

Acts #6
Speaking in Tongues
Acts 2:4

In our last study of the Book of Acts, we looked the fire of Pentecost. Tonight we are going to spend just a few more minutes in this same area as we deal with the issue of speaking in tongues.

Let me begin by remind you that the object of our Bible studies is to present the truth of the Scriptures as they relate to the Church of the Living Lord. And as we deal with the subject of speaking in tongues, our position is no different. What I want us to do tonight, is to allow the Word of God to speak to us, as the Holy Spirit goes about the task of teaching us the truth.

Speaking in tongues is mentioned in three New Testament books: Mark 16:17, Acts and 1 Corinthians.

The phenomena accompanying the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost bore witness to the release of a new spiritual power, the dawning of a new era. The assembled crowds were confounded by the spectacular gift of speaking with other tongues which the Spirit had imparted to the waiting disciples. All were greatly impressed by the fact that every man heard the disciples speak in his own language. Acts 2:7 tells us that, "They were all amazed and marveled..."

What was "the promise of the Father" (Luke 24:49) for which the disciples were commanded to wait for in Jerusalem? It was the "endowment of power from on high." The speaking in tongues, the mighty sound "like a rushing mighty wind," and the "cloven tongues as of fire," were all incidental. Those three things are all distinct and separable. The evidence of the endowment was effectiveness and extensiveness in witness, as seen in Acts 1:8, "But you shall receive power, after the Holy Spirit is come upon you; and you shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." It is true the filling of the Spirit was accompanied by speaking with tongues, but this was neither the gift itself, nor it most significant evidence.

As we study this matter of "speaking in tongues" it is important to understand the difference between the "other tongues" of Pentecost and the "unknown tongues" at Corinth. Incidentally the word "unknown" does not occur in the Greek. It would be more correctly translated simply "tongues." "Other tongues" occurs only in Acts 2:4. In Acts 10:46 and 19:6 the rendering is simply "with tongues," and Acts 19:6 the addition of "and prophesied" would seem to make a distinction between ecstatic utterance and plainly spoken teaching.

To understand the difference between the "tongues" at Pentecost and the "tongues" spoken of at Corinth, we will see the Scriptural contrast:

At Pentecost ALL spoke in tongues according to Acts 2:4. This was not true of the believers at Corinth according to 1 Corinthians 12:30.

At Pentecost the tongues were UNDERSTOOD by all according to Acts 2:6. At Corinth they were understood by NONE according to 1 Corinthians 14:2.

At Pentecost they spoke to MEN according to Acts 2:6. At Corinth they spoke to GOD according to 1 Corinthians 14:2.

At Pentecost no interpreter was necessary according to Acts 2:6. At Corinth tongue-speaking was forbidden if no interpreter was present according to 1 Corinthians 14:23,28.

At Pentecost tongues were a sign or credential to believers according to Acts 11:15. At Corinth tongues was a sign to unbelievers according to 1 Corinthians 14:22.

At Pentecost strangers were filled with awe and marveled according to Acts 2:7-8. At Corinth Paul warned that strangers would say they were mad according to 1 Corinthians 14:23.

At Pentecost there was perfect harmony according to Acts 2:1. At Corinth there was confusion according to 1 Corinthians 14:33.

Since it is obvious from the Word of God that the "tongues" at Pentecost and the "tongues" in Corinth are not the same, we need to understand that we must see them as different.

If the "tongues" of 1 Corinthians are not identical with those of Acts 2, what were they? The "other tongues" of Pentecost were other than their native tongues. They spoke in languages they had not acquired, yet, they were real languages which were understood by strangers from other lands who knew them. It was not jargon, but intelligible language. Therefore, it would seem that the "tongues" of 1 Corinthians were ecstatic, vocal utterances, fervent and rapturous religious expressions, not necessarily intelligible to speaker or hearer except through the gift of interpretation. This conclusion seems to be in harmony with the teachings of 1 Corinthians 12-14.

One of the questions that must be addressed in our study is this, "Is the gift of tongues still real today?" There are those that will tell you that some of the gifts of the Spirit were temporary and were only for the early Church, to meet special conditions that existed before there was a written New Testament. Their conclusion is - Now that we have the New Testament, the necessity has passed and therefore the gift has been withdrawn.

