

| Grace OPC High School Sunday Class Teaching Notes | | | |
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| Year: | 1 of 4 | | Date: Week 3 |
| Quarter: | 4 of 4 | Biblical Thinking | |
| Lesson Title: | The Gift of Tongues | | |
| Lesson Purpose: | To look at the gifts of Tongues and to see if we should expect to see it in the church today. | | |

1. Introduction

Last week we saw:

- ❑ Apostle is used generally in Scripture of those sent on a mission (in a sense all believers are apostles).
- ❑ However, there was a specific category (we called them Apostles of Christ) who saw the risen Christ and were personally commissioned by Him. These are no longer present in the church and there are good reasons why this should be the case.
- ❑ If Apostles of Christ are not present in the church today, we should not expect to see the signs, wonders and miracles that the Lord gave to authenticate them
- ❑ Healing was given as one of the signs to authenticate Apostles of Christ. Even they could not heal at will but Scripture talks of “gifts of healing”, which implies that each instance of healing was a gift. If this is true, there never was in the NT a healing ministry as some pretend to have it today.
- ❑ Nevertheless, healing is still present in the church but it is now administered through the elders and may not therefore involve the sense of “gifts of healings” as we find it in the NT

This week we will look at the gift of tongues

2. The gift of Tongues

We have seen that tongues were a gift to the early church:

| The Gift | Scriptures |
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| Apostles, Helps, Administrations | 1 Corinthians 12:27 Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it. 28 And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, <i>various</i> kinds of tongues. |
| Apostles, Evangelists, Pastors and teachers | Ephesians 4:10 He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.) 11 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. |

2.1. What was the gift of tongues?

It is clear from Acts 2 that it was the ability to speak another earthly language without having studied or learned that tongue.

Acts 2:1 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. **2** And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. **3** And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. **4** And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance. **5** Now there were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men from every nation under heaven. **6** And when this sound occurred, the crowd came together, and were bewildered because each one of them was hearing them speak in his own language. **7** They were amazed and astonished, saying, “Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans? **8** “And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born? **9** “Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, **10** Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, **11** Cretans and Arabs—we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God.” **12** And they all continued in amazement and great perplexity, saying to one another, “What does this mean?”

The modern day gift of tongues is often if not always different. Some, however, maintain that there were different gifts of tongues. They quote the reference to “tongues of angels and tongues of men” in 1 Cor 13:

1 Corinthians 13:1 If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

But there is relatively little evidence for this in Scripture and this verse in Corinthians could simply be hyperbole - “even if I could speak the language of heaven (but I can’t!), if I

didn't have love....". It seems much more likely that there was only one genuine gift of tongues, which operated as on the Day of Pentecost and was described above.

In 1 Corinthians 12-14, Paul was rebuking the Corinthians for their general disorderliness, including their tongue-speaking, and it may be because they had moved away from the real gift to something unintelligible (1 Cor 14:7-12).

1 Corinthians 14:7 Yet *even* lifeless things, either flute or harp, in producing a sound, if they do not produce a distinction in the tones, how will it be known what is played on the flute or on the harp? **8** For if the bugle produces an indistinct sound, who will prepare himself for battle? **9** So also you, unless you utter by the tongue speech that is clear, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air. **10** There are, perhaps, a great many kinds of languages in the world, and no *kind* is without meaning. **11** If then I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be to the one who speaks a barbarian, and the one who speaks will be a barbarian to me. **12** So also you, since you are zealous of spiritual *gifts*, seek to abound for the edification of the church.

Most cults can duplicate the modern gift of tongues at will and there are accounts of unbelievers doing so as a stunt. Would such an important sign gift be so readily duplicated by the enemies of God? So we maintain that the true gift of tongues was the extraordinary, Spirit-given ability for a person to speak an earthly language of which they had no prior knowledge.

2.2. What was the purpose of the gift of tongues?

From Scripture it would seem that the gift had at least 2 purposes:

2.2.1. A sign to unbelievers

1 Corinthians 14:20 Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking be mature. **21** In the Law it is written, "BY MEN OF STRANGE TONGUES AND BY THE LIPS OF STRANGERS I WILL SPEAK TO THIS PEOPLE, AND EVEN SO THEY WILL NOT LISTEN TO ME," says the Lord. **22** So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophecy *is for a sign*, not to unbelievers but to those who believe.

