

**The Miracle
of
Pentecost**

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Unrepeated and Unrepeatable

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Part One

The Day of Pentecost

THE word "pentecost" means "fifty." The Feast of Pentecost occurred fifty days after the Feast of Firstfruits. The Feast of Firstfruits reached its prophetic fulfillment with the resurrection of Jesus Christ to immortality. He became the firstfruits of the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:20). The Day of Pentecost, as recorded in Acts 2, came fifty days after Jesus was raised from the dead, and ten days after his ascension.

This festival was also called the Feast of Weeks, but because it occurred fifty days after the Feast of Firstfruits, it was called Pentecost. It lasted only one day, and came on the first day of the week. The Jews were to count seven Sabbaths (seventh days) "unto the morrow after the seventh sabbath shall ye number fifty days" (Lev. 23:16).

In a real sense, the church had its birthday on Pentecost, when the early believers were formed into one body (Acts 2). We want to deal with verses 1 through 21 in this part. Read these verses now!

The early believers were gathered "with one accord in one place" (v. 1). Here was real unity! It is not difficult to get one hundred twenty people in one place at once, but it is humanly impossible to get that many who are of one accord.

Let us observe three things in these verses: WIND, FIRE, and TONGUES. If Pentecost is to be repeated today (as some claim), all three should be in evidence. We must be fair and honest with God's Word. Let's observe carefully what is here. This historic event is as unrepeatable as the events of Christmas, Easter, Calvary, or your own birthday.

A Rushing Mighty Wind

Notice that this was the sound, or noise, "as of a rushing mighty wind." The Greek word *pneuma* can mean either "wind" or "spirit." Sometimes the Spirit comes as a mighty wind; sometimes as a gentle breeze. God doesn't cast all of his conversions in the same mold. Neither do all grow at the same rate.

Cloven Tongues Like as of Fire

Observe that "it sat upon each of them." Pentecost is an event that is unrepeatable and unrepeatable, like the creation of the world, or the birth, death, and resurrection of our Lord. Jesus Christ, by his Spirit,

took up residence in the church. He has continued with the church ever since. This event occurred on a specific day—Pentecost; at a specific place—Jerusalem; it concerned a chosen few—the ones gathered at that time; for a specific purpose—to introduce a new order. What happened here we might well call a reversal of the events at Babel (Gen. 11).

What happened at Pentecost should not be taken as the norm for believers today. The reason is that they were being introduced into a new order—a new age. They had been regenerated under the old age in which they previously lived. When we compare the tongues movement of today with that recorded in Acts 2, we see a huge gulf between the two. I sincerely doubt that Peter would feel at home in the modern Pentecostal movement.

Believers are brought into union with other believers and given a position in the church (the body of Christ). This is called baptism of the Spirit. "For by one Spirit *WE WERE ALL BAPTIZED* into one body, whether Jews or Greeks" (1 Cor. 12:13, NASB). Notice the past tense. Every genuine Christian has experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This means that he has been united with the rest of Christ's body. This work is performed by Jesus Christ himself. John the Baptist declared him to be the baptizer with the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:11).

The early church received the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. This historical event is recorded in Acts 2. Paul the Apostle gives the doctrinal explanation of this in his epistles. The church is made up of Jews and Gentiles, united in one body and fitted together "for an habitation of God through the Spirit" (Eph. 2:19-22). Nothing similar existed in Old Testament times.

The supernatural phenomena of fire, wind, and languages introduced a new economy. They were the visible outward signs of the new age being inaugurated. The Mosaic age was introduced with fire, smoke, and an earthquake as Mount Sinai was wrapped in flames (Ex. 19:18). Obviously, these phenomena did not continue throughout the Jewish dispensation. The Jews did not say: "I want to go back to Sinai, to see the fire, smoke, and earthquake!" Neither did God keep calling them back to Sinai! They were to move on through the wilderness to Canaan, their destination. Sinai was to the dispensation of the law what Pentecost is to the church dispensation.

Similarly, the future day of the Lord, which introduces the kingdom age, will be opened with signs of fire, smoke, and celestial commotions, plus an outpouring of the Spirit (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 4

2:16-21). In the ado about tongues today, much is said about tongues, but little or nothing about wind and fire. Why do we not have the audible wind and visible tongues of fire in the modern-day tongues movement?

Doubtless, Pentecost is unrepeatable! It was a public demonstration for the purpose of establishing the fact that a new age was beginning. The blessings of this age were not to be confined to the Jews, as were those of the Mosaic age. The gospel was to be heralded to every kindred, tongue, and nation. This was important, since Pentecost was a wholly Jewish feast. The Gentiles were not admitted until later. (See Acts 13:46.) The mongrel Samaritans (mixed race) received the Spirit (Acts 8:14-25); the racially pure Gentiles did not receive it until the event recorded in Acts 10.

The keys to the kingdom were given to Peter on his confession of faith in Christ as the Son of God (Matt. 16:16-19). Keys were symbols of the authority delegated to Peter for the purpose of opening the door of salvation to the Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles—in that order (Acts 2; 8; 10). Note carefully that Peter was not given the keys to the church. Only the Lord adds to the church (Acts 2:47b; 4:12).

*“All filled . . . Began to Speak With
Other Tongues”*

Notice that the Spirit fell on all of them. No one was passed over because he had failed to meet some condition beyond that of simple faith. What were these tongues? It should be obvious to any careful student that they were languages (v. 6b). In 1611 (when the KJV was translated) “tongue” meant “language,” not “religious ecstasy.”

Who were the people in Jerusalem at that time? They are listed in verses 5-11. There were two classes of Jews in Palestine then: Southern Palestinian Jews, called Judeans, were there. Considered as the aristocrats, they spoke at least three languages—Latin, Greek, and Aramaic. The other class, the Galileans of Northern Palestine, were the uneducated peasants. They spoke only one language—Aramaic. They knew no Gentile language, yet they received this spiritual gift (vv. 7, 8).

