



Truth

On Tough Texts

WWW.THESCRPTUREALONE.COM

A MINISTRY OF GRACE BIBLE CHURCH

ISSUE 4 (November 2005)

Temporary Spiritual Gifts (2)

(I Cor. 12:8–11; 13:8-13)

IN OUR LAST ISSUE, WE BEGAN A STUDY OF THE temporary spiritual gifts. We first examined the “Finality of Inspiration,” second, “The Reason Some Spiritual Gifts Were Temporary,” and third, “The List of Spiritual Gifts.” Continuing that list, we come to the last two temporary gifts.

Tongues were the supernatural ability to speak a human language without previous knowledge of it. This gift also has direct bearing on our study, so let us take the time to deal with it.

First, consider *exactly* what tongues were. Definitions are always essential when dealing with any issue. The Greek for “tongues” is *glossa*, which has three meanings: (1) the physical organ; (2) figurative for speech and language; (3) an obscure expression that needs explanation. Which one of those, then, is meant in a discussion of the spiritual gift of tongues? The physical organ is obviously not what is referred to since Paul points out that there are “different *kinds* of tongues” (I Cor. 12:10). Neither can this refer to an “obscure expression” or an “unintelligible sound” because Paul clearly and sharply criticizes the Corinthians for using “unknown languages,” that is, ecstatic utterances, because no one could understand them (14:2, 9, 11, 26). All gifts are for edification, so how can anyone be edified if they can’t understand what is being said?

Therefore, there can be no valid argument against “tongues” being known, earthly languages. This is made quite plain in Acts 2:6 and 8:

. . .the multitude came together, and were bewildered, because they were each one hearing them speak in his own language. And how is it that we

each hear them in our own language to which we were born?

Verses 9-11 go on to list many of the regions from which these languages came. The dear, sincere Christians today who claim tongues to be “an ecstatic heavenly language” are simply wrong. *This is absolutely impossible by the words used in Scripture.* As we said, this was exactly the practice Paul condemned in the church at Corinth, and we’ll see this in greater depth in a moment. Clearly, tongues were earthly languages that people, by supernatural means, were able to speak without having any previous knowledge of them.

Second, what was the purpose of tongues? May we say clearly and with no mistake: *the purpose of the “sign gifts” was always and only a sign to Jews.* Throughout their history the Jews have required “signs,” outward proofs of what God was doing. That was the *only* purpose of the “sign gifts.” This fact is proven beyond argument by the three occurrences of tongues in Acts.

The first occurrence of tongues was, of course, in Acts 2. This sign was to validate to the Jews who were present the partial fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy of the coming Holy Spirit. Luke even quotes Joel’s prophecy in verses 16-21 (we’ll come back to Joel’s prophecy later). The second occurrence is in Acts 10:44-47. At his conversion to Christ, Cornelius (a Gentile) spoke in tongues. This was not for his benefit but was for the benefit of the Jews who were present (v. 45). This sign was for the purpose of validating to the Jews God’s acceptance of Gentiles. The third occurrence is in Acts 19:1-7. In Ephesus there were some disciples of John the Baptist who had not yet received the New Testament

message of Christ. We are told that they believed, were baptized by Christian baptism (*baptizō*, which always means immersion), and spoke in tongues. The tongues were a sign to the Jews who were present that Paul's message was authoritative. So, we can conclude, *these three occurrences of tongues are the only valid occurrences on record.*

But the question arises, "What about the occurrence of tongues in I Corinthians?" Many base today's "tongues movement" on the situation in Corinth. But let us please remember that the Christians in Corinth were not doing *anything* right. I once heard a charismatic preacher on the radio who in his excitement blurted out: "Oh, I wish all our churches were just like the one at Corinth!" Indeed, many churches are striving for this, but what a grave error. There is nothing in that church after which we should pattern churches today. The believers there had perverted everything they touched.

To answer our question about how we should view the occurrence of tongues in Corinth, let us *carefully* trace the Biblical history. The last occurrence of tongues (Acts 19) was at the beginning of Paul's three year ministry in Ephesus, and it was actually during that time period that Paul wrote his letter to the church at Corinth. So, since tongues had occurred in Ephesus, and since Paul mentioned them in his letter to the Corinthians (far down on the list, we might add), tongues were not yet past at that time. But, as we have pointed out already, *Paul condemned the Corinthian practice.* The "tongues" in Corinth were clearly self-produced "ecstatic speech" only, not valid occurrences of the supernatural gift. I Corinthians 14:6-15 makes this clear. The tongues in Corinth were totally useless because no one could understand them. This is, in point of fact, exactly what we see in today's modern "tongues movement." The occurrences today do not even remotely resemble the Biblical occurrences of tongues in the book of Acts.

