

Toward a Peaceful Resolution Concerning the “Gift of Tongues.”

Introduction:

It is amazing how divisive this issue has become among Christians over the last century. Emotions run very high on both sides of this issue. In the history of the church we have managed to divide over several issues, including church government, the Lord’s Table and Baptism.

Often we have “rushed to judgment” of one another rather than fully considering the position taken. Therefore, let us take time to fully consider the evidence before making a hasty judgment.

Some people from both camps will think this position to be heretical. But some, will consider it, evaluate it, adopt it and grow in the love of Jesus Christ. The objective of this study is love (1 Tim 1:5).

1. The Problem: division in the Body of Christ.

God does not desire division within His body. 1 Cor 12:24-25

But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked, 25 so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.

We know that there are times when division must occur. Rom 16:17-18

We are called to preserve the unity of the Spirit. Eph 4:1-6

Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, 3 being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

2. The Reasons:

A. Lack of understanding of Scripture.

Both sides of the issue claim that the other side is void of understanding or under the doctrine of demons. Each side thinks it is spiritual and the other side is either lost or sorely mistaken. Could it be that both sides are “spiritual” except when they are fighting with each other or putting the other down? James, the half-brother of the Lord, dealt with this in 4:11-12.

Part of the problems of the First Advent stemmed from Scribes and Pharisees who thought they fully understood the Law. Jesus points out that they should

have been seeking the author of the Law rather than holding to the letter of it (John 5:37ff). They knew a lot of Scripture, but did not know the Author.

Many since then have sought to live by laws rather than be led by the Spirit of God. 2 Cor 3:6 We must remember some very important principles, that where there is no law, there is no sin (Rom 4:15; 5:13) and that where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty (2 Cor 3:17). If there is no prohibition of a certain form of worship, then there is the freedom to use it. Christianity can go into any culture in any time frame and teach the principles without imposing a specific form. The form can be adapted to that culture.

Some of the arguments on both sides of the aisle do not consider these principles, both trying to get the other to accede to their laws.

Reasons for a lack of understanding:

1. Lack of love. 1 Tim 1:5
2. Lack of desire to do the Word. John 7:17
3. Looking for verses to prove one's position rather than trying to consider all the verses.

B. Lack of love for fellow Christians.

We are more interested in who is right rather than what is right. This makes us more interested in the messenger of truth than in the truth itself. The Truth is found in the person of Jesus Christ (John 14:6) whose words became the standard for sound doctrine (1 Tim 6:3).

On both the Charismatic side and the non-charismatic side the opposition to one another often runs from mere tolerance to outright disgust and hatred. Both groups often think that the other side is lost, yet the Bible says "whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16)." "Whosoever" is not a difficult word to understand. Salvation is based in belief in the Son's work on the cross and resurrection (1Cor 15:1-3). The "whosoever" are on both sides of the aisle.

Some stand in fear of the others, thinking they are involved in false doctrine and avoiding them, often because of the forms of worship that are chosen.

How are we going to answer Jesus' questions, "do you love Me? (John 21:15-17)" when we are not willing to love those He paid for in the Body? Since Jesus is and always has been God, to love God, the same as loving Jesus, one must love one another. 1 John 2:9-11; 4:19-21

Our love for one another is the greatest evangelistic tool given to men. (John 13:34-35). We must consider the cost of the battles within the church to the

unsaved who look at Christians fighting with one another (Gal 5:14-15) instead of serving one another (Gal 5:13) and do not want any part of this “religion.”

We must learn to treat one another the way we would want to be treated (Matt 7:12). I have found that when I have been wrong my desire is for others to treat me with grace until I could get straightened out. I also want acceptance when changes are made. Can't we do these simple things for one another.

A simple consistent test might help us greatly. If we would take the qualities of love found in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, replace the word “love” with our own name and then ask “true or false” we might get some important insights into our own nature. Do we display these qualities to Christians we don't agree with?

3. The Solution:

A. Finding the truth.

1. That which is of the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit's role is to reveal the Son, not Himself (John 15:26-27; 16:12-15). Often more focus is put on the “manifestation” of the Spirit than the content of the words spoken. Paul in 1 Corinthians 14:14-19 points out the importance of the content.

