

4. The most misused gift

July 28, 2013

Last Sunday we learned three relationships we have with the Holy Spirit – “with us,” “in us,” and “upon us.” We also learned that there are a lot of misconceptions regarding the works and gifts of the Holy Spirit.

This morning we are going to clarify one particular gift of the Holy Spirit which has been abused by many Christians and at the same time it also has been ignored by the other groups of believers. It is my hope and prayer that you guys would understand clearly what the Word of God says about this precious gift of the Holy Spirit without men’s opinions and denominations’ rules.

A. OTHER TONGUES

Acts 2:3-4 And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting . 3 Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

To keep the Scriptures in context, we started our study from v3. As the Holy Spirit came upon the 120 believers in the outer court of the temple, these believers were able to speak in other languages that they had not known.

The Greek word for ‘tongue’ in v3 and 4 is ‘glossa’. Its definition is not a little muscle inside of our mouths, rather it is ‘language.’ You may wonder, “What kind of language?” Let’s read on.

B. THE PURPOSE OF OTHER TONGUES

Acts 2:5-13 And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven. 6 And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language. 7 Then they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, “Look, are not all these who speak Galileans? 8 And how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born? 9 Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, 11 Cretans and Arabs--we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God.” 12 So they were all amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “Whatever could this mean?” 13 Others mocking said, “They are full of new wine.”

We find at least 15 different geographical locations and clearly stated that the citizens of those places heard Peter and the others declare God’s wonderful works in languages they could understand.

Trust me, learning language can be challenging – English, Swedish, Spanish, and Korean. You not only have to understand the grammar of the language and the definitions of the words you are learning, but also you must understand nuances of words.

But in this case, these believers who spoke foreign languages did not know anything about what they were speaking, nor did they know those languages.

Some main line denomination biblical commentators whom I respect very much insist, "Unless we are instructed otherwise in Scripture, we must assume that when "speaking in tongues" is mentioned elsewhere in Acts, or in 1 Corinthians, it refers to an identical experience: believers praising God in the Spirit in languages that are known." In other words, they believe that speaking in tongues is strictly speaking in human language. But they are wrong.

Much to their dismay, the Bible says otherwise. Remember that I asked you guys to notice the Greek word 'glossa' for 'tongues' in v3 and 4? It appears again in 1 Corinthians 13:

1 Corinthians 13:1 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.

According to this verse, speaking in tongues can be human languages as well as angelic language that we humans have no idea.

C. WHAT IS THE CONTENT OF TONGUES?

Have you ever wondered what the content of your tongues is if you are speaking in tongues?

1) Praising the Lord

Acts 2:11b we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God.

In this verse the Bible tells us that the content of tongues is speaking the wonderful work of God. In other words, speaking in tongues is praising the Lord through unknown language to the speaker.

2) Praying to the Lord on our behalf

Romans 8:26 Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

Paul tells us here in the Book of Romans that the Holy Spirit helps us when we do not know how we ought to pray, because the Spirit Himself will make intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. He is searching the heart and He knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because He makes intercession for the believers according to the will of God.

Some of you might be thinking, "I really don't care about this speaking in tongues. I don't care about spiritual gifts and I don't want to know."

Guess what, God knew what some of you are thinking and obviously God does care. Check this out:

1 Corinthians 12:1 Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant:

See, God is watching you and knows what you are thinking .

Probably the mindset like that enables the ignorance we have among the Christian believers regarding the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the multitudes of people follow their leaders blindly and mindlessly.

D. TO WHOM ARE TONGUES ADDRESSED?

1 Corinthians 14:2 For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries.

Apostle Paul tells us that he who speaks in an unknown tongue not unto men, but unto God. Is that clear enough for you? In all cases of the use of tongues in the New Testament, we find that they were addressed to God.

There is not a single reference in the Bible where the gift of tongues was used to address to men by either preaching or teaching; rather we find that they were always addressed to God. It means that a true interpretation of tongues would also be addressed to God. This is a very important point you should keep in mind.

Some biblical scholars in the main line denominations try to put down speaking in tongues as some sort of "gibberish" because they assume that it is not known to men, some even insist that speaking in tongues is from satan. That is a very dangerous statement because they are calling what is God's as the devil's. After all, communication with God, not man, is the purpose of the gift of tongues.

Interestingly, what happened at the Day of Pentecost was a reversal of the judgment at the Tower of Babel when God confused men's language in Genesis 11. The Tower of Babel was not built as a place of refuge in time of next great flood. This tower revealed the arrogant, defiant, and rebellious attitude of men against God. The Tower of Babel was an idolatrous symbol. It was a place where people worshiped the creature rather than the Creator.