There are at least two other reasons why the occurrence of tongues in Corinth was not valid. *First*, we repeat, tongues (and all "sign gifts") were for Jews and Jews only. There is no indication that there were Jews present in that church, nor is it even realistic to think that there *might* have been Jews in that church. How silly it is to see Gentiles today doing something that existed centuries ago only for the benefit of Jews. *Second*, in every valid occurrence of tongues there was an Apostle present to authenticate and validate the occurrence. In fact, the occurrence of *any* "sign gift" was either *done* by or, at the very least, *confirmed* by an Apostle. There were no Apostles in Corinth at this time. If there had been, they certainly would not have allowed the terrible things that were going on there to continue. So, to conclude, tongues *could* have been valid in Corinth under the right circumstances, but under the circumstances that existed, they were far from it.

Finally, a point that is usually totally overlooked on this issue is that if tongues are so vital, so mandatory for spirituality, why are they not taught in *at least the majority* of the New Testament Epistles if not *all* of them? Why do we see them only in a single letter written to a totally messed up church? An important principle of Biblical interpretation is *analogia scripturae* (the analogy of Scripture, comparing Scripture with Scripture), but here we see an isolated practice in a twisted church that is used to build the foundation for an entire theology—Charismatic Theology.

Interpretation was the supernatural ability to translate a human language without previous knowledge of it. Our discussion of tongues, also applies here.

IV. The Importance of this Position

Why is the position we have offered here so important? Why is this such an important issue? There are at least four reasons for taking the position that all the gifts listed in I Corinthians 12:8-11 were temporary.

First, and most important, this position emphasizes the *absolute* authority, completeness, and sufficiency of Scripture (a doctrine that is being attacked in every way possible in our day). Without this position, we can quite literally do anything we want with the "sign gifts." Why? Because many of the proponents of these gifts today say they are receiving new revelation. But if we accept the Word of God as authoritative and complete, then we immediately rule out any such "new revelation." Are we saying that God no longer heals, for example? Of course not. God still heals and does other supernatural things that confound the mind of man. What we are saying is that God no longer gives such power to men because the Word of God replaced any such need for outward signs.

Second, this position is the only one that fits the context of I Corinthians 12-14. This we have already emphasized.

Third, this position is the only one that is consistent. Here is an important point. Some evangelicals go down through the list of gifts in I Corinthians 12:8-10 and literally "pick and choose" which gifts are valid for today and which ones are not. Many will go through the list and say, "The gifts of wisdom, knowledge, faith, and discernment are for today, but the gifts of healing, miracles, prophecy (foretelling the future), tongues, and interpretation are not." Those in the Charismatic Movement are quite justified in their criticism of this practice. This kind of Biblical interpretation is sad indeed. The position we have presented here, however, is consistent; it proves grammatically, contextually, and historically that *all* these gifts are past and no longer needed because we now have the completed Word of God, God's final revelation to man.

Fourth, this position destroys the false teachings about the "sign gifts" that are prevalent today. There are

many today, both charismatic and non-charismatic, who are guilty of what we might call “Corinthianism,” that is, the over-emphasis and/or the incorrect emphasis on spiritual gifts. Many evangelicals, for example, speak of “how to find your spiritual gift” and then list principles of how to ascertain the gifts in yourself and others. But the Word of God contains no such listing of principles, nor does it ever say to “seek your gift.” True, it says we should *desire* spiritual gifts (I Cor. 14:1), but it never says that we should in our own effort go out and *find* our gift. We don’t need to find it because it was never lost. What the Scripture *does* say is that the Holy Spirit bestows gifts as He wills (I Cor. 12:11), and that we should earnestly desire the best gifts (v. 31). Therefore, as we yield to the Spirit and desire to serve the Lord, He will give us and make us aware of the gift(s) that will best glorify Him and edify the Church (I Cor. 12:7; 14:12).