What was it a sign to unbelievers of? Judgement for rejecting God's word! That is why Paul quotes from Isaiah 28:11-12:

Isaiah 28:11 Indeed, He will speak to this people Through stammering lips and a foreign tongue, **12** He who said to them, "Here is rest, give rest to the weary," And, "Here is repose," but they would not listen. **13** So the word of the LORD to them will be, "Order on order, order on order, Line on line, line on line, A little here, a little there," That they may go and stumble backward, be broken, snared and taken captive. **14** Therefore, hear the word of the LORD, O scoffers, Who rule this people who are in Jerusalem, **15** Because you have said, "We have made a covenant with death, And with Sheol we have made a pact. The overwhelming scourge will not reach us when it passes by, For we have made falsehood our refuge and we have concealed ourselves with deception." **16** Therefore thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a tested stone, A costly cornerstone for the foundation, firmly placed. He who believes *in it* will not be disturbed. **17** "I will make justice the measuring line And righteousness the level; Then hail will sweep away the refuge of lies And the waters will overflow the secret place. **18** "Your covenant with death will be canceled, And your pact with Sheol will not stand; When the overwhelming scourge passes through, Then you become its trampling *place*.

This prophecy was given to show that a mark of God's judgment upon His people for rejecting the words of the prophets would be defeat and destruction by foreign armies who would speak strange languages that the Jews did not understand. This was fulfilled initially when Israel was taken into exile to Babylon. The Jews knew very well that the speaking of foreign languages in Jerusalem was a sign of judgment. Deliverance was spoken of as no longer hearing these tongues:

Isaiah 33:17 Your eyes will see the King in His beauty; They will behold a far-distant land. **18** Your heart will meditate on terror: "Where is he who counts? Where is he who weighs? Where is he who counts the towers?" **19** You will no longer see a fierce people, A people of unintelligible speech which no one comprehends, Of a stammering tongue which no one understands.

This understanding of the implications of hearing foreign tongues in Jerusalem is probably one reason why the Jews were so perplexed on the Day of Pentecost:

Acts 2:5 Now there were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men from every nation under heaven. **6** And when this sound occurred, the crowd came together, **and were bewildered** because each one of them was hearing them speak in his own language. **7 They were amazed and astonished**, saying, "Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans? **2:12** **And they all continued in amazement and great perplexity**, saying to one another, "What does this mean?"

From this perspective, the speaking of foreign languages at Pentecost in Jerusalem was a sign of impending judgment - they had now rejected the words of The Prophet! That judgment came when Jerusalem was destroyed in AD 70 and at that time this purpose of the

gift ceased. That could be why Paul wanted more and more people to speak in tongues - so that the sign may be given more and more as the destruction of Jerusalem approaches.

1 Corinthians 14:5 Now I wish that you all spoke in tongues, but *even* more that you would prophesy; and greater is one who prophesies than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may receive edifying.

2.2.2. A gift to edify the church

It seems that in certain circumstances, when the tongue spoken was also interpreted, the church could be edified through what was spoken:

1 Corinthians 14:5 Now I wish that you all spoke in tongues, but *even* more that you would prophesy; and greater is one who prophesies than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may receive edifying.

But Paul places strict limits on the use of the gift in the church. No more than 2 or 3 were to speak in tongues in Corinth and all must be interpreted. If there was no interpretation, the gift should not be used in the church meetings:

1 Corinthians 14:26 What is *the outcome* then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. **27** If anyone speaks in a tongue, *it should be* by two or at the most three, and *each* in turn, and one must interpret; **28** but if there is no interpreter, he must keep silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God.

2.3. Why are there no longer tongues in the Church today?

If the sign purpose of the gift has ceased, the only possible remaining purpose would be the edification of the church. We know that the early church had access (if to any Scriptures) only to the Old Testament and maybe one or two Gospels and letters. In these circumstances, God intervened through certain gifts (generally prophecy, tongues and knowledge) to edify and instruct the infant church. Once the Scriptures were completed, however, there would be little use for a gift of this kind, since a far greater and complete source of edification and instruction would now be present in the church. This is a compelling interpretation of 1 Corinthians 13:8, in which “that which is perfect” as referring to the Scriptures:

1 Corinthians 13:8 Love never fails; but if *there are gifts* of prophecy, they will be done away; **if there are tongues, they will cease**; if *there is* knowledge, it will be done away. **9** For we know in part and we prophesy in part; **10 but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away**. **11** When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. **12** For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.

