

Message #48

Various Texts

“The Gift of Tongues”
(Part 2)

Why devote so much time to the study of one gift? The answer is found in I Cor. 12:1: God does not want us to be “unaware.” If ever there has been a gift that has been misinterpreted, misunderstood and misapplied, it is tongues. It is spiritual ignorance that brings people into spiritual bondage, disillusionment and despair. Since God does not want us ignorant, we must carefully study each gift so that we might have a full understanding.

GOD DOES NOT WANT HIS PEOPLE TO BE UNAWARE OF THE SPIRITUAL GIFT OF TONGUES AND, THEREFORE, GOD’S PEOPLE HAVE A BIBLICAL RIGHT AND RESPONSIBILITY TO SYSTEMATICALLY AND SERIOUSLY STUDY THIS GIFT OF TONGUES.

Corinth was an unspiritual, carnal church. It was a church with much confusion on the subject of the gift of tongues and that is precisely why Paul devotes so much time to discussing it.

The more we systematically study, the stronger we will spiritually become. Our authority for what we believe IS NOT our experience; it IS NOT our feelings; it IS NOT someone’s opinion; it IS NOT someone’s “religion”; our authority IS the Bible! The more we know and understand of the Bible, the more stable and spiritual we will be.

QUESTION #1 – How is the word “tongues” used in the New Testament?

The word “tongues” is the Greek word “glossa.” This word is used, according to Moulton and Gedan, some 50 times in the N.T. Of these 50 uses, 24 times this word is used by Paul. In fact, in the context of I Cor. 12-14, the word “tongues” is used 21 times: 12:10 (twice), 28, 30; 13:1, 8; 14:2, 4, 5 (twice), 6, 9, 13, 14, 18, 19, 22, 23, 26, 29 and 39.

Paul’s other uses occur twice in Romans (13:13 & 14:11), plus once in Philippians (2:11). The other 26 N.T. uses are three times in Mark (7:33, 35; 16:17); two times in Luke (1:64; 16:24); six times in Acts (2:3, 4, 11, 26; 10:46; 19:6); five times in James (1:26; 3:5, 6 (twice), 8); one time in I Peter (3:10); and eight times in Revelation (5:9; 7:9; 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; 16:10; 17:15) (W. F. Moulton & A. S. Gedan, *A Concordance to the Greek Testament*, pp. 172-173).

Now in examining ALL of these N.T. references, we may accurately and honestly conclude that the word is used in at least four ways:

Way #1 - It refers to the physical organ, the tongue – Mark 7:33, 35; Luke 16:24; Rev. 16:10.

Way #2 - It refers to the tongue-shaped object – Acts 2:3.

Way #3 - It refers to the content of one’s speech – Rom. 3:13; 14:11; I Cor. 14:9; Phil. 2:11; James 1:26; 3:5, 6, 8; I Pet. 3:10; I John 3:18.

Way #4 - It refers to the nationality of one’s language – Acts 2:11; Rev. 5:9; 7:9; 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; 17:15.

Now of course the particular use of the word that is pertinent to this study is tongues as a language. It is obvious that the gift of tongues was a gift to be able to speak in some other language. There is no evidence or indication that there is any difference between the tongues of Acts 2 and the tongues of I Cor. 12-14. In fact, those who claim to have this “gift of tongues” today often refer to it as the “Pentecostal experience.” Don W. Hollis, in his book *Tongues, Healing and You*, writes: “This spiritual speaking termed by theologians ‘glossolalia’ goes back to the day of Pentecost when, according to Acts 2:4, the early Christians began to speak with other tongues when they were filled with the Holy Ghost (Don W. Hollis, *Tongues, Healing and You*, p. 9). Clearly from this we can see that those who claim they have the gift of tongues relate their gift to Acts 2.

If we turn to Acts 2 to examine the context, we may clearly observe that the word “tongue” is used to refer to an actual human language (Acts 2: 6, 8, 11). In fact, the word translated “language” in Acts 2:8 is the Greek word from which we get our English word “dialect,” a word that describes not only the actual language of a particular nation, but the actual dialect of a particular country or district (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 109).

