

QUESTIONABLE PRESUPPOSITIONS IN JOHN MACARTHUR'S CESSATIONISM - MacArthur is emphatic that the *gift of tongues* is permanently defined in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost in **Acts chapter two**. His words couldn't be clearer - "...the only detailed description of the true gift of tongues in Scripture is found in Acts 2 on the day of Pentecost - a text that clearly identifies this gift as the supernatural ability to speak genuine, meaningful, translatable languages. In Genesis 11, at the tower of Babel, the Lord had confused the languages of the world as a judgment on humanity. In contrast, on the day of Pentecost, the curse of Babel was miraculously undone, demonstrating that the wonderful words of God, including the gospel of Jesus Christ, were to be taken throughout the whole world to those in every nation."

Justin Peters takes the exact same track. Repeatedly, in his "Strange Fire" teaching sessions he makes his position clear by identifying the *gift of tongues* with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Acts chapter two. In fact, virtually *all* cessationists make the same assumption, and for good reasons. They *need* to define the *gift of tongues* by **Acts 2** in order to make the rest of their arguments work.

In spite of all their arguments there is one stubborn fact that is unwilling to budge. There is not *one solitary reference to the "gift of tongues" in the book of Acts*. That phrase is *never* used, though speaking in tongues is mentioned on several occasions. *Why is that?* Add to this the fact that the New Testament *does* designate that term very specifically and deliberately in *other* places means its *omission* from the book of Acts isn't an oversight. Luke (the author of Acts) traveled extensively with Paul and would have appreciated Paul's theology and teaching on the *gift of tongues* in the congregational life of the church. Remember, Luke wrote Book of Acts, according to most scholars, about five or ten years *after* Paul wrote First Corinthians. Luke *knew* Paul's theology of the *gift* of tongues. And he knew that *wasn't* what he was observing when the Holy Spirit was poured out in the book of Acts. It is my argument that the *gift of tongues* is the specific term *exclusively used* to describe the *public speaking in tongues - always with the gift of interpretation - in the worship gathering of the local church*.

- 1) **WE KNOW FOR CERTAIN THE GIFT OF TONGUES IN 1 CORINTHIANS IS TREATED AS DIFFERENT FROM THE OUTPOURING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN ACTS CHAPTER TWO - 1 Corinthians 14:26-28** - "What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up. [27] If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret. [28] But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God."

First, only two or three are to exercise the gift. In other words, unlike the recorded outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Act 2 where *everyone* spoke out, this is *not* to be the case with the gift of tongues in the worship gathering. Two or three is plenty, according to Paul.

Second, one person was to speak in tongues at a time. In Acts chapter two they all spoke at exactly the *same* time. There was no requirement to take turns. But in Paul's instruction for the *public gift of tongues* in the worship service, he strictly forbids everyone speaking out in tongues at the same time.

Third, and this is quite important, according to Paul, after one person spoke in tongues, either he or she or someone else was to exercise the *gift of interpretation*. In other words, even if "*two or three*" exercised the gift, they weren't to exercise that gift *back to back* without the *gift of interpretation* coming along in between.

Fourth, Paul insists that the gift of tongues be used in an *orderly* rather than random fashion - **1 Corinthians 12:40** - "But all things should be done decently and in order." In Acts 2 the outpouring of the Spirit had the appearance of randomness to the point that some of the onlookers who didn't know the languages spoken attributed the tongues to drunkenness.

- 2) **MACARTHUR WANTS TO USE 1 CORINTHIANS 12:29-30 TO CANCEL OUT THE INCLUSIVENESS OF THE SPIRIT'S BAPTISM IN ACTS 2 AND PAUL'S DESIRE FOR ALL THE BELIEVERS IN CORINTH TO SPEAK IN TONGUES IN 1 CORINTHIANS 14:5 - 1 Corinthians 12:29-30** - "Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? [30] Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?"

And the answer Paul expects from those rhetorical questions is obvious. "*No, Paul. Of course not everyone speaks in tongues in the sense of the GIFT of tongues in the congregational life of the church at worship with the accompanying gift of interpretation.*" This makes sense when we remember *all* of the instructions given by Paul in **1 Corinthians 12 through 14** have to do with worship of the congregation when the church comes together. The same could be said about his mention of *teachers* and *prophets*. The focus of his question is the congregational life of the local church.

The difference with the book of Acts is apparent. In every case where the Spirit is poured out *everyone in the group* speaks in tongues/and/or/prophesies - and all at the same time. But MacArthur *doesn't want* everyone speaking in tongues. In fact, he doesn't want *anyone* speaking in tongues. So MacArthur - and virtually *all* cessationists - takes Paul's question dealing with the *public gift of tongues* and pretends Paul is talking about the outpouring of the Spirit in Acts 2.

