

The Gift of Tongues

by William MacDonald

The gift of tongues is a supernatural enablement from God, given for the common good, and its use must be controlled to avoid abuse.

Duration: 36:15

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 13:8-11, Hebrews 2:2-4

Topics: "Gift Of Tongues"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the purpose of signs, wonders, miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit in confirming the gospel message. He refers to Hebrews chapter 2, emphasizing that the word spoken by angels was the law given on Mount Sinai. The speaker highlights the penalty associated with disobeying the law and contrasts it with the greater revelation of grace through Jesus Christ. He also mentions the abuse of spiritual gifts and the need for maturity in their use. The sermon concludes by affirming that while the sign gifts may pass away, faith, hope, and love continue.

Transcript

We have some questions I'd like to go over at the outset. How would you answer this one? Since Christ, as the Lamb of God, taken away the sin of the world, and Christ died for our sins, why does the believer die physically? Good question. Why do believers die physically? Well, I think there are a lot of aspects to the answer to this.

First of all, sin has penalty, and sin has consequences. And we have to distinguish between the consequences of sin and the penalty of sin. When a person is saved, the penalty of sin is forgiven once for all.

The consequences sometimes remain, don't they? For instance, if a person has lived a dissolute life before he was saved, maybe he's been on very strong drugs, and his mind is really affected by it, well, he can still be saved by the grace of God. So the consequences oftentimes remain. That's one aspect of the question.

The other aspect is this. Another aspect is this. What would it be like not to die? Have you ever visited in a retirement home, in one of our homes for aged Christians, and you see people 100 years old? Would you like to live to be 150? I wouldn't.

When you see the ravages of age in a person's life, really, death is a mercy for the child of God, isn't it? Death is the messenger of God that brings the soul to heaven. It's really something to think about. I think about it all the time, because I visit in those homes a great deal.

I wouldn't want to live here. Frankly, to be very honest with you, I don't want to live to be 100. It's all in the Lord's hands, but I don't particularly want to live to be 100.

I just hope the Lord takes me with my boots on. Another aspect of the question is this. Supposing Christians didn't die, and everybody else did.

That would create quite a situation, wouldn't it? Everybody would flock to the banner of Christ, not because of conviction of sin, not because of eternal life, but just because they would profess faith in Christ just in order to avoid dying. If we didn't die, you might just as well ask, why does a Christian have to get sick? It's really the same question. Why, after we're sick, don't we enjoy perfect health? The answer is, why shouldn't we share the woes and ills of humanity? Why should we be exempt from them down here? I think it's a good question, and I think it has many facets to the answer, and I'm sure that you will be thinking about many of them and discussing them one with another.

Number two, is it important to seek to know what one's spiritual gift is, or is it not better to walk in the Spirit and then one's gift will become obvious? My answer is, it's important to know what one's spiritual gift is, and I don't think it does necessarily become obvious just by walking in the Spirit. As I said this morning, a lot of people don't know what their spiritual gift is because they've never exposed themselves to different aspects of Christian service. When we were at Emmaus many years ago, we had fellows who knew they didn't want to do street-corner preaching.

They knew that. And we had to get a team of mules and drag them out there on the street corner, and then after they got going, we couldn't shut them up. And many fellows in full-time Christian work today got their start at 64th and Halstead in Chicago because they exposed themselves to it and they found out what a wonderful experience it was.

And it was with tremendous training. I mean, if you're not on top of it out there in the street corner, you have the humiliating experience of seeing the crowd drift away. Somebody ahead of you preaches and draws a big crowd and then you get up and take ten minutes and they all filter away and drove.

So I think it's very important to be willing, and that's what we try to do in the Discipleship Intern Training Program. We don't expect every one of you to be evangelists. We don't expect every one of you to be teachers.

But just be willing for nine months to expose yourself to these different types of service. Let us tell you at the end of the year what we think your spiritual gift is. And it works.

It really works. And I think it helps the fellows as they plan and prepare for the future. 1 Corinthians 12.31 If, for instance, the local assembly is lacking the gift of administration among the current men, is it possible that the Spirit would give that gift to one of the current men rather than sending someone in with that particular gift? Let me read it again.

