

The Gift of Tongues

By The Most Reverend Philip Edward Phlegar Weeks

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The “red herring” of the charismatic movement is glossalalia, speaking in tongues! No other manifestation of the Holy Spirit has received so much attention as has this single manifestation. The very uniqueness of this gift has been the cause of division in churches where the Baptism in the Holy Spirit has occurred without proper teaching and adequate understanding preceding the occurrence.

Classical Pentecostals maintain that it is the evidence of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit and once you speak in tongues you have the Holy Spirit and never need to exercise the gift again. One contribution the charismatic movement in the previous century gave to the Church was to make people aware of other manifestations than just glossalalia. This is not to discount the importance of “tongues”, but simply to say that speaking or praying in an unlearned language may not necessarily be the evidence of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit.

In one church where I was Pastor, a member who was crippled and used a crutch to assist in his walking, went to the altar for prayer requesting the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. He was instantly healed and walked away from the altar leaving his crutch behind. However, he never accepted the fact that he got Baptized in the Holy Spirit with the evidence of healing because he had been improperly taught that he must speak in tongues. The Gift is the Holy Spirit Himself; a Gift promised by Jesus before His Ascension. Tongues are part of the package, and only one part.

That said, let me say that there are several expressions of this manifestation. St. Paul speaks of praying and singing in the Spirit (tongues) as well as doing the same in his natural (vernacular) language. He also taught about the necessity of having an interpretation when a message is spoken in tongues in an assembly. He encouraged the Ephesians to pray in the Spirit which includes the unlearned language.

It is apparent there are at least four different types of tongues.

There is the devotional language that is privately used in personal prayer life and at times in worship. I have been aware of people receiving the Body and Blood of Jesus with lips moving in silence and realized they were worshipping in the Spirit. They were glorifying Jesus! In Romans St. Paul says the Holy Spirit assists us with sounds in our praying when we do not know for what or how to pray. It is an important part of intercessory prayer.

There is a time in worship when tongues may be exercised both in audible prayer and in singing. I attended a Camps Farthest Out soon after receiving the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. It was a unique CFO because of the strong charismatic emphasis and the speakers being Derek Prince, Bob Mumford and Charles Simpson. One night as we were singing and worshipping, at the conclusion of a praise song a woman began singing in tongues.

The tune was exceptionally unique; different from the normal. As soon as she concluded her singing, a man on the opposite side of the auditorium began singing the same unique tune and the words were in English. Tongues and Interpretation. Praise offered to God in thanksgiving for all He has done for us. Not necessarily a translation although there are instances where a person has prayed in a language not known to the individual only to be told later they were praying in a language the “interpreter” knew.

One of the most unique stories I have heard was of a prayer group visited by a Christian from Africa. In the group was a dear lady whose prayer language was a strange clicking sound. Time and again she prayed for the Holy Spirit to give her a language of syllables like the other people. On the occasion of the African’s visit the group prayed and upon conclusion he asked who made the clicking sound. She was embarrassed but admitted she was the one. “That is the sound my tribe makes when the King is passing by,” he related. Could it have been that King Jesus was passing as she prayed with the other people?

A young lady came to our prayer group who loved the Spanish language and was fluent in it. She would not disclose her reason for prayer possibly embarrassed by the particular problem. My wife June was one of the people praying for her and was praying in tongues. June does not know the first word in Spanish but the young lady suddenly came alert and told us that June was saying things that only God could have known about her. She was hearing June’s “tongue” as Spanish.

A message in tongues may be spoken with the interpretation following. This may be prophetic; it may be direction for the Body of Christ or for an individual. Sometimes it may take a message in tongues to get our attention so we can hear in the vernacular what God has been trying to say to us.

And the fourth usage of tongues may be employed in an act of exorcism when the strong force of the Holy Spirit comes against the demonic force whose presence we are seeking to banish. Our own authoritative speech may be insufficient and we may need the authority of the Holy Spirit to address a possessing demon.

Try to tell a person you love most just how much you love and appreciate them. Try to tell them for three minutes without sounding like a broken record by repeating yourself. But with tongues you can praise God indefinitely, and He desires praise from us. I am thankful that I can praise God in a language in which I have not sworn, and when I do not know how to pray for some one, I may depend upon the Holy Spirit to form the right words that reaches the Mind of God.

St. James in his epistle gives us an understanding of the importance of the tongue and the dangerous harm caused when it is not in submission to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. It is the smallest member of the body, and James said it is the last to be tamed. Perhaps many peoples’ overt objection to speaking in tongues is because we are unwilling to submit this littlest member to the Lordship of Jesus. To speak in a language we do not understand is

the height of being a fool for Christ's sake. It is living in the faith that the words we speak by faith are the words of the Holy Spirit.