

Place: Lurgan 7:11:2006

Reading: Acts 2: 1-13

THE CHURCH ABLAZE

4. IS THE GIFT OF TONGUES FOR TODAY ?

Few subjects are as hotly disputed in current Christendom as the subject of the “ *gift of tongues.*” In the last few years the so called “ *Charismatic Movement,*” has swept the world infiltrating most denominations and many independent groups as well. Celebrated personalities are paraded as recipients of the gift. Tremendous stress is laid upon the importance of spiritual gifts, especially the gift of tongues. Charismatics typically describe tongues as an ecstatic experience without parallel that arouses the spirit in a way that must be experienced to be appreciated. For example, Robert V. Morris says,

“ *For me the gift of tongues turned out to be the gift of praise. As I used the unknown language which God had given me I felt rising in me the love, the awe, the adoration pure and uncontingent, that I had not been able to achieve in thought out prayer.*” Countless charismatics testify that speaking in tongues has enriched their lives. One leading Pentecostal author declares that “ *the chief purpose of tongues is to provide the human spirit with an opportunity to worship God in ecstatic prayer, praise, thanksgiving and song.*” Another has testified, “ *When I started*

praying in tongues I felt, and people told me I looked twenty years younger I am built up, and given joy, courage, peace, the sense of God's presence and I happen to be a weak personality who needs this.”

My such testimonies make a powerful sales pitch for speaking in tongues. If tongues can give health, happiness, and make you look younger, the potential market is unlimited. And what could be possibly wrong with such an experience ? If it makes a person feel good, closer to the Lord, spiritually stronger, or even delirious with joy, can it in any way be dangerous or deceptive ? My it can and it is ! You see, some Charismatics say, “ *if you want to speak in a heavenly language, the intellect must be set aside.*” Yet how extremely dangerous it is to switch off the mind and allow the emotions freedom. George Gardner was a Charismatic pastor who left the movement. In his interesting book “ *The Corinthian Catastrophe,*” he discusses the danger of surrendering one’s mind and self over to experience. This leads to an inevitable emotional breakdown and opens up one to an attack from Satan. Such a letdown causes the individual to go back again and again to an experience for stronger doses of emotion. This according to Gardner, becomes almost like a drug, requiring heavier and heavier doses to get the same emotional high. Yet we are never told in Scripture to turn off our minds or to bypass rational thought, rather we are encouraged to renew our minds through the study of the Word of God.

(Rom 12:2 Col 3:10) So what is happening today ? Has God reserved for this present generation a renewal of the extraordinary gifts of grace which marked the

first Christians ? Is it now possible to hear the same miraculous tongues that amazed the crowds on the Day of Pentecost ? Has the gift of tongues resumed in the 21st century ? Several years ago in the USA a popular weekly television program featured a detective. His name was Sergeant Friday. In every story a situation developed in which Sergeant Friday said to a witness whom he questioned, “ *Just the facts, Mister. Just state the facts.* ” With God's help, that's what we want to do this !

And if the experience's believers claim to have, do not agree with the Bible, the experience is wrong, not the Bible. So often we hear, “ *Oh, but you've never experienced it. I've felt it, and it's so wonderful.* ” “ *Don't knock it unless you've tried it.* ” And “ *a man with an experience is never at the mercy of a man with only an argument.* ” Now is experience wrong ? No ! The Christian life is a love affair. “ *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart* ” (Mk 12:30) Love is experiential not theoretical. But the Lord Jesus gave the proper pattern in (Jn 8:32) when He said, “ *ye shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free.* ” (Jn 8:32) What that “ *truth,* ” is, is seen in the previous verse where Christ speaks of “ *My Word.* ” (Jn 8:31)

My our Christian life is not to be built on feelings, however good they may seem, but upon the rock of Holy Scripture. God's design is from Truth to Experience, not from Experience to Truth. But “ *I know Bill, and it happened to him. Mrs. Simon is one of the sweetest people I know, and she had that experience. If it is genuine to them it must be real.* ”