Well, let's read 1 Corinthians 12.31. That might help. 1 Corinthians 12.31 which we've been over. We mentioned today.

1 Corinthians 12.31 But desire earnestly the greater gift. And I mentioned that's the local assembly. Desire earnestly the greater gift.

Still more excellent way of showing it to you. If, for instance, the local assembly is lacking the gift of administration among the current men, is it possible that the Spirit would give that gift to one of the current men rather than sending someone in with that particular gift? My answer is no. It's possible that there's a man in the assembly with the gift who has never stirred it up.

That's possible. But I don't think it's possible that God would give it because I think the man got his gift when he got saved. I think the gifts were given out when the man got saved.

But it is possible that there's a man in that assembly who might have that gift and yet has never really been exercised about it or holds himself back. Don't forget that with regard to the matter of elders, there's a divine side, but there's also a human side. The divine side is found in Acts 20, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers.

Only the Holy Spirit can make a man an overseer. But the other side of it is in 1 Timothy 3. If any man desires the work of overseership, you have to have both. I think there are men today that under God could be elders in an assembly, but they don't desire it.

Maybe their life is gobbled up by business affairs, by the cares of this life, and they're not willing to give themselves to that service for the Lord. So my answer is no. I don't think that God will give the gift to somebody already in the meeting.

He could reveal the gift to someone already in the meeting, or he could send someone in with that particular gift. And the fourth question is, and thank you very much for the questions. I really like them.

What is the tongue of angels which we could speak? 1 Corinthians 13.1 So I speak with the tongues of men and of angels. Actually, the Bible doesn't explain anywhere what the tongues of angels are. All I can say is that any time angels spoke with human beings in the Bible, they always spoke in an intelligible language.

It's amazing, isn't it? Angels coming down, sometimes in the form of men, and they speak with men. This is perfect conversation. It wasn't a foreign language at all.

They just spoke in the language that the people understood. But I think here, tongues of angels in 1 Corinthians 13.1 is a figurative expression for the most exalted utterance. We think of a silver-tongued orator, something like that.

Think of a man like Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the priest of preachers. When I read the expression, the tongues of angels, I think of that. I think that Paul is using a figurative expression to describe the most exalted language.

He's saying, even if I could speak like that, the most exalted language that the human mind can conceive of and don't have love for, it's all just a clanging noise, which is truth. Okay, we're going to go on with our little study. First of all, we're going to review the gift of the Spirit.

What is a gift? We reminded ourselves this morning that a gift is a supernatural enablement from God. It has nothing to do with natural talent at all. In fact, I would think that more often than not, God gives this

supernatural ability to a man who doesn't have it naturally.

It's more glory to God if he does that. Isn't it? I often think back to the times when we were at Emmaus and there were a couple of Dutchmen who used to come and help us, Henry van Rijn and Charles van Rijn. Well, there was another one, Lou van Rijn, too.

And those men were brought up under kind of difficult circumstances, and when something needed to be done, they would go down to the basement to where the scrap lumber was, and they would take some of that scrap lumber, and make some of the nicest things with it. Some of us Jews were good carpenters, too. When they wanted to make something, they'd go down to the lumber yard and get some nice new lumber.

It was more glory to the van Rijn to be able to use scrap lumber and do something good. That's true with God, too. God likes to use scrap lumber.

And as I said this morning, God likes to use people who don't have that ability, and he gives them that ability and people stand by them. It sure wasn't him. It had to be the Lord.

That's the way it should be. That's really the way it should be. The gifts are named in these passages of Scripture that are listed here, and the list is fairly complete.

Notice the gifts were given for the common good. They were given not for selfish aims, not for personal good, but they were given for the good of all. They were given to help other people.

We saw in 1 Corinthians 12, 11 that the Spirit distributes gifts individually just as he will. This is a sovereign operation of the Spirit of God, and he passes them out the way he wants to pass them out. And your praying for a gift has nothing to do with it.

