



## “Do all speak with tongues?” (2)

Malcolm Edwards

**S**PIRIT GIFTS are by no means confined to the New Testament. In Numbers 11:25 God took of the Spirit He had given to Moses and bestowed it on seventy chosen elders to assist Moses in the teaching and governing of the people. These were only temporary gifts, since we learn no more about them after the wilderness journeys. Having fulfilled a special purpose they were eventually withdrawn, or died with those who possessed them.

Likewise, during his ministry Jesus gave his twelve disciples powers to heal the sick and cast out devils, and then extended the gifts to seventy other disciples. Like the gifts to the seventy elders of Moses, these gifts were temporary, otherwise there would have been no need for the later gifts at Pentecost.

### The decline of the Spirit gifts

But neither were the Pentecost gifts permanent, since Paul himself prophesied their eventual decline: “Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away” (1 Cor. 13:8-10).

The apostle does not mean that tongues would fail in their work for salvation, but that, together with the rest of the Spirit gifts, they would be superseded by something better, in the same way that anything imperfect must always give way to the perfect. The term ‘perfect’ means ‘complete’ or ‘mature’, and Paul goes on to liken these coming changes to the progression from infancy to manhood: “When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known” (vv. 11,12).

In the parallel passage to this in Ephesians 4 the apostle elaborates further on this expected ecclesial maturity, stating that the objective of the Spirit gifts was:

“. . . for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ” (vv. 12-15).

As we said in the [first article](#), apart from the direct bestowal of these gifts at Pentecost and to the Cornelius group, the only other means of receiving the Spirit gifts recorded was that of the laying on of the apostles hands. That this ability to bestow the gifts was confined only to the apostles is proven by the fact that, after Philip the evangelist (not Philip the apostle) had performed many miracles in Samaria, it was still necessary for Peter and John to go there to impart the gifts to his Samaritan converts:

“Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy [Spirit] . . . Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy [Spirit]” (Acts 8:14-17).

This being the case, it can be understood that, as each apostle departed this life, the availability of the gifts would correspondingly decrease. After the death of the last apostle, the gifts would be manifested among only a very few for no more than one generation, before ceasing altogether. This fulfils what was foretold in 1 Corin-

thians 13:8: "but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away".

In addition to this, we learn from Hebrews 6 that the gifts were only a taste of powers that were reserved for a future age: "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy [Spirit], and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame" (vv. 4-6).

The early Christian fathers obviously believed this, since Chrysostom (A.D. 345-407) testified that there was no gift of tongues in the church of his day, and that he was himself convinced that the gifts of the Spirit had ceased. Augustine, who also lived during this same period, wrote of them as follows: "That thing was done for a tokening, and it passed away".

In his book *Miracles Yesterday and Today* (1918), Benjamin B. Warfield writes of the Spirit gifts: "They were part of the credentials of the apostles as the authoritative agents of God in founding the Church. Their function thus confined them to distinctively the Apostolic Church, and they necessarily passed away".

### The mature ecclesia

The remaining question to be answered is, Did the withdrawing of the gifts leave the believers of that time in a state of spiritual maturity as Paul had predicted? And, if so, how long did it last?

There was much in the infant ecclesia that required improvement; one need only read the first letter to Corinth to see this. It was not only that they misused the gift of tongues, but, amongst other things, they abused the Lord's Supper, went to law against each other, and divided into factions.

Nevertheless, Paul confidently expected things to improve vastly, both at Corinth and in the other ecclesias. He anxiously wrote to the Galatians: "My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you" (Gal 4:19). He prayed concerning the Ephesians, "... that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and

to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God" (3:17-19), and said that the purpose of the Spirit gifts was that the Ephesians should, "speaking the truth in love . . . grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ" (4:15).

But something additional was required to bring about these desired changes. The Spirit gifts were certainly a great help towards higher spirituality, but, if they were eventually to fail, what would remain to bring this expected maturity? There can be only one answer: the writings of the apostles and the influence of love. Many of these writings were already in circulation in Paul's time; for example, he asked the Colossians to pass on his letter to Laodicea (4:16), and Peter refers to Paul's epistles in his own writings (2 Pet. 3:16).

Long before the New Testament Scriptures were tidily collated into one book, their strong influence on the infant ecclesia was unquestionable. Ignatius, around A.D. 100, quoted the apostolic writings, as also did Justin Martyr and other early Christian fathers. Obviously the vast majority of converts had no direct access to copies of them, but they soon learnt parts of them orally, which after all had been the mode of learning for centuries. Thus the valuable work of the Spirit continued by this means.

As with the Old Testament Scriptures, once the apostolic writings were complete the work of inspiration was concluded. But remaining for posterity were four wonderful Gospel narratives about the life and teaching of Jesus, an informative record of ecclesial development in the form of the Acts of the Apostles, and the whole counsel of God in the form of twenty one epistles rich in spiritual guidance and admonition. The challenging book of the Apocalypse completed the Scripture canon.

The high spiritual tone of the later epistles, such as those written by John, are a strong indication that a period of spiritual maturity had already been reached in the ecclesias of that time, but they also contained anxious warnings of approaching apostasy. This is most evident in the letters to the seven churches in the book of Revelation, where only two out of the seven measured up to the Lord's standard.

This period of stability and maturity lasted perhaps less than one hundred years before the first-century ecclesia began to be torn apart by Roman persecution and by growing apostasy

within. But the Word of God itself stood sure and has survived triumphantly to our day.

### Modern claimants to Spirit gifts

Comparing so-called speaking in tongues today with the apostolic gifts is rather like comparing a counterfeit coin with a genuine one, since on close examination they are simply not the same either in appearance or quality.

