

The Gift of Tongues (Part 2)

by Chuck Smith

Chuck Smith explores the complexities and regulations surrounding the gift of tongues in the Christian faith, emphasizing its proper use and significance today.

Scripture: Acts 2:38-39, 1 Corinthians 12:11-13

Topics: "Spiritual Gifts", "The Gift of Tongues"

Description

Chuck Smith discusses the gift of tongues, emphasizing that not everyone possesses this gift as it is distributed by the Holy Spirit as He wills. He clarifies that while personal use of tongues is unrestricted, in church settings it should be regulated and accompanied by interpretation to avoid confusion. Smith highlights the importance of prophecy over tongues for edification within the church and addresses common misconceptions and rumors surrounding the gift. He concludes by affirming the validity of tongues for personal devotion and encourages believers to remain open to the workings of the Holy Spirit.

Transcript

In this lesson we will be looking at 1 Corinthians 12, 13, and 14 (but mainly chapter 14), as we continue this very controversial subject of speaking in other tongues.

The question arises, "Is speaking in tongues for everybody?" In chapter 12, after Paul is talking about the various gifts of the Spirit and naming the different gifts, he then declares, having given a list of nine, "that the Holy Spirit divides to each man severally as He wills" (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:11).

Now in looking at this listing of the gifts of the Spirit, notice how Paul said that "to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom, to another the word of knowledge, to another faith [and so on] to another... to another..." When he gets to the gift of tongues he says, "To another kinds of tongues [or diverse kinds of tongues]." Now even when reading that, we would not infer that everyone has the gift of the word of wisdom or that everyone has the gifts of healing or the word of faith. So we would also infer that not everyone has the gift of speaking in tongues.

In fact, when you get down to 1 Corinthians 12:28-30 Paul seems to be a even little more clear on the subject as he said,

And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that, miracles, then the gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all

prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Have all the gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?

So these are rhetorical questions and the answer is obviously, "No." Not everybody has the gifts of healing. Not everybody is a prophet or has the gift of a prophet within the church. Not everybody has the gift of the working of miracles. And thus, not everybody has the gift of speaking in tongues.

Now this particular gift has definite restrictions and limitations on its use. First of all, in a person's own personal devotions there is no limitation on the use of the gift. You can speak in tongues in your own personal devotions just as much and just as often as you please. There are no restrictions whatsoever. In fact, Paul thanks God that he speaks in tongues more than all of the Corinthians. It was a popular gift in the Corinthian church and many people liked to exercise the gift to an excess. Paul said,

I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all: Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that [by my voice] I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue. (1 Corinthians 14:18-19)

So in the church services the use of tongues are definitely restricted and regulated. First of all, it is restricted to a person being present with the gift of interpretation. In 1 Corinthians 14:28, Paul said,

But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God.

In other words, you are not to speak out in tongues in church if there is no interpreter present.

And then Paul places other limitations on it. He said in 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; and let one interpret.

And then another rule is that it should always be done decently and in order.

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

I do not believe that utterances in tongues in church should ever be disruptive. I do not believe that they should ever be given during the time that the pastor or the minister is ministering the Word of God. I do not believe that it is proper or right to interrupt him with an utterance in tongues. In the Pentecostal circles they often do this. A sermon will be interrupted many times by utterances in tongues. So much so, that we used to call them tongues and interruptions because they were so often interrupting and disruptive in a service. And it really gets to be quite confusing when that takes place.

In 1 Corinthians 14:33, Paul said,

"For God is not the author of confusion."

What should our scriptural attitude be towards speaking in tongues? Now there are some who forbid and would forbid the use of the gift of tongues even to the point of saying that it is of the devil. There are rumors that continue to circulate through the church and they keep coming back.

I keep getting letters about Madelyn Murray O'Hare who is trying to get some kind of a prohibition for all religious broadcasting. And please fill out this form and send to the FCC. The FCC sends out letters every

once in a while saying, "Please do not send us any more letters or any more of these forms. There is nothing at all to this rumor." But you know, someone gets it and they print up a lot of them and here they come in the mail again! People are all upset because this rumor is passing by again. And I guess that I have seen that one come through probably twenty-five different times in the last twenty-five years. About once a year it comes around.