You can pray from now until the millennium for a gift, and you won't get it if you don't already have it. Because the Spirit of God does that, and he does it the way he wants. As members of the human body are not all the same, so the members of Christ do not all have the same gifts.

And Paul labors that illustration, the illustration of the human body, and shows that's the way it is in the body of Christ. That means that nobody should feel worthless, and no one should feel independent of others. No one should say, well I'm just a cypher in the body of Christ, there's nothing I can do.

And nobody should say, here I am, I'm the king of the mountains, and I don't need anybody's help. It's wrong to suggest that all believers should have any one gift. This is not a biblical statement.

But a local assembly can desire the greater gift. Not an individual, but a local assembly. It's plural.

In chapter 12, verse 31. We saw in chapter 13, that unless a gift is exercised in love, it's absolutely useless. That's interesting.

You know what that says? That says grace is greater than gifts. They were emphasizing gifts. I was in England some years ago, and I said to a brother in Christ, what church do you attend? And he said, well I attend such and such a church where we have all the gifts of the spirit.

Well, I didn't say anything for once. But my mind went immediately to Corinth. Corinth had all the gifts of the spirit.

The fact that you have all the gifts of the spirit doesn't mean you're a spiritual ascended. They were carnal. They had people in Corinth that didn't even believe in the resurrection.

They didn't believe in the resurrection of the Lord, and they tolerated them in the assembly. You know they were going to law against one another. They had immorality, and it wasn't being just.

They had all the gifts of the spirit. So that's what leads me to say that grace is greater than gifts. And if you had to choose, choose the godliness rather than the gift.

Unless the gift is exercised in love, it's useless. Love thinks of others, not of self. This is a very important key to chapters 12, 13, and 14.

Exercise the gift in love. Love thinks of others. In your exercise, try to be helping other people in their most holy faith.

Now, we go on to the next transparency, which has to do with the control of the use of the tongues. Control of the use of the tongues. First of all, we see that Paul never says anything against the use of tongues.

It's the abuse of tongues that is the subject here. Now, why do I emphasize that? Well, in their reaction to some of the things that go on in the evangelical world today, I hear Christians saying tongues are of the devil. I don't think we should say that.

I don't think we should say that. Paul never said that. It was the abuse of tongues that Paul is speaking of.

And as I told you before, men were getting up in the assembly in Corinth and they were using tongues for self-display. They were using tongues for self-edification. They were using tongues as a child uses a toy.

And Paul says, look, we've got to exercise some control in this matter. And he sets down seven controls for the use of tongues in the assembly. Seven controls.

The first is, do not forbid to speak in tongues. 1 Corinthians chapter 14, verse 39. Do not forbid to speak in tongues.

It says, wherefore my brethren, covet earnestly to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues. But, but, he adds other controls. The second control is this.

Not more than three may speak in tongues in any one meeting. Verse 27A. Verse 27A.

It says, if any man speak in a tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three. Now that rules out a meeting in which there's just general speaking in tongues. Couldn't be.

Paul says, three in any one meeting. Are you with me? And then it says, they must speak one at a time. Not all speaking together.

It says in the King James, and that by course, in other versions it might say, and that in turn. That means, no general queuing of the room with a lot of babble in tongues. No, no.

One at a time. Three at the most. One at a time.

Four, there must be an interpreter. The same verse. The same verse.

And let one interpret. Verse 28, but if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church, and let him speak to himself, and to God. Verse 34, the women must keep silence.

The women must keep silence. Let the women keep silence in the churches, for it is not permitted unto them to speak, but let them be in subjection, as also saith the law. And these are the commandments of the Lord.

Paul says that at the end of the chapter. He says, these are the commandments of the Lord. The women must keep silence.

Verse 26b, number six. What is said must be edifying. In other words, they are to judge what is said, and it must have the effect of building up the saints in their most holy faith.

And then finally, number seven, verse 40. Everything must be done decently and in order. The meeting must be orderly at all times.

So these are the seven controls that the Spirit of God lays down with regard to this whole thing. Paul correcting the abuse of tongues in the assembly. Now that probably raises hundreds of questions in your mind.

