

ADDITIONAL NOTE ON (1 Corinthians) CHAPTER 14

(SDA Bible Commentary, volume 6, pages 795-796)

Two principal views with regard to the gift of tongues as discussed in ch. 14 are held: (1) That the manifestation is to be described in terms of the phenomenon of tongues on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2); that the language spoken under the influence of the gift was a foreign language, one that could be easily understood by a foreigner of that tongue; that by speaking in a foreign tongue in the church when no one understanding the language was present the Corinthians were perverting the function of the gift; and that it was this misuse of the gift that Paul rebuked.

(2) That the manifestation was different from that on the day of Pentecost; that the language was not one spoken by men, and that thus no man could understand unless there was present an interpreter who possessed the gift of the Spirit to understand the language (1 Cor. 12:10); that its function was to confirm the faith of new converts (1 Cor. 14:22; cf. Acts 10:44-46; 11:15) and to provide personal spiritual edification (1 Cor. 14:4); that it was the exercise, in public assemblies, of this gift, designed primarily for private, personal edification, that Paul rebuked in 1 Cor. 14. Other views combine elements of these two views.

It will be helpful in a consideration of this question to enumerate the characteristics of the gift of tongues as it was manifested at Pentecost and in Corinth. For a discussion of the gift there was clearly an ability to speak in foreign languages, and the purpose of the gift was to facilitate the spread of the gospel (cf. AA 39, 40). A second function may be seen in the experience of Peter in the house of Cornelius, where the manifestation of the gift convinced Peter and the skeptical Jewish Christians who were with him that God accepted the Gentiles (see on Acts 10:46), and doubtless also convinced Cornelius and those with him that the work of Peter bore the signet of Heaven.

Concerning the gift later manifested at Corinth the following characteristics are noted: (1) The gift is inferior to prophecy (1 Cor. 14:1). (2) The speaker in tongues addresses God, not men (v. 2). (3) No man understands the speaker in tongues (v. 2). (4) The speaker is "in the spirit," that is, in an ecstatic state (1 Cor. 14:2, 14; cf. on Rev. 1:10). (5) The speaker utters mysteries (1 Cor. 14:2; for a definition of mysteries see on Rom. 11:25). (6) The speaker edifies himself, not the church (1 Cor. 14:4). (7) Paul wishes that all had the gift (v. 5). (8) The speaker should pray that he may interpret so that the church may be edified (vs. 12, 13). (9) The understanding, or mind, is unfruitful when one prays in a "tongue," thereby indicating that the experience is not one of the conscious mind (v. 14). (10) The gift was for a sign to them that believe not (v. 22). (11) The gift was to be used in the church only if an interpreter was present (v. 27); otherwise the speaker was to speak only to himself and to God (v. 28). (12) The Corinthians were admonished not to forbid speaking in tongues (v. 39).

This list of characteristics of the gift makes clear that the apostle is not dealing with a counterfeit gift. He has listed "tongues" among the genuine gifts of the Spirit (ch. 12:8-10), and nowhere hints that the manifestation described in ch. 14 is not of God. On the contrary, he commends it (ch. 14:5, 17), claims that he spoke with tongues more than the Corinthians (v. 18), wishes that all had the gift, and urges the believers not to forbid the exercise of the gift (v. 39). His aim throughout the discussion is to show its proper place and function and to warn against its abuse.

That the Corinthians abused the gift is evident. They spoke with tongues in the church when no interpreter was present and when no one but the speakers themselves was benefited. Several apparently spoke at the same time and while others were prophesying, teaching, etc. This resulted in general confusion (vs. 26-33, 40).

The question as to whether the tongues were in a spoken language or in a language unknown by men, or simply inarticulate sounds, has been much debated by commentators. Those who believe that the speech was in a language foreign to the speaker but understood by those familiar with the language argue by what they call the analogy of Scripture, that the gift in Corinth ought to be explained on the basis of the manifestations on Pentecost (Acts 2) and on other occasions (Acts 10:44-46; 11:15; 19:6) and that therefore **the purpose was clearly to enable men to preach the gospel in tongues formerly unknown to them.** Passages like 1 Cor. 14:2, which indicate that no man understands, they interpret as meaning that no one present understands, although foreigners might. They further point out that it is difficult to conceive that the Holy Spirit would manifest Himself in an unknown tongue under the circumstances of ch. 14.