Along my journey in life I have met many fine believers who believe that speaking in tongues is for today. We can, bless God, for many Pentecostal people who believe in the Word of God, believe in the deity of Christ, His sacrificial death, His physical resurrection, salvation by grace alone, and the need to live in obedience to Christ and proclaim the faith with zeal. But then we are exhorted to “ *speak the truth in love,* ” (Eph 4:15) and the question that should continually confront is, “ *What saith the Scriptures ?* ”

(1) THE MEANING OF THIS GIFT

“ *Glossa,* ” is the word in the NT for “ *tongue.* ” Scholars tell us that this word appears 50 times in the NT. Sixteen times it refers to a literal human tongue, the physical organ of the mouth, once in (Acts 2:3) it is used of “ *cloven tongues like as of fire,* ” and thirty three times the word means “ *language.* ” Now the interesting thing is this. Not once in the Bible does “ *tongues,* ” mean a heavenly language that only God understands. Tongues are mentioned in 3 books of the Bible. (Mk 16: Acts 2: 10: 19 and 1 Cor Chs 12 -14) Now I want us to examine some of these passages to ascertain one simple fact. Namely that the Biblical gift of tongues were *known languages*. Let's begin with,

(a) THE DAY OF PENTECOST: ACTS 2

Now keep in mind that the Acts of the Apostles is a *transitional period*. From beginning to end in the Book of Acts changes are taking place. In Acts we go from

the synagogue to the church: from OT saints to NT believers: from a body of Jewish believers to a body the church made up of Jews and Gentiles who are one in Christ. In Acts the dead are being raised. (9:36-42 20:9) Is that happening today ? Where are the so-called healers in our land who can raise the dead ? Dr. L. Strauss was confronted on one occasion by someone who asked him, “ *Sir, have you spoken in tongues ?*” He replied, “ *For forty six years I’ve spoken in English and God has been to bless.*” “ *But Sir, have you had a valid New Testament experience ?*” Strauss, replied, “ *Is walking on water a valid NT experience ? Is raising the dead a valid NT experience ?*”

Joseph Dillow summarised it perfectly when he said, “ *We must not the tragic mistake of teaching the Experience of the Apostles, but rather we must Experience the Teaching of the Apostles. The Experience of the Apostles is found in the transitional book of Acts, while the Teaching of the Apostles is set forth clearly in the Epistles which are our guide for our Christian Experience today.*”

Keep in mind then that Acts is a transitional period and changes are taking place. But look at (2:4-6) These tongues were human languages. Can you picture this scene ? This vast crowd, containing people from many places had come to Jerusalem for the Day of Pentecost, and they were amazed because “ *every man heard them speak in his own language.*” (2:6) Luke goes to name some 15 different countries and areas whose languages were being spoken. Furthermore, the Greek word *dialektos*, from which we get the English word

“ *dialect,*” is also used in reference to the languages in (2:6,8) Unbelievers present at Pentecost heard God's message proclaimed in their own local dialects. Such a description could not apply to ecstatic speech. These were known languages. And this event sets the tone for the rest of the book. Look at,

(b) THE HOUSE OF CORNELIUS: ACTS 10:

Look at (10:46) Now its the same Greek word (glossa) that is used here as was used in (Acts 2) So known languages are in view here to. In this instance, the tongues weren't for communicating so much as they were for evidence that the Gentiles were also part of the church. God was just showing to believing Jews that the Holy Spirit had come to the Gentiles just as He had to them. Now in (Ch 11) Peter recounts to his fellow apostles the miraculous event of (Acts 10) Look at (11:15-17) That last statement shows that there was no way to deny the Gentiles had received the Holy Spirit. Had it happened any other way, Peter might not have believed it. Yes, the Gentiles were also part of the church and speaking in tongues was the visible proof of that. Have a look at,

(c) THE CITY OF EPHESUS: ACTS 19:

Now by the time we reach (Ch 19) there's one other group of people that hadn't been included in the Body of Christ, a little group of twelve Old Testament saints who had been baptised by John the Baptist. They didn't know Christ had risen and sent the Holy Spirit.