QUESTION #2 – What type of “language” was Biblical tongues?

Another way to ask this question is was tongues a real human language of earth or was it some ecstatic language of heaven?

Steve Clark, who studied history at Yale and philosophy at Notre Dame, who has written a pro-charismatic book entitled, *Baptized in the Spirit*, says the reason why tongues is so important is because the Holy Spirit can overcome inhibitions and by-pass the mind. He then goes on to say that the more common type of gift of tongues is the one that does not communicate in any language that anyone can understand (Steve Clark, *Baptized in the Spirit*, p. 38 & pp. 126-127). In other words, most believe that tongues is a gift that by-passes the mind and speaks in some unintelligible language.

Proof #1 - The proof of the word “unknown” which shows up in some translations. I Cor. 14:2, 4, 13, 14, 19.

For example, the King James Version adds the word “unknown” before the word tongue in each of the above references.

(Fact #1) - The word “unknown” IS NOT in the original text and IS in italics in the English translations to show that point.

(Fact #2) - The translators added the word with actual human languages in mind. The “unknown” refers to a foreign language which was not previously known by the speaker.

Proof #2 - The proof of the language of angels which shows up in I Cor. 13:1.

(Fact #1) - Whenever angels spoke, they ALWAYS spoke in an understandable human language that men could understand (Gen. 19:1, 12-14; Luke 1:26-38).

In fact, in Rev. 5:11 we get a glimpse of an angelic praise service in heaven, which is attended by “myriads” of people and the language is very clear (5:12). Furthermore, when John was in heaven visiting with an angel, he was able to write down everything in clear, understandable language (Rev. 22:8-10).

(Fact #2) - Paul’s point is not to elevate language, but to elevate love.

Proof #3 - The proof of private prayer which shows up in I Cor. 14:4, 28.

In I Cor. 14:4, Paul is rebuking the Corinthians for edifying themselves. In I Cor. 14:28, Paul is telling the tongues speaker to keep his mouth shut if there is no one present who can translate the language. In fact, this verse proves tongues was an actual human language that could be interpreted.

Proof #4 - The proof of spirit prayer which shows up in Rom. 8:26.

However, upon close examination of the context, one discovers that clearly the Holy Spirit’s intercessory prayer ministry is not anything that comes out of our mouths.

In fact, there are four powerful, Biblical evidences that Biblical tongues was a normal, human-type of language:

Evidence #1 - The normal use of the word refers to a normal human language.

Evidence #2 - The gift of interpretation is a gift of translation. 12:10; 14:27

Paul says that tongues needed an interpreter and interpreters are needed to translate from one language to another. Harold Hoehner, a professor at Dallas Seminary, writes: “Paul states that tongues need to be interpreted (hermeneia). This word has the primary sense of “translation” and suggests that there is to be a translation of a foreign language.

Evidence #3 - Paul’s quote in I Cor. 14:21 is a quote from Is. 28:11-12, which was an actual language. In examining Isaiah, we discover the “strange tongues” Paul is referring to is the foreign language of the Assyrians who would dominate Israel as a judgment of God (Is. 28:1-2). Tongues became a sign that Israel had been judged by God and conquered by another power who spoke a different language other than Hebrew.

Evidence #4 - Tongues in Acts 2 were clearly a normal human language. Acts 2:4, 5, 6, 8, 11

QUESTION #3 – What is the Biblical “definition” of tongues?

On the basis of Biblical data, we may define Biblical tongues as a supernatural ability to verbally communicate a message of God in a normal, human language that was not previously known by the speaker.

Biblical tongues was the communication of God’s truth in a foreign language.

Biblical interpretation was the translation of that truth into the known language.

God does not want us to be unaware of these important realities!

The critical question for the believer certainly IS NOT can I speak in a foreign language; it IS will I obey the Word of God written in my own language?