

Title: So, what is the Gift of Tongues?

Text: 1 Corinthians 14.1-5

Theme: The definition and role of the gift of tongues

Series: 1 Corinthians #79

Prop Stmt. If we don't have the Spirit, we are dead.

Read Text:

The gift of tongues is part of a much larger picture, which is what normally makes this such a challenging subject to tackle in one message. I am hoping that you can think theologically-holistically with me this morning. In other words, instead of simply being interested in what my take is on this subject, I am so desirous that you allow the entire message of the book of 1 Corinthians to be the context that helps you see the bigger picture, because behind much of the argument over the gift of tongues is a disagreement over more serious issues.

For example, if a person believes that the Scriptures are not truly sufficient to provide us with all that we need for this life, but that in addition to the Scriptures, we need a further word from the Lord, then we have a serious problem. Without an objective basis, a ruler, a standard, an unchanging gauge by which to interpret our impressions, or experiences, we end up becoming our own authority. So, if my view of God's sufficient Word that has been revealed, recorded and preserved is not consistent with God's view of His Word, then I am going to be open to things (ideas and thoughts that are contrary to God's Word) I ought to be closed to, which will in turn cause me to be closed to the very Word of God that I must be open to.

We bring to the study of this subject a theology. And Paul addresses this subject to a group of people who had some faulty theology that we need to remember is part of this picture. There were some people in the church at Corinth who considered themselves to have spiritually "arrived." There was a clear problem with those who thought that they were the spiritually elite, when in reality they were spiritually immature. This two-tiered version of Christianity is dead wrong. I have dealt with this rather extensively in this series, so I do not want to belabor the point, but simply put you in remembrance. Therefore...

1. Your view of Sanctification usually drives your view of the gift of tongues.

Your view of how (the process, the steps, the journey, the means) a person becomes a more fully committed follower of Christ (def. of sanctification) usually (not always) is what is the bigger issue behind your view of the role and purpose of tongues. Frankly, I am much more concerned about your view of this subject than I am that you agree with my position in every detail about the gift of tongues.

There are many people who are very sincere, and very committed to growing as a follower of Christ. They want Christ to be honored in their lives. They want to please

longer sin. Once again, you have a two-tiered grouping: those who are fully sanctified and those who are only partially sanctified. Do you see that this 2-step sanctification theology is driven by a misunderstanding of the already, but not yet reality for the believer?

For example, is there healing in the atonement? Does Isaiah 53.5 not say that “by his wounds we are healed”? YES!! That blessing was secured for us by Christ. However, we are not promised that we will receive all of the benefits (namely glorification) of that before the return of Christ. Already we are in Christ (positionally), but not yet do we experience all of the benefits. Take Romans 8, for example. We groan, we suffer, we are weak, we endure, we wrestle, face trouble hardship, persecution and danger. We are considered to be as sheep to be slaughtered. And in yet in all these things we are still more than conquerors through him who loved us, because even though we now, experience these problems, we are already in Christ and none of things including death, life, angels or demons can ever separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. We still get sick and we still die (Rom. 8.10), and yet Jesus promised that “He who believes in me will never die!” There is a sense in which now, we won’t die (spiritually) but that promise also includes a physical aspect to it that applies to our glorified bodies. Already we won’t die spiritually, but not yet is that promise fully in place for our physical bodies. That comes after the return of Christ. Do you see that much of the theology of sanctification that is taught by some of our “charismatic” brothers and sisters is in actuality a confusion of the “already but not” yet tension.

Now, go back to the pattern in Acts. If the two-step process is how it is supposed to happen, then we should expect this to happen to the other people who come to Christ, whose stories are recorded in the Bible. Does this happen? By the way, the matter of speaking in tongues occurs in the book of Acts and in the book of 1 Corinthians. Those who argue that this gift is clearly not for today like to point that out, since if it was intended to be an ongoing part of the Christian experience would it not be part of the other letters that Paul or the other apostles wrote? Those who argue that this gift is clearly for today like to ask how many times does something need to be taught in the Bible to be important? Good point. We are studying the 1 Corinthians part, let’s do a survey of the book of Acts on this subject and see what we find.

