

WHAT ABOUT TONGUES, part 2
1 Cor. 14:1-25

Imagine a scene with me as you go & a visit a certain church for the first time in your city:

You arrive on time and enter, only to discover that all the wealthy people came an hour earlier and have been feasting away and stuffing their faces. – Some are even drunk, at church! – And there's no food left for you, or for the poor people just arriving. – They sit in another section of the house, separate from the plush room where the rich are seated.

Then to your dismay, someone stands up and announced that they would be taking the Lord's Supper together, in such a state!...

You look around, and you recognise people who are known in town to be sexually immoral, still, yet they are taking Communion as if all is well. – You turn & see people whom you've heard are busy suing each other in court. – You see married people who divorce their spouses. – You see others who were out last night dining at the local idol temple. – You see women with shaved heads, in defiance of men.

Where are you? – You are at Corinth.

After Communion, the rest of the service begins. – People are speaking in foreign languages all at once, babbling away. – Others are trying to interpret, while others are giving prophecies. – Some are singing, others are praying, and some are just confused, including you.

You can see why Paul said: 11:17... This was the church service from Hell. – Here was the church where they might as well have prayed to Satan, 'May your will be done on earth as it is in Hades'.

1 Cor. is all about confronting worldliness with the life-changing power of the gospel. – See, the church had become like the world.

There was too much of Corinth in the church, and too little of the true Church in Corinth.

+ Realise that there was nothing uniquely Christian about ecstatic speech and strange utterances: Many of the pagan Greco-Roman religions, including those active at Corinth, also had bizarre tongues. – Just as recent studies have shown was common in Zulu tradition as well, and in other traditional cultures.

In the ancient world, worshippers of a god or goddess would drink & dance themselves into a frenzy until they went unconscious. See, this was the state in which you communed most with the gods, (or the ancestors as would be said in Africa). –

At such times of drunkenness, they believed their spirits left their bodies and had direct fellowship with the divine (or spirit world). – When such worship reached a climax, their ecstatic tongues would prove they were speaking the very language of the gods!

Sounds just like Corinth. – And just like many churches today.

~ The wife of John Wimber, founder of the Vineyard movement, describes the 'watershed event' that launched her husband into a new stage of charismatic power. – They had a guest speaker who invited everyone under the age of 25 to come forward and 'receive the Holy Spirit'. – She writes:

One fellow, Tim, started bouncing. His arms flung out and he fell over, but one of his hands accidentally hit a mike stand and he took it down with him. He was tangled up in the cord with the mike next to his mouth. Then he began speaking in tongues, so the sound went throughout the gymnasium (where we were meeting) ... The majority of the young people were shaking and falling over. At one point, it looked like a battlefield scene – bodies everywhere, people weeping, wailing, and speaking in tongues, much shouting and loud behaviour. And there was Tim, in the middle of it all, babbling into the microphone.

The Corinthian church has never had more imitators & admirers than today. – All the more reason for us to be studying this crucial epistle. – What a great time in history to be alive and to rediscover the stunning relevance & clarity of God's Word!

→NB, many of us may already be convinced that tongues are not for today. – But *could you explain it to others from 1 Cor. 14, the most tongues-filled chapter in the whole Bible?!...*

Stand, Read (vv. 1-25) & Pray:

Give title...

Recall theme in v. 20...

REVIEW from part 1 last week...

***FIVE QUESTIONS about the gift of tongues – so that we are not childish but mature & loving as we edify one another & give a credible witness to the world:**

1. WHAT is the Gift of Tongues?

In a word, tongues = languages. – If our English Bibles had translated it that way, it would have helped. – Every time you see "tongues" in the Bible, insert "languages".

Answer, in all 4 places that tongues appears in the NT – 3x in Acts & here in 1 Cor. 14. – BTW, always same Grk word for "tongues" (*glossolalia!*), and "speaking" (*laleo*), both in Acts & 1 Cor.. – What is tongues? – Answer:

Tongues is a miraculous ability to speak previously unlearned foreign languages as a sign to the Jews [authenticating the apostolic era and God's welcoming of Gentiles into the Church].

2. WHY are tongues inferior to hearing God's Word? (in church)

Simplified & shortened from last week...