Those who hold that the phenomenon consisted of unintelligible sounds not related to any human language argue that this is the most natural way to interpret the various passages concerned, and that this is the inevitable conclusion to be drawn when all of the characteristics listed are taken into consideration. They believe that Paul's illustrations in vs. 7-10 are designed to show that the utterances were either inarticulate sounds or a language not capable of being understood by men unless they too were possessed of the Spirit and were endowed with the gift of interpretation (ch. 12:10).

Whatever view is adopted, one thing is certain, that the manifestation of the gift at Pentecost and the purposes for which it was given (Acts 2) differed in many respects from the gift as manifested in Corinth. The gift at Corinth served to edify the speaker, not others (1 Cor. 14:4). Paul did not encourage its use in public unless an interpreter was present (vs. 12, 13, 27). He did not recommend its use in the church (vs. 19, 28). The address was to God, not men (vs. 2, 28). The speaker was in a state of ecstasy with his conscious mind dormant (v. 14). These things were not true of the gift that came upon the disciples at Pentecost. The ability to speak in foreign languages was distinctly designed to edify others. It was bestowed so that the disciples could preach the gospel without the services of an interpreter. The address in a tongue was to men, not God, and the speaker was not in an ecstatic state but functioned even as one might do who had acquired facility in the language through study (see on Acts 2).

Because of certain obscurities with regard to the precise manner in which the gift of tongues was anciently manifested, Satan has found it easy to counterfeit the gift. Incoherent ejaculations were well known and widely met with in pagan worship. Also in later times, under the guise of Christianity, various manifestations of so-called tongues have from time to time appeared. However, when these manifestations are compared with the scriptural specifications of the gift of tongues they are found to be something quite at variance with the gift anciently imparted by the Spirit. These manifestations must therefore be rejected as spurious. **However, the presence of the counterfeit must not lead us to think meanly of the genuine.** The proper manifestation of the gift with which Paul deals in 1 Cor. 14 performed a useful function. True, it was abused, but Paul attempted to correct the abuses and to assign the operation of the gift to its proper place and function.

Notes by Sid

From just a quick reading of Acts 2 (which I'm very familiar with) and 1 Cor. 14 (which I seldom look at), it seemed obvious to me that these were two quite different gifts. However, since it has been some time since I've studied that topic, I brought out my SDA Bible Commentary to see if I was somehow mistaken. I have found no reason to disagree with what it says about the gift of tongues in 1 Cor. 14.

From my reading of the Bible and of the attached commentary, I would humbly submit my following opinions:

1. The speaking in tongues in Acts 2 and in 1 Cor. 14 are NOT the same, for the reasons stated in the commentary.
2. Both are legitimate. For obvious reasons in Acts 2, it was edifying to the church. Paul, in 1 Cor. 14, says that this other type of speaking in tongues is edifying to the speaker. Paul also indicates that it is a good thing – vs. 4, 5, 18, 22, 26.
3. Paul warns against the abuse of the tongues of 1 Cor. 14. It is incomprehensible for me to see how Acts 2 tongues speaking could possibly be abused by humans, since humans have no control over such things.
4. Contrary to popular belief in other Christian churches, Paul did not expect or encourage every church member to receive the gift of 1 Cor. 14 tongues.
5. Paul seems to indicate that there was no loss of self-control during such utterances. This is also contrary to popular belief.
6. Has Acts 2 tongues speaking been witnessed in modern times? Absolutely.
7. Has Acts 2 tongues speaking been counterfeited by satan? I doubt it, but I really don't know.
8. Has 1 Cor. 14 tongues speaking been witnessed in modern times? I don't know.
9. Has 1 Cor. 14 tongues speaking been counterfeited by satan? Absolutely.
10. Can we judge other people's experience and/or witness of tongues, as described in 1 Cor. 14?
 - a. If we can see or are told of things that go against scripture, then we can be assured that it is either satan's counterfeit, or just someone faking it.
 - b. If we have no Biblical evidence of anything wrong, then we are on dangerous ground if we claim that someone else's witness/experience with 1 Cor. 14 tongues speaking is NOT Biblical, or worse – satanic. A related factor is that "by their fruits ye shall know them". When we hear of Christian people, who are well-known for their good fruits, who also speak in the tongues of 1 Cor. 14, then I think we are amiss if we do not consider the possibility of this being Biblical tongues speaking.

This is my studied opinion. I realize that I could be mistaken. -Sid Nash 2011; updated 8/21/2021