies appears to be generally completely misunderstood today. Most people think it just means "receiving" what has been said. In fact the purpose is to test the prophecy, to keep whatever is good and to firmly reject what is bad, as commanded explicitly in 1 Thessalonians 5:19-22. This should be done by open discussion, with detailed consideration of the arguments, with comparison with scripture and earlier revelations (compare, for example, Acts 11:1-18; Acts 15:1-29). All prophecy is imperfect (1 Corinthians 13:9) and the discussion process is important in identifying its deficiencies, and indeed whether it is a God-given message at all. The proper exercise of this process will in itself tend to purify the meeting of spurious prophecy. The process of

discussion of the prophecies has the effect of making everyone think about them, and is an important part of making sure that the church does not miss the importance of what God is saying.

The testing should not only be of what is said, but also of the spirit of the prophet himself, and how he reacts to the discussion process. The wisdom from above has the attributes in James 3:17-18, while worldly or devilish wisdom will reveal itself by its reactions to any criticism (James 3:14-16).

1 Corinthians 14:30 also shows that the general church practice of allowing preachers to continue without interruption, and without subsequent discussion of what they have said is not scriptural.

All may contribute, one by one

1 Corinthians 14:31 says that all can prophesy one by one, but subject to the "continuous assessment" process for prophecies already noted. This verse shows clearly that Paul does not intend to limit the total number of prophecies in a meeting to two or three: that would be a mistake, as the devil has only to stir up that number of rubbish prophecies to prevent God's true word being brought by others. We should however be careful to consider whether our contribution will be helpful to teach and encourage others or best left until another occasion (1 Corinthians 14:31).

True spirituality is under total conscious control: no confusion

All God's true prophets are always in control of themselves (1 Corinthians 14:32). There is no place for any kind of compulsive behaviour (such is demonic) or any other manifestations which are not under the conscious control of the Christian concerned. Any one who exhibits any manifestation and says they could not help their behaviour proves they were not operating under the Holy Spirit. Prophets operate best in a disciplined meeting where everyone is fully paying attention to what is going on, and where only one thing happens at a time. This orderliness is also revealed by the fact that Paul expects the church to be sitting in an orderly way during the proceedings (1 Corinthians 14:30), and everyone present is under the conscious control of their own spirit.

The underlying principle is that because God is not the author of confusion, there should be **no confusion** (1 Corinthians 14:33), with everything done decently and in order (1 Corinthians 14:40). Where there is confusion, we may be sure that an alien spirit is operating. This should be dealt with firmly by those with responsibility to lead the meeting.

An example of conduct causing confusion

One practice which was making the meeting disorderly at Corinth was the attitude of some of the women (1 Corinthians 14:34-35), who were creating noise during the meeting. (NB. This is not a blanket prohibition of women taking part in the meeting, as is clear from the permission they have to prophesy (1 Corinthians 11:5).) Women chattering amongst themselves, or calling out questions to husbands during the meeting (1 Corinthians 14:35) was not to be permitted because of the general air of confusion this caused (as it does even to this day in some Jewish synagogues). (We note in passing, that this passage may suggest that at Corinth the men and women sat separately).

True spirituality acknowledges the rightness of these instructions

True spirituality is shown by acknowledging the rightness of these instructions given by Paul by command of the Lord (1 Corinthians 14:36-38). Those who rebel against these commands show they are "not recognised" (i.e. that they are not operating by God's Holy Spirit). A similar statement had been previously made to the Corinthians concerning other issues (1 Corinthians 11:17-19). Being "not recognised" means that such people are to be avoided since they do not hold to the teachings given by God (2 Thessalonians 3:6, with 2 Thessalonians 2:15).

Prophecy preferred but tongues not banned

Although prophecy is preferred in church meetings, **tongues must not be forbidden** (1 Corinthians 14:39), but everything should be done decently and in order. This attitude is interesting: Paul knew some would be tempted to ban the public use of tongues entirely, as being much the easiest option. Paul is determined that the Spirit should not be quenched (1 Thessalonians 5:19): he recognises the gift of unrecognisable languages as genuinely from God and knows personally just how useful it is. If tongues is banned in public, its use will soon die out in private, and intercession will wither.

Conclusion

The gift of tongues is a continuing gift to the church, showing the full control God has over the entire personality. It is a useful language for the believer to pray in, and builds up the spiritual strength of the individual believer who exercises the gift. He should however pray for the power to interpret his utterances so that his mind may also be fruitful. Used in this way the gift of tongues is a powerful aid to prayer and intercession.

The use of the gift in church is to be permitted, subject to various instructions, detailed in 1 Corinthians 14, which ensure that the gift is used in a way which will build up the church.

APPENDIX: MODERN ERRORS AND SUBSIDIARY MATTERS

TONGUES SAID TO HAVE CEASED ON BASIS OF 1 COR 13

Tongues are sometimes said to have ceased. This theory is based on a narrow exegesis of 1 Corinthians 13. This was dealt with in the main paper. The idea that the reference to that which is perfect is to the completed bible hardly deserves refutation. Anyone who thinks he knows as he is known or already sees God face to face is deluded. The reason why we believe the scriptures are necessary and sufficient for salvation is that they were sufficient for that purpose for Christians of the first century. Today we can need no more than they did as far as salvation is concerned. The Apostles of Christ of that time were given all the revelation needed for that salvation to be made known to us (Matthew 28:18-20 etc.).