TWO REASONS why tongues are inferior to prophecy:

a. vv. 2-19, B/c it requires interpreting

v. 2a – I.e., ‘Only God speaks every human language, so unless there is an interpreter, God & you are the only ones getting anything out of your tongues-speaking.’

Just like would’ve happened at Pentecost, EXCEPT that, in the perfect plan of God, that was the exact time when at least 15 different languages would be assembled in Jerusalem for that festival! – But in Corinth that was not the case, so the gift of tongues required an interpreter.

Pentecost was unique, a once-off, once-for-all event in the great history of our salvation and the birth of Christ’s Church. – On that day the Spirit came, and He has been with us ever since. –

BUT in a church like Corinth, after Pentecost, the gift of tongues had to have its *twin sister* along – the gift of interpretation. (Otherwise, as we’ll see in v. 28, the tongues speaker was to remain silent & only meditate privately.)

Picking up where we left off:

v. 13 – While praying in tongues to God, this must mean that either: (a) he should pray that he can interpret (which seems atypical, in light of vv 27-28) –

OR (b) pray that his tongues would ‘generate an interpretation’, that ‘someone would interpret’, since that was always the goal in the first place. (Likewise, v. 5d could refer to a separate person interpreting, after the tongues-speaker.)

v. 14 – I.e., ‘My spirit, my inner person, is engaged in using my spiritual gift of languages. YET without an interpretation, my mind isn’t helping anyone – it bears not fruit in your life and profits nobody.’ – B/c whole context here is NOT about fruit in your own life, but fruit in others, by using your gift to profit/edify/benefit others.

The vss to follow will confirm this interpretation:

v. 15 – I.e., ‘I am resolved to use both my gift of tongues AND my gift of interpretation. I will not separate the twin sisters, the dynamic duo of miracles – a gifted tongue, and a gifted interpretation.’

vv. 16-17 – Instead of saying, ‘Amen’, all they can say is, ‘Huh??’. –“Ungifted” from Grk word *idiotes*! – Instead of ministering to them, all you are doing is making them feel like an ‘idiot’, or think that you’re one.

+ This was why the Protestant Reformers stopped having church in Latin. – It’s why the Wycliffes & Tyndales & Luther’s gave their lives to translating the Bible in the language of the people – so that others could use their minds & understand and: v. 17c, be “edified”!

→Should we ever say ‘Amen’ in church, ‘Truly, So let it be!’? – Ever wondered where that custom has come from? – This was normal for the early church – esp. in response to a prayer. –

NB, saying 'Amen' starts with having an 'Amen attitude': Christians are truth-loving people. – We're eager to affirm & endorse God's truth whenever we hear it spoken, prayed, or sung! It honours God, and also encourages those who spoke it.

Reread v. 16b...

v. 18 – Wow, even more than the tongue-happy Corinthians? – Paul knew how to put them in their place! – Though the NT never once shows Paul doing this, we have to conclude from here and other texts that Paul's tongues was another miracle that validated his apostleship. – Just like at Pentecost, it gave him a platform for preaching the gospel to other languages (Cf. implicit in Rom. 15:18-19; 2 Cor. 2:12)

I.e., 'I'm not for a minute doubting the genuineness of the spiritual gift of tongues in the early church. But I am ranking it much lower on my list of priorities when we gather for corporate worship.'

v. 19 – Here's how important tongues was to Paul: Five words of teaching the Corinthians in their language was 9,995 times better than something in tongues!

NB, again "with my mind" = interpreting, or explaining God's message, in an intelligible & understandable way.

~ As one of you told me last Sunday after the sermon: 'Ah, now I get it: it's not about the tongues, it's about the explanation. It's the explanation that matters, that's Paul's whole point!'

[Summ.] Paul's point: Uninterpreted tongues don't serve the great purpose for which spiritual gifts were given: Edification! – It's the top item on Christ's agenda as Head of His body:

vv. 3, 4, 5d, 6, 12, 14, 17, 19 – And as we're going to see: vv. 26, 31...

→TEN TIMES in one chp. Paul hammers home this goal of all spiritual gifts: NOT self-benefit, but church-benefit.

