

Doctrine of Holy Spirit

The Gifts of the Spirit

1. When the modern church asks about the gifts of the Spirit, of particular concern is whether or not speaking in tongues is a gift that is still operational.
2. There is no universal consensus on the gift of tongues, because of deep division.
 - Some wonder if the gift of tongues in the book of Acts is different from the tongues spoken about in Paul's letter to the church in Corinth. Some believe that the miracle on the Day of Pentecost was not the ability to speak but the ability to hear what was spoken in one's own tongue. *Acts 2:8 And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?*
 - Some wonder why there is a deep silence concerning the gift of tongues throughout church history, from the first century to the twentieth century. The Charismatic answer to this silence is to say that God allowed a former "rain", and is now providing a "latter rain" of blessing. *Joel 2:23 Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God: for he hath given you the former rain moderately, and he will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month.*
 - Some wonder if the speaking in tongues in the church in Corinth was miraculous in nature? If it was, are the tongues spoken today the same as in Corinth? There is reason for concern today because linguists confirm that the ecstatic utterances are not a language. The Biblical word for tongues, glossolia, refers to a language. People do have a natural ability to articulate unintelligible sounds.
 - Some wonder if the modern day tongues movement is an indication of being baptized in the Holy Spirit.
3. Attention is turned to Scripture. A lengthy discussion of tongues is found in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, chapters 12, 13, and 14.
4. One of the most popular chapters in the Bible is chapter 13, the love chapter. This is significant because it comes in the middle of a discourse about love being abused.
 - *1 Corinthians 13:1 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.*
5. The issue of tongues begins in 1 Corinthians 12 in the larger context of spiritual gifts.
 - *1 Corinthians 12:1 Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant.*

Special Note.

The first apostolic principle is that people of God be informed, and not acting in an unwise manner with reference to the gifts of the Spirit. The church of Corinth was a very turbulent church full of corruption and abuses. In his letter to the Corinthians, Clement, bishop of Rome at the end of the first century, was frustrated because the problems were continuing. He reminds the Corinthians of the letter they had received from Paul.

- *1 Corinthians 12:2 Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led. 3 Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.*
- *1 Corinthians 12:4 Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. 6 And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. 7 But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. 8 For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; 9 To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; 10 To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues:*

Special Note.

Paul is not giving an exhaustive list of spiritual gifts. He is merely saying that there are numerous gifts which the Spirit gives. There is diversity. The purpose of the gifts of the Spirit is the edification of the whole body if there is no edification, the expression of a gift is self-centered.

- *1 Corinthians 12:12 For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. 13 For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.*

Special Note.

Because there is an essential unity to the body of Christ, Jew and Gentile have been empowered by the Holy Spirit. During the days of the Reformation, this passage was important to teach the priesthood of all believers. The ministry of the church is not to be restricted to a specialized priesthood. Rather, the whole body is to be involved in ministry because the whole body has been equipped to perform spiritual service for the Lord. It is organized, it is diverse, it has many parts, but the body as a whole is to minister.

- *1 Corinthians 12:14 For the body is not one member, but many. 15 If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? 16 And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? 17 If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? 18 But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.*

Special Note.

Using a debating technique of absurdity, Paul establishes the logical necessity of diversity of function within the body. Paul wants to rebuke those who make the gift of tongues the supreme test of spirituality in Corinth. It is not. If the body of Christ were a single eye, it might have acute sight, but it would be deaf and dumb. Therefore, God has set the members in the body as is proper, which is to say the Lord has assigned spiritual gifts in diversity to give balance and symmetry.

- *1 Corinthians 12:27 Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. 28 And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. 29 Are all apostles? are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? 30 Have all the gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? 31 But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.*

Special Note.

It is significant that the gift of tongues is mentioned last, in a list that begins with apostles being listed first. A series of rhetorical questions are asked. The answer to each is, "No." The apostolic teaching is that not all are to speak in tongues. Later, Paul would say that his personal desire was that everyone speak in tongues, but the doctrinal teaching is that not everyone can, or should speak with tongues. The best gifts should be coveted. The best gifts are those associated with love. To that end, Paul will show the church a more excellent way to walk. The church is to walk in love. The church is to earnestly desire the best gift, not earnestly desire tongues.

Love: A More Excellent Way

6. To amplify what he is saying, Paul takes time to explain the many facets of love.
 - *1 Corinthians 13 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. 2 And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. 3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.*

Love is Longsuffering,**Love does not Envy, or Boast, and is not Proud**

4 Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,

**Love is not inappropriate, Selfish,
Easily Provoked to Anger, or Thinks Evil**

5 Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;

Love does not Rejoice in Evil, but in Truth

6 Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;

Love Bears, Believes, Hopes, and Endures

7 Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

**Love will Never Go Away
Prophecies, Tongues, and Knowledge Shall Cease**

8 Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.

Through a Glass Darkly

9 For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. 10 But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. 11 When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. 12 For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. 13 And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

7. Finally, Paul gets to the crux of the matter.

- *1 Corinthians 14:1 Follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy.*

8. When Paul exhorts all Christians to seek to prophesy, he is not suggesting that all Christians seek to be an agent of revelation. Rather, to prophesy is to evangelize.

Special Note.

To prophesy is to speak forth the truth of God. When a Christian bears witness to the faith, that is a prophetic act.

9. If a person speaks in an unclear manner, then that person is speaking to God, for no man can understand him.

- *1 Corinthians 14:2 For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries.*

Special Note.

The word “unknown” is not in the Greek text, and is misleading. There is no such thing in the Bible as an unknown tongue. Every man was able to hear the person who spoke in their own tongue, or language (Acts 2:8).

