

## GIFTS OF CONTROVERSY ( PART ONE)

–MESSY ( BUT BEAUTIFUL) CHRISTIANITY, WEEK 44–

*1 Corinthians 12:27-31 (NIV)*

### I. \_\_\_\_\_ RECEIVES SOME \_\_\_\_\_

<sup>27</sup> Now you are the body of Christ,  
and each one of you is a part of it.

<sup>28</sup> And God has placed in the church  
first of all apostles,  
second prophets,  
third teachers,  
then miracles,  
then gifts of healing,  
of helping,  
of guidance,  
and of different kinds of tongues.

### II. \_\_\_\_\_ EVERYONE RECEIVES \_\_\_\_\_ GIFT

*New International Version*

<sup>29</sup> Are all apostles?

Are all prophets?

Are all teachers?

Do all work miracles?

<sup>30</sup> Do all have gifts of healing?

Do all speak in tongues?

Do all interpret?

*New English Translation*

<sup>29</sup> Not all are apostles, are they?

Not all are prophets, are they?

Not all are teachers, are they?

Not all perform miracles, do they?

<sup>30</sup> Not all have gifts of healing, do they?

Not all speak in tongues, do they?

Not all interpret, do they?

### III. SOME \_\_\_\_\_ BETTER FOR \_\_\_\_\_

<sup>31</sup> Now eagerly desire the greater gifts.

## IV. TWO CONTROVERSIAL GIFTS ( WE WILL DISCUSS PROPHECY IN TWO WEEKS)

### 1. Apostle

- **Definition:** *Primary:* Representatives appointed directly by Christ to plant and lead churches, empowered with significant spiritual authority (1 Cor 4:9; 9:1-2; 15:4-9; 2 Cor 12:12; Eph 3:5); *Secondary:* Appointed messengers sent by a church (2 Cor 8:23; Phil 2:25).
- **The Essential Issue:** Does the gift/office of Apostle exist today? The best answer seems to be no in the *primary* sense. Paul's understanding seems to limit this gift/role in that sense to the first-generation witnesses of Christ's resurrection. We could think of "apostles" still existing in the *secondary* sense, as church emissaries or missionaries and church-planters, but this does not seem to be the sense Paul intends here when he says apostles are "first" in the church (It is hard to see how a modern-day missionary would rank higher than a prophet without that missionary exercising prophetic gifts himself or herself).

## 2. Speaking in Tongues (“other languages”)

- **Definition:** Speaking in tongues (or better, “other languages”) is a supernatural ability to speak in a language unknown to the speaker (Acts 2:4-11; 1 Cor 14:2). The purpose seems primarily for personal prayer or praise to God (1 Cor 14:2, 14-17), a function of the person’s spirit, apart from their mind (1 Cor 14:14-15). It may be supernaturally translated by the gift of interpretation (1 Cor 14:13).
- **The Essential Issue:** Does a true gift of speaking in tongues still function today?
- **A Contested Question:** Should all Christians speak in tongues, especially as evidence of baptism in the Spirit? I think the answer clearly is no, because of 1 Corinthians 12:30. *To insist that all Christians are to speak in tongues is to argue the exact opposite of Paul’s point in 1 Corinthians 12-14.* Pentecostals may argue that speaking in tongues as a sign of baptism in the Spirit (expected for all Christians) is different from the spiritual gift of speaking in tongues (given to only some Christians), but this is not a persuasive distinction to me.
- **The Most Difficult Question:** Is speaking in a tongue (other language) always an identifiable human language, or is it sometimes unrecognizable as language?

### Arguments that a true gift of tongues is always a recognizable language

- This is how the phenomenon is first described, in Acts 2. Luke, the author of Acts, was an associate of Paul and would likely be aware of how Paul viewed tongues.
- The Greek term “tongue” essentially means “language,” and the assumption may be that when someone heard this term that an existing language would be expected.
- In 1 Corinthians 14:2 Paul says the tongue-speaker speaks mysteries and that no one understands him, but this is because an *untranslated* tongue is described. If someone who spoke that language were there (or someone with a gift of translation) it would no longer be a mystery.
- We have some testimonies from Christians of gifts of tongues functioning today *in the form of an existing human language*.

### Arguments that a true gift of tongues can be unrecognizable as a language

- Beyond Acts 2, we have no hint in the Bible that the gift of tongues was used for evangelism in areas of different languages (notice how Paul says the tongue-speaker talks to God, not humans in 1 Cor 14:2). Paul’s assumption in 1 Corinthians 14:23 is that an unbeliever would *not* be able to understand tongues if present.
- In terms of terminology, what Paul addresses could be a form of ecstatic speech which would itself need not be a language (in ancient paganism see Lambichus VIII 129; in ancient Christianity see Origin, *Contra Celsum*, VII 9; for an ancient Jewish reference to the languages of angels, see *Testament of Job* 48-50).
- If speaking in tongues was simply a different human language, there would not need to be a *spiritual gift* of interpretation—if someone who spoke that language were present, they could translate it “naturally.”
- We have testimonies from Christians today of gifts of tongues *in language-like form apart from existing human languages* (this is the most common form of tongue-speaking in charismatic circles today).