Jews from all parts of the dispersion—India, Asia Minor, North Africa, and the Mediterranean world—were in Jerusalem to keep the feast. Many of them no longer spoke Hebrew, since they had been living in other countries for hundreds of years.

According to Peter, baptism of the Spirit is what these disciples received on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 11:15-17). It was the fulfill-

ment of the promise of John the Baptist (Matt. 3:11; Luke 3:16). Jesus also promised them: "Ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence" (Acts 1:5). The promise was fulfilled a few days later—ten days, to be exact (Acts 2). This was indeed a real miracle! These men, whose accent showed them to be Galilean Jews, were capable of speaking many foreign languages.

Modern Pentecostalism

It seems that Pentecostalists have set up two levels of the Christian life. Simple faith in Christ is supposed to admit one only to the lower, inferior level. Any teaching that gives that impression is unscriptural and wrongly formulated. To assert that speaking in tongues is either indispensable or a highly desirable evidence that one has received the coveted baptism of the Spirit is to add to the Scriptures. The movement is theologically misdirected at this point. It is doctrinally wrong. It ignores dispensational truth.

The New Testament says much about an encounter with Jesus Christ, but nowhere does it make the gift of tongues a sign of such an encounter. To call God "Abba, Father" is evidence that his Spirit is at work (Gal. 4:6, 7; Rom. 8:14-17). How wonderful it is to know that we are God's children—his heirs, and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ! The Spirit in us is from the God of history and the Christ of Scripture. That should be sufficient!

This insatiable desire for tongues often seems to be an attempt to *prove* God's promises, when we should be content to simply believe them. Isn't God's Word enough? Can we go wrong if we walk by faith and not by sight? Consider doubting Thomas. He said that he would not believe that Jesus was raised from the dead unless he saw and felt the nail prints. Eight days later, he looked upon the resurrected Jesus and believed. Our Lord said to him: "Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed" (John 20:25-29). Consider also the sign seekers of Jesus' day. To them he said: "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: for as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matt. 12:39, 40).

Many today, as then, are seeking a sign instead of simply believing in the lowly Nazarene. They insist that the only acceptable sign is tongues. The impression is often given that we should engage in two movements: one for salvation, and one for a "second blessing" that

we should seek. This "second blessing" is regarded as a post-conversion experience. This is erroneously called baptism of the Spirit. It is taught as being necessary in order to prove oneself, and to obtain charismatic gifts.

Partial Fulfillment of Joel's Prophecy

Understandably, the episode on Pentecost is confusing. Some doubted and some mocked, and said: "These men are full of new wine" (Acts 2:12, 13). It was not alcoholic spirits, but the Holy Spirit at work.

We definitely see a partial fulfillment of Joel's prophecy on the Day of Pentecost. Peter said: "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel" (v. 16). He then quoted from Joel 2:28-32.

To arrive at the Day of Pentecost, we must move 600 to 800 years down the corridors of time from the time of Joel, to about 32 A.D. On that day, the sign was announced in only one place—Jerusalem, the headquarters of the Jews. In the next twenty-five years, however, it was to spread to the Samaritans (Acts 8); to full-blooded Gentiles (Acts 10); and to about twelve "certain disciples" (Acts 19:1-7).

Remember that Peter's text for his Pentecostal sermon was Joel 2:28-32. The latter part of Joel's prophecy was not fulfilled in Peter's day. It is focused on "the day of the LORD" (vv. 1, 31). This period, in contrast to man's day, is called "Jacob's trouble" (Jer. 30:7): It is probably seven years in duration (Dan. 9:27), and is called the "great tribulation" by Jesus (Matt. 24:21). Moreover, the church will escape this period when God's wrath is poured out upon an unbelieving world, and especially upon Israel.

Notice that Joel said "afterward" (2:38). After what? After the invasion of the northern army and the deliverance of Israel from it (v. 20). Consequently, we should look for neither a continued fulfillment during the church age, nor for a coming fulfillment toward the end of the church age. The rest of the prophecy will be fulfilled after the church has been caught up to meet the Lord, and God turns to, and works with, Israel again. Notice also that Peter adds "last days" (by inspiration, of course), when he quotes Joel. The term should be understood as it is used in Isaiah 2:2. Notice too that the "REMNANT" of Israel is in view (Joel 2:32). The prophet is not speaking of the Gentiles of the church age, but of the *remnant of the Jews*, after the New Testament church is completed. (See Rom. 11:25-27.) This, clearly, has not yet come about.

Certainly the earnest, or down payment, is seen in Acts 2, but

there will be a more complete fulfillment in the Day of the Lord (great tribulation), and in the Millennial Kingdom, during which the restoration and conversion of the remnant of Israel is to take place. (See Zech. 12:10-14; Rom. 11:1-27; Ezek. 39:28, 29.)

Yes, the fulfillment of the rest of Joel's prophecy is still future. It will be fulfilled in the Day of the Lord and in the Kingdom Age with an outpouring of God's Spirit. This will usher in the kingdom blessings. "In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness" (Zech. 13:1).

God be praised!

Part Two

External Gifts

PENTECOST, recorded in Acts 2, was perhaps also a fulfillment of Isaiah 28:11: "For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people." It was the Jews in Jerusalem on Pentecost who heard the good news in other languages. Of course, the disciples were responsible for telling the gospel to the Jews, but when this prophecy would be fulfilled, the good news would be given to them in Gentile languages. Perhaps this doesn't mean much to us, but to the Jews of Isaiah's day, it was a great insult. The Jews reasoned: "Imagine Gentiles coming to us with God's Word—we Jews, the custodians of God's revelation, who have the law, the covenants, and the promises." (See Rom. 9:4.)

