

The Gift of Tongues

by William Holiday

Speaking in "other tongues" or "tongues" is mentioned in only two books of the New Testament, with one possible rather obscure reference in the Old. The references are Acts 2:4; 10:46, 47; 19:6; 1 Corinthians 12, 14; and Isaiah.

In Acts 2, upon the descent of the Holy Spirit, the one hundred and twenty spoke in "other tongues" and were clearly understood by the multitudes gathered there, each one hearing in his own tongue in which he was born. As all Jews today do not speak Yiddish, so at that time all Jews did not speak Aramaic, but the languages of their adopted countries. And each understood what the disciples were saying.

You will note, then, these two facts: First, these disciples spoke not in an unknown tongue, but in languages other than that native or familiar to them. Second, there were no interpreters. The purpose of the miracle was apparently that all nationalities present in the crowd might hear the glorification of God.

The next time the Holy Spirit was given—this time to a group in Samaria (Acts 8: 14-17)—absolutely no mention is made of speaking in tongues.

The third time the Holy Spirit descended upon Christians was at the home of Cornelius (Acts 10:46, 47). Here the Gentiles spoke with tongues and magnified God. Some time later, when Peter tells of his instance before the Mother Church in Jerusalem, he declares it to have been identical with what took place on the day of Pentecost. He gives the essential element of both experiences as being the infilling of the Holy Spirit for power and heart purity, to which God bore witness in each heart.

We must pause a moment to examine this witness. A witness is mentioned in Romans 8:16 and 1 John 5:10, which is simply the inner assurance born of God that Christ has forgiven the sins and regenerated and adopted the seeker. In Acts 15, the witness is the same assurance that Christ has granted the Holy Spirit in His fullness for power and inner cleansing. This witness, and the holy life following, cannot be imitated, while any outward manifestation, such as speaking in tongues, can be. And speaking in tongues is not what is referred to by the words, "bear them witness," there being not the slightest evidence pointing that way.

Acts 19:6 gives us the other example of the descent of the Holy Spirit, and we must assume it to be the same in its essential elements as the others. Here speaking in tongues occurred.

The "tongues" of Acts, then, must be a temporary gift of languages. But had it been a necessary accompaniment of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, it would undoubtedly have been so stated. However, no hint of such is to be found. And at Samaria there is no indication that tongues even occurred.

In 1 Corinthians 12:10 Paul mentions tongues as one of the gifts of the Spirit, but not given to everyone any more than the gift of healing, or of working miracles, or of prophecy. In 1 Corinthians 12:28-31, the gift is again mentioned, and the apostle asks, "Are all apostles?" The implied answer is, obviously, "No." "Are all teachers?" Of course, "No." "Have all gifts of healing?" "No." "Do all speak with tongues?" "No." "Do all interpret?" Again, "No." And yet because one does not teach, or is not an apostle, or does not have gifts of healing, or does not speak with tongues, or interpret, there is no hint of lack of spirituality. It is only that the Spirit has not chosen to give that particular gift. Then follows the admonition, "Covet the best gifts," and tongues is placed last. "However," says Paul, "I show unto you a more excellent way." The wonderful love chapter is the climax of the argument.

In the fourteenth chapter of the same book Paul begins to regulate the speaking in tongues, and in effect he says, "If you must speak in tongues, do so after this manner; but it were better if you prophesied." (The real meaning of prophesy here is to "forthtell" or simply to preach.) And he closes by saying, "Covet to preach, but don't forbid to speak with tongues." But the regulations he puts on the exercise of this one gift are severe, and he does all he can to urge the exercise of the other gifts at the expense of this one.

Throughout the Bible, with the possible exception of the rather obscure passage in Isaiah 28:11, to which Paul evidently refers in 1 Corinthians 14: 21, tongues is not mentioned anywhere else. And in not one of these places is it ever mentioned as an essential accompaniment of the baptism with the Holy Spirit.

Paul makes no mention of it when he prays for the entire sanctification of the believers (1 Thess. 5:23), nor when he urges the Corinthians to cleanse themselves "from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1). Nor does John refer to it when he speaks of perfect love (1 John 4:18), nor Peter when he urges "holiness in all manner of conversation, or living" (1 Peter 1:15). All these things can be attained only with the purity of heart spoken of in Acts 15:9 in connection with the baptism of the Holy Ghost.

"The Free Methodist"

WHERE WERE YOU?

Ponder the following which is taken from a church paper in Georgia:

"I am a Junior boy. Last Sunday night I thought I'd go to church. My buddy went to the movies and wanted me to go along, but I didn't think I ought to go there, so I went to church.

"I looked for my Sunday-school teacher, but he wasn't there.

"I looked for a couple of deacons I know, but they weren't there.

"I looked for my mother's Sunday-school teacher, who has called at our house, but she wasn't there.

"I guess they don't think church Sunday night is important."—Covenant Weekly

FAMILY ALTARS

If every home in every land had altars
Where families worshiped daily and where prayer
Was lifted up and God's dear Word held sacred,
With Christ, a welcomed Guest, beside them there,
The nations would not need to reassemble
In further parley over future peace;
For enmity and strife would be forgotten,
And wars, and their wild rumors, would all cease.
The love of God is born at family altars;
Peace and goodwill to all mankind is part
Of any praying group's sincere devotion.
God, God, may every household take to heart
The old earth's desperate need and rear its altars
Close by its own hearthside—and peace, long sought,
Will lave the earth because of mankind's heeding
The vital lessons that the Master taught.

Grace Noll Crowell, Housewife (Texas)

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"A missionary is one who is sent, whether he be sent across the ocean or only across the street. Missionary work is not a matter of mileage but of obedience. Some people are concerned for souls ten thousands of miles away but exhibit little concern for the perishing in their own town or street."

The King's Highway