- **The Three Possible Origins of a Gift of Tongues**

We are told in 1 John 4:1, “*Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.*” This warns us that not all spiritual phenomena that seem “good” are necessarily from God—we must carefully test all phenomena generated by spirits. Three possible origins exist for a gift of speaking in tongues:

- *The Holy Spirit*, who gives it as a supernatural gift to whoever he wills. Note Paul clearly says in 1 Corinthians 14:39 “do not forbid speaking in tongues” (though the question of whether tongues is always a real language impacts what we think is going on in modern tongue-speaking).
- *Imagined, a Psychological state*. It is possible that some modern-day tongue-speaking is not supernatural at all, but rather a learned behavior for psychological and social reasons and with psychological and social benefits. Peer-pressure expectations in churches that expect this gift could help generate this experience.
- *A Demon, providing a false and deceptive gift of tongues*. This is clearly the most disturbing possibility, but we are prepared for it by 1 John 4:1, 1 Corinthians 12:1-3, and 2 Corinthians 11:14.

- **Testing a Gift of Tongues**

In light of the above, in my opinion, every Christian with a gift of tongues should pray about whether God would have them submit the gift to a test, as commanded in 1 John 4:1 (for books that reference this, see Foster, *The Third View of Tongues*, 87-94; Anderson, *Bondage Breaker*, 171-72).

- This should be done in a context of humble prayer, where we submit to God, not accusing, challenging, or maligning the Holy Spirit in any way, but rather acting humbly in obedience to 1 John 4:1. It is wise to ask God to grant the gift of discernment of spirits (and/or have someone involved with that kind of sensitivity).
- We ask the person to begin speaking in their tongue, then address the spirit animating the tongue and ask it to answer our questions in English through the person’s mouth. 1 John 4:1-3 says, “*Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.*”<sup>2</sup> *This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God,*<sup>3</sup> *but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.*” Accordingly, questions are asked like: “Do you confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh?”; “Is Jesus Christ Lord?”; “Do you glorify God the Father in all you do?” Etc.
- It is imperative that we continue to ask questions for a time, because a demon can *sometimes* give deceptive answers to these questions *for a time*, but eventually the pressure will become too great, and if it’s a demon it will be forced to reveal itself.

- It is also imperative to understand that the specific question “Do you confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh,” is not necessarily sufficient, nor necessarily the only key question. *That was the specific issue in the particular kind of false prophecy and false teaching John was writing about in 1 John.* A demon *may* be able to say yes to this question *in some sense* (!), since the demon knows Jesus in fact did come in the flesh. That is why questions *along this theme* seem to be the key, focusing on Jesus, his lordship, the Holy Trinity, bringing glory to the Father, etc. Care should be taken to frame the questions in such a way that the Holy Spirit could affirm, since our hope is that we are actually speaking to the Holy Spirit (for example, asking “Is Jesus your Lord” would probably not be appropriate, since we would probably not think of Jesus as the “lord” of the Holy Spirit. However, we could ask “Do you glorify God the Father in all you do?” This is something the Holy Spirit could affirm but a demon would not—though it may be able to lie for a time [!]).
- In our own practice, we ask questions in biblical Greek crafted from specific New Testament passages. This is effective because it bypasses the person’s mind completely; the person does not understand Greek, but the spirit (or Spirit) animating the tongue-gift certainly does. This has seemed to be particularly effective (probably especially because of the power of Holy Scripture).
- If the gift is confirmed to be from the Holy Spirit we would praise God for it and thank God for confirming it to us.
- If the gift is revealed to be a demonic counterfeit, we would have the person renounce it, and we would command the false spirit(s) to leave the person. Prayers to God and commands to the demon to depart are maintained until the person has a sense of departure and some relief is felt.

### THE BOTTOM LINE

\_\_\_\_\_ **the Variety of** \_\_\_\_\_, **but Be** \_\_\_\_\_ **about** \_\_\_\_\_

...by \_\_\_\_\_ not everyone is supposed to have \_\_\_\_\_.

...by \_\_\_\_\_ God to \_\_\_\_\_ any spiritual gift \_\_\_\_\_.

...by \_\_\_\_\_ any \_\_\_\_\_ gift you receive, to be \_\_\_\_\_. Consider:

The test of Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

The test of fruit (Matt 7:15-20)

The test of love (1 Corinthians 13)

The test of direct challenge (as described above; 1 John 4:1-3)