In the book of Acts there are four passages that include something about the gift of tongues. Acts 2 is the initial experience of the baptism of the Spirit, both the tongues of fire and the gift of tongues that was given to some, perhaps all (120) in the upper room. The next occurrence is Acts 8, where the Spirit came upon the brand new Samaritan (half-Jew/half-Gentile) believers who had been raised to believe in only the Pentateuch as their Bible. The third occurrence is in Acts 10 where Cornelius (Roman – full blooded Gentile) along with many in his household come to faith in Christ. This event (Acts 10) led to the confrontation in Acts 11 between Peter and the Jewish believers who accused him of eating with Gentiles. The final occurrence of tongues appears in Acts 19, where a group of disciples of John the Baptist are caught in what D.A. Carson calls “a kind of salvation-historical warp.” In the first occurrence (Acts 8) tongues is not mentioned explicitly, though I think that it was part of the event.

Acts 8

Preaching

Salvation

Water Baptism

(break)

Prayer and Reception of the Holy Spirit (w/ evidence – assumed)

This scenario seems to support the 2nd blessing view.

Acts 10

Preaching

Salvation/Reception of Holy Spirit (w/ tongues)

Water Baptism

This scenario does not support the 2nd blessing view.

Acts 19. 1-7

Salvation (earlier)

Water baptism (John's)

(break)

Prayer and reception of the Holy Spirit (w/ tongues)

This scenario can be argued by both sides, but seems to be a very unique situation that cannot be used as a pattern, since these people knew the message of John the Baptist about the Messiah and Christ and believed it. But, they had not heard about the coming of the Holy Spirit, though because of the preaching ministry of Apollos they probably knew of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ.

The danger with looking at these events for the purpose of trying to find out if they support a 2nd blessing view and is therefore a template for the “normal” Christian life and expected experience or not is that we end up missing what Luke’s intent was in writing this entire book. The book of Acts was not written to argue for or against the operation of tongues in the life of the believer for today. Keep in mind that Luke is tracing the story of the gospel and church of Jesus Christ from Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria and then to the uttermost regions of the world. It starts out Jewish and becomes more and more Gentile all the time. As a result, the early church is transitioning racially, economically, and geographically. Along the way, the leadership and the people are struggling to figure out what their relationship with the OT law is now supposed to look like. Along with that, what is the relationship between the Jews and the Gentiles supposed to look like in the church?

There were many other places in Acts where the preaching of the gospel brought about the conversion of people without any mention of the gift of tongues. In fact Luke records many examples of people being full of the Holy Spirit where no mention of tongues is made. But again, Luke’s main point in writing Acts is not to give us a template for the

Christian life, but to show that the gospel was a movement away from Jerusalem to Rome, from Jews to Gentiles, from Israel to the world. The only time when believers were waiting for the Holy Spirit to come upon them was in Acts 2 which was in direct obedience to the instructions of Christ. There is no other example of a person becoming a follower of Christ, then waiting and waiting and hoping and praying to be filled with the Spirit. When there is a gap between salvation and filling, it is not that the people are waiting and longing for it. It happens when the apostles come and are first hand witnesses and participants of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on entire groups of people who were not waiting for the Spirit.

B. View #2 Christianity is a one-step process. (w/ ongoing maturing)

In all of Paul's writings to the early church and particularly in his books that deal very specifically with the doctrine of Sanctification, Paul makes no mention of a two-step process. Some of have tried to teach this from Romans 12.1-2, but they build a theological tower on a flimsy grammatical argument that cannot support the structure. In other words, Paul teaches that a person who becomes a follower of Christ, then begins the process of growing, maturing, and spiritually developing in a process that does not conclude until that person is with Christ.