Beloved, every Sunday as you leave church and walk to your car..., ask yourself: 'WHO ELSE has benefitted from me being here besides me? How were others built up by my being here – by my participation in corporate worship – in singing the Word, praying it, hearing it read & taught, seeing it at the Lord's Table? By my fellowship with others b/f & after church?'

Do I just come to church for a personal take-away, or do I also come to give-away? – Am I more of a taker, or a giver in this body?...

Reread: v. 12...

2nd reason why tongues *should* have an inferiority complex:

b. vv. 21-23, Because tongues were a *sign for unbelieving Jews*.

Just like at Pentecost, when Peter explained the miracle of languages that had just happened: Acts 2:16-21...

All 3x in Acts that tongues are mentioned, Jews were present. – And so here. –

Remember, Acts 18, Corinth had a synagogue, Paul always started there – both Jews & Greeks got saved, and a church was born:

v. 21 – Qtg from Isaiah about the Assyrians - NB, these “strange tongues” were those of Assyrians, an actual, known language. – As a sign of God’s judgment on Israel, by bringing in foreign oppressors whose language they would not know. –

+ Like waking up at night and hearing a foreign language outside *your* window in Joburg. – Probably NOT a good sign!...

~ Gary Gilley: *God had warned Israel on several occasions (Isaiah 28:11,12; 33:19; Deuteronomy 28:49,50; Jeremiah 5:15) that when they found themselves invaded and surrounded by those speaking in languages they did not understand, it was a sign to them that they were being judged by God for their disobedience.*

When, at Pentecost and in the early years of the church, tongues were spoken in the presence of Jews, it would be a sign to them that judgment was coming because of their rejection of the Messiah. That judgment came with the destruction of Jerusalem, the temple, and the scattering of the Jewish people in AD 70.

At that point, the purpose of tongues (as a sign to disobedient Israel) had been fulfilled, and therefore, tongues ceased. This was the primary purpose for tongues.

v. 22a – Hearing tongues, other languages spoken church, should’ve caused Jews at Corinth (or anywhere) to say, ‘Uh oh, God said He would do this long ago. He’s judging us through Gentiles. He’s making us jealous by the grace He is now showing to non-Jews. The wall between us & them has come down. God is welcoming them in to His Church through Christ’s New Covenant. We don’t want to be left out!’

I.e., tongues was a sign of God’s blessing AND His curse: His curse upon the disobedient Jews, but His blessing now for the whole world, for any sinner who would turn to Christ, Gentile or Jew!

→Give GOSPEL here: This sign still speaks today, that miracle points to a salvation still available, still on offer to all!...

→Do you realise?: Tongues has NO purpose when only believers are together, or if no Jews are present. – Next time, in vv 26ff, we’ll get a glimpse of how tongues was *supposed* to function, of how God would’ve used this miraculous gift for His glory in the early church....

v. 23 – It will bedlam, chaos, anarchy! – And the world will love it – just the proof they wanted that we’re a bunch of lunatics and madmen! –

Charismatic chaos in the church discredits the gospel and ruins our witness to a lost world.

NB the irony here between vv. 22 & 23: tongues were for evangelising lost Jews, as seen clearly in Acts, as it drew a crowd & created a platform for preaching the gospel. –

YET when tongues are uninterpreted or disorderly, it only hinders our evangelism, it *destroys our platform*.

+ As we'll see in my seminar during Bible Hour: Pentecostals point to the Azusa Street 'Revival' in 1906 as their birthplace. – Yet here's how a major newspaper reported those events: [They] "practice the most fanatical rites, preach the wildest theories and work themselves into a state of made excitement in their peculiar zeal".

Reread: v. 23..., KJV, "ye are mad!"

+ We'll also see in the seminar how Charles Parham, the founder, first believed & taught that these tongues would be actual languages, and that people would then go as missionaries to the ends of the earth and not have to spend years studying the language anymore! –

One guy went to India and tried it, but guess what?.... Then he tried again in Hong Kong, but started first by studying the language. Others were not so resilient and just returned home as defeated failures.

More fuel for a mocking world. – More kindling for the fires of the scoffers. – More obstacles to keep us from truly witnessing to them and winning them to Christ.