Then, too, imagine Isaiah (not a popular preacher anyway), telling his people that the lowly Gentiles, who do not even have the law, are going to instruct us. It was so strange and foreign to their thinking that they could not, or would not, accept it. This was a sign that God would set Israel aside. The Jews, who should have been declaring the gospel in their beautiful Hebrew language, would hear it in the hated Gentile languages.

Incidentally, the verse from Isaiah is quoted in 1 Corinthians 14:21, a passage that we shall treat later in this booklet. I just want to say here that Pentecost signaled a change—that God's revelation would be carried to all peoples of the earth, including the Jews, who for many centuries were the custodians of God's truth.

In this part, we want to study Mark 16:15-20, which sets forth certain external gifts given to the apostles. These gifts of the Spirit, these signs (a sign is a miracle) were to confirm the Word that they were preaching (v. 20). Incidentally, the word "word" is from the Greek *logos*. Since the New Testament had not yet been written, the purpose of these miracles was to convince all who heard the disciples that the living Jesus was with them, in them, and working through them. Through them he was carrying on his ministry, from God's right hand. The Book of Acts has rightly been called "The Acts of the Ascended Christ." Our Lord spent his earthly ministry in preparing his disciples for this very thing, to carry on his work in spite of intense rejection and persecution.

What Mark foretold in the closing verses of his Gospel is confirmed in the Book of Hebrews. This message "first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God

also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will" (2:3, 4). Notice again that these signs, wonders, and miracles were for the purpose of confirming the Word, and that this ministry was carried out "by them that heard him." They were the ones who lived during the earthly ministry of Christ and the days immediately following. This clearly eliminates the so-called "miracle workers" of our day. The Book of Acts is an inspired history of the fulfillment of the commission that Jesus gave to his disciples. Observe, too, that they had the "gifts [plural] of the Holy Ghost," referring to the miraculous, external working of miracles. The "gift [singular] of the Spirit" is the Spirit itself, which abides in the church (each believer) today, but the gifts of the Spirit were limited to the early church, the dispensation covered by the apostles.

Some Gifts Would Cease

Scripture makes it clear that some of these gifts would cease after the New Testament was written, and became the authority for the church throughout the church dispensation. Let us consider three examples: PROPHECY—the giving of prophetic truth directly from God to man, as John, on the Island of Patmos, received the Revelation, the final book of the New Testament; KNOWLEDGE—the giving of divine knowledge directly from the Lord to a man like Paul, who wrote more New Testament Scripture than anyone else; TONGUES—what happened on Pentecost: people were gathered from many countries (Acts 2). One spoke and they all heard in their own language. Listen to Scripture, given by divine inspiration: "Whether there be prophecies, they shall fail [be done away]; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away" (1 Cor. 13:8). Here is conclusive evidence that these external gifts of the Spirit would end with the coming of the New Testament.

Moreover, the early church had power to raise the dead. For example, Peter raised Dorcas, or Tabitha (Acts 9:36-43). Is this gift still operative in the church today? I think not! Evidently, some of the gifts possessed by the early church are not possessed by any Christians today, including the ones who claim to have all of the gifts of the early church.

What are some other signs (miracles) of the early church before the New Testament was written? Mark 16:17, 18 lists the following:

Cast Out Devils (v. 17)

I'm not sure what is meant by this term. Perhaps it means a mental

disease, or some kind of illness. Today, if one is mentally ill, we may say that he is insane, has paranoia or schizophrenia. In the same way, if one is physically ill, we may say that he has pneumonia, or cancer. In Bible times, for any of these illnesses, the people would probably have said that he had a devil, or an unclean spirit. For example, we read that "unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed" (Acts 8:7; see also Acts 5:16).

Speak With New Tongues (v. 17)

This probably has no reference to speaking in tongues, as such. A new creature in Christ has a new tongue with which to praise God. In other words, he has a tongue that is new and different in character.

The gift of tongues is the least desirable gift, while love is the most desirable gift, the "more excellent way" (1 Cor. 12:31). "The best way of all" (*NEB*) is the way of love, which Paul expounds in the next chapter. First Corinthians, the epistle in which Paul deals with tongues, is one of his earlier epistles. He never mentions tongues in his later epistles, because this gift was probably no longer in use, even then. He had said that tongues "should cease" (1 Cor. 13:8). The canon of Scripture would be completed, and would take the place of prophecies, knowledge, and tongues. It is significant that the love chapter is between the two in which Paul deals with spiritual gifts.

Speaking in tongues, moreover, is childishness, compared to knowing doctrine. In fact, it has this serious danger: it keeps the believer from getting into doctrine, because he becomes more interested in ecstatic experience than in learning the Word. The just do not live by feeling, but by faith (Rom. 1:17). But some have to experience a certain feeling, or talk in tongues, or see a miracle every day in order to get along. If you are living by feeling, you are not living by faith. For years, we didn't say anything about feelings. In fact, we (especially the men) shied away from them. Now some want to go overboard on feelings, at the expense of facts and faith. The conviction seems to be that "if it feels all right, it must be all right." Feelings can be terribly deceiving!

In all honesty, let me say this. I've talked to many, many persons who claim the gift of tongues, and I've always found them to be honest, sincere people, who love the Lord and his Word. They don't have a spiritual problem, but they do have a doctrinal problem. When one does not know doctrine, he reverts to rationalism, ritualism, or emotionalism. Did you ever notice how one who is shallow, or un-

learned in the doctrines finds expression in one of these three areas? Emotionalism has a great appeal today, perhaps as a reaction against the ritualism of cold Christianity. The two extremes in Christendom today are ritualistic churches and emotional churches. Significantly, the tongues movement has raised its head in both, while, generally, it has skipped the middle, Bible-based churches. To the Corinthians, tongues had become their criterion. Consequently, Paul said of them: "They measure themselves by themselves, and compare themselves with themselves, they are without understanding" (2 Cor. 10:12, *NASB*). This attitude is typical of people today who claim the gift of tongues. If one has a certain experience, another has to have the same experience—same words, same feeling, same behavior, etc.