There are those rumors that are always circulating of someone who took a picture out of an airplane window of a cloud formation. Or I heard another version of it that was at a funeral where a person was touched and as they were taking pictures of the flowers, they decided to take a picture of a beautiful formation of the clouds in the sky. And when it was developed, there was Jesus standing with outstretched arms in similar style to how Warner Sallman has painted Christ.

There was also the example of the face of Christ in the melting snow and the different stories you get of how that particular picture was taken. But you never can trace that down to the original source. It was always a friend of my aunt's or it was someone that my cousin knew. And you never can get back to the first cause on those rumors.

And thus, these rumors have a way of just constantly circulating. There was the disappearing angel who was hitchhiking. These are rumors that just have ways of circulating. In fact, we even got a letter a while back and it said, "We understand that your wife picked up a hitchhiker" She never does that, but they said she picked up a hitchhiker and it turned out to be an angel. No, that did not happen. But it is just that old rumor coming around again and you never can get back to the original source. It was always a friend of a friend and you cannot find out who it was.

Now probably one of the oldest rumors (and it continues to circulate) is that someone was speaking in tongues and there was a person there who understood the language. They happened to be a missionary or someone who had known that language or grew up in that country or something. And when they heard this person speaking in tongues, they were supposedly saying horrible, blasphemous things about Jesus. That rumor has been around since the Corinthian church. And Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 12:13 to correct that particular rumor as he said,

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant. Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led. Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed:

You see how that rumor was going around even then and so Paul is saying, "No, no. It does not happen. No man, by the Spirit, calls Jesus accursed."

We are not to forbid a person to speak in tongues, as long as it is within the scriptural parameters. Paul said,

Wherefore brethren, covet to prophesy and forbid not to speak with tongues. (1 Corinthians 14:39)

But in the church it is to be limited in its use. And we have spoken of two or at the most three utterances and it is not to be used at all unless there is an interpreter present. But it is to be preferred that the gift of prophecy be exercised rather than the gift of tongues. And Paul definitely stated his desire was to speak in a known language that the church might be edified. Certainly the gift of prophecy is a preferable to the gift of tongues as far as the exercise within a church.

Paul said in 14:1, 4-9,

Follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy. He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifies himself, but he that prophesies edifies the church. And I would that you all spoke with tongues, but rather that you prophesied, for greater is he that prophesies than he that speaks with tongues except he interpret that the church might receive edifying. He that speaketh in an [unknown] tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church. 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. 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? And even things without life giving sound, whether pipe or harp, except they give a distinction in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped? For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle? So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the air.

So Paul is definitely putting prophecy and the exercise of that gift above that of tongues in public services. Then he declares,

If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad? (1Corinthians 14:23)

So what about the Scripture, "Whether there be tongues, they shall cease"? Those people who say that tongues are not for today usually use this Scripture as their proof text. "Whether there be tongues, they shall cease," there in 1 Corinthians 13, where Paul is comparing, first of all, the eternal things with the temporal things. He is comparing the things that will go on versus the things that are going to be set aside. "And now abide these three: faith, hope, love." These are the abiding things. There are things that will not abide. Love will never fail. That will go on. But whether there be prophecies, they shall fail. Whether there be tongues, they shall cease. Whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. So, whether there be tongues, they shall cease. But notice the contrast. It is between the abiding things and the things that are temporal and that will pass.

Now the controversy arises then over the interpretation of "when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away" (1 Corinthians 13:10). Let us read it in its context.

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

Now what is "that which is perfect?" Those who try to relegate the gift of tongues only for the apostolic period (only for the early church) interpret "that which is perfect" to be the full canon of Scripture. The idea or the inference is that until the full body or canon of Scripture was written-- until John finally put the "amen" at the end of the Book of Revelation--that up until that time the word of knowledge and the gift of prophecy and the gift of tongues were used for teaching and instructing in the ways of the Lord.