It is clear that the abiding manifestation of the Spirit is found in fruit produced through the believer (Gal 5:22-23; John 15:1-11). This spiritual fruit reveals The Son and is done in love.

John 15:26-27

26 "When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me, 27 and you will testify also, because you have been with Me from the beginning.

John 16:12-15

12 "I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 13 "But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. 14 "He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you.

2. What the Bible says.

The BIBLICAL Gift of Tongues was given to certain individuals so that they could speak a human language that they had not academically learned. It is better referred to as the Gift of Languages. Acts 2:6,8

Acts 2:4-12

4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance. 5 Now there were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men from every nation under heaven. 6 And when this sound occurred, the crowd came together, and were bewildered because each one of them was hearing them speak in his own language. 7 They were amazed and astonished, saying, " Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans? 8 "And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born? 9 "Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, 11 Cretans and Arabs--we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God."

The gift was a gift of speaking a different language not in hearing one. Spiritual Gifts are given to believers, not to unbelievers.

B. Understanding each other.

The main problem arises today in trying to consider if the utterings that are called the "Gift of Tongues" are indeed the Biblical gift. What is clearly described in the Bible is communication in a human language that one had not been taught. What is today called the "gift of tongues" never existed in the first century. Those who are uncomfortable with this modern day "gift of tongues" somehow make the mistake of trying to prove that it disappeared in the first century. Why bother when it did not exist? If they think it is still around, or that someone says it is, it becomes an emotional issue with them.

We must be very careful not to confuse the Biblical Gift of Languages with the modern-day phenomena called the "gift of tongues."

Was the Biblical Gift of Languages ever a requirement for salvation? No. cf Acts 16:31 cf Eph 2:8-9; John 3:16 (We must stand against "doctrine" that says it is Gal 1:6-8) The book of Acts describes what happened to some when they accepted Jesus Christ as their savior. It does not prescribe it for all.

Was it for every believer? No. 1 Cor 12:30

What about the Christian brother or sister of today who "speaks in tongues?" If it is not a true language then it is not the Biblical Gift of Languages (tongues).

Are they to be condemned? No. Rom 8:1, 35-39 (If God does not what gives us the right?)

Are they to be loved? Without question. 1 John 4:18

Are they to be feared? No. 1 John 4:18

Many times this subject is taught from an attitude of fear, hatred, or arrogance. This tells us that there will be some inherent flaws. The goal of any Biblical instruction must be "love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. For some men, straying from these things have turned aside to fruitless discussion, wanting to be teachers of the Law, even though they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions." 1 Tim 1:5-7

The last place that we would want to find ourselves is "fighting against God," because we have taken a Pharisaic, self-righteous stand. If you love them as God does, then condemnation will not occur even though you do not agree with their actions. They are not any less a brother or sister in Christ than the one who is involved in works of the flesh. Acts 5:39; Gal 5:19-21

If a person thinks that unintelligible utterings are a sign of spirituality then it seems that they have been misguided and should be treated as a weaker brother, not in self-righteous condemnation. Self-righteousness is frequently on both sides of this matter. Our tendency as human beings is to rationalize our faults and treat graciously those who have faults similar to ours. But if another's faults are different we get self-righteous. Sounds a lot like the twelve disciples to me! The real "fruit of the Spirit" can deal graciously with the faults of another. Gal 5:22-23

What about their emotionalism? Emotionalism is defined by Webster's dictionary as (1) emotional character (2) the tendency to be emotional (3) display of emotion. We usually define it as "improper emotion, or when emotions take control of the soul." To remove "emotionalism" in accordance with Webster's definition then would be to remove all emotion. We would then become Stoics or Gnostics. But we reserve to ourselves great emotion when it comes to sporting events, a newborn child, a new "thing" we have bought, entertainment, things of this world. How have we come to think that we cannot have great positive emotions that are expressed toward God? That somehow those are not valid or even sinful? That they are permissible in heaven or in the Millennial Kingdom but not in the Spiritual Kingdom (Col 1:13-14) that is already present? Joy is clearly a "fruit of the Spirit." Who are we to tell a person how much joy they can have or how it can be expressed (Gal 5:1)

We are warned to "beware of the leaven of the Pharisees" (Matt 16:6-12) but we are never warned about becoming too joyous over our heavenly Father and His Son.