Further, may we for a moment examine the “sign gifts” in *historical perspective*. In I Corinthians 13:8 we read that certain gifts “shall cease.” In fact, by way of example, Paul even lists three such gifts: prophecy, tongues, and knowledge. The Greek construction indicates that these would literally “cease of themselves,” that is, just fade away. The Greek also indicates that these would not return. As one studies Church History he finds that that is exactly what happened—the temporary gifts faded away, never to return. We offer the following historical facts.

One will find not even a hint in the writings of the Post Apostolic Fathers that tongues were valid after the first century. Some of the great theologians of the ancient Church (Clement of Rome, Augustine, and others) considered tongues to be a practice of the early Church only. In the early centuries of the Church only followers of Montanus (who, along with his disciple Tertullian, was branded a heretic) spoke in “tongues.” In the seventeenth century a group called the Cevenol priests were also branded heretics when their “prophecies” went unfulfilled. One of the most shocking facts is that of the group called the Shakers. The founder, Mother Ann Lee (1736-1784), regarded herself as the female equivalent of Christ and established the Shaker community in Troy, New York. She claimed that God revealed to her that sexual intercourse, even within marriage, was wicked. So, to “mortify the flesh” and give victory over temptation, she had her followers, men and women alike, dance together in the nude while they spoke in “tongues.” There was another group, the Irvingites (founded by Edward Irving in 1830), that declared prophecies (which went unfulfilled), claimed healings (which were followed by death), and practiced “tongues.” I hope the reader notices that a supposed “new revelation” was claimed in most of these instances. That is one reason we strongly emphasize the passing away of such things when the Scriptures were completed.

But the focal point occurred in 1901 at the Bethel Bible College in Topeka, Kansas. A woman named Agnes Ozman claimed that she received the “baptism of the Holy Spirit” and proceeded to speak in “tongues.” The practice quickly became part of the Holiness Movement and gave birth to the mainline Pentecostal denominations. The modern Charismatic Movement was born in an Episcopal church in Van Nuys, California in 1960.

One of the most disturbing and dangerous things about the Charismatic Movement is how “tongues” can be added to one’s Theology without affecting anything else. This practice has spread to many denominations such as Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Presbyterian, and even Baptist. It has become a common and dangerous ground for “fellowship.”

At this point a question arises, “If tongues did cease back in the first century, why are they so prevalent today?” Some Pentecostals and Charismatics view Montanus and Mother Ann Lee as their forerunners, but this puts them in an obviously heretical position. Realizing this fact, the majority of Charismatics say that tongues *did* cease but have returned as God pours out His Spirit once more upon the earth. Their strongest “proof” of this is Joel 2:28 and Peter’s reference to that prophecy in his sermon on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:16-21). Joel prophesied that there would be a great outpouring of the Spirit in the last days. But as one reads those verses, he quickly finds that Joel’s prophecy was *not* fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost. Furthermore, his prophecy has not been fulfilled since Pentecost nor can it be fulfilled in the Church Age. Why? Because that prophecy can only be fulfilled at the end of the Jewish age, which itself cannot come as long as the Church is on the earth. So, this prophecy will be fulfilled in connection with Christ’s return to the earth for the Millennium.

Why, then, did Peter even refer to this prophecy? Peter was saying that what the people were witnessing on the Day of Pentecost was *similar* to what Joel prophesied. The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was only an “earnest,” a first installment, of what was to come. Paul used this very word in Ephesians 1:14 to show that the Holy Spirit is the “earnest” (first installment) of our inheritance in Christ. The Holy Spirit was sent to “bind the contract.” Additionally, Peter was saying to those people who thought the Spirit-filled believers were drunk that they *should* have recognized what they were seeing as the work of the Holy Spirit, not drunkenness.

May we lovingly say, the practice of speaking in tongues, as well as the other sign gifts, is clearly not valid today. Those who hold to these do so from incorrect exegesis and historical ignorance. We should not try to use that which God says is past. These gifts are from an immature age and are retained today only by immature Christians.

V. God's Sovereign Control Of Spiritual Gifts (12:11)

But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.

What then of the gifts that remain? Let us close with three brief considerations.

First, the gifts in Romans 12:6-8 and two of the office gifts in Ephesians 4:11 still remain. If I might interject at this point, two gifts spoken of in I Corinthians 12:28, even though in the same context with the gifts that are past, are still valid today because they are mentioned elsewhere in Scripture (namely, in the Romans list).

Second, God wants us to manifest those gifts. Some might think, in light of our study, that there really aren't

very many gifts left. But these gifts are more than enough to edify the body of Christ.