Caution

Beware that you are not led around by your emotions. Beware that your desire for an emotional experience does not lead you into false doctrine. Talking in tongues, and the emotion that goes with it, often becomes a hobby. The difference between a hobby and a horse is this; you can get off of a horse. The attempt to have an ecstatic experience generally is nothing more or less than ignorance of the Word. The power is in the Word, not in experience (Heb. 4:12). The power is in the Holy Spirit, not in emotion (Acts 1:8). There is a trend today, even among those who acknowledge the Bible as authoritative, to ignore or minimize Bible doctrine, and to emphasize experience. True, experience is important. To have Christ is to have new life—a changed life. But how can one know that an experience is genuine, apart from authority? Bible doctrine provides the test for experiences.

The gift of tongues (like the wind and the fire) was connected to the inauguration of a new age, an age that was characterized by preaching the gospel to every kindred, tongue, and nation. This is in contrast to the Jewish age, which was confined to Israel only.

The tongues movement today is experience oriented rather than Biblically oriented. This writer feels that if the gift of tongues (as was in evidence at Pentecost) is operative today, the place to use it is on the mission field, where it would do some good. Ironically, the ones who claim this gift for today train their missionaries in the same way that all of the rest of us do.

Take up Serpents (v. 18)

Paul was bitten by a "viper . . . venomous beast," and the barbarians who witnessed it thought that he would surely drop dead. How-
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ever, he was unhurt (Acts 28:3-6). When Jesus commissioned the seventy, among other things he said: "Behold, I give you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you" (Luke 10:19). The fact that Paul and the seventy could do these things is no indication that we can do them. Some in the southeastern part of our country handle rattlesnakes, to test their faith. They believe that if they have enough faith, the bite will not hurt them, as was the case with Paul. Some have died; others are in trouble with the law. This kind of activity is based on a misinterpretation of Scripture, as is the modern tongues movement.

Drink Any Deadly Thing (v. 18)

Some, like the snake handlers, have tempted God by drinking poison, saying that if one has enough faith, it will not harm him. Some of them have died; the law is after others. They simply misunderstand Scripture. Such behavior brings reproach upon the name of Christ, and shows a terrible ignorance of God's program. Once emotions, or experiences, become enthroned in one's heart as authoritative, the Bible, and God, are dethroned, or at best, relegated to second place. This leads to nothing but confusion.

*Lay hands . . . They Shall Recover
(v. 18)*

Peter healed a man crippled from birth by simply saying: "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk" (Acts 3:1-10). Read about the two healings brought about in like manner by Paul's ministry (Acts 19:11, 12; 28:8, 9). Is this gift operative today? I believe in miracles. I believe that God heals today. I do not believe in "divine healers." I doubt that anyone today has the gift exercised by Peter and Paul.

An eleven year old boy, in Barstow, California, had diabetes. A "faith healer" declared him healed a few months ago, but he died shortly thereafter. Medical authorities concluded that his death was caused by insulin being withheld from him. His parents are being charged with voluntary manslaughter. This kind of thing has happened many times in our generation.

Jesus performed miracles while here in his earthly ministry. This gave man a foretaste of the coming kingdom. He also gave the apostles these external gifts. They were to carry on after he had ascended to the Father, and to introduce a new order. Until the New Testament

had been written, they were to confirm the fact that Jesus was with them.

However, the work of the Spirit was not limited to the early church. Christ still works in the church today. The gifts of the Spirit which the apostles had were external and temporary; the gift of the Spirit is the Spirit itself. It abides today in each genuine believer. "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God . . . Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (Rom. 8:14, 9b).

Part Three

Questions About Tongues

ANSWERS to questions about tongues are not to be found in the experiences of men, but in the Word of God. Three key passages deal with tongues:

1. Acts 2—Giving of tongues (languages) at Pentecost.
2. 1 Corinthians 12—Counsel concerning spiritual gifts.
3. 1 Corinthians 14—The misuse of gifts, especially tongues.

We will deal now with 1 Corinthians 12.

Verses 1-3

Perhaps we should first define "spiritual gifts." Notice that "gifts" is in italics, which indicates that there is no word in the original Greek manuscript, but this word has been supplied by the translators. One authority has translated the term literally, "the spiritual things." Generally, it is understood to be the ability that God has given a believer for service.

Apparently, some of the Corinthians had carried elements of their heathen background into the church, and had failed to understand the operation of the Holy Spirit in the work of conversion, and in living the Christian life. Paul told them: "No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost" (v. 3). He then sought to put spiritual gifts in their proper perspective. In this epistle, he seems to be answering a series of questions that the Corinthians had asked. Consequently, he begins Chapter 12: "Now concerning spiritual gifts . . ."

Verses 4-7

Within a fellowship of people there is variety and also unity. The key is in verse 7. Each believer has some gift to be used for the benefit of the whole body. No believer has all of the gifts, and not all possess the same gifts. Those who feel that only people who speak in tongues have the Spirit fall into the very error that Paul was trying to avoid. In no sense is speaking in tongues a sign of spiritual attainment. It is a missionary tool, to be used for the furtherance of the gospel. We must recognize that the situation in our world today is quite different from that in which the early church lived and worked. We can reach people of other languages if we want to by using the modern tools at our fingertips.

Verses 8-11—Description of Gifts

Are all the gifts listed here given today? Some would answer "yes," and insist that we limit God if we do not believe that all of these gifts are operative today. Is it not equally true that we limit God if we insist that he *must* bestow all of the gifts in every age? Dare we attempt to tell God what to do?

