

**THE PERSON AND WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT (continued) - "Is Speaking In Tongues for the Church Today?"**

Many Christians believe that the use of "tongues" disappeared early in the history of the Christian Church. They believe God never intended that speaking in tongues (*personal* tongues), or the *congregational* tongues (the *gift* of tongues) would be an ongoing part of spiritual life. The reasons they give for their position are basically as follows:

- 1) **TONGUES WERE A SUPERNATURAL SIGN, PRIMARILY TO UNBELIEVING JEWS** - Great stress is put on Paul's words in **1 Corinthians 14:21-22**, where Paul quotes from **Isaiah 28:11-12**. Let's look at those words:

**1 Corinthians 14:21-22** - "In the Law it is written, "By people of strange tongues and by the lips of foreigners will I speak to this people, and even then they will not listen to me, says the Lord." [22] Thus tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers, while prophecy is a sign not for unbelievers but for believers."

**Isaiah 28:11-12** - "For by people of strange lips and with a foreign tongue the Lord will speak to this people, [12] to whom he has said, 'This is rest; give rest to the weary; and this is repose' yet they would not hear."

*Isaiah* writes of God's judgment coming on Israel because they refused to listen to Him. The people of *unknown speech* were the foreign armies of the Assyrians. Israel would not be brought to submit to God even though her destruction was fast approaching. *Paul* argues that in the same way that the strange words of another people would not benefit the unbelieving Jews, the *uninterpreted* utterances of the Corinthian congregation would be of no use to the unbeliever in their midst. **Indeed, tongues, uninterpreted in the church, encourages a response on the part of unbelievers that only hardens them in their unbelief and judgement - 1 Corinthians 14:23** - "If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your minds?"

This is such a misunderstood point. The *only* time tongues are referred to as a "*sign*" in the New Testament is as a *negative sign of judgement*. This is the whole point of Paul's words. If you want to interpret Paul's difficult words in their context he teaches this sign of *uninterpreted tongues* still functions this way in the church.

- 2) **TONGUES WERE A MIRACLE GIFT DESIGNED TO ACCOMPANY APOSTOLIC MINISTRY. WHEN THE APOSTLES DIED OFF, SO DID THE TONGUES** - The text usually used here is **2 Corinthians 12:12** - "The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works." See also **Hebrews 2:3-4** - "...how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, [4] while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will."

There is certainly no argument with the fact that these supernatural giftings were part of the Apostle's office. What is lacking in this argument is a Scriptural statement to the effect that these signs were *only* for Apostles. And it is the *apostolic distinctive that is necessary for this argument to work*. There are serious problems along this line. Which Apostles do we mean? The first twelve? What about other texts that list many other Apostles? What about *Philip* (**Acts 8:13**)? What about *James, the Lord's brother* (**Galatians 1:19**)? What about *Barnabas* (**Acts 14:14**)? *Silas* (**1 Thessalonians 1:1, 2:6**)? *Timothy* (**1 Thessalonians 1:1, 2:6-7**)? How about *Andronicus* (**Romans 16:7**)? *Junias* (**Romans 16:7**)? And a host of others?

And what shall we do with texts that specifically link supernatural working (including, very specifically, tongues) with any and all who believe - **Mark 16:17-18** - "And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; [18] they will pick up serpents with their hands; and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover." Also, the fact that Paul writes to the church at Corinth, *correcting*, but not *disallowing* the gift of tongues, shows that tongues were used by far more than just the Apostles.

- 3) **TONGUES WERE USEFUL UNTIL THE FINAL REVELATION CONTAINED IN SCRIPTURE WAS COMPLETED** - The text frequently cited is **1 Corinthians 13:8-13** - "[8] Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. [9] For we know in part and we prophesy in part, [10] but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. [11] When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. [12] For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. [13] So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love."

Certainly, Paul does state that there will be a time when tongues and prophecy will no longer be needed. The question is *when* is that time. The argument is that tongues and prophecy communicated some knowledge of God to His church. But with the completion of Scripture this kind of communication is no longer necessary. Central to this argument is the belief that the "*perfect*" spoken of in verse 10 is the completed New Testament Scripture.

This, however, hardly fits the context of the passage. Paul's whole point in **verse 12** is that presently, everything we know about God comes in a *mediated form*. We simply do not have direct, visual contact with God. The day will come, however, when we will know *directly* - "face to face" (**verse 12**).

Every major *non-pentecostal* commentary in print recognizes Paul to be talking about the *second coming of Christ*. Far from proving that the gifts of the Spirit have *ceased*, this passage teaches their usefulness continues right up to the time of Jesus' second coming. Another very important, and frequently overlooked reference along these lines is **1 Corinthians 1:4-8** - "**I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, [5] that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge— [6] even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you— [7] so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, [8] who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.**"

- 4) **THE SILENCE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT AFTER PAUL'S WORDS TO CORINTH PROVES THAT TONGUES HAD CEASED EARLY IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH** - This is the dominant argument used in John MacArthur's church policy statement. The danger in this kind of argument is that the same can be said about *the Lord's Supper* (it's not mentioned after 1 Corinthians either).

Also, this argument can easily cut its own throat. It is generally agreed that **2 Thessalonians** was written long before **1 Corinthians**. Yet there is no mention of any of the "*sign gifts*" of the Spirit in 2 Thessalonians. *I suppose one might have concluded that the use of supernatural gifts had died out even earlier!* Yet, Paul's letter to the Corinthians proves otherwise. Arguments from silence are usually not effective, and, unless motivated by personal bias, are usually not used.