Now there is no indication at all in the Scriptures where speaking in tongues was ever what you would call "revelatory" or the "revealing" of God's word--of God's will. That did happen in prophecy and it could happen in the word of knowledge, but never were tongues used in the Scripture as a teaching tool.

Contrariwise, Paul tells us that:

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. (1 Corinthians 14:2)

So they were never used in the Scriptures as a teaching tool or as a tool whereby the will or the purposes of God or the word of God was revealed.

Now you have two possibilities. First, that which is perfect is the complete body of Scripture, completed in the Book of Revelation. But the question arises, is the revelation complete? The Bible tells us that God has given us all that pertains to knowledge in the understanding of God. It is all there--all that we need. But yet there are parts of God's revelation that were not given. Even in Revelation 10, when the seven thunders uttered their voices, John was about to write what the seven thunders said. And the angel said, "Do not write that. Seal that up." And so what the seven thunders uttered was not written. So we actually do not have a complete revelation because part of it was sealed.

Jesus, in talking to His disciples in John 16:3 said that He had many other things to tell them but they could not bear them now. And Paul, in writing to the Corinthians said that there were things that he could not share with them.

And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. (1 Corinthians 3:1-2)

There were things that Paul would like to have shared with them but they just were not able to handle it. So there is a part of the revelation that has not been complete. And thus, to say that that which is perfect is the complete revelation of God's Scripture could be argued. Most of the earlier theologians interpreted "that which is perfect is come" to be a reference to the coming again of Jesus Christ. And it would seem to fit better in the context to interpret that as the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

As we mentioned the word of knowledge and the gift of prophecy were revelatory gifts. But there is no indication that the gift of tongues was ever used in that way. But the question then comes, "do we have perfect knowledge today?" Paul said,

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. (1 Corinthians 13:12)

Do you know everything? I have met some people that thought they did. But I have to confess to you, I know in part. As Shakespeare said, "But man, proud man...Most ignorant of what he's most assured" (Measure for Measure, 2.2). I know the Scriptures better than any other subject but I will frankly confess to you that I am very ignorant in the Scriptures. There is so much to be known. And I have always discovered that the more anybody knows about any particular subject, the more they realize that there is so much that they do not know. The person who thinks he knows it all is usually the person who knows the least. And it is something that "we know in part and we prophecy in part. But when that which is perfect is come then this, which is in part, shall be done away" (1Corinthians 13:10).

The argument is forwarded that the word perfect (that which is perfect) is the neuter gender in the Greek language and thus, it is a reference to the Word rather than to the coming of Jesus. But that really is not a legitimate argument because the word Spirit used with reference to the Holy Spirit is always in the neuter

also, and yet we know that the Holy Spirit is the third person of the Godhead.

Now in Acts 2, when the Day of Pentecost had fully come and the disciples received the gift of the Holy Spirit and the first exercise of this gift of tongues, we do read there that they were convicted. The people who had gathered were convicted at the preaching of Peter and said, "What shall we do seeing we have crucified the Lord of glory?"

Then Peter said unto them,

Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. (Acts 2:38-39)

Now when the crowd had first assembled on the Day of Pentecost because of the phenomena, they were all wondering "what does this mean?" They were in amazement because they heard these people speaking the wonderful works of God in seventeen different languages. And they had come from all over the world, and thus, they heard the language that they were familiar with in the other parts of the world--the Medes, Parthians, and all the others. They heard these various languages being spoken and they wondered, What does this mean?

And so Peter stood up and he said,

Ye men of Israel, hearken unto me. This is that which was spoken of by the prophet Joel who declared, "In the last days," saith the Lord, "I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh. And your sons and daughters shall prophesy. Your young men shall see visions. Your old men shall dream dreams. And upon My servants and handmaidens will I pour out of My Spirit in that day," saith the Lord. There will be blood and fire, vapor of smoke, the moon will be turned into blood and the sun into darkness before the great and notable day of the Lord come. And it shall come to pass that whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. (cf. Acts 2:16-21)

Now notice the prophecy of Joel is first of all for when? "In the last days," saith the Lord. Are these the last days? I believe they are. But the prophecy is for the last days and the prophecy takes you right on through the Great Tribulation. Because one of the aspects of the Great Tribulation is the sun will darken and the moon will turn to blood (turning a bloody color). That is one of the things that will happen during the Great Tribulation period and that is spoken of by Jesus as one of the signs of the Great Tribulation. And of course it is told in the Book of Revelation as one of the events of the Great Tribulation period.