Another question: Can one possess more than one gift? Yes! Every believer has at least one; some more than one; none has all of the gifts. In the human body there are eyes, ears, feet, and other members. So it is in the church—many members but one body.

Now the crux of the tongues controversy hinges on two questions and their answers. If we can answer them Scripturally, we can solve the tongues problem:

1. What is "talking in tongues" in the light of the New Testament?
2. Is this gift operative in the church today?

As has been mentioned, the church is compared to a human body in this passage, but there is more. The church had its birthday on the Day of Pentecost, and will reach its full maturity when Jesus comes. It is also compared to a person as he develops from infancy to manhood. These special, spectacular gifts (like tongues) were necessary in the early stages of the church, when there was no New Testament to give light. These external gifts were the "baby talk" of the church. As Paul expressed it: "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" (1 Cor. 13:11). It seems evident to this writer that some gifts were permanent and some temporal.

The gift of tongues, furthermore, was never given to an individual, but to a whole company. Its obvious purpose was communication. It was a sign, which proves that it was temporary. The law was given with signs at Sinai, but they did not continue throughout the law dispensation. They called attention to what was being done. Likewise, the external gifts of the apostolic church were withdrawn when the Word was established and confirmed (Mark 16:20; Heb. 2:3, 4).

Some think that if they weep and get emotional when they talk about Christ, they are more spiritual. Often, unbelievers use profanity in an effort to be more emphatic. Profanity is a crutch for conversational cripples, and proves only that they lack the command of language necessary to express themselves emphatically without it. It is the "effort of a feeble mind to express itself forcefully." So also is talking in tongues, and shouting "amen" and "hallelujah" every other word, a crutch for people who lack understanding of God's plan, or

are unable to express themselves well. They want to talk in tongues, but are unable to talk intelligently about God's program.

The tongues movement has, in recent years, raised its head in the ritualistic churches, of all places. Such churches offer little meat, and almost no exposition of the Bible. As a result, the people cling to this movement because they are spiritually starving. A Christian life is really the most convincing manifestation of the Spirit of God in the life of an individual.

It would seem that these carnal Corinthians were imitating what happened at Pentecost. It also appears that people involved in the modern tongues movement are trying to imitate the Corinthians. They were not a very good example. Since they were "measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves," Paul concluded that they "are not wise" (2 Cor. 10:12). A much better example would be the Bereans, who "searched the scriptures daily" (Acts 17:11).

The issue of tongues was treated as a problem in the church at Corinth. It was, in fact, one of many problems. Note some of the problems listed below: Contention between brethren, and their pride in man's wisdom (chap. 1); carnality and behaving like babes (chaps. 2, 3); immorality to the extent that a man had taken his father's wife—stepmother, perhaps (chap. 5); going to law with a brother before a heathen court (chap. 6); divorce and remarriage (chap. 7); drunkenness and judging connected with the Lord's Supper (chaps. 10, 11); pride and misuse of spiritual gifts (chaps. 12, 14); doubting the resurrection (chap. 15). It would stretch anyone's imagination to consider this a model church! I suppose that we should be thankful for the problems at Corinth, since they prompted Paul to write these sixteen chapters.

People who are involved in the tongues movement are, I feel, hung up on one passage—1 Corinthians 12; 14. Their eyes seem to be glued to this passage. They need to back off and look at the whole book. The purpose of this epistle is to deal with a series of problems in this particular church. This Paul seeks to do by treating a problem in each chapter.

Regarding the working of God's Spirit, two extremes are observable: some limit it through their unbelief; others seek to direct it according to their own choosing. They decide that this or that should be done, and say, in effect: "God, let's get on with it." Why magnify one spiritual gift above others?

Did you know that heathen people have talked in tongues? For

example, some Hindus. Did you know that drug addicts, while under the emotional strain of a psychedelic trip, have talked in tongues? I am using the term here as it is used in Pentecostalism today. The point is that "talking in tongues" is not limited to the Christian community. Have the drug addicts and the heathens who have talked in tongues been baptized by the Spirit of God? I think not! You see, the "gift of tongues" is the easiest one to counterfeit. Incidentally, no one has ever received the gift of being able to read Hebrew and Greek, so they could read God's Word in its original form. All who have mastered these languages in our time have done so after long, patient study. Strange isn't it, if the gift of tongues as described in Acts 2 is operative today?

Verses 12, 13

The Real Baptism of the Spirit

Our relationship to other Christians is illustrated by the relationship of the members of the human body. To understand our relationship, we must understand a basic doctrinal truth. We have all been baptized (past tense) by the Spirit. The goal of this action is one body, which we have in the church.

As we have pointed out in this study, the gifts of prophecy, knowledge, and tongues would cease and would be replaced by the New Testament (1 Cor. 13:8). They were designed for special functions in the early church, until the inspired New Testament was given. The Bible doesn't describe for us the manner of inspiration. It simply states the fact and extent of it. No person living today has ever been used by God to produce an inspired writing. That gift, prophecy and knowledge, ceased with the writing of the Revelation. The canon of Scripture was closed. (Study Rev. 22:18, 19.) It is foolish to argue about it on the basis of our own reason and experience. The only authoritative statements of inspiration are in the Bible. All who claim this gift, since about 90-96 A.D., when the Revelation was written, are in error.

Verses 14-24—One Body

The human body couldn't function with only feet, ears, or eyes. Each part is indispensable. Each person in the body of Christ is needed, even if he feels that his role is insignificant.

Verses 25-27

Paul here indicates how we can minister to one another, by explaining what the outcome of our gifts should be. Gifts are to aid and

unify believers, not to divide them. The negative: "That there should be no schism [division]." The positive: "The members should have the same care one for another."

Verse 28

The entire church dispensation is in view here, from its birth on the Day of Pentecost till the end of the age. In this period, we have apostles, prophets, tongues, etc. Quite obviously, the controversy arises over which are temporal and which are permanent.

