

In our last study, we looked at the phenomenon of tongues and determined how we can know if what we see being claimed as speaking in tongues is genuine or whether it is something other than what the Bible describes. We ascertained that tongues (heretofore called “foreign languages”) is a known language

In this brochure, we will look at whether or not speaking in foreign languages is a gift that is still extant today. There are many views regarding this gift. Most charismatic and some mainline denominations hold to the existence of the gift of foreign languages today. Some believe that tongues-speaking is still extant but that it is a private prayer language – a gift to be exercised in the privacy of one’s own prayer closet and not publicly in the church. Others say that whatever God was doing in the early church should be the same for us today.

Others outside these denominations believe that the gift has ceased altogether, having been a foundational to the establishment of the church but now no longer necessary.

First, those who believe that tongues-speaking is a private prayer language do so because they misinterpret 1 Corinthians 14:2 & 28. It is said that Paul indicates that one can pray privately to God in a language that only He understands. To understand the text in this way is to miss the whole point of Paul’s teaching through chapters 12-14.

Paul teaches that gifts exercised without love are useless (13:1-3), that the gifts are for the edification, not of ourselves but of others (12:7, 14:26). In 14:2, Paul is using sarcasm to show that when one speaks in a foreign language, no one in the assembly knows what he is saying. It is foreign to them. If someone came into a room speaking what appears to be gibberish, we would say, “God only knows what he is saying!” This does not establish a prayer language but it declares that it is unfruitful for the edification of others.

Next, there are those who claim that whatever went on in the early church should be occurring in the church today. It is primarily based upon a misunderstanding of the purpose of the record of the Acts of the Apostles. Luke was recording history – what God did to transition from the Old Covenant to the New, from Israel to the Church. It is a transitional book. If one wants to find principles from Acts normative for the Church, one ought to find those principles confirmed in the Epistles. They are instructional, Acts is transitional.

One who believes Acts to be normative for the Church, however, has some difficulty. This view is fairly easy to disprove. In Acts 5, we see people dying for lying to the Holy Spirit. Do we see that phenomenon occurring with frequency today? I would submit that we do not. What about earthquakes that open jails and release prisoners? Doubtful. The proponent of this

view holds to a selectivity that is not supported by Scripture.

What then of the cessation of the gift of tongues? Some argue that the Bible does not indicate that any gifts will cease (overlooking 1 Cor. 13:8) or if acknowledging it, not agreeing as to when they might have ceased.

In response, there are certain spiritual gifts that are no longer extant. For example, the gift of apostleship (Eph. 4:11) has ceased. There were certain qualifications that were required to be an apostle, one of which was that they had to have seen the risen Lord. This eliminates apostles outside the first century. To this, most Charismatics would agree. This eliminates the theory that certain gifts cannot have ceased.

The strongest argument in favor of the cessation of the gift of speaking in foreign languages is the same one that argues in favor of the cessation of prophecy. One must look to the Apostle John for this evidence. It is apparent that false prophets were abounding in the first century. Paul wrote against them in 55 AD (1 Cor. 12:3). They were still a problem when John wrote against them in around 90 AD (1 John 4:1-3). By the time of the writing of the book of Revelation, around 95 AD, it appears that they had not subsided.

First, note that John writes the letter on the authority of a prophet, not an apostle.

The letter is called a prophecy (1:3, 22:18-19) and nowhere does John assert his apostleship.

Second, John makes two strong assertions at the end of the letter (some believe that it is Christ Himself that makes the assertions). If anyone *adds to the words* of the prophecy of the book, then he is to be accursed (v.18). He also says that if anyone takes away from the *prophecy* of the book, then he is eternally damned (v. 19). The latter is different than the former. This is a warning not to alter the contents of the letter.

However, in v. 18, the emphasis is upon the *words* and adding to them. What is being decried here is any further prophecy. John, as the last Apostle, is declaring an end to prophecy. He has tried to combat false prophecy in the church but to no avail (Rev. 2:20). The easiest way for him to help the church avoid false prophecy as he is passing off the scene is by bringing it to a close. In essence, he is saying, "Here is how you can tell if a prophet is false – if he claims to have a prophecy, then it is false because prophecy is over."

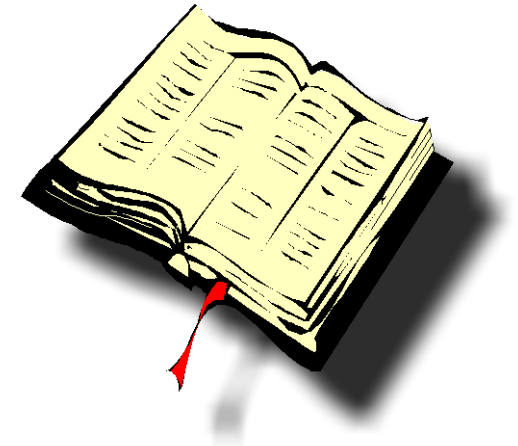
Now one might say, well that is fine for prophecy, but what has that to do with the gift of speaking in foreign languages? Much!

First Corinthians is the only New Testament book, other than Acts, to mention the gift of speaking in foreign languages (Mark's disputed text in his gospel being the only exception). Chapter 14 gives us the only description of the exercise of the gift

within the confines of the assembly of believers. Here, in verse 27, we find that tongues must not be spoken apart from an interpretation, and this for the edification of the church. As this is a spiritual gift given through the Holy Spirit, the function of this gift within the assembly is revelatory in nature. It is a form of prophecy. Some are called prophets and they would speak prophecy in a language which is their own. Other, having the gift of languages, would speak a prophecy in a language not their own nor that of the congregation, thus the need for an interpreter. This would be for the edification of all and it would make use of all of the gifts within the assembly (how could one exercise his gift of interpretation without the exercise of the gift of languages also being exercised?) This makes full use of all the gifts according to 1 Corinthians 12.

So, if tongues-speaking in the assembly is under the auspices of prophecy as a revelatory gift, and no less than John the Apostle has declared the cessation of prophecy, then the gift of foreign languages is no longer extant in the Church today.

If anyone comes to you purporting to speak in tongues, then you may lovingly demonstrate from the Scriptures the error of their way and point them back to the truth.



"Thy Word is Truth"
(John 17:17b)

What does the Bible Say About the Gift of Tongues?

Part 2 – Are They for Today?

by

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