If you'd like them out, send them in. I have some additional points on the next transparency, and I think these are very important. Why don't you just take a go.

First point is this. Signs, wonders, miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit were given to confirm the gospel message when it was first preached by the Apostles. Turn to Hebrews chapter 2. I think this verse is very, very important.

Hebrews chapter 2 and verse 4. But I have to go back. Verse 2, I'm going to begin at verse 2. It says, If the word spoken by angels was steadfast. What was the word spoken by angels? That was the law that God gave on Mount Sinai.

That's what it was. The word spoken by angels was the law, the Ten Commandments, which God gave on Mount Sinai. What does it say about the law? It says, If the word spoken through angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward.

There was a penalty connected with disobeying the law, with breaking the law. How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation? We have a greater revelation than the revelation of the law. That's the revelation of grace through the Lord Jesus Christ.

If we neglect so great salvation. Now notice, Which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord. He was the one that introduced it.

Was confirmed to us by them that heard him. How was it confirmed to us? Verse 4 tells you, God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with diverse miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will. When the Lord first delivered the message, there was no New Testament in written form.

The apostles go forth with this message, and people would say, How do I know that what you're preaching is of God? How do I know that what you're preaching is true? And God said, Okay, I'll confirm that message by giving these men, these apostles, the ability to perform signs and wonders and miracles and

gifts of the Holy Ghost. Those miracles had a confirming effect in a day when they didn't have the word of God in complete written form. That's what the verse says.

Passing on the need for signs may have passed when the New Testament was completed in written form. Many people believe that, that the need for the signs may have passed when the New Testament was completed in written form, and some believe that that's the meaning of 1 Corinthians 13, 10. It's the next two lines that Lance says.

When that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. Now, I really think we should turn to 1 Corinthians 13 and look at the last part of it. I like to be fair.

The easiest thing in the world is just to adopt one interpretation of Scripture and stick with it. But in this passage of Scripture, there are two main interpretations, and I'd like to give both of them. Beginning in verse 8 of 1 Corinthians 13.

1 Corinthians 13, 8. It says, Love never fails. Whether there be prophecies, they shall be done away. Whether there be tongues, they shall cease.

Whether there be knowledge, it shall be done 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.

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. 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.

Now abide of faith, hope, love. These three, but the greatest of these is love. Now let me give you two main interpretations of that passage.

The traditional interpretation down through the history of the church is that that which is perfect refers to the heavenly state, to the glorified state, to the time when we're with the Lord and like him forever. That's the tradition. That's what the church traditionally has believed down through the years.

The other interpretation is that which is perfect refers to the coming of the New Testament in written form. Let me go over the verses and think of them in that regard. Whether there be prophecies, they shall fail.

That is, when the New Testament is given. Whether there be tongues, they shall speak when the New Testament was given. Whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.

And remember when I said this morning, that means knowledge supernaturally imparted. I don't mean knowledge, basic knowledge, because that's never going to pass away, is it? We're always going to know. The fact goes on to say we shall know as we are known.

But what it means is that the giving of divine knowledge is the time when that would cease. And according to this interpretation, that ceased when the New Testament was given. And in a sense, of course, that's true, because as I said this morning, if somebody gets up in our meeting and says, Dear friends, I have a revelation from the Lord, and it's something you won't find in the New Testament, it's in addition to the New Testament, we say, sit down, brother, we don't want to hear it.

Because Duke tells us that the faith was once for all delivered unto the saints. And we believe that we have in the covers of this book the complete word of God. But I think it's important to know that when you come to knowledge, it doesn't mean knowledge in general.

It means knowledge, special knowledge, supernaturally imparted, the giving of the Christian faith. Whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. We know in part and we prophesy in part.

Paul speaking in his day. Knowledge was given out piecemeal. Peter was given some.

We'll get back to 1 and 2 Peter. John was given some. John's gospel, 1 and 2 and 3 John's revelation.

And so the writers of the New Testament, they knew in part. The revelation was handed out to them partially, and of course it went to make up the full revelation. And we prophesy in part.