Verses 29, 30

"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?" The obvious answer to all of these questions is a great big NO!

Notice too that Paul lists these gifts in order of their prominence, first, second, etc. First is apostleship, one requirement of which was to have seen the living Jesus (1 Cor. 9:1, 2). He then lists prophets and teachers, followed by five others. The gift of tongues is listed last, and this is the one that was receiving undue emphasis from the Corinthians. Their mistake in magnifying tongues is an error that is duplicated by some today. They say that it is a mark of spirituality, that all believers should speak in tongues. Paul's point is that this was not even true in the apostolic church. "Do all speak in tongues?" The expected answer is NO! Believers who do not speak in tongues are not second-rate Christians. Someone may ask, however: "Couldn't God do this today?" The answer to that is a great big YES, but God may not choose to do all that he can do at any given time. For example, he could strike dead all the wicked at this moment, but I doubt that he will.

Paul concluded this magnificent chapter by introducing "a more excellent way," the way of love which outshines all gifts. There is a logical reason for its appearance here. All gifts are worth nothing in the absence of love. Under this circumstance they are as worthless as chaff. The supreme motive for the use of any or all gifts is LOVE!

Part Four

Use and Misuse of Tongues

THE use and misuse of tongues is as old as the New Testament. The Apostle Paul may be observed dealing with this problem in 1 Corinthians 14. In this chapter he seems to make two basic points: 1) prophecy is a superior gift, more edifying than tongues; 2) when the gift of tongues is manifest, certain guidelines are to be observed. These Paul seeks to expound.

What was the nature of the languages discussed in 1 Corinthians 14? Known languages? phenomenon? some sort of ecstatic speech? When we studied Acts 2 (Part 1 of this study), we learned that "tongues" means known languages. The unlearned Galileans spoke and Jews present from all over the Mediterranean world heard and understood in their own language. This pastor affirms that "tongues" in 1 Corinthians 14, means the same thing. The word "unknown" is used six times in this chapter, and each time it is in italics, which designates that there is no word in the original Greek. So, strictly speaking, there is no such thing as an "unknown tongue" mentioned here or elsewhere in the Bible. For example, the Russian language is not unknown, but known. It is only unknown to people who are ignorant of it—including the writer.

The word "tongue" is normally used to mean "language" in the Bible. Why place an abnormal meaning upon the word in 1 Corinthians 14? Indeed, there is no reason to do so unless you want to put something into the passage that really is not there.

If we class the Corinthian passage as being unknown, and Acts 2 as being known, we may interpret the unknown by the known. This is always a sound hermeneutical principle. Without doubt, the word "tongues" in Acts 2 refers to known languages.

The "tongue" of Isaiah 28:11, quoted here in verse 21, was a known language in Isaiah's time. It referred to a language, or a tongue, other than Hebrew. In the Corinthian passage Paul is speaking of human languages not understood by the listeners. Consequently, an interpreter was needed. We now turn our study to 1 Corinthians 14.

Verses 1-12

In these verses Paul is emphasizing the truth that prophecy (speaking for God), is more profitable than tongues. The gift of prophecy, "foretelling and forthtelling" new revelations from God, was temporary and would cease (1 Cor. 3:8). However, proclaiming and teaching

the completed revelation of God as contained in the Bible is the task of the church today. The apostles and prophets spoke first for their own generation, and then for all the generations to follow. If this fact is recognized and applied consistently, it will clear up much of the current confusion about 1 Corinthians 12-14.

One who speaks in tongues may edify himself, Paul continues, but if there is no interpreter he doesn't help others. The basic principle which he seeks to establish is that a gift is to be used for the benefit of all of the church, not just for the one who has it. Consequently, prophecy is preferable because it edifies, exhorts, and comforts (v. 3). The only way that tongues could help, even then, was to have an interpreter present. Otherwise, one spoke mysteries (v. 2).

Paul illustrated these points in two ways. First, he compared the use of tongues to a musical instrument. "If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?" (v. 8). This illustration is drawn from Ezekiel 33:2-4. In battle, the Israelites had a certain sound on the trumpet for assembly, attack, withdrawal, etc. If the bugler didn't make his call clear, the soldiers might make ready to eat instead of girding for battle. So it is with tongues that are not understood by the hearers. They cannot bring the clear Word of the Lord to the church. The speaker fails to communicate. He "shall speak into the air" (v. 9). Therefore, no interpreter, no speaking in tongues. This is the point that Paul goes after, and he comes on strong!

Second, it is evident that Paul refers to earthly languages. He comments on their number and variety in verse 10. "There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world, and none of them is without signification." Notice that these voices, or languages, are "in the world" not in heaven. They do not speak of some angelic language, as some erroneously believe. *The Living Bible* paraphrases this verse: "I suppose that there are hundreds of different languages in the world, and all are excellent for those who understand them." I am convinced that this is the correct thought. Furthermore, Paul says in verse 18: "I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all," which is readily understandable in the light of his travels as the world's greatest missionary. No communication results if two people speak in two different languages. One must communicate with meaning. Paul illustrates this point with the world of music and the world of language (vv. 6-12). He further applies both illustrations to these Corinthians: "so likewise ye" (v. 9); "even so ye" (v. 12). An abundance of noise was creating nothing but chaos in their worship services. The saints are

left confused if there is no clear word from God. Tongues do not convey a clear word.

Verses 14-20

Tongues are of no value if no one interprets. This is equally true of every part of the worship service. If one prays, sings, or pronounces a blessing, there must be understanding (vv. 15-17). Without it, there can be no edification. How can the unlearned say "Amen" at the end of a prayer if he does not know what was said (v. 16). Consequently, prayer is not to be in an "unknown tongue" (vv. 14-16).