Look at (19:1-6) You see as with the Gentiles in (Ch 10) the Spirit made clear to an apostolic witness that the disciples of John the Baptist were also part of the church. So through the Book of Acts you can see the marvellous genius of the Holy Spirit in putting together the Body of Christ. There is no part of the body that can say, “ *We have something you don't have.*” Once it was proven that Jews, Gentiles and the remnant of Old Testament saints could come into the body of Christ, there was no need for the filling of the Holy Spirit to be accompanied by tongue-speaking. In other words the gift of tongues was given to confirm that these different groups were part of the church. And my its the same Greek word again. This was not this mamby, pamby stuff we hear today. Some years ago a young couple from England were touring the USA and they stopped at St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Van Nvys California, Denis Bennet the rector of the church initiated the current Charismatic Movement. They were curious to find out more about the Baptism of the Spirit and as they talked to Bennet, he tried to explain what speaking in tongues meant. Half amused a smile came on the face of the young man, “ *Could this be something I've been doing in my prayers ever since I was three years old,*” he asked. His wife also smiled, “ *Me too.*” Unknown to one another they had been speaking like this from time to time since they were young children. Do you know what that is ? Nonsense. For Biblical tongues were *known languages*. Look at,

**(d) THE LANGUAGE OF CORINTHIANS:
1 Corinthians 14:**

Now there are those who argue for a distinction between the use of tongues in (Acts 2) and that referred to in (1 Corinthians). The former they say is intelligent communication while the later are “ *heavenly languages.*” However, as John F. Walvoord notes in his discussion on the matter, there is really no foundation grammatically which would justify a distinction to be made. All of the passages in both Acts and 1 Corinthians use the same words for “ *speaking,*” and for “ *tongue.*” Look at (1 Cor 14:2) That we are told is a language that is not of this world. It describes something mysterious, heavenly or unintelligible utterance. But you'll notice that the word “ *unknown,*” is in italics, it does not appear in the original.

Look at (1 Cor 13:1) Now that phrase, “ *the tongues of men,*” simply means “ *an actual language.*” But then, many tell us that “ *the tongues of angels,*” involves some kind of heavenly language. A private prayer language, a heavenly language known only to God. Well, if you're going to make angel talk the gift of tongues you're going to have force it for its nowhere else in the Bible. Any time an angel ever communicated with a man he communicated in normal human language. (Lk 1:11-20 26-37 2:10) You see nowhere does the Bible teach that the gift of tongues is anything other than human languages. Biblical tongues are not gibberish, but languages. What passes for tongues in the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements are not true languages. Modern tongue-speaking (glossolalia) is not the same as the Biblical gift of tongues. William Samarin, professor of Linguistics at the University of Toronto wrote, “ *Over a period of five*

*years I have taken part in meetings in Italy, Holland, Jamaica, Canada, and the United States. I have observed old-fashioned Pentecostals and neo-Pentecostals: I have been in small meetings at private homes as well as mammoth public meetings: I have seen such different cultural settings as are found among the Puerto Ricans of the Bronx, the snake handlers of the Appalachians and Russian Molakans in Los Angeles yet in spite of superficial similarities, glossolalia (modern tongue speaking) is fundamentally **not language.**”*

William Samarin is one of many men who have made studies of modern tongue speaking. These studies all agree that what we're hearing today is not language and if it is not language then it is not the Biblical gift of tongues. For the tongues that were spoken in the Bible were *known languages*. (1)

(2) THE MOTIVE BEHIND THIS GIFT

Why was this gift of tongues given ? I believe it was given,

(a) TO ENUNCIATE GOD'S JUDGMENT:

It was a sign to the Jewish nation. Look at (1 Cor 14:21-22) “ *Tongues are for a sign,*” A sign to whom ? Are they a sign to Christians confirming the Baptism of the Holy Spirit ? No ! “ *Not to them that believe.*” (1 Cor 14:22) **Tongues are not a sign to Christians.** “ *But to them that believe not.*” Now who are those that believe not ? The answer is in (14:21) Where is Paul quoting from ?