Third, let us beware of today's unbalanced emphasis on the spiritual gifts. May we please remember: as we are yielded to the Holy Spirit, He will empower us and impart to us the spiritual gifts that will glorify God and edify the Church. The Holy Spirit is the one **dividing to every man severally as he will**. It's not our place to seek the gifts, but to be yielded and wait for Him to give them.

*Dr. J. D. Watson
Pastor-Teacher
Grace Bible Church*

In The Next Issue: Who In The World Were Those "Sons of God"? (Gen. 6:4; etc.)

Truth is to use. Whatever is useful is true for the user, though for someone else it may not be useful, so not true. The truth of any idea is its ability to produce desirable results. If it can show no such results it is false. That is pragmatism stripped of its jargon.

Now, since practicality is a marked characteristic of the American people they naturally lean strongly toward the philosophy of utility. Whatever will get things done immediately with a maximum of efficiency and a minimum of undesirable side effects must be good. The proof is that it succeeds; no one wants to argue with success. . .

Right here is where the pragmatic philosophy comes into its own. It asks no embarrassing questions about the wisdom of what we are doing or even about the morality of it. It accepts our chosen ends as right and good and casts about for efficient means and ways to get them accomplished. When it discovers something that works it soon finds a text to justify it, "consecrates" it to the Lord and plunges ahead. Next a magazine article is written about it, then a book, and finally the inventor is granted an honorary degree. After that any question about the scripturalness of things or even the moral validity of them is completely swept away. You cannot argue with success. The method works; ergo, it must be good...

What shall we do to break its power over us? The answer is simple. *We must acknowledge the right of Jesus Christ to control the activities of His church.* The New Testament contains full instructions, not only about what we are to believe but what we are to do and how we are to go about doing it. *Any deviation from those instructions is a denial of the Lordship of Christ.*

I say the answer is simple, but it is not easy for it requires that we obey God rather than man, and that always brings down the wrath of the religious majority. It is not a question of knowing what to do; we can easily learn that from the Scriptures. It is a question of whether or not we have the courage to do it.

A. W. Tozer, *God Tells the Man Who Cares*
pp. 69-71 (emphasis in the original)

In these days, when so many make their boast of “advanced thought,” it may sound singular to speak of sticking to God’s testimonies . . . Perseverance in the truth when it is unfashionable is the test of a real believer . . . Others may gad abroad after the novelties of human opinion; but the true-born child of God glories in saying to his heavenly Father, “I have stuck unto Thy testimonies.”

Charles Spurgeon on Ps. 119:31,
The Golden Alphabet: A Devotional Commentary on Psalm 119

Scripture has its authority from God, not from the church . . . But a most pernicious error widely prevails that Scripture has only so much weight as is conceded to it by the consent of the church. As if the eternal and inviolable truth of God depended upon the decision of men! . . . Thus these sacrilegious men, wishing to impose an unbridled tyranny under the cover of the church, do not care with what absurdities they ensnare themselves and others, provided they can force this one idea upon the simple-minded: that the church has authority in all things.

But such wranglers are neatly refuted by just one word of the apostle. He testifies that the church is “built upon the foundation of the prophets and apostles” (Eph. 2:20). If the teaching of the prophets and apostles is the foundation, this must have had authority before the church began to exist.

John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (I.VII.1, 2)

To account for such an amazing book with its continuity of development on natural means would demand a greater miracle than inspiration itself.

Louis Sperry Chafer, *Major Bible Themes*, p. 13

Truth On Tough Texts

A Ministry of
Grace Bible Church
P.O. Box 235
Meeker, CO 81641
www.TheScriptureAlone.com
docwatson@nctelecom.net

This monthly publication is intended to address Scriptures that have historically been debated, are particularly difficult to understand, or have generated questions among Believers. We hope it will be an encouragement and challenge to God’s people to carefully examine and discern Truth. Periodically, we will also include book reviews of popular books, for much that is published today demands discerning reading. While the positions presented here are based on years of careful Biblical research, we recognize that other respected men of God differ.

If you have a question that perplexes you, please send it along so that we might address it either in an article or in our “Q & A” section. Other comments are also warmly welcomed.

This publication is sent free of charge to anyone who requests it. To aid in the ministry, tax-deductible donations will be greatly appreciated, but never demanded. If you know someone you think would enjoy TOTT, please send along their address.