God's judgment at Babel scattered the people, but God's blessing at Pentecost united the believers in the Spirit. At Babel, the people were unable to understand each other; but at Pentecost, men heard praises for God and understood what was said. The Tower of Babel was a scheme designed to praise men and make a name for men, but Pentecost brought praise to God. The building of Babel was an act of rebellion, but Pentecost was a ministry of humble submission to God. What a contrast!

E. THE BIBLICAL GUIDELINES FOR SPEAKING IN TONGUES

The ability to pray in an unknown tongue is NOT the primary or singularly true evidence of the filling of the Holy Spirit. Wrong emphasis on this particular gift leads many to seek the gift of tongues – and even to counterfeit it – merely to prove to themselves and others that they really are filled with the Holy Spirit to puff up their spiritual arrogance.

Here are several biblical guidelines we must heed from 1 Corinthians chapter 14:

1) Tongues in private

1 Corinthians 14:18-19 I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all; 19 yet in the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that I may teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue.

Even though he spoke with tongues, Paul refused to exercise the gift of tongues in church, it must be assumed that he prayed and sang in tongues in his own private devotions.

2) Tongues in public

1 Corinthians 14:27-28 If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be two or at the most three, each in turn, and let one interpret. 28 But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God.

• **It must be done with the interpretation that follows.**

Without the interpretation, speaking in tongues does not edify others in public contrary to the charismatic denominations' concepts. I've seen a pastor walking to the

pulpit started to speak in tongues and many people in the congregation did as well in loud voices. But there were no interpretation and nobody expected it.

One very important thing for the interpretation of tongues: We just learned that the content of tongues is praise and/or prayer to the Lord, the interpretation of tongues also must be praise and/or prayer to the Lord, nothing else. I've heard someone stood up and said, "Thus saith the Lord," in King Jimmy language after someone's tongues. That would be a message from the Lord to His people, not from His people to the Lord. In other words, that is NOT an interpretation, rather a prophecy.

- **It must be limited.**

Some of the charismatic church leaders encourage their congregation to speak in tongues in the middle of service. According to what we just read from the Bible, three at the most with the interpretation to follow. There is no room to budge or a loophole to go through. Anything else is against the Word of God.

- **If there is no interpretation, the speaker of the tongues must be silent because he or she did out of God's order.**

In some church services the sermon is interrupted by an utterance in tongues. But there is no scriptural basis at all for these types of interruptions.

Let me put it in this way. If someone stands up and starts to speak in tongues in the middle of our service, we will listen and wait for the interpretation to follow. If there is an interpretation of the tongues, we will receive it with joy. If there is none, either I or our worship pastor Al will say, "We will ignore that tongues since there is no interpretation, because it was out of order."

1 Corinthians 14:40 Let all things be done decently and in order.

F. ARE WE QUENCHING THE HOLY SPIRIT?

About twenty years ago, one elderly Christian brother told me that because Calvary Chapels do not allow people to speak in tongues during their services, we are quenching the Holy Spirit. At that time I didn't know the Word of God enough to show him what he said was wrong from the Bible.

So are we quenching the Spirit by not allowing tongues to be spoken during service without any guidance or limitation? Absolutely not. How can I quenching the Holy Spirit when I teach you guys to follow what the Bible says of which Author is the Holy Spirit Himself?

G. IS SPEAKING IN TONGUES NO LONGER AVAILABLE?

1 Corinthians 13:8-10 Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part. 10 But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.

What is "that which is perfect"? Though some who believe the miraculous gifts ceased with the apostles say it refers to the completion of the New Testament, they are wrong. Virtually all commentators are agreed that 'which is perfect' is when we are in the eternal presence of the Perfect One, whether we are with the Lord forever either through the return of Christ or our death.

The Greek word for 'perfect' is "telos." Considering the way the New Testament uses "telos" in other passages (1 Corinthians 1:8; 15:24; James 5:11; Revelation 20:5, 7; 21:6; 22:13), it certainly seems to be speaking about the coming of Jesus.

Many who believe the miraculous gifts ended with the apostles, such as pastor John MacArthur, claim since the verb 'will cease' is not in the passive, but in the middle voice, it could be translated, tongues will stop by themselves. Their analysis sounds scholarly, but is disregarded by virtually all Greek scholars. In other words, they are trying to justify their denomination doctrines over what the Bible says.

H. APPLICATIONS

- 1) Speaking in tongues is a gift from the Holy Spirit. There is nothing for us to boast about having it or exercising it. Rather boast about the Gift Giver.
- 2) Do not follow men's or denomination's wrong doctrines over God's Word. God's Word triumphs over anything and everything.