Some have concluded that while Paul makes no room for a two-step process, but Luke does. So...take your pick. Find a system that works for you! That may sound appealing to the post-modern world of Christianity today, but it is wrong. Luke does not teach a two-tiered approach to sanctification. He is giving an account of how the gospel spread, and how the Spirit of God worked to expand the church racially and geographically in a way that forced the early Jewish believers to widen their view of the church of Christ and the kingdom of God. The kingdom of Christ is bigger than you. Here is the unmistakable evidence for it! Look at these people speaking in tongues (Samaritans – Acts 8; Gentiles – Acts 10), just like the 120 in the upper room on the day of Pentecost.

There are two dangers that I want to navigate our theological and experiential ship to avoid. The first danger is what I think many Charismatics run into when they attempt to read into the historical accounts of Israel and Acts a pattern for their individual experiences of Christian growth. There are lessons to be learned and marvelous truths to embrace, but we dare not go beyond the purposes of Scripture and try to make it say something that it was never intended to say. On the other hand, non-charismatics can look at these four accounts in Acts and conclude that tongues were only given as a sign when the Spirit initially came upon a group of people, and no where else in the book of Acts are tongues mentioned as being part of the regular life of the church. But, in making that observation, it seems that some have concluded that the Spirit came and that was it. Hold the phone! Christ came, lived, died and ascended. The Spirit came with power and did not leave. He is still here. He did not simply get the church going and then disappear, He came and stayed. His ministry characterizes this age. The age of the church is the age of the Spirit. Luke does not tell us of the expansion of the church to the Samaritans and then to the Gentiles for the purpose of showing how each individual believer is supposed to get power for their spiritual battles. To preach that is to abuse the

text and to frustrate your people by painting a picture that does not exist. In fact, each time Luke mentions tongues, it is a corporate experience by a new people group and not a private experience by one individual believer. By the time we get to Corinth, it does appear that the picture has changed slightly. There, tongues are more individualistic, may be used in private, and if used in public, have to have a translator, while Luke says nothing of the presence and purpose of a translator in his accounts.

But, on the other hand, there is nothing in Luke's gospel that would suggest that evidences of the Spirit's ministry, including speaking in tongues are over and done with either. Luke is not writing a dissertation defending the gift of or attacking the abuse of tongues. He is showing that in this age of the church, every person who comes to Christ is part of a new group, a new nation, a new family, a new people who are marked by and characterized by the Holy Spirit and enjoy His personal presence and involvement in their lives.

Now, I recognize that I have not yet answered the two big questions of: What exactly are the gift of tongues and are they for today? I am not avoiding the subject, but please re-read this sermon this week in preparation for next week's message. No text and no truth in the Bible stands alone. They are all connected and they all inevitably point to Christ.

Those of you from a charismatic background have perhaps seen how this gift has been oversold and held up to be something that it was never intended to be, while those of you from a background that was influenced strongly by a reaction to the charismatic movement have been scared to death to touch anything that seems the least bit emotional and experiential.

I do not believe that the Bible provides for a 2nd blessing theology. But I do believe that that it provides for a 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th, etc. blessing theology. When Paul said in Eph. 5.18, that we are to be filled with the Spirit, meaning, be ye continually filled with the Spirit, many non-charismatics have been content to point out what it does not say. It does not say one and done or the 2nd time is the charm. What does it say? It says that we are to live with under the personal influence of the Spirit of God all of the time. But, what that ends up sounding like in real life, is that living under the influence of the Spirit is basically no big deal. If we really believe that, then we must expect that reality of the Spirit of God to change the way we believe and live. Why is the command there in the first place? Is the command in Eph 5.18 to be filled with the Spirit not there because it is possible for us to live as if we are empty?

Yes, it is dangerous to base your spirituality on the endless pursuit of emotional and manipulative experiences. It is just as dangerous to live a mediocre Christian life that does not hunger and thirst after Christ, that does not pant for God like a deer panting for water, that does not passionately pursue him with all that I am. It is extremely dangerous to live a compartmentalized and "normal" life where we have planned everything out so well, that we don't need God. The truth is, if we don't have the Spirit of God, we and this church are dead, even if we think we are alive.