(Is 28:11-12) What does that refer to ? A time in the history of Israel when they turned away from God. Through Isaiah came this warning, predicting the invasion from Assyria and Israel's resulting captivity. “ *You are going to hear men speak in languages you won't understand. They will be your conquerors and captors and you will know when you hear such My judgment has come.*”

Now that prediction came true 780 odd years before Paul wrote to the Corinthians. But now once again God was getting ready to judge Israel. Do you recall the words of the Lord Jesus ? “ *When ye see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles.*” (Lk 21:20-24) Again the sign of judgment was being heard, “ *with men of other tongues will I speak unto this people.*” (Israel) My when Titus the Roman sacked the city of Jerusalem and dispersed the Jews over the world in AD 70, the reason for tongues disappeared and the gift ceased in and of itself. The reason for the gift is no longer here and God does not give His gifts as toys when their purpose has ceased to be. (a)

(b) TO INDICATE GOD'S PURPOSE:

Come back to (2:1) Now with the establishment of the Church on the Day of Pentecost a new day had dawned for the people of God. For 2,000 years the Jews were a specially chosen and privileged people. But from now the barriers were down and God would speak to all nations in all languages. Tongues were therefore a sign

of transition between the Old and the New, but once the period of transition was past, the sign was no longer necessary. O. Palmer Robertson has said, “*Tongues served well to show that Christianity, though begun in the cradle of Judaism, was not to be distinctively Jewish now that the transition (between Old and New Covenants) has been made, the sign of transition has no abiding value in the life of the church. Today there is no need for a sign to show that God is moving from the single nation of Israel to all nations. That movement has become an accomplished fact.*”

People say today, “*We need to repeat Pentecost.*” No, we don’t. No-one ever has. No-one ever will. We don’t need to repeat Pentecost anymore than we need to repeat Bethlehem or Calvary. Listen, **Bethlehem was God with us, Calvary was God for us, Pentecost was God in us !** You see the gift of tongues related to the childhood of the church. In arguing for the temporary nature of certain gifts, including tongues, Paul uses the illustration of physical and mental growth from childhood to adulthood. (1 Cor 13:8-11) Why does Paul use this picture ? To show that the church was in a process of development at the time he wrote from infancy to maturity. (1 Cor 14:20) My tongues appeared briefly in the early days of the church as the church was being established, but once that occurred they were gone, they stopped. They belonged to the childhood of the church. Today, the Church's life and ministry is founded on the Word of God.
(Acts 20:17-38) (a) (b)

(c) *TO AUTHENTICATE GOD' SERVANTS:*

Think of this, the apostles of Christ came into the Roman Empire and Jewish communities preaching a startling message. They were declaring that the crucified Jesus of Nazareth had been miraculously raised from the dead, that He had ascended and was the only Saviour ! (Acts 4:12) Now that was a very difficult message for either Jew or Gentile to receive. What proof was there that this Jesus was Messiah and Saviour ?
(2:33 4:12) How could men know that what the apostles preached was accurate ? God solved this problem by granting to the apostles and those closely associated with them mighty signs which served to corroborate the message and the men. (Mk 16:15)

Paul says in (2 Cor 12:12) “*Truly the signs of an apostles were wrought among you in all patience: in signs: and wonders and mighty deeds.*” Charles Hodge states, “*The signs of an apostle were the insignia of the apostleship, those things which by divine appointment were made the evidence of a mission from God.*”

(Heb 2:4) Now let me ask you, where the apostles unique ? Well, they were chosen directly by Christ, (Lk 6:13) they were eye-witnesses of His resurrection, (1:22) they had power to work miracles, (5:12 8:18) and they were those whose gift was temporary.
(Eph 2:19-20) Now when a person constructs a building he puts a foundation down once. Then the superstructure is built on that. My once the foundation of the church was completed the apostolic

gift was removed.

