

Sermon 146: Romans 12:6-8: The Gift of Tongues: Part 1

OUTLINE

The historical roots of modern day tongues
The theological justification for modern day tongues
The differing nature of modern day tongues

INTRODUCTION

We come now to the gift of tongues. This is not featured in the list to the Romans or the Ephesians but only in the letter to the Corinthians. We find it in the list of supernatural gifts in 1 Cor. 12:8-10 and then again in v28-30. Although this gift is mentioned last in terms of importance in 1 Cor. 12:28, we are going to take it together with prophecy because it is so closely associated with it in discussions today. It is impossible to talk about the gift of tongues in the bible without talking about the modern day phenomenon of tongues in the church. Today there are millions of people who claim to have the gift of tongues and claim that it is the gift of a private prayer language for every believer. It is claimed that we need a second experience after salvation, a baptism of the Spirit which evidences itself in tongues which takes one deeper in the spiritual life. It is claimed that tongues is the thing needed for a holier life, a deeper worship experience, that it is the doorway to all the other power gifts, and a perfect prayer language that the devil doesn't understand. In this message we are going to outline the historical roots of the modern day tongues phenomenon; then we will look at some of the theological beliefs the phenomenon rests on and then finally compare the modern day phenomenon with the biblical phenomenon as we have it recorded.

Perhaps I should say at the outset that we are moving into controversial territory. As we have looked at the offices of apostle and prophet we have been on solid ground as these things are mentioned as foundational. Now that we begin looking at the other gifts there is more diversity in opinion. Differences in opinion on these issues are less dangerous though I still think they are having a huge negative impact in the church today.

The historical roots of modern day tongues

It is generally agreed that the return of tongues is a recent thing. There have been some mentions of tongues in various fringe cults, such as the Montanists, Camisards, Quakers and Irvingites. It should be stressed that these other groups believed their tongues were actual languages. The trouble is that the majority of these groups were filled with self-appointed prophets making false prophecies about Christ's return, and were often guilty of heresies. For example, Edward Irving denied that Christ was sinless. Joseph Smith and the early Mormons also spoke in tongues, they believed that theirs was a pre-Babel Adamic tongue.¹ Our modern day practice and understanding began in Kansas with the teaching of Charles Parham, though there were instances he makes mention of before his particular brand of tongues. He began conducting his first religious services at the age of 15, this is too young. He dropped out of his education because he felt it would hinder him in ministry. He was never ordained. He preached faith healing, lived by faith, in other words didn't ask for financial aid, and began a bible college. He urged his students to study Acts to determine what evidence was given to those who received the Spirit. This led to a number of prayer

¹ <http://lds-church-history.blogspot.co.nz/2012/10/speaking-in-tongues.html>

meetings which resulted in Agnes Ozman speaking in tongues after being prayed for on Jan. 1 1901. Parham began to propagate this teaching and experience.

He believed that this outpouring of the Spirit as a sealing for the marriage supper of the lamb was evidenced with tongues. He saw it as an endowment of power for service and believed that they were actual languages. "Alfred G. Garr and his wife went to the Far East with the conviction that they could preach the gospel in 'the Indian and Chinese languages.' Lucy Farrow went to Africa and returned after seven months during which she was alleged to have preached to the natives in their own 'Kru language.' The German pastor and analyst Oskar Pfister reported the case of a Pentecostal... 'Simon,' who had planned to go to China using tongues for preaching. Numerous other Pentecostal missionaries went abroad believing they had the miraculous ability to speak in the languages of those to whom they were sent. