

Message #47

I Corinthians 12:8-11

“The Gift of Tongues”
(Part 1)

Somewhere around the year 1900, Charles Parham, the founder of Bethel Bible College in Topeka, Kansas, began to propagate his belief that speaking in tongues was evidence and proof of true salvation. Charles Parham has been called “The father of the modern Pentecostal Movement.”

On January 1, 1901, one of his students, Agnes Ozman of Bethel Bible College received what they termed “the baptism” and began to speak in tongues. This was the official birthday of Pentecostalism in the United States, a movement that would, as Richard Schwab wrote in his book, *Let the Bible Speak About Tongues*, spread around the globe like a wildfire across the prairie.

Four years later, in 1905, W. J. Seymour established the Azusa Street Mission in Los Angeles, California. It was this mission that became known for tongues speaking and training Pentecostal ministers. One year later, in 1906, the first Pentecostal doctrinal document, known as “The Apostolic Faith” was published which set forth at least four central beliefs:

- 1) The belief that the events recorded in Acts 2 are to be continually experienced in every church.
- 2) The belief that the Acts 2 experience is a separate experience that occurs after salvation.
- 3) The belief that speaking in tongues proves one has had the Acts 2 experience.
- 4) The belief that speaking in tongues is to be expected in the life of every believer.

On April 3, 1960, Father Dennis Bennet, the rector of the Episcopal Church in Van Nuys, California, announced from his pulpit that he had spoken in tongues and this was the beginning of the modern day charismatic tongues revival.

Of all of the gifts of the Spirit, there has never been one that has caused more divisions, more discussions and commanded more attention than the “gift of tongues.”

The tongues issue is not a new theological problem peculiar to the United States ever since 1900. The tongues issue is as old as Corinth. The problem and the controversy of “tongues” has its historical roots in the carnal and problematic church of Corinth.

The Corinthian church had become so caught up with the “gift of tongues” that they actually downplayed the communication of God’s Word in a language everyone could understand and at the same time elevated speaking in a language that no one could understand (I Cor. 14:1-4). Tongues became such a powerful movement in this church of Corinth that this church thought everyone should speak in a language no one could understand (I Cor. 14:23-24). The church of Corinth was very confused about the “gift of tongues” and so are many churches today.

We will devote more time to the study of this particular gift because: 1) Paul devoted more time to the discussion of tongues than any other gift; 2) The Corinthians elevated tongues more than any other gift; 3) No other gift has caused as many problems in church history as tongues.

**GOD'S PEOPLE HAVE A BIBLICAL RIGHT AND RESPONSIBILITY TO SYSTEM-
ATICALLY AND SERIOUSLY STUDY THE GIFT OF TONGUES AND TO
QUESTION, TO EXAMINE, AND EVEN JUDGE THOSE WHO CLAIM THEY
HAVE THIS GIFT.**

REASON #1 – We have a Biblical right to question tongues because God does not want us to be “unaware.” I Cor. 12:1

Ignorance is something that has plagued the tongues movement and the history of this ignorance can obviously be traced back to Corinth.

Dr. Gause writes: Pentecostals are unwilling “to support advanced theological training. (They) tend to place their religious commitments and experiences in an unanalyzed vacuum unaffected by other intellectual developments. Traditional Pentecostals want a slicked-up evangelistic and hortatory professionalism but not an analytical and systematic theology. This kind of development has produced an anti-intellectualism that revolts against education, rejects intellectual analysis of religious experience and rejects a biblical examination and analysis of religious experience” (*Perspectives on the New Pentecostalism*, p. 114).

REASON #2 – We have a Biblical right to question tongues because God expects His church to make judgments. I Cor. 14:27-29

Clearly in the context of speaking in tongues, judgments were to be made.

REASON #3 – We have a Biblical right to question tongues because God states there will be false teachers and false doctrines. I Cor. 11:13-15; I John 4:1-4

It is a proven historical fact that many unbelievers have spoken in tongues:

- 1) James Prichard, in his book *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* says that in 1100 B.C., an Egyptian temple official recorded an incident when a young man from Canaan, seemingly possessed by some god, behaved strangely and spoke in some frenzied language.
- 2) Plato, in three of his dialogues, says that a prophetess of Delphi, a priestess at Dodona and a Sybyline priestess spoke in languages that were unintelligible.
- 3) Virgil, who lived a century before Jesus Christ, describes a priestess on the island of Delos who spoke in an unintelligible language in some ecstatic state.

- 4) Plutarch, who lived in the first century, describes a seeress at Delphi, not far from Corinth, who spoke in tongues of incoherent utterances.
- 5) Joseph Smith, who himself dabbled in the occult, claims that the Nephites, who are critical to the history of the Mormons, could speak in tongues (*Book of Mormon*, Alma 9:21).
- 6) Mr. John Miles, in his writing on tongues records the words of Richard Seymour, who once supported tongues:

“Now before you sit down and write me a letter telling me how real your experience with tongues is, let me tell you about mine. I’ve spoken in “tongues” on several occasions. I’ve walked down aisles, I’ve prayed through at the altar, I’ve followed instructions of the spiritual leaders who were telling me how to speak in tongues, and I spoke in tongues. It was very real. It happened. There was nothing unreal about it. But it was not of the Holy Spirit! How do I know? I wasn’t even saved at the time that’s how I know. I became convinced by the preaching I heard that I must speak in tongues to be right with God. I was determined to do it, and I did it.”

REASON #4 – We have a Biblical right to question tongues because God is not the only source of supernatural phenomena. Ex. 7:10-12; Matt. 24:24; II Thess. 2:9

Signs and lying wonders are a great trick of Satan.

REASON #5 – We have a Biblical right to question tongues because God has commanded that His people accurately handle His Word. II Tim. 2:15

Mr. Miles, in examining the abundance of charismatic literature, concluded the following about how charismatics use the Bible:

- 1) Verses were examined without ANY consideration of context.
- 2) There was a complete disregard for ANY systematic approach to the Bible.
- 3) There was a continual appeal to one’s own experience rather than to God’s own Word.

REASON #6 – We have a Biblical right to question tongues because God has revealed that as we near the end, false doctrine will increase. I Tim. 4:1-3; II Tim. 3:1-8

As we near the end, we know from God’s Word that false doctrine will surface and therefore, we have every right to question a movement like tongues.

Emotions and experiences are only valid if they line up with God’s Word.

You may have had all sorts of religious experiences in your life, but that does not automatically mean you are right with God. It is possible to have a religious look about you, but deep in your heart you know you are not right with God and your life is not a powerful reflection of His glory.