We have already shown that the apostolic gifts were given to stabilise and unify the young ecclesia. A widely divided Christianity today, plus divisions within Pentecostal and other charismatic churches, strongly suggest that what passes for modern Spirit gifts is the same kind of ecstatic phenomena found in other religions and cults, in which the singing is heavily rhythmical and accompanied by drumming, arm-waving, dancing, and in some cases screaming, laughing and falling down.

Dr Donald Metz, in his book *Speaking with Tongues*, considers the glossolalia manifested in Christian churches today to be psychologically produced. Dr E. Mansell Pattison, in *Speaking in Tongues and about Tongues*, comments that glossolalia, as a psychological phenomenon, is easy to produce and readily understandable.

One cannot help remembering a warning given by the Lord Jesus Christ that when he returned he would not reject those who doubted the existence of Spirit gifts, but, most significantly, those who claimed to possess them: "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Mt. 7:22,23). The passage can hardly mean that the gifts themselves were true and the possessors were wicked, since that was never so in apostolic times. The alternative conclusion is that some people will be so utterly obsessed with and deceived by their Christianised psychic abilities as to be totally incredulous at being pronounced counterfeit by Christ at his return.

This is a very good reason why one should examine most carefully all such well-meant claims by church groups, especially since most of them cite speaking with tongues as their only witness to Spirit possession. The passage in Isaiah 8 quoted in Part 1, warning Israel against wizards that chirp and mutter, goes on to say: "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not

according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (v. 20). Israel were directed to Scripture itself as the only means of finding God's Truth. This applies equally today.

### Tongues with disunity

Many churches claim to speak with tongues and to have special revelation through the Spirit, but have their differences on fundamental doctrine and other matters. This strongly contradicts their claims, especially since the purpose of the apostolic gifts was to unify (Eph. 4:13). For example, some believe in adult baptism, others do not; some keep the Jewish sabbath, others do not. Like all other churches, those who claim to have the Spirit gifts have divisions over such matters as divorce, abortion, women priests, acceptance of gay people, etc. Significantly, in connection with their claims of Spirit guidance, they differ also on Scripture interpretation and the fulfilment of prophecy. Their so-called gifts give them no superiority in doctrine or piety over other churches, and publicity about corrupt leadership, and downright fraud amongst some of their groups, has not helped their general credibility.

One is driven to the view that today Scripture itself is the final arbiter of truth and morality, which rather renders any modern claims to have Spirit gifts as irrelevant. At best, their 'gifts' add dubious excitement and emotion to their worship, and at worst they are manifesting the same psychic practices of other pagan religions and the occult.

Claiming the possession of Divine power and direct communication with God is a disarming ploy often used by Pentecostals in countering adverse Scriptural arguments. No matter what difficulties are presented to such people, they can always be contested by the rather smug claim of a special relationship with Jesus, so that sentiment and experience tends always to have the final say. It must be emphasised that this is not to charge such people with dishonesty or insincerity. It may be, however, that they are emotionally deluded. Feelings are notoriously self-deceptive, and almost always deaf to reason and rationality.

When all is said and done, the meeting of the Divine mind with the human mind is what religion is all about, and the Word of God is the only certain means of revelation to produce this.

Scripture is also the only arbiter of religious truth. Marooned alone on a desert island and close to nature, one might understandably feel

nearer to God, but without His written Word one could never learn about His character or about salvation.

The work of God's Spirit in providing written revelation and producing spiritual minds is expressed in 2 Timothy 3: "But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; and that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (vv. 14-17).

#### Prayer, providence and confidence

In denying claims by other churches of Spirit-gift possession, we should never give the impression that we do not believe in any form of miraculous guidance or healing today, nor in Divine miracles generally. We should hasten to affirm that we strongly believe in the power of prayer, and in the hand of providence. We pray for God's blessing on a meeting or for guidance in reading His Word. Such blessings or guidance are all part of Divine providence and the work of His all-pervading Spirit through angelic minis-

tration. But this is totally different from believing that the influence comes via ourselves as a possessed gift.

Being a small and close community we have the advantage of being quickly informed of sicknesses and problems in certain ecclesias, and combined prayers are always forthcoming when called for. In this respect we could easily claim to be a more effective praying community than many other churches, but we do not, and should not, glory unduly in this. When our members testify to having experienced providential happenings in their lives, we are most thankful and encouraged to hear of it. But we do not rely on, nor seek to promote, the spectacular.

Our faith requires no ecstatic claims of Divine wonders, which often prove to be exaggerated or totally false. Truth itself, springing from a love of God's Word, and combined with prayerful holiness, is sufficient to assure us what our duty should be: "It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD" (Lam. 3:26).

(Concluded)

Main external Sources: *What about Tongue Speaking?*, A. A. Hoekema, and *Speaking in Tongues and about Tongues*, E. Mansell Pattison.



Encounter

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## The Law given through Moses\*

### 18. The Day of Atonement

Islip Collyer

IN IMAGINATION based on Scripture we have conjured up the great Day of Atonement in ancient Israel—the tenth day of the seventh month, when a strict fast was commanded, a solemn affliction of soul in which all have to take part. Even strangers who happen to be in Israel at the time are required to conform. On this day the high priest will enter the most holy place, offering a perfect sacrifice for himself and for the people, and demonstrating that the

offering is accepted by the fact that he comes out alive.

Could there be anything else akin to this experience? Men often feel a nervous tension when they have to enter the presence of a human king. At such a time they would not forget any of the instruction they have received from courtiers. Yet with amazing perverseness they may be free

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