

Thursday Evening Bible Class.

Tongues and Prophesying

1 Corinthians 14:21-25

15th April 2021

Additional contributions to supplement the Introduction.

As the Gospel was going to be preached to the Gentiles, there would be a language barrier. Although Jesus and the disciples spoke Greek, they also had their own dialects. They would have been familiar with Aramaic, and Hebrew of course. However different cities and regions also had their own languages and dialects, (Acts 14:11 for example). Having the ability to converse in native tongues rather than official languages would be very beneficial for the spread of the gospel as it would be easier to get the simple gospel message across, using more familiar terms. Some suggest that the disciples came out with gibberish at Pentecost, and that the miracle was with the hearers, but in Acts 2, verse 6 and 8 the Greek word used is *dialektos*, so the miracle was one of speech and not hearing. They were not speaking random noises as it came to them in some kind of ecstatic fervour as Pentecostals fraudulently claim today. The great occasion of this outpouring of the Spirit (prophesied by the prophet Joel) is recorded in Acts 2:6-12 *Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God. And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this?*

Not only was this outpouring of the Holy Spirit in this way designed to aid the preaching of the gospel in a more efficient and effective way, it also gave authority to what they were saying. It was evidence to prove who were apostles, and disciples of the Lord Jesus, and gave what they were saying credibility – in the absence of the New Testament writings - see Mark 16:17 *And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues;*

Amongst those who were cynical and ready to criticise, who did not believe, they thought that the disciples were mad and drunk. Acts 2:13: *Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine.*

This is exactly the impression that Paul warns of in 1 Corinthians 14:23 (NET): *So if the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and unbelievers or uninformed people enter, will they not say that you have lost your minds?*

In the Acts 2 example, clearly, when the language spoken, was matched by a listener, the person who heard the gospel preached in his own language was amazed, and was very impressed. So, the gift of tongues could have a great impact, especially when people saw that they were unlearned and ignorant men see Acts 4:13. Thus speaking in tongues captured the imagination and was an obvious manifestation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

It must be remembered that the event of Pentecost and the preaching of the gospel was to Jews. But a little later on, the gospel was preached to Gentiles, and the first Gentile converts also were given the authority, and comfort of the Holy Spirit gifts in the same way, Acts 10: 44 *While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.*

45 And they of the circumcision [the Jews] which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days.

Cornelius, a Roman centurion, had family and friends who were also Romans, as a soldier, many of his friends (Acts 10:24) may have been other conscripts from other parts of the Roman empire, and multilingual as well. Again, they were shown the power of the Word of God, in their own home languages, as evidence of the authority of the Apostolic witness, and the truth of what they had been told.

The city of Corinth was very rich, a centre of trade, culture, and pagan worship. It was also cosmopolitan, with many ethnicities and different races of people living there – Jews included. The Ecclesia there would have been made up of a real mixed bunch of people. They would in turn, preached to all sorts of people from around the Roman empire, as people travelled through.

It is readily apparent that unbaptised people came to their meetings and listened to what was said, as we can see from verses 22,23 in this 14th chapter.

However, it seems that people valued the gift of speaking other languages rather highly, for the wrong reasons, not just for the sake of preaching, but for the impression it gave, a feelgood factor, or appearing clever, or smart and so on. That some disciples were getting agitated, or worked up, about what spirit gift they had received, is clearly seen, by the writing of Paul in chapter 12. He shows that in fact, hidden abilities and gifts are just as important, rather, more important than the obvious ones. Today Pentecostals

make a huge fuss and bother about speaking in tongues – gobbledegook, random grunts and noises, which form no part of any organised language, but just as the noises come into their head. Anyone can do this, without any need to be in a state of ecstasy whipped up by raucous drumbeats and shouting pastors. Indeed, my two-year-old grandson is rather adept at it! This shows how it is human nature to seek out the glory, to want visible recognition of being special, and so Pentecostals today fall into the trap of which some in the early days of the First Century. In 1 Corinthians 12:28, the gift of speaking in different languages was actually at the end of the list, and in verse 10 again, the gift of prophesying for instance is before that of speaking in tongues. 1 Corinthians 12:31: *But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.* All of this rivalry would completely negate the whole purpose of the gifts of the Holy Spirit which was to magnify the gospel, so in chapter 13, Paul says *Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity [or love] I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.*

In chapter 14, Paul responded to observations that people were all trying to speak in different languages at the same time, and even without interpreters, so what was the point? It was mis-using the gifts of God just to make themselves look good. So, he explains that one at a time, please, and only if you have an interpreter, (verse 27) who can explain to others what is being said. He explains that without this decency and order (verse 40) being conducted, it will create a bad impression like a trumpet being blown but giving a wrong signal (verse 8)

Prophesying was also a gift of the Holy Spirit. However, when the gifts of the Holy Spirit were withdrawn, prophesying as a function of the ecclesia continued, and is still practised by the Ecclesia today. Clearly just from this fact alone, it can be seen, that as work of the disciples it is of greater import. As already noted, when lists of the

gifts of the Holy Spirit are given in the New Testament, prophecy always comes before speaking in tongues. Prophesying does not just mean inspired predictive speech, foretelling the future. It means simply to speak forth or to proclaim. It includes speaking under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and includes revealing the future, but it also includes proclaiming the word of God. It is for this reason that Chapter 14 of 1 Corinthians begins: 1 Corinthians 14:1 *Follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy.*

Prophesying did not always include dramatic interventions like Agabus in Acts 21, or the four daughters of Philip in the same chapter. But as Paul explains in Chapter 14, the purpose of prophesying or speaking forth is *for edification, and exhortation, and comfort* – see verse 3. It appears that certain people preferred the more obvious gift of tongues rather than prophecy. But Paul writes to the Thessalonian: 1 Thessalonians 5:20: *Despise not prophesyings.*

In chapter 13, Paul admitted that currently they only prophesied in part – (13:9) because that which is perfect had not yet come. This is referring to the remaining letters of the Apostles, and particularly the giving of the Apocalypse by the Lord Jesus to the Apostle John. The giving of this revelation would enable the believers to prophecy in full, as opposed to in part. That is - to proclaim the gospel, and explain the purpose of God with the nations from the time thy were preaching to the Gentiles back then at the time of the Romans, right through to the time of the end of the Gentiles. All information was given that was necessary. The scripture was complete. It was perfect. All it needed was faithful believers to teach it. In fact the work of this prophesying and proclaiming would continue, as we are informed in the Apocalypse itself - see chapter 11:3 onwards.

In 1611, the Bible was translated into English, and has since then at least one portion of Scripture has been translated for 3,312 languages. The New Testament is available in 1,521 languages, with portions in 1,121. The complete Bible has been translated into 670

languages. Clearly today there is not quite the same need for preaching the Bible in different languages and speaking in tongues.

However Paul instructed Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:8 *Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God.*

We are informed in 2 Timothy 3:16 *All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:*

Bearing this in mind, Pauls words must be relevant today. Indeed they are! We read in Revelation 19:10 ... **the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.** The ecclesia still speaks forth, and is a lampstand proclaiming the truth of God's word, and is still prophesying. Speaking in tongues is not a sign of the Spirit today, nor is it required.

Brother Terry