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Unwrapping Our Gifts Part 4

Text: 1 Corinthians 13:8; 12:9-10

In his book, *Fresh Wind of the Spirit* (Abingdon Press, 1975), Kenneth Cain Kinghorn describes two extreme attitudes towards spiritual gifts: charisphobia and charismania. Some believers fear *any* talk about spiritual gifts. Other believers raise the subject to a place of prominence that is unhealthy. The classic Pentecostal position in the area of theology that deals with the Holy Spirit (pneumatology), says that the evidence of our being filled with the Holy Spirit is that we will speak in tongues. I have been to what were called “tarry services” in which a person prays that he/she might receive the Holy Ghost. How will they know whether or not the Holy Spirit had entered them? They will speak in tongues! Cf. Acts 2:4.

The experience for which these believers were tarrying (waiting) is the experience of opening your mouth and uttering syllables that are not intelligible to those listening. To some, these would be uttering a string of nonsensical words or gibberish.

According to 1 Corinthians 12:10, tongues and the interpretation of tongues are gifts of the Spirit. Cessationists would say tongues are a *sign* gift and our need for the *sign* has ceased. Cf. 1 Corinthians 14:22.

Let’s walk through 1 Corinthians 14 and make some observations about tongues.

1. Speaking in tongues is a *prayer* language, wherein the speaker speaks to God, not to humans (2).
2. Speaking in tongues is a *private prayer* language (4)
3. Speaking in tongues, in a public setting (without interpretation being given) accomplishes confusion rather than clarity. It is, in Paul’s words, an uncertain sound (6-9).
4. The exercising of this gift, and any spiritual gift, is for the purpose of edifying the church (12).
5. If speaking in tongues is done publicly it should always be followed by an interpretation of that message in tongues (13, 27-28)

**Responses**

1. For many, speaking in tongues is such an exciting gift that they would *seek* it. I want to remind you that the Holy Spirit determines what gift(s) we shall have. We don’t choose or seek our spiritual gift(s) Cf. 1 Corinthians 12:7-11.
2. Since we do not know if there will be an interpreter, I would advise that if you have this gift, you exercise it in private prayer.
3. The speaking in tongues described in Acts 2, at Pentecost, the apostles did not speak gibberish or intelligible syllables. They spoke *known* languages (Acts 2:1-11). The gift of tongues, as I understand it, is the gift of languages. There are, according to Paul, tongues of humans and tongues of angels (1 Corinthians 13:1). For many, speaking in tongues is their heavenly or prayer language. I’ve heard people say, “If you speak to God in an unknown tongue then the devil can’t know what you're saying.”

**Illus.**

I have preached on every continent except Antarctica and Oceania. When I have gone to South Korea to preach, I have had a translator assigned to me. That person took my preaching in English and translated it, phrase by phrase, for my Korean audience. If God gave me, a man who has not studied Korean, the ability to speak it fluently while I was in Korea, that would be the gift of languages.

1. In this 21st century, the Church is at its best when spiritual gifts are exercised with a clear sound, for the building up of the Body of Christ.
2. I do not believe God would interrupt a service in English, in which we are all being edified, to have a person speaking several seconds or minutes of unintelligible content. If there was not an interpretation following, I would declare the tongue-speaker out of order. Even if there is an interpretation, isn’t that a bit confusing? God breaks through and has us shift our focus and attention to the person speaking in tongues? God can certainly do that at any time. However, that is not the norm. In 1 Corinthians 12, we learn that all believers were baptized in the Spirit (v.13) but not all spoke in tongues (v. 30).

**Summary/concluding thoughts**

I have no biblical basis for forbidding anybody to speak in tongues, especially if it is used in your private prayer time with God (1 Corinthians 14:39).

I urge order in public worship. Most times, a person breaking out in ecstatic utterances, especially with no interpretation, is simply disruptive. We cannot attribute chaos to the Holy Ghost.

Amen