Their conclusion is based on their interpretation of 1 Corinthians 13:8-10 where Church is given instructions concerning the value of love, "Love never fails; but whether there be prophecies, they shall be done away; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away." But a careful study of the Greek language reveals this interpretation of verse 10, "But when that which is perfect DOES come" or "But when that which is perfect SHALL come." This proposition is couched in a general form. It means that when ANY thing which is perfect is seen or enjoyed, then that which is imperfect is "forgotten, laid aside, or vanishes."

Therefore, in the full and perfect light of day, the imperfect and feeble light of the stars vanishes. The sense here is, that in HEAVEN - a state of absolute perfection - that which is "in part," or "which is imperfect," shall be lost in superior brightness. ALL imperfection will vanish. All that we possess here that is obscure shall be lost in the superior and perfect glory of that eternal world. All shall be clear and eternal.

In light of the clear teachings of the Word of God, one cannot use this passage of Scripture to say that the gift of tongues is no longer in existence.

The Scriptures indicate that speaking in tongues is primarily a devotional gift. We need to put emphasis on tongues where the emphasis belongs. That is what Paul was trying to do with the Church at Corinth by saying to them in 1 Corinthians 14:18, "I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than all of you."

Paul was telling the Corinthians the purpose of speaking in tongues and what praying in tongues would do for them. Tongues is primarily a devotional gift to be used in one's prayer life for praising and worshipping God, for building up oneself.

To make sure that speaking in tongues did not get out of hand in public worship services, the Word of God has given us guidelines to follow concerning the use of this particular gift, as seen in 1 Corinthians 14:23, "If, therefore, the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or un believers, will they not say that ye are

mad?" There fore, he gives us the following guidelines, as seen in verses 27-28, "If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course; 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."

Look at what God says in verse 23, "If every body in a service is speaking in tongues, those that do not understand and the unbelievers will think you are crazy." So these are the guidelines, "If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course; and let one interpret..." **The formula is this: If someone speaks in tongues, that must be followed by an interpretation of what has been spoken. Then the second person may speak in tongues, and that followed by an interpretation. And then, the third, and last, person may speak in tongues, and that followed by an interpretation. And that would end any speaking in tongues in an open worship service.**

Although permitting tongues, the Word of God appears to discourage too great an emphasis on this gift. And the reason is that it is the one gift that is most open to counterfeit. Satan delights to imitate and debase all that is good and holy, and pervert it to his own ungodly uses. But remember this, if there were not real, there could be no counterfeit!!

The next question that we need to ask is this, "Do all Christian speak in tongues?" The obvious answer from the Word of God is "No," as seen in 1 Corinthians 12:29-30, "Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Have all the gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?" The obvious answer to these questions is "No"!

I realize that there are those folks who believe that a person can be saved and later receive "Spirit baptism" and that "second blessing" brings with it the "gift of tongues." My friend, that simply has no biblical basis for being taught! The Bible very clearly teaches us that the moment we are saved, the Holy Spirit of God places us in the Body of Christ, which is the Church, and that in itself is "Spirit baptism" as seen in 1 Corinthians 12:13.

In studying the Scripture, I have concluded that tongues indeed is a "gift" of the Spirit. Today there are Presbyterians, Baptists, Anglicans, Lutherans, and Methodists, as well as Pentecostals, who *speak* or *have spoken* in tongues - or who *have not*, and *do not expect to*.

But, listen carefully, if tongues IS the gift of the Holy Spirit, it CANNOT be divisive in itself. When those who speak in tongues misuse it so that it becomes divisive, it indicates that the gift has been counterfeited. How do we know? Because the Word of God says in 1 Corinthians 14:33, "For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all churches of the saints."

On the other hand, those who forbid the use of tongues do the Church a disservice because they appear to contradict the teaching of the apostle Paul.

All spiritual gifts that are genuine promote peace and harmony and maintain the unity of the Spirit.

If you are saved, then you have the greatest gift that God has to offer any person, and that is your salvation. Trust God to show you what other gifts you might have, and then use them for His honor and glory.

If you are not saved, then why not today??