Paul has said some things that might be interpreted as antagonistic in spirit, so he explains that he knows what he is talking about. He has spoken in tongues more than any of them, so he speaks from experience. He concludes that he would rather speak five words with understanding than ten thousand words in a language that no one present could understand (v. 19).

The fact that these Corinthians insisted on using tongues in this way shows that they were spiritually children (v. 20). It is proper to imitate children with regard to malice. Children forget quickly. They do not hold grudges. When it comes to a worship service, adult Christians should act like adult Christians.

According to verse 17, the purpose of public worship is to edify the congregation. Now Paul had preached to people of various languages and dialects of the Graeco-Roman world as the apostle to the Gentiles. His conclusion was: "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" (v. 19). Incidentally, the further we get from Pentecost, the less we hear about tongues. This suggests that they were already beginning to cease, even in New Testament times.

Verses 21-25

A Sign to Unbelievers

Paul quotes Isaiah 28:11 to show that God had a special purpose in using tongues. They were a sign to unbelieving Jews. In Isaiah, the Assyrians are prophesied to be coming upon Israel as a result of divine judgment. Hearing the strange speech of the Assyrians was to be a sign to them that God's judgment was falling because of their unbelief. In the same way, God used tongues centuries later as a sign to the Jews, who were unyielding in their unbelief. It was an unusual demonstration of God's power, to show that he was with this new group called Christians.

Furthermore, the failure of the Jews to heed this tongue sign and turn to Christianity also resulted in a judgment on the nation. Just as the Assyrians came down and devastated Israel years before, so the Romans in 70 A.D. destroyed Jerusalem and the temple because the Jews continued in their unbelief. Can't you see why Paul put prophecy ahead of tongues as a gift? Both destructions could have been avoided, had God's people heard and heeded his prophetic Word.

Clearly, one purpose for tongues was to be a demonstration to unbelieving Jews. In Acts, wherever tongues were used, Jews were present, including Acts 10, which records the first Gentiles being added to the church. Tongues were designed for unbelievers. Prophecy is for believers (v. 22).

The apostle explained to the Corinthians that if an unbeliever came into one of their services when everyone was speaking in tongues, he would say, "Ye are MAD" (v. 23). However, it was different with prophecy. If this unbeliever heard God's Word expounded in a language that he could understand, he might come under conviction, repent of his sin, and say, "God is in you of a truth" (vv. 24, 25).

Once more, Paul is discussing tongues in a public meeting. Under no circumstance, he says, is everyone to speak at once in babbling confusion. We are not to give the impression that the Holy Spirit has made us insane. If there is no interpreter, keep quiet, the apostle says (v. 28). The ones who spoke in tongues were not to monopolize the meeting.

Verses 22, 23

Here is a strange section. It declares that tongues are a sign to unbelievers and then affirms that their effect on unbelievers is to make them think that the church is a crowd of madmen. That is a knotty one—a seeming contradiction! I'm not sure that I can unravel it, but let me suggest this. The tongues used at Pentecost were the tongues of those present. Everyone heard in his own language the wonderful works of God, but tongues practiced without respect for those present will have the opposite effect. At any rate, the clear, consistent testimony of the church will convict the sinner. This is what we need to emphasize.

Verses 25-30

Tongues Must be Regulated

Paul had already pointed out that tongues would cease with the completion of the New Testament (13:8). In the meantime, they did serve a purpose in the early church because it lacked a complete

written New Testament. Even then it was necessary to regulate tongues, so Paul gave some guiding principles.

In verses 26-33 he gives us a window through which we may look in on a worship service at Corinth. Each church member comes with a psalm, a doctrine, a revelation by direct inspiration, a message in a tongue, an interpretation, etc. This is in keeping with the gifts of the Spirit listed in 12:10.

Let us make a few observations concerning the worship services of this infant church. There was a spontaneity in the worship which made it possible for many to participate. There was no rigid formality. People were more directly involved in the services than they generally are today. But let us remember that this chapter is a discussion of tongues in the apostolic church, not a regulation for a present-day church service. The Bible must always be understood in the context of the time in which it was written. There should be no competition among worshipers. Consequently, Paul gave instructions concerning tongues with the purpose of making the services more edifying. To edify is the true purpose of all worship.

1. At the most, two or three should be allowed to speak in tongues at any service. The gift was not to be magnified out of proportion. This was to guard against permitting an inferior gift to monopolize the worship service.

2. These two or three were to speak in turn. Many speaking at once only added to the confusion.

3. There must be an interpreter. If there was none, no foreign tongue was to be heard. Many who advocate tongues today do not observe these simple rules.

Verses 29-32

The Place of Prophecy

Prophecy was to have its rules also. There was to be no interruption by others while one was speaking. If one felt that he had a gift of prophecy while another was speaking, he was to control the impulse until the other had finished. Why? Confusion and chaos would otherwise result. "God is not the author of confusion, but of peace" (v. 33). Because of the exciting character of tongues, they tend to disorder more than other gifts. The spirit of prophecy was more easily controlled than tongues. "Remember that a person who has a message from God has the power to stop himself or wait his turn" (v. 32, *Living Bible*). One who has the urge to speak in tongues finds it hard to refrain, but tongues out of their proper context make for bedlam

instead of the order that becomes the house of God. Small wonder that the Apostle Paul laid down some rules.

A certain theological student participated in a tongues meeting. He claimed the gift of interpretation. After a dramatic but fictitious interpretation, he told the gathering that he had simply recited part of John 1 in Greek. You see, it pays to put God's Word first and human experience second. Furthermore, those who make tongues a badge of spirituality, or a status symbol of the saints, must remember that tongues and their interpretations are not peculiar to Christianity. They are found in pagan religions and spiritism, both ancient and modern. Heathens, such as Hindus, drug addicts while under the emotional strain of a psychedelic trip, Muslims, and spirit mediums have spoken in tongues. The admonition of 1 John 4:1 would seem appropriate: "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world."

