

The Holy Spirit and the Gift of Tongues

by Dr. E. Stanley Jones

One of the greatest needs of the church is a rediscovery of the Holy Spirit. Without the Holy Spirit the Christian faith is a counsel of perfection. With Him anything is possible. A Holy Spiritless Christianity is a vast whipping up of the will, a tense striving, an exhausting struggle to be good and to do one's duty. With the Holy Spirit there is an effortless adequacy, a sure touch on everything. With Him everything in Christianity becomes possible and not only possible but actual. The Holy Spirit is the applied edge of redemption.

The modern hunger on the part of earnest Christians to break through the formalism, the barren intellectualism, the half-wayness of modern Christianity and to discover the power and the firsthandness of the Christianity of the Acts is a hopeful sign. We rejoice in this hunger and its result in changed lives.

But it is disconcerting that this rediscovery of the Holy Spirit is in many places being linked up with the gift of tongues. "You have the Holy Spirit if you have the gift of tongues and you haven't Him if you haven't that gift". It is not always stated that badly, but it is implied.

To bind up the possession of the Holy Spirit with the possession of the gift of tongues is, to my mind, perhaps the greatest spiritual disaster that has struck this confused and groping age. For nothing would queer the gift of the Holy Spirit more quickly to the thoughtful mind of this age than to reduce the Holy Spirit to unintelligibility. For the gift of tongues is unintelligible utterance — unintelligible to the speaker and to the hearers, except as it be interpreted by the gift of interpretation in someone else. This differentiates it from the tongues used at Pentecost. There "every man heard in his own language the wonderful works of God." This type of tongues was immediately available to every man who heard — it was in his own language and it needed no interpreter. And it was not stray sentences which they heard in their own languages — it was a whole discourse and was so plain and available that at the end people accepted it and were converted. This type of tongues has apparently not reappeared in its modern expression. People have come to India hoping to be able to evangelize the people of India without learning the language and without using an ordinary interpreter. The wreckage of those hopes is strewn across India. It simply hasn't happened. If you speak the Gospel to India, you learn the language or use an interpreter. The Pentecost type of tongues is not available.

Then what was the point in the Pentecost type of tongues? Was it not this: People were gathered from all that ancient world on this festival from Europe, Asia, Africa. A new movement of redemption was being launched. Would it be a Jewish phenomenon, so that if you accepted it you would become a Jew, with the Jewish language and Jewish culture? No, that Jewish mold was broken. "Every man heard in his own language the wonderful works of God." (Acts 2:6-8) God was going to use all languages and all cultures to express this New Life. Here the Gospel was emancipated from Jewish national narrowness and universalized. The mold was broken. This was a special miracle for a special occasion and for a special purpose — universalization. This happened in Jerusalem, the center of Jewish exclusiveness; it also happened at the house of Cornelius, a Roman Gentile in Caesarea; and it happened in Ephesus, the center of Greek and pagan culture in Asia Minor. So at the heart of Jewish culture, Jerusalem at the heart of Roman culture in Caesarea and at the heart of Greek and pagan culture in Ephesus the gift of tongues was

connected with the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 10:46:19:6). This was a strategically imparted gift to break the narrow local conceptious and universalize the Gospel. Just as "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews" was written in Roman, Greek and Hebrew on the cross, to let all nations and tongues know He is King, so in these three centers of culture the Gospel spoke directly in their language. In Caesarea it says they spoke "in tongues extolling God." It was not an unknown tongue, the people knew they were "extolling God" and at Ephesus they spoke "in tongues and prophesied" — and prophecy was not foretelling events, but forthtelling the Good News; the people understood.

This set the Pentecost type of tongues as something apart and different — a special miracle for a special purpose. The only other place "tongues" is mentioned in the New Testament is at Corinth. Here appeared another type of tongues — an unknown tongue, unknown to the speaker and unknown to the listeners, except someone arose who could interpret.

Incidentally, this dependence on someone who interprets the unknown tongue introduces another mediator between man and God. The New Testament says "there is one Mediator" — Jesus. But this puts in another. How do I know the interpreter isn't introducing his own thoughts and calling it the voice of God? That puts you and your guidance at the mercy of an unknown quantity. Some theological students, studying Hebrew, went to a tongues meeting and quoted the Twenty-third Psalm in Hebrew. An "interpreter" arose and interpreted it, but it had no relation to the Psalm!

The type of tongues appearing today is the Corinth type, an unknown tongue, and not the Pentecost type where the speaking was in a known tongue. "Every man heard in his own language the wonderful works of God." This unknown type appearing in Corinth and appearing today was one of the gifts of the Spirit. But the gifts of the Spirit are not to be confounded with the gift of the Spirit. The gift of the Spirit is for all, but the gifts of the Spirit He "divides severally as He wills." (1 Cor. 12:11) Paul asks: "Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?" (1 Cor. 12:30) Meaning, they do not. And yet they have the gift of the Spirit. This gift of tongues was one of the lower gifts and Paul said that they were not to exercise it unless there was an interpreter.

Paul says that the Corinthian type of tongues could not be used as an evangelistic agency: "If a non-believer comes among you and hears you speaking in tongues he will think you mad." But at Pentecost it was an evangelistic agency and a very effective agency.

Then he goes on and says: "But earnestly desire the best gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way" — the way of love. Then he ends the discussion on love (1 Cor. 13) with this: "Make love your aim, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy." (1 Cor. 14:1) So the two gifts emphasized were the gift of love and the power to prophesy, that is the power to impart the Good News.

Incidentally, this discussion of tongues contained in the 12th, 13th and 14th chapters of 1 Corinthians is the only mention of tongues in the whole of the Epistles of Paul, John, Peter and all the rest of the Epistles. And it was only raised in these chapters because it was causing division and confusion. In all the theological writings of the apostles it is only mentioned once. If it has the im-

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