Another problem text for MacArthur and all cessationists is **1 Corinthians 14:5** - "*Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up.*"

Paul clearly says he wants *everyone* in the church at Corinth to speak in tongues. But **MacArthur** doesn't want everyone to speak in tongues. So what can he do? He uses those same verses we just studied in **1 Corinthians 12:28-29** to say, "*See, tongues isn't for everybody!*"

In fact, let me quote John MacArthur directly as he explains Paul's specific statement that he - the Apostle Paul - wanted *all the Christians at Corinth to speak in tongues in 1 Corinthians 14:5*: MacArthur says: "*Charismatics often point to 1 Corinthians 14:5 ["...I want you all to speak in tongues"] as a proof-text for their insistence that all Christians ought to practice glossolalia. In so doing, they fail to recognize that the apostle was not stating an actual possibility, but rather using hypothetical hyperbole*"(p.145). How convenient! Paul was exaggerating.

- 3) **MACARTHUR WANTS TO USE THE KNOWN LANGUAGES SPOKEN IN ACTS 2 TO DEFINE THE PUBLIC, CONGREGATIONAL GIFT OF TONGUES IN 1 CORINTHIANS** - I'm dealing with this point after showing how cessationists *always* equate the *outpouring of the Spirit in Acts 2* with the *gift of tongues in 1 Corinthians* for a specific reason. I'm following up on my point that it is this *first* faulty presumption that *leads to all the other cessationist conclusions*.

MacArthur fits this pattern with precision. Listen as he describes the *languages spoken* in Acts 2 and links this up with the *gift of tongues* in 1 Corinthians: "*But the only detailed description of the true gift of tongues in Scripture is found in Acts 2 (there's the foundational false presupposition) on the day of Pentecost - a text that clearly identifies this gift as the supernatural ability to speak genuine, meaningful, translatable languages.*" MacArthur continues: "*That the disciples spoke authentic languages is not only confirmed by the Greek word "tongues" ("glossa", a term that refers to human languages), but also by Luke's later use of the word "dialect" (6-7) and*

his inclusion of a list of the foreign languages that were spoken (9-11)."

Next, like *all* cessationists, MacArthur connects Acts 2 to 1 Corinthians: **"A simple word study effectively makes that point, since both passages (Acts 2 and 1 Corinthians) use the same terminology to describe the miraculous gift. In Acts, Luke used "laleo" ("to speak") in combination with "glossa" ("tongues") four times (Acts 2:4,11; 10:46; 19:6). In 1 Corinthians 12-14, Paul uses forms of that same combination thirteen times..."**

MacArthur's point is to discredit what he sees as *non-language tongues* in the gift of tongues exercised today. By linking Acts 2 - where we *know* tongues was recognized as *knowable languages* by many of the visiting bystanders - by linking this with 1 Corinthians (by saying the very same word for *"tongues"* is used in Acts 2 and 1 Corinthians - that is, *"languages"* - then his conclusion is what we see today of the gift of tongues is fake. That's the net effect of MacArthur's argument.

- a) **First, it is exegetically unwise to automatically assume that because the same word is used in two or three or four places that it means the same thing. Donald Carson deals with this in his excellent book "Exegetical Fallacies." He makes the point - these are my words, not a direct quote - that just because a given Biblical word occurring in different places has exactly the same root meaning doesn't mean the word means the same thing in different contexts.**

I know that's an involved concept. Let me give a ridiculously simple example. Look at these two Bible verses: **Acts 12:13** - "And when he knocked at the door of the gateway, a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer." Next, **John 10:9** - "I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture." The obviously same word is *"door."* And it's not only the same in our *English* translations. It's *exactly* the same word in the Greek. It's not just *similar* or of the same *family*. It's *exactly* the same Greek word - Greek letter for Greek letter - *"thoo-ra."* But while the *word* is exactly the same, the *meaning* isn't. Jesus isn't made of *wood*. There are some similar *concepts* in terms of an opening or way. But there are also *major differences in meaning* in spite of the fact that it is exactly the same *word*.

Carson's point is the meaning of a term needs the *setting of the context* in order to give its accurate sense. Just because MacArthur proves the repetition of the same *word* doesn't establish the same *meaning*. I pointed out the many, many differences in Paul's discussion of the *gift of tongues* and the *outpouring of the Spirit in Acts 2*.

- b) **Having said all that, I have no problem with MacArthur pointing out his own view that tongues should always be an actual language. Let's assume he's right. That still doesn't take us very far. Linguists estimate (they don't actually know with certainty) that there are presently about 7000 languages in the world today. That's today. How many tens of thousands of languages have come and disappeared no one knows. Of these languages, many hundreds have no capacity to be known beyond the handful of people who speak them. Outside of a very small handful of isolated peoples, they are, to use MacArthur's words describing charismatics, "jibberish."**

Someone might respond - I think MacArthur would - that the purpose of the *sign gift of tongues* is to *validate the presence of God in a visible, obvious way*. Therefore, God would use a language *known* to someone in the setting where the gift was used so the sign would be *verifiable*. If that is what the gift of tongues is all about in 1 Corinthians it is strange to me that whatever language was spoken, the only hope for the congregation getting the meaning of what was said was a *supernatural miracle of interpretation*. Why wouldn't God just pick a language already known to someone in the assembly. Wouldn't the *sign impact* be greater that way? Clearly, God doesn't consult regarding His gifts. Then and now the reminder from God's Word is the same - **1 Corinthians 12:11** - "All of these (the gifts) are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills."