

THE NEW TESTAMENT GIFT OF TONGUES

I. WHAT WAS THE GIFT OF TONGUES?

A. What the Bible says it was: "A supernatural ability to speak an unlearned language or dialect."

(Greek word: glossa- the physical tongue or language)

1. A sample of the "dialects" is listed in Acts 2:1-11. The audience heard and recognized their own

language---this is why they were "amazed and marveled".

2. The gift was always in a language/dialect which had meaning and could be understood or interpreted

by others (1 Cor. 14:7-11).

3. The Old Testament quote used in 1 Corinthians 14:21 indicates that these "tongues" were foreign

languages used during the time the Assyrians invaded Israel (cf. Isaiah 28:11ff).

4. The word used for "interpretation" in 1 Corinthians 12:10,30; 14:5,13,26-28, appears twelve (12)

times in the New Testament and always means, "to translate one language into another language".

(Arndt & Gingrich Lexicon)

5. The word used for "interpretation" in 1 Corinthians 14:21 is the Greek word, heteroglossais, and is

a word meaning "speaking a foreign language."

B. What It Was Not: The gift of tongues was not an ecstatic utterance, babble, or "private" prayer language

(ie., "angelic tongue").

1. The word commonly used to support this theory, "unknown", listed in 1 Corinthians 14:2,4,13,14,19,

and 27 (in the King James Version) is NOT from the ancient mss., but was added by the trans-

lators of the King James---note the use of italics in the text indicating a word has been "added".

2. Paul never spoke "with the tongues of angels" any more than he gave "all his possessions to feed the

poor" or delivered "his body to be burned" (1 Cor. 13:1-3). These are all figures of speech that Paul

uses to "exaggerate" his point.

3. In 1 Corinthians 14:28, the phrase "but if there is no interpreter, let him be silent in church and let him

speak to himself and to God", is often used to support the idea of a "private prayer language". But to

do so is to violate the context of 1 Corinthians 14! In verse 28, Paul is simply saying that in the

PUBLIC WORSHIP SERVICE, if there is no "interpreter", he would allow the person with the gift of

tongues to exercise his gift "silently" in the service (the word "silent" means "without a single noise").

There is no mention of ever allowing it to be used at home in one's personal devotions or prayer time.

The only place the Bible allows the gift to be used "silently" is in the public worship service because

there is no one present to explain what is being said and thus the primary purpose of the gift

(cf. vs. 22) cannot be accomplished as God intended.

SUMMARY:

1 Corinthians 14:39 clearly says "do not forbid to speak in tongues"-- this text means exactly what

it says! We are not to forbid one another to speak in tongues as long as:

- 1) It is in accordance with the PRIMARY PURPOSE for which tongues was intended (vs. 22)
- 2) It is in accordance with the PROPER PROCEDURE clearly stated by Paul (vs. 27,28)

II. HOW DID ONE RECEIVE THE GIFT OF TONGUES?

- A. All spiritual gifts are sovereignly given by the Holy Spirit (1 Peter 4:10; 1 Cor. 12:4-11,18,27-30).
- B. Not everyone received the gift (1 Cor. 12:27-30).
- C. We are never told to "seek" or "pursue" this gift--the Church was told to "earnestly desire the greater gifts" (1 Cor. 12:31) [i.e. seek or pursue that which edifies (1 Cor. 14:1,3,4,12)].

III. HOW DID THE GIFT OF TONGUES FUNCTION?

- A. The gift was not to be used without the corresponding gift of "interpretation" (1 Cor. 14:12-19,28).
Because we have already established under section I. that Biblically there is no "private" prayer language,
it is also clear from 1 Corinthians 14 that there would always be PRIOR knowledge of an interpreter present.
- B. Without an interpreter, one was to "keep silent" in the church (1 Cor. 14:1-6, 28).
- C. Only two or at the most three were permitted to speak in tongues, and each in turn, with one to interpret (1 Cor. 14:27,28).

IV. WHAT DID THE GIFT OF TONGUES SIGNIFY FOR THE RECIPIENT?

- A. What it did mean:
 1. It was an initiatory sign at Pentecost (Acts 2:4) to the Jews, in Caesarea (Acts 10:46) to the Gentiles,
and at Ephesus (Acts 19:6) to the disciples of John. No where else is it mentioned or taught except when Paul corrects the unruly church at Corinth. It is never mentioned when single conversions are spoken of and is not spoken of in Acts with any other group conversions.
 2. It meant that God had given a sign to unbelievers through that person, a sign of judgment to the Jews and hope to the Gentiles (1 Cor. 14: 20-22).
 3. It meant that men could edify the church when used with the corresponding gift of interpretation,
along with all of the other gifts (1 Peter 4:10,11 1 Cor. 14:1-6,12-19,26).
 4. It meant that it was a "lesser gift" and that the church was to desire the "greater gifts".
This meant "greater" in the sense that other gifts had a greater ministry to the church, with the greater influence for edification and godliness. "Tongues" was not nearly as beneficial in equipping the saints.
- B. What it did not mean:
 1. It did not mean that one had become a Christian--that required faith plus nothing! (Eph. 2:8,9)
 2. It did not mean that one had been baptized in the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13).
 3. It did not mean that one had reached some "spiritual plateau" or level of maturity above others in the Body. (There is not ONE single command or example for speaking in tongues as an indication of spiritual growth or maturity!!)
 4. It did not mean that one had had some "deep" experience with God that others had not yet had

for themselves (this attitude only breeds a critical spirit and was part of the problem at Corinth).

V. SUMMARY: HOW IMPORTANT IS THE GIFT OF TONGUES FOR US TODAY?

A. There is not one command in the entire New Testament to speak in tongues. And yet the Lord said,

"If you love Me, keep My commandments." (John 14:15)

B. The Apostle Paul wrote over 100 chapters in the New Testament, but only addressed himself to the

subject of tongues in three: 1 Corinthians 12, 13, 14 (Chapter 14 is devoted to correcting the ABUSE

of the gift and is very applicable today for the same reason.)

C. It was never intended to be for ALL believers! (1 Cor. 12:27-30)

D. The mentioning of tongues to the Corinthians was directed towards the infantile, immature believer who needed to

"grow up" in his Christian life. (1 Cor. 1:11; 3:1,2; 4:7,18; 5:1,2,6; 6:1,7; 14:20)

E. There is a "more excellent way": LOVE! (1 Cor. 12:31-14:1)

LOVE NEVER SEEKS ITS OWN NOR IS IT ARROGANT!

F. Christ Himself never speaks in an unknown language though He prayed frequently and was filled with the

Spirit. (John 3:34)

G. The Spirit was not sent to draw attention to us but to "bear witness of Christ." (John 15:26)

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