

Eternity Daily Bible Study - No. 346
Series: The Primal Church - Acts Chapters 1-8
Verses: Acts 2:4-13
Topic: The Gift Of Tongues
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Correspondence can be sent to John Edmiston at johned@aibi.ph
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Acts 2:4-13 MKJV And they were all filled of the Holy Spirit, and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them utterance. (5) And dwelling at Jerusalem there were Jews, devout men out of every nation under heaven. (6) But this sound occurring, the multitude came together and were confounded, because they each heard them speaking in his own dialect. (7) And they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, Behold, are not these who speak all Galileans? (8) And how do we each hear in our own dialect in which we were born? (9) Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, (10) Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya around Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, (11) Cretans and Arabians, we hear them speaking the great things of God in our own languages. (12) And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying to one another, What does this mean? (13) But others mocking said, These men are full of sweet wine.

There are some that say that Pentecost was a miracle of hearing, because each heard them speaking in his or her own dialect. However verse 4 clearly says: "and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them utterance." The disciples were actually speaking "other languages" under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

God can give us supernatural linguistic ability in the tongues of men and of angels. Tongues is a wisdom gift – it is knowledge you did not have before – knowledge of Elamite or Parthian or whatever – and godly wisdom is the biblical sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Two incidents from my early Christian life and ministry may illustrate this. The first was when I was at bible college and was in a small group with a Korean brother who burst into passionate prayer in his own language and I suddenly understood every word that he said – even though I do not know a word of Korean.

The second incident was in late 1986 when I spent a couple of months teaching Isaiah at the Gogodala Christian Training Center in Mapodo in the remote Western Province of Papua New Guinea. In just three weeks I picked up the complex Gogodala language enough to produce my lecture notes in it. It seemed to almost "beam into" me. I became temporarily fluent in the language and then promptly forgot it and today all I can say is "Nagala" which means hello.

God the Creator has access to the language centers of our brain – which He demonstrated at the Tower of Babel in Genesis chapter 11. God can confuse our languages on one hand or help us to understand them and speak them on the other.

The missionary task of the church requires linguistic ability, which God can give us by the empowering work of the Holy Spirit. Tongues is not just a nice worship experience, it is also tool for spreading the gospel.

There are also worship tongues and prayer tongues for communicating with the unseen realms – see 1 Corinthians 14. My own prayer language sounds like a Melanesian language but I have never identified it as a particular language group. I only use it for private worship and for intercession.

As I said before tongues is a wisdom gift and at Pentecost the wisdom was displayed in two ways: a) knowledge of foreign languages and b) knowledge of the glory of God and how to proclaim it. Tongues is not spiritual folly and it should not be seen as foolish (e.g. those who said “they are full of sweet wine”).

True tongues are wise and indicate that we are receiving knowledge from God about Himself and about the larger world (in this case a language of the world). Thus the tongues-speaker should demonstrate godly wisdom. The spiritual fruit of godly wisdom was the hallmark of selection of the first deacons in Acts 6 and a mark of people who were recognized as possessing ‘a spirit of the gods’ such as Joseph, Solomon and Daniel. Godly wisdom is also part and parcel of what we intuitively call “sainthood”.

All spiritual gifts should be used in love and lead to an integrated personality full of wisdom and truth. In a few cases tongues can be demonic and disturbing. Tongues that do not glorify God or produce wiser saints need to be tested. God even tells us to test the spirits. (1 John 4:1-4)

Finally tongues should not be used divisively. As an inter-denominational missionary I often do not disclose the fact that I speak in tongues, and I only use my gift in circles where it is readily accepted and will not cause confusion or discord. There is nothing wrong in restraining a spiritual gift out of love or out of concern for the body of Christ. This is still a delicate thing in many circles and I would not injure the faith of any.

Blessings,

John Edmiston

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