3. What about TWO OTHER COMMON TEXTS used to support modern tongues-speaking?

1 Cor. 13:1 – I.e., "languages of men" – Zulu, Chinese, etc. – "and of angels" – So what language do angels speak? – How dare I impose my own experience of ecstatic utterance and impose that on Scripture? – Scripture must always be my starting point & final authority, not my experience.

WHAT language do the angels always speak in Scripture? – Human language, understandable, coherent, known languages. – It's very contrived to read anything else into this verse.

Plus, vv. 1-3 are filled with hypothetical, exaggerated language: vv. 2-3... Paul is not giving actual testimony to him speaking some 'heavenly language'.

Rom. 8:26 – But lit., these groanings are "unspeakable," "unutterable." – Whatever this verse refers to, it cannot refer to anything uttered, e.g., *tongues-speaking!*

4. Should we expect, or seek, the gift of tongues today?

Are we at risk of violating v. 39b?...

Are we in danger of this? – Never.

These words were written in AD 55 to a group of people who had received this gift from the Holy Spirit to authenticate Paul's apostolic ministry and as a sign to the Jews of God's coming judgment. – It was a valid, biblical gift at the time, so it could not be banned. – Apparently some at Corinth were tempted to ban these uninterpreted, attention-seeking outbursts at Corinth during church.

But Paul says: v. 39b...

Because it was a valid gift at that time. – Remember our definition of tongues?: *Tongues is a miraculous ability to speak previously unlearned foreign languages as a sign to the Jews [authenticating the apostolic era and God’s welcoming of Gentiles into the Church].*

SO WHAT ABOUT TODAY? – *Should we seek tongues or expect it?...*

Answer: 1 Cor. was Paul’s first epistle. – He wrote 12 others, and didn’t even mention tongues once. – Peter never mentions it; nor James, nor John, nor Jude.

After the NT era, the record of church history shows a glaring silence about tongues. – It was gone. – Tongues stopped. – Look back at Paul’s prediction in 1 Cor. 13:8b...

Chrysostom and Augustine—the greatest theologians of the eastern and western churches—considered tongues obsolete. – In fact (as we’ll see in Bible Hour), during the first five hundred years of the church, the only people who claimed to have spoken in tongues were followers of Montanus, who was branded as a heretic. (MacArthur)

From all I’ve studied & seen, I do not believe there is anything miraculous about today’s tongues. – I believe it is a counterfeit of the real thing.

I don’t know of one reliably documented case of cross-cultural missionaries not having to do language training but instead getting the gift of tongues instantaneously so that they could reach the people.

+ As we’ll see in a Bible Hour: The story of the Pentecostal-Charismatic Movmt is a bizarre story, full of some good and much harm. – But what would the story be without these false tongues, this counterfeit gift that in no way fits the biblical description? –

Take away tongues, and the past century of Pentecostal-Charismatic history would unravel. – Take away tongues, and what would be left? – Take away tongues, and how many so-called revivals would’ve never happened? – How many false prophets would’ve never had a hearing? – How many televangelists would’ve never got their show off the ground, if you just took away these false tongues?...

Take away tongues, and how many churches would’ve never been started, denominations never formed, movements never launched?

Ah, the power of one good lie. – The power of one myth, told & retold, over & over again, until we all start to believe it. – The deadly power of deception.

YET the liberating power of God’s truth! – Jn. 8:32, “You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free!” – Ps. 119, “I shall run in the way of Your commandments.... Your commandments are exceedingly broad...a lamp to my feet, light to my path!” – Jam. 2, the “Law of liberty”!

~ One former charismatic pastor’s testimony: *I loved speaking in tongues. And in the face of mounting evidence which contradicted the validity of my own experiences, I did everything in my power to hold fast. I searched the Scriptures. I prayed. I practiced these gifts more than many. But eventually, the gap between my experience of these gifts and*

their portrayal in Scripture stretched my sense of integrity to the limits. (Babcox, qtd. in Geisler, *Signs & Wonders*)

Time ran out...

5. HOW THEN do we explain modern tongues? – What IS actually happening, especially when it seems to come from some who are very devout, sincere & godly (more than some of us!)?

Answer: For next Sunday!...