TONGUES IS JUST REPETITIVE GABBLE AND NOT A REAL LANGUAGE

"Tongues" is sometimes said to sound like gabble and not a real language. Frankly this is an impossible judgement to make - Paul never attempted it - indeed he makes the very point that different languages have different sounds (1 Corinthians 14:10-11). Listening to foreign radio stations broadcasting in a language from a different language group from one's own usually gives the impression of repetitive gabble - but clearly it cannot be. Given the nature of this gift as a sign to reveal **unbelief**, we do well to be cautious about making such a judgement: it may simply reveal our own dangerously unbelieving position.

If there is a lot of improper pressure on people to speak in tongues, rather than to be genuinely Baptised in the Holy Spirit, the result may be some faking of tongue-speaking. The biblical answer to this problem is to preach the gospel honestly, and apply the teaching given in 1 Corinthians 14: that will deal with any problems. (Interestingly Paul did not suggest any tongue-speaking was fake - even in Corinth!)

MODERN TONGUES SAID TO BE DIFFERENT FROM THOSE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT AND THEREFORE NOT REAL

Many people claim that the "tongues" of today are not the same as those in the New Testament. This is a curious claim since there is no way that anyone who was not there can make such a statement. The claim seems to rest on two assumptions:

1. that all N.T. tongues were in languages known to at least some of the people who were present.
2. that what people speak today is "repetitive gabble".

The first of these assumptions arises from assuming that the situation in Acts 2 was the biblical norm, when people heard the mighty works of God in their own language. This approach then assumes that "interpretation of tongues" is simply that someone in the meeting knows the language (naturally?) and says what the tongue meant. However Paul makes clear his view in 1 Corinthians 14:2 that tongues are mysteries spoken towards God that no man understands, showing that the norm for tongues was that they were not naturally understood by anyone present.

The charge that all modern tongues is just gabble is dealt with above. It reveals unbelief in the heart of the hearer.

WHAT ABOUT DEMONIC TONGUES?

Many people are filled with fear that they may receive "demonic tongues". Interestingly, there is no reference to such in scripture, even though such tongues occur in various non-Christian religions. Nor does Paul seem to think this a problem among Christians - even among such carnal ones as at Corinth - but then they were purified by persecution, and had been converted under the genuine gospel - aspects frequently not the case today.

The answer is to ensure that no one attempts to receive the Baptism in the Holy Spirit in advance of genuine repentance towards God and faith in Jesus Christ, expressed by obedience in Baptism. No person should be prayed for in connection with this gift who is walking in knowing disobedience to the commands of God. In such circumstances will God give a stone instead of a fish (Luke 11:1-13)?

Those who have received another spirit or another Jesus (2 Corinthians 11:4) should seek God to be freed from all which is not genuine, and seek to be fully obedient to the true Gospel of Christ. In these circumstances it is important to be sure not merely that the false spirits are removed from their lives, but that they receive the genuine Baptism of the Holy Spirit in its place (Matthew 12:43-45).

SIMULTANEOUS UNINTERPRETED SPEAKING OR SINGING IN TONGUES

Some groups have completely rejected Paul's apostolic command not to all speak in tongues at once (1 Corinthians 14:23,27,37-38).

Some argue that Paul is only talking about a situation where there are unbelievers present, and claim that it is perfectly acceptable if everyone present is a Christian. But how can anyone be sure that there are no unbelievers present? We can be

pretty well certain that there will be "ungifted" persons present (i.e. those without the gift of the interpretation of tongues). Paul himself clearly envisages that most people present at Corinth will be believers, and that the entry of the ungifted or unbelievers was the exception rather than customary (1 Corinthians 14:23)

Others argue that it is perfectly acceptable provided it is the "overflow of the Spirit" (whatever that means). This seems to be in flat denial of the obligation for the spirit of the prophet to be subject to the prophet (i.e. that any Holy Spirit filled person can control what flows out from them) (1 Corinthians 14:32).

Some have attempted to argue that the "prayer with one accord" in Acts 4:24 justifies the practice - that the only way they could have prayed thus was by praying in tongues all at once. Frankly this hardly requires refutation - tongues is not mentioned. Moreover the clear form of the prayer shows that it was coherent and in an understandable language. Praying with one accord simply means that everyone had the witness of the spirit concerning the prayers offered, irrespective of who it was who opened their mouth and spoke.

Ezra 3:11-13 is prayed in aid of the same practice, again the suggestion that this has any relevance to praying in tongues altogether is ridiculous.

Exactly the same scriptural limitations are imposed on singing in tongues (the so-called "singing in the spirit") as on speaking in tongues. Communal use is forbidden. That the singing may sound pretty, and some people like it, is irrelevant.

These notes are not comprehensive but should stimulate personal bible study. Every effort has been made to be accurate, but the reader should test everything in accord with the example of Acts 17:11 and the command of 1 Thessalonians 5:21. Errors, or queries which are unresolved after consulting the LORD, should be referred to the author (email: rhjbibpap@rhj.org.uk). (v1 13.8.1995, v2 2.9.2018)

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