And I mentioned that prophesy in the original sense, in the primary sense of the New Testament, means being a spokesman for God, speaking the word of God. And we don't have prophets today in that sense, because we have the word of God. When that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.

According to this interpretation, when that which is perfect is come, that's the New Testament. That which is in part shall be done away, that is these piecemeals doling out of divine truth to different men. That has stopped.

There isn't any more. Paul says, when I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child. When I became a man, I put away childish things.

And he's speaking about the abuses that were going on in connection with these gifts in Corinth, and how men were using them as toys for personal pleasure. Now we see through a glass darkly. In other words, no one of those men in the New Testament period had the full grasp of the truth.

It was being given to different ones. We see through a glass darkly. But then, face to face, in the New Testament, we have the completion of the revelation of God, the completion of the canon of Scripture.

Now I know in part, but then shall I know as also I am known. That is, when the full revelation was given. But in the meantime, although those signed gifts might pass away, faith, hope, and love continue.

And the greatest of these is love, and love thinks of others and not of self. So, that's what I mean when I say the need for signs may have passed when the New Testament was completed in written form. Some believe that's the meaning of 1 Corinthians 13.

And I certainly lean in that direction. When that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part, is told John to be on the way. A final additional point on this line is this.

The Lord is not pleased by the kind of faith that requires a sign. John chapter 20 and verse 29. John 20 and 29.

I'm going back to verse 26. And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them. Then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst and said, Peace be unto you.

Then said he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hand, and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side, and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God. Jesus said unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed.

Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed. I say again, God is not pleased by the kind of faith that requires a sign. He was here among the Jewish people in his incarnation.

He was performing miracles such as no man ever did. And he was speaking words that no man ever spoke. And they said to him, Show us a sign from heaven.

What did he say? He said, There will be no sign given you, but the sign of the prophet Jonah. Referring to his own resurrection. He was looking forward to his death, burial, and resurrection.

That would be the sign. The Jews require a sign. The Greeks seek after wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified.

God wants us to believe without seeing. To believe just because he says it. And I believe that's true today.

You can buy this wonderful book in almost any local drug store. It's widely available in this country. And God is holding people responsible for that book.

Even if one rose from the dead today, then wouldn't he need it? God wants them to go to the word of God, see what's written in the word of God, and believe it, because it is there in the word of God. So let's remember these additional points. Signs, wonders, miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit were given to confirm the gospel message when it was first preached by the apostles.

It distinctly says that in Hebrews 2, verse 4. The need for signs may have passed. You say, why do you say may have passed? For this reason, I'll tell you why I say it. If God wanted to use tongues in outer Mongolia for some purpose, I don't think I'm in a position to say he couldn't do it.

I'm not sure he is doing it in outer Mongolia. But if he wants to do it, he's sovereign, he can do what he wants to do. But I lean in the direction that the need for these signs ceased when the New Testament was given, and God says, there is, you believe it.

My word. You know, God loves to be believed, and do you blame him? When you say something to someone, and he says, I don't believe it. What's he saying? He's saying, you're a liar.

That's what we say to God when we don't believe his word. We say, you're a liar. You know, that was the original sin, wasn't it? God said to Adam and Eve, there it is, there's your lovely garden, just don't eat of the fruit of the tree.

And Satan came and said, be my guest, have some fruit. God is just withholding from you something that's good. And Eve had to decide whether God was lying or whether Satan was lying.

That's sin, isn't it? She decided God was lying, and Satan was telling the truth. And listen, all the ambulances and horses and hospitals and cemeteries in the world today are the result of all the sickening that God was lying. God wants to be believed, and he wants to believe.

He wants to be believed because it's here in his precious word, not because of science. He wants to believe without seeing the belief, just because. Father, we thank you for your precious word.

We thank you that your word is the surest thing in all the universe. We thank you there's no risk in believing you. But there's nothing more reasonable than that a creature should believe his creator.

And so we come to you tonight. We pray that you will take us back to the word of God and give us hearts to believe all that you have said. Deliver us from being fine seekers, Lord, but just men and women of faith who base their faith completely on the word of God.

We ask it in Jesus' name, amen.

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