Now notice that the prophecy of Joel, "Upon My servants and handmaidens will I pour out in those days of My Spirit and they shall prophesy" (Joel 2:28). So it was a prophecy of Joel that this "gift of prophecy" would be exercised by those upon whom the Spirit was poured out in the last days, those who would actually be going into the tribulation period. Thus, if you take "tongues they shall cease, whether there be prophecies they shall fail," if that is all tied together and knowledge is vanishing away, then we realize that prophecies have not failed. They continue and will continue on into the tribulation period, according to the promise of God through the prophet Joel. This is a prophecy for the last days.

So the gift of prophecy was to fail concurrent with the ceasing of the gift of tongues and the gift of the word of knowledge. So the assumption that I would have to make is that the gift of speaking in tongues is indeed a valid gift for the believers today. And that it is an excellent gift whereby you will be enhanced in

your own personal devotional life and in your prayer life.

Now we are told in the end of 1 Corinthians 12, to "covet earnestly the best gifts." And Paul said, "Yet I will show you a more excellent way." What are the best gifts? That all depends upon what you need. If there is someone who is here tonight who is blind, then I would say one of the best gifts would be the gift of faith and perhaps the working of miracles. It would probably be one that they would appreciate more than any other. If we are in real confusion over a particular problem, then I would say that the gift of the word of wisdom would probably be the best gift to have exercised, to give us direction. If someone was here purporting themselves to be some great spiritual person and yet there are some weird aspects about them that would cause us to question, then I would suppose the gift of discerning of spirits would probably be the best gift in that situation.

So it all depends on what the situation is as to what is the best gift. And if the situation is involving your own personal devotional life--to be enriched that you might be edified--then I would say that the gift of tongues would be the best gift to help you in your prayer life, to enhance your personal prayer life and worship and that intimacy of worship with God. That would be the best gift for you.

So we want to have one more lesson on the subject of the gift of tongues. We will be talking about the gift of tongues and sort of the mechanical kind of aspects of it. We will be looking at it from the very practical standpoint of this particular gift of speaking in tongues. We will look at some of the practices of some of the Pentecostal churches and how to receive the gift of tongues. We will be talking about some of the methodologies that we have observed in the past. How a person is encouraged to say, "Glory, glory, glory, glory, glory," as fast as he can and, "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus." What we will study will probably surprise and shock you, as we deal with some of these "helpers" of the Holy Spirit in seeking to help people to receive the gift of tongues.

We will be talking about the receiving of the gift of tongues in our next study, as we will conclude this particular section on speaking with tongues. We will then go on to other fuller, richer aspects of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer.

Father, we thank You for all of the help that we can get. And Lord, surely You know that we need it. And we thank You for the Holy Spirit and His help in our worship and in our praise and in our prayer life. Lord, we thank You for the gift of tongues and for the ability that You give us to express to You our praise and our thanksgiving. When we find that our human intellect is weak and inept in its abilities to express all that we feel within our heart and within our spirit. We thank You, Lord for this ability and this help that You give to us. So Lord, we pray that You will help us to be open to all that You are wanting to do. May we never, Lord, be guilty of closing any doors and placing any restrictions or limitations upon You and that which You might desire for us or to do for us. And Lord, forgive us if we should have ever said, "Well, I do not need that," because Lord, anything You give us we need and we need desperately. And Lord, we need all the help we can get. And so we thank You for that help. And Lord, just know, that we are open to all You might want to do in us, through us, and for us, Lord. We want to be totally open to You and to the working of Your Spirit within our lives. So Lord, move in our hearts. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net