The famous prophecy in Daniel also implies that gifts such as vision and prophecy would not continue long after Messiah was cut off:

Daniel 9:24-27 “Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, **to seal up vision and prophecy**, and to anoint the most holy place.²⁵ “So you are to know and discern that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress.²⁶ “Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined.²⁷ “And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate.”

For these reasons, we understand that the gift of tongues has passed out of the church and has no modern-day purpose that might lead us to expect it to be present.

2.4. What is the evidence from church history?

Is the position we are advancing here in keeping with the accounts we can obtain from a study of church history? If we found consistent evidence that tongue-speaking continued for a sustained period and was a valued part of life in the church after the destruction of Jerusalem and the completion of the canon, we might have grounds to re-consider our position and the Bible passages.

Justin Martyr (110-165) “For the prophetic gifts remain with us, even to the present time. And hence you ought to understand that the gifts formerly among your nation have been transferred to us”

Does this say that tongues were continuing? We have no Biblical accounts that tongues were a gift to the Jewish people in the Old Testament. Justin Martyr clearly is speaking of something that had been present with the Jews and had now transferred to the Christian church.

Montanus (126-180) Eusebius wrote this of him: *“a recent convert, Montanus by name, through his unquenchable desire for leadership, gave the adversary opportunity against him. And he became beside himself, and being suddenly in a sort of frenzy and ecstasy, he raved, and began to babble and utter strange things, prophesying in a manner contrary to the constant custom of the church handed down by tradition from the beginning.”* He regarded himself as the inspired organ of the Holy Spirit and had an influence on others (such as Tertullian and Irenaeus) – but not a positive one. It is clear that whatever he did was not regarded as an orthodox expression of spiritual gifts.

Irenaeus (120-202) *“...terming those persons “perfect” who have received the Spirit of God, and who through the Spirit of God do speak in all languages, as he used Himself also to speak. In like manner we do also hear many brethren in the church, who possess prophetic gifts, and who through the Spirit speak all kinds of languages, and bring to light for the general benefit the hidden things of men, and declare the mysteries of God”* Seems to indicate a second-hand acquaintance with the phenomenon. May have been referring to the Montanists who were influential at the time.

Origen (185-254) *“Moreover, The Holy Spirit gave signs of His presence at the beginning of Christ’s ministry, and after His ascension He gave still more; but since that time these signs have diminished, although there are still traces of His presence in the few who have had their souls purified by the Gospel, and their actions regulated by its influence.”*

3rd council of Carthage in 397 closed the canon and declared that only these scriptures were to be read in the churches.

Chrysostom (345-407) – in his commentary on 1 Cor 12:1-2 *“This whole place is very obscure: but the obscurity is produced by our ignorance of the facts referred to and by their cessation, being such as then used to occur but now no longer take place”*

Augustine (354-430) in his commentary on 1 John *“In the earliest time, “the Holy Ghost fell upon them that believed: and they spake with tongues,” which they had not learned, “as the Spirit gave them utterance.” These were signs adapted to the time. For there behoved to be that betokening of the Holy Spirit in all tongues, to shew that the Gospel of God was to run through all tongues over the whole earth. That thing was done for a betokening, and it passed away.”*

Even if we accept that the events described by Irenaeus and others of his day, including Montanus, were genuine, it is clear that when the canon of Scripture was completed it was acknowledged that the gifts as described in the Bible had served their purpose and passed away.

2.5. If there are no tongues, what else does this mean?

How shall we evaluate the claimed manifestation of tongues in the church today?

First, we must ask to what extent the “gift” that is in the church today corresponds with the gift that was in the early church – the speaking of a genuine earthly language by someone who had not previously studied that tongue.

Second, we may ask what purpose the gift now serves in the church, following the completion of Scripture and the judgment on Jerusalem.

Second, we may ask whether the churches follow the strict guidelines for the use of tongues in the church that Paul has given. Is there any evidence that the churches are truly edified through the manifestation of the “gift”?

When we ask some simple questions such as these, we will find that the modern manifestation of the gift is not the same thing as was present in the early church.

3. Conclusions

We have seen:

- The gift of tongues was the ability to speak an earthly language with no prior knowledge of it.
- It was given as a sign of judgement to unbelieving Jews and to a limited extent for edification of the church.
- Since God’s judgment on Jerusalem was completed in AD 70 and the canon of Scripture was completed in 397, there is no further purpose for the gift.
- This understanding fits the accounts from early church history
- With this background, we can evaluate the alleged manifestations of tongue-speaking in the church today as being erroneous