When a person spoke in a foreign language, in the Bible, since the gift was authentic, since the gift was given by the Spirit, then that person could knowingly speak to God, even if no man understood.

The spiritual gift of tongues, or speaking a foreign language, must be put into perspective. The general facility of speaking is designed to speak intelligibly, and for the edification of the church. There is a dangerous assumption in the modern tongues movement that ecstatic utterances convey good words. How does anyone know? Since these modern day ecstatic utterances form no language, it is far better to actually pray with the mind engaged, because those who worship God must worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:24).

Special Note.

The word for mysteries may be “synonymous with sublime and elevated truth; truth that was not before known, and that might be of the utmost importance” (Barnes' Notes).

10. In contrast to the person who speaks in a foreign language, is the person who speaks forth words of edification. Such a person is much more loving, and beneficial to the body of Christ.

- The selfless Christian. *1 Corinthians 14:3 But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort.*
- The selfish Christian. *1 Corinthians 14:4 He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church.*

11. Because of the value of the person who speaks forth words of edification for all, Paul wishes that everyone would prophesy.

- *1 Corinthians 14:5 I would that ye all spake with tongues, but rather that ye prophesied: for greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying.*

Special Note.

A question arises as to the need for an interpreter. If the purpose of tongues was to be able to communicate the gospel to people in their own tongue, or language, why was an interpreter needed in Corinth when someone spoke in tongues?

The implied answer is that the gift of tongues was abused. A person who had been given this gift did not restrain themselves until an appropriate audience was found. Such a person stood up and started speaking to show off.

I attend an English speaking church. One or two people can speak Spanish.

If I had been given the gift of the Spanish tongue, or language, and I stood up and started talking during a service, no one would understand me unless it was interpreted by someone else. There is no such thing as self-interpretation in Scripture. People either heard others speak in their own language, or a trusted interpreter was to be present so that in the mouth of two or more witnesses, as the Law required, something could be authenticated.

If the person who did not know Spanish was not present, I am commanded to be silent, and not use my spiritual gift at that moment.

- *1 Corinthians 14:28 But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God.*

That is an amazing thought. The people in Corinth were told not to use their gift of tongues, or languages, since no one would be edified. To insist on displaying one's spiritual gift would just be showing off. It would be as obscene as someone making a show of how much money they give, or talking about how lovely they can sing. The essence of evil of the modern day tongues movement is that it is selfish, self-centered, unprofitable, and disruptive. There is no objective evidence that the ecstatic utterances of today are authentic languages, or that anyone is knowingly talking to God.

12. The conclusion is that there is no profit to the people of God unless the normal faculty of speech is properly used.

- *1 Corinthians 14:6 Now, brethren, if I come unto you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you, except I shall speak to you either by revelation, or by knowledge, or by prophesying, or by doctrine?*

13. Prior to the completion of the Canon of Scripture, the church could have been profited by someone giving a revelation, a word of knowledge, a prophesy, or a doctrine. There would have been profit even if someone spoke in a foreign language, provided there was an interpreter. Otherwise, there was no profit.

Special Note.

Some of the spiritual gifts in the early church are not familiar with us today. We know what the Bible means by a person presenting a teaching, or doctrine, or telling forth the word of truth. What is not clear is what is meant, "*by revelation*", or, "*by knowledge*".

It is possible that the words, "*by revelation*", refers to a spirit of discernment, as Peter exercised when he exposed the hearts of Ananias and Sapphira, or when Phillip rebuked Simon Magnus.

It is possible that the words, “*by knowledge*”, refer to the interpretation of a dream or vision. To Daniel was given the gift of knowledge of the dream and vision of Nebuchadnezzar.

- *Daniel 2:30 But as for me, this secret is not revealed to me for any wisdom that I have more than any living, but for their sakes that shall make known the interpretation to the king, and that thou mightest know the thoughts of thy heart.*

Whatever is meant, someone speaking to the church, and giving it a sound teaching, or doctrine, an insightful revelation, a word of knowledge, a gospel truth, is preferable to showing off with unintelligible utterances that only God can understand, provided a language is spoken. Even God cannot comprehend mindless gibberish.

14. One of the problems with the modern day tongues movement is that it allows for emotional utterances that are found in non-Christian religions and practices. The exact sounds occur. There is no edification of the body of Christ.

15. Realizing that people would not cease their misbehavior, Paul gave strict instructions to regulate how the gift of tongues would be used in the church.

- **First Regulation.** Let all things be done with a view to edification of the whole body. *1 Corinthians 14:26 How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying.*
- **Second Regulation.** Only two or three people are to speak in tongues in a meeting. The modern day general practice of tongues speaking at random is inappropriate. *1 Corinthians 14:27 If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course....*
- **Third Regulation.** After each person speaks, in proper order, there must be one interpreter. *1 Corinthians 14:27b ...and let one interpret.*
- **Fourth Regulation.** If no one is able to interpret what is being said, the gift of tongues is not to be exercised. *1 Corinthians 14:28 But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God.*
- **Fifth Regulation.** The person who speaks in tongues is to be in control of his faculties. *1 Corinthians 14:32 And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.*
- **Sixth Regulation.** Women are not to speak in tongues in the church. *1 Corinthians 14:34 Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law.*

16. The apostle does not say that tongues are bad. What he does say is that there is something better than the good, and the better. Tongues are good, love is better. Tongues are good, prophesy is better. Tongues are not a sign of super spirituality, or of special empowerment from God.