Have you ever been so afraid that you could not talk? Or so angry? But you tried, and words got tangled together and did not come out clearly? How about being so happy that you could not talk or so broken or humbled that you could not talk or pray? Do you know anyone that has? Because of what has been

promoted in this country and around the world as the "gift of tongues" one could easily think they had been given the "gift," if they opened their mouth and unintelligible sounds came out and especially if they had been encouraged to seek it. The emotional release then could easily come to be diligently sought more than the One Who Comforts. In this it is not good. Paul indicates that spiritual gifts helped get people out of idolatry, so obviously spiritual gifts should not lead us into idolatry, i.e. worship of the Gift and not the Giver. (1 Cor 12:1-2)

Some people want the "gift" so bad that they cause their tongue to "trip" and when it does they think they have got it. This is not the Biblical Gift of Languages.

Are these mistakes any more devastating to the Body of Christ than the materialism and apathy that has crept into the church? cf Rev 3:14-20 Are they any more devastating than attitudes of elitism that harm unity in the Body of Christ?

Has The Evil One used this so-called modern day "gift of tongues" to his advantage? Without question. Many who claim this is a Charisma Gift from God have tried to force it on everyone else. This has led to a reaction from those who do not accept it instead of a response out of love. This reaction is basically driven by fear and sadly at times it is driven by hate from those who have had a bad experience with those of the "Charismatic" movement. They wonder, "what if it is from God and I don't have it?" Then they think, "but I don't want it." The mistake is when a "Theology" is developed that is fear and hate driven or done out of arrogance. God did not list "temporary" gifts other than Knowledge and Prophecy and probably Wisdom and Distinguishing of Spirits because they are their counterpart gifts (1 Cor 12:8-11). Many of the gifts that are held to be permanent are found in lists that include the so-called "temporaries" (See 1 Cor 12:8-10, 28, 29-30; Eph 4:11; Rom 12:6-8; 1 Pet 4:11 for all the lists of gifts found in the New Testament). Distinctions beyond the four just mentioned are purely based on man's understanding of Scripture, which is subject to error, and not based on direct statement. As history attests, it is very easy to read our preferences into God's Word to try and prove a presupposition that we have. This is eisegesis (reading into) instead of exegesis (reading out of). Many in history have been guilty of projecting their own sins onto someone else such as when the Pharisees accused Jesus of blasphemy. We must always be careful of reading into others what we see in ourselves.

Has the Evil One taken advantage of this emotional state? Without question. Some have been led into false doctrine-such as, you can become god. Some who believe that they are the sole source of truth have already claimed that position. John 8:44 cf 10:34 cf Psalms 82:6

It is also clear that God can and does heal today. It is clear that He can answer prayers and that He heals people (James 5:13-16). The Biblical Gift of Healing

did not require faith on the part of the recipient even though many times it was present (Acts 3:1-10). It was a ministry to others and like any other gift, it did not require the recipient of the ministry to have faith. The Biblical Gift of Healing when used gave total and immediate restoration to the individual. When someone prays for someone else and they are healed-God did it. That person may even call it a gift in that they were able to participate in it, but if it cannot be done like Peter and John did it, then it is not the Gift of Healing referred to in the Scripture. We are not to get into "useless wranglings over words." (1 Tim 6:3-5) Throughout history, there have been counterfeits. When we study the real thing, we can see the counterfeits.

C. Displaying grace.

The love of Christ is to control us. 2 Cor 5:13-14

God looks on the hearts.

4. The Real Issues:

We are told to not make an issue out of spiritual gifts. 1 Cor 12:25

The real issue is love and edification of the Church. 1 Cor 13:4-8a; 14:1,5,12,17; Rom 14:19

5. For those who are "Charismatic."

The issue here is also love for non-charismatics.

Both sides of this issue tend to function in arrogance-thinking they are right and the other side is heretical.

Both sides might think of the other as not being saved, yet salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ (Eph 2:8-9).

Both sides tend to stand in condemnation of the other without giving the other the benefit of the doubt.

We must learn to "accept one another as Christ accepted us to the glory of God (Rom 15:7)."