

THE GIFT OF - T O N G U E S - A SIGN GIFT

TEXT: Acts 2,10,19; I Cor. 12-14

EXPLANATION

I. WHAT WAS INVOLVED IN THIS GIFT

- A. The gift of tongues was the God-given ability to speak in another known and discernable language.
- B. The word "tongue" () which is used in the book of Acts, as well as I Corinthians, has reference to spoken languages and cannot be applied to some gibberish or ecstatic expressions which are not discernible language.
- C. We should note that the word "unknown which is italicized in the scriptures does not appear in the original language. The word has been inserted by the translators since they did not know which language was implied in the context. Note I Cor. 14:2,4,13,14,19).

EXERCISE

II. HOW THIS GIFT WAS EXERCISED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

- A. This gift was used to introduce the beginning of the church program and to authenticate the gospel ministry and its messengers.
 - 1. To inaugurate the church program on the Day of Pentecost the disciples received the Holy Spirit as the Lord had promised (Jn. 14:16,17; Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8:) and they spoke with other tongues (Acts 2:1-5).

2. Notice the Jews who were assembled from every nation under heaven heard them speak in their own language and these languages are specifically named (Acts 2:5-13). Note 2:6,8.
3. This leads to a question which needs to be answered. Why was the gift of tongues exercised on the Day of Pentecost and on only two other occasions? Notice according to the Scriptures it was prophesied that God would speak to Israel (the Jews) with other tongues (known languages) and yet they would not hear. Tongues-speaking then was a warning of judgment because of their unbelief:
 - a. Notice this is what the law had prophesied (Deut.28:49).
 - b. This is what Isaiah had prophesied (Isa. 28:11; 33:19) and also Jeremiah (Jer. 3:15).
 - c. Notice this is the purpose which Paul declared the gift of tongues served (I Cor. 14:21,22).
 - d. On the Day of Pentecost when tongues were spoken it was a sign to the unbelieving Jews of judgment to come for their unbelief. This judgment fell in 70 A.D. when Jerusalem was destroyed and the Jews dispersed.
4. Notice since tongues-speaking was a sign to the unbelieving Jews when this gift was exercised on the two other occasions (Acts 10,19) Jews were present and it served the same purpose. Note Acts 10: 44,45.
5. Some have cited Acts 19: 1-7 to prove that one can be saved and not have the baptism of the Holy Spirit. But these Jews in answering Paul's question indicated that they had not been present on the Day of Pentecost and had not been baptized into the body of Christ and become a part of the church program. These Jews were disciples of John the Baptist like Apollos (Acts 18:24-28:) and knew nothing of the new church program which God had

begun.

6. We should note that tongues-speaking was not an evidence of individuals who were saved and had received the Holy Spirit. Many were saved and received the Holy Spirit but they did not exercise the gift of tongues-speaking (Acts 8:12, 36-38).

B. This gift was exercised in the Corinthian church in a carnal and immature manner.

1. The Corinthian believers elevated this gift above the other gifts and this no doubt engendered spiritual pride and divisions (I Cor. 14:26).
2. The Corinthian believers failed to understand that the spiritual gifts were given to "edify" or build up other believers in the body of Christ and this requires love and consideration of others. The apostle Paul pointed out that spiritual gifts without love for others are useless (I Cor. 12:31; 13:1-3).

EXTENT

III. HOW THIS GIFT OPERATES AND APPLIES TO INDIVIDUALS IN OUR DAY

- A. The sign gift of tongues-speaking does not extend to our day. This gift ceased with the closing of the N.T. canon of Scripture (I Cor. 13:8-10). The reference to "that which is perfect" is a neuter pronoun and not masculine -

it refers to the Scriptures and not to Christ.

- B. If the gift of tongues were operative in our day missionaries wouldn't have to spend years in language school learning foreign languages.

- C. If the gift of tongues were for our day, Paul would have laid out its practice for the churches in the doctrinal epistles of Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, I and II Timothy, etc. But the only epistle to a church that mentions tongues is the Corinthian epistle and this church was carnal and plagued with all kinds of spiritual problems. One problem no doubt was the elevation of the gift of tongues above the other gifts. To correct this problem the apostle Paul gave several arguments:
 - 1. Paul first ranked the gift of prophesy above the gift of tongues because it edified everyone who heard (I Cor. 14:1-5).
 - 2. Paul said edification requires a comprehension of what is said (I Cor. 14:6-11).
 - 3. Paul said edification demands consideration for unbelievers (I Cor. 14:23-25). If the believers were to meet and they all spoke in tongues an unbeliever would think them to be mad. However, if they met and prophesied or proclaimed God's Word an unbeliever who would come might be convicted and converted.
 - 4. Paul also pointed out that the spiritual gifts were distributed by the Holy Spirit Himself according to His will and all believers had gifts but not all had the gift of tongues (I Cor. 12:11; 12:30). This is why it is ridiculous to seek this gift or any gift for that matter. People who seek the baptism of the Holy Spirit and a demonstration of this baptism by speaking in tongues fail to understand that gifts are sovereignly given by the Spirit and these are given at the moment of salvation.
 - 5. Finally Paul refers to the misuse of tongues as immature and childish and that edification or the "building up" of others is the primary concern and to do this requires understanding (I Cor. 14:12; 19,20).

ERROR

IV. HOW THIS GIFT CAN BE MISUSED AND MISAPPLIED

- A. Some assert that the tongues-speakings in I Cor. 12-14 are ecstatic utterances (I Cor. 14:4). Advocates say this gift is to be exercised in a personal and private devotion manner. Notice this idea directs its exercise inward and excludes others. This would disqualify tongues as a spiritual gift. The gifts are not to be exercised selfishly but outwardly and for the edification of others in the church.
- B. Some contend that speaking in tongues is an evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The apostle Paul pointed out that all believers have been baptized by the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 12:13). The Scriptures indicate if a person doesn't have the Holy Spirit He is not saved (Romans 8:9). Paul further points out that while all have been baptized by the Holy Spirit, all didn't speak in tongues. For this reason, speaking in tongues could not be a sign of baptism of the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 12:30).
- C. Some use the prophetic words of John the Baptist to say that believers need to be baptized with the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:11). But the fulfillment of John's prophecy came on the Day of Pentecost and this was a once-for-all historical event. Note Luke 24:49; John 14:16,17; Acts 1:4; 2:33).
- D. Some contend that believers must seek the baptism of the Holy Spirit and ask for it. But there is nowhere mentioned in the Scriptures that believers should seek Holy Spirit baptism. And there is a good reason for the absence of such a command. If a believer is already baptized by the Spirit, why should he seek it? For a christian to ask for the Spirit's baptism is like a married man asking his wife to marry him. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is a once-for-all occasion (I Cor. 12:13) but the filling or controlling power of the Holy Spirit may and should occur repeatedly (Eph. 5:18).

- E. Many proponents of the tongues movement contend that tongues-speaking is the path to christian growth and maturity. They assert that it provides renewed devotion, a deeper prayer life, and a more intimate communion with God. But tongues-speaking is not limited to christianity alone. Tongues-speaking has been reported from the days of Plato and it has involved non-christian religions as well. It has been a practice among Hindus, Moslems, Mormons, and spiritual mediums. Even the Unitarians who reject the deity of Christ have reportedly spoken in tongues. Since tongues-speaking is practiced by non-christians it cannot be a path to christian growth or evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This practice among non-christians gives further prove that the present day ecstatic utterances of tongues-speaking is of the devil and not God.
- F. We should keep in mind that one of the devil's devices is to counterfeit the things of God and thereby deceive people. The tongues movement is no doubt something the devil has widely used.