Now if the gift of apostleship was temporary, and if that gift was attested by other gifts (including tongues) then the need for those attesting gifts no longer exists. In other words, if these signs were given to confirm the ministry of the apostles, and there are no more apostles then it seems obvious that these signs which accompanied their ministry are no longer operative either. Do you know what Paul says ? He says, “ *tongues shall cease.* ” (1 Cor 13:8) And the Greek verb (pauo) he uses means “ *to cease permanently.* ” It implies that when tongues ceased, they would never start up again, and the later books of the Bible do not mention tongues again. My if the gift of tongues is still supposed to be present in the church, as some say, then something is terribly wrong. For if the gift of speaking different languages still exists, then for some strange reason God is requiring missionaries to take many years of language study so they can preach the gospel. But why would God do that when He could simply give the gift of languages ? It would seem that if the gift still existed, that would happen and people like those in the Wycliffe Bible Translation would not have to study for years to grasp the language. But my its because the gift does not exist today, we need to study other languages. So we've looked at (1) (2)

(3) THE MISUNDERSTANDING ABOUT THIS GIFT

Indeed there are several misunderstandings regarding

speaking in tongues. For e.g.; some say,

(a) TONGUES IS AN EVIDENCE OF THE BAPTISM OF THE SPIRIT:

Sometimes a believer may be asked by a Charismatic, “ *Have you received the Holy Spirit ?* ” If the Christian replies that he has, then he is usually asked, “ *have you received the gift of tongues ?* ” The second question is based on the idea that the gift of tongues is the sure sign of the baptism of the Spirit. Well, is this so ? Look at (1 Cor 12:30) Here Paul asks the question, “ *Do all speak with tongues ?* ” The implied answer is “ *no.* ” The remarkable thing is this, the Corinthians had not all spoken in tongues, but they had all experienced the Baptism of the Spirit. (1 Cor 12:13) So even in NT times when the gift was still operative it was not the sure sign of the Spirit's Baptism. Still others say,

(b) TONGUES IS A PRIVATE PRAYER LANGUAGE:

They base that on (1 Cor 14:2) where Paul says, “ *For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men but unto God, for no man understandeth him.* ” Now Paul is not suggesting here that tongues should be used as a private prayer language, rather he was pointing out the futility of speaking in tongues without an interpreter, because only God would know if anything was said. Spiritual gifts were never intended to be used for God's benefit, or for the benefit of the gifted person. Peter says, “ *As each of you has*

received a gift, employ it for one another.” (A.N.T. 1 Pet 4:10) Still others say,

(c) TONGUES IS A SIGN OF SPIRITUALITY:

Is it ? Did you know that tongues are mentioned only in the earliest books of the NT ? Paul wrote at least 12 epistles after 1 Corinthians and never mentioned tongues again. Peter never mentioned tongues, neither did James, John, or Jude. Tongues appeared briefly in the Early Days of the Church as the church was being established, but once that occurred they were gone. They belonged to the childhood of the church. ***Tongues a Sign of Spirituality ?*** My the most carnal church that Paul had majored in this gift. Paul describes the Corinthian believers as quarrelsome and divisive, (3:3) Carnal, (3:3) guilty of gross immorality, (5:1) and so on. ***No, the real mark of spirituality is not speaking in tongues, the real mark of spirituality is Controlling the One Tongue you do have.*** If that is so, how are you doing ? Some believers are always at it. They will be at it as soon as they leave this church. My has a question mark got to be over your spirituality: over your salvation ?

Is the gift of tongues for today ? No ! Indeed the greatest tragedy arising from the modern tongues movement is the missing of the Spirit-filled life. Do you recall the dog in the ancient fable who while crossing a bridge with a bone in his mouth, saw his reflection in the water below ? The bone he saw in the reflection looked so much better than the one in his

mouth, that he dropped the ***substance for the shadow*** and went hungry. Many hungry people are like that dog. They have dropped, ignored, by-passed the satisfying reality of (Eph 5:18) for a shadow of exciting experience built around ecstatic speech. Is this you ? Have you dropped the substance for the shadow ? Or are you continually being filled with the Spirit ?