It is a fact that the apostles were miraculously endowed with the ability to speak foreign languages, but this gift was not permanent equipment for missionary service; it was temporary equipment for a special service. It was one of the miracles that marked the age of the apostles. Too many are trying to copy and demonstrate Pentecost when they should be following the teachings given that day. It was unique in history. Pentecost is a day, not an experience. Moreover, the disciples did not pray it down gradually, it came "suddenly" (Acts 2:2) and unbidden to the apostles. There is no evidence that they asked for it or expected it.

True, a certain amount of emotion may accompany one's Christian experience, depending upon the individual. But emotions are not a witness. Joy *should* flow from the facts and promises of God. But when the emotion subsides and the yelling stops, a solid and lasting foundation of Scriptural knowledge and practice must take over.

Verses 34-40

The Place of Women in the Church

Some of the confusion in the Corinthian church arose because women were interrupting the worship service. Women were to maintain a modest silence, to demonstrate their obedience in compliance with the Old Testament principle of Genesis 3:16. If a woman had a genuine inquiry, she wasn't to interrupt the worship service, but to ask her husband later at home. Paul insisted that women should "keep

silence in the churches . . . for it is a shame for women to speak in the church."

If one does not realize that Paul is dealing with a specific problem in a specific church at a specific time, he can get some bad theology out of that. Some have! Further, one could turn to 1 Timothy 2:11, 12 for more support. "Let the women learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach . . . but to be in silence."

In spite of all this, Paul was not a woman hater, as some erroneously believe. He spoke out against women because they were in the wrong here. He also corrected Peter when he was wrong (Gal. 2:11-14). Female publicity of the first century suggests loose morals.

In the tongues movement, alleged experiences are placed above the Word. Here is where it is seriously astray. The Word is construed to fit the experience rather than the experience tested by the Bible. The apostle assures the church at Corinth that he is writing the commandments of God. "But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant" (vv. 37, 38).

Verses 39, 40

Paul concludes that tongues were not forbidden in the apostolic age, IF the rules of this chapter were observed. "Let all things be done decently and in order."

Should we seek to speak in tongues today? In the light of what we have learned in this study, I believe that we should not. To seek the gift of tongues today is not necessary because the conditions under which tongues were needed no longer exist. Our edification today comes from a completed Book. For this reason, tongues were to cease (13:8). Incidentally, Paul does not mention tongues in later epistles in which gifts of the spirit are listed. This suggests that this gift was already passing away. (Cp. Rom. 12:4-8; Eph. 4:11-13.)

It was only to the Corinthian church, which had earned a reputation for carnality, that he gave detailed instructions concerning tongues. He said that even there it would be better to prophesy. Putting all of the evidence together, we conclude that no situation is apt to arise today that will make tongues a necessity.

Part Five

Dangers of Tongues

1. Tongues may obscure the gospel. In the tongues movement, the focal point of interest is tongues, not the gospel. The writer has seen individuals become so wrapped up in tongues experiences that they ceased completely to grow in the understanding of God's truth. Often the conditions of verses 23 and 24 are repeated today.

2. Tongues foster spiritual pride.

3. They become a substitute for the normal Christian life. There is always the grave danger of substituting the spectacular for the normal. It is easier to rely on an experience, such as tongues, than to walk quietly day by day with God. Besides, little faith and understanding are required to speak with tongues.

How do we explain the current activity in tongues? Our final court of appeal is the Bible, not someone's experience. An experience can be real, yet still unhealthy. Three factors should get serious consideration in answering this question.

1. The Psychological Factor

A person is psychologically affected by the atmosphere created in many tongues meetings. Emotions reach a fever pitch. The music and tone of the preacher create an atmosphere that is conducive to tongues speaking.

The book, *The Psychology of Speaking in Tongues*, was written by a clinical psychologist, John P. Kildahl, with much help from his friend, Paul A. Qualhem, M.D., psychiatrist. The book published by Harper and Row, sells for \$4.95 and is a sensitive and scientific account of the most intensive firsthand study of the subject ever undertaken. Both Bible believing Christians, they spent ten years traveling coast to coast researching the tongue movement. They found that people of glossolalia are more submissive, suggestible, and dependent in the presence of authority figures than non-tongue speakers. Tongue speakers cannot exercise their skills unless they have complete confidence in some leader who also speaks in tongues, according to the author. While distinguishing between tongue speaking and hypnotism, the author insists that if a person can be hypnotized, he can, under the right conditions, learn to speak in tongues. "The standard reference work by Ernest Hilgard, *Hypnotic Susceptibility*, makes it clear that hypnosis and glossolalia are induced in a similar manner" (p. 37). The author also learned there was no consistency of interpretation for

the same taped messages by those claiming the gift of interpretation. Furthermore, he considers tongue-speaking a learned skill requiring a stock routine rather than a spiritual gift.

2. Spiritual Starvation

A man who is starving is likely to grasp at anything that appears to be food. People who have not experienced normal Christian growth for many years may see tongues as the answer to their spiritual ills. This pastor has seen this happen in the lives of many Christians. It is easy to understand how tongues may appear as an attractive alternative to the dead, sterile type of Christianity so prevalent today.

3. Imitators

Some have been taught that tongues are the mark of a true Christian, or at least that they are a highly desirable goal. Consequently, they seek to reproduce certain sounds in order to achieve the status symbol, or badge of spirituality recognized by an exclusive group. It appears that the Corinthians were imitating Pentecost, while people involved in the modern tongues movement are trying to imitate the Corinthians. They do this because their leaders have told them that this is the way to unquestioned and unquestionable spirituality.

Now a word about our own attitudes: We need to exercise real discernment in the area of tongues. We also need to show love to Christians who have a different viewpoint. It is important to emphasize that which unites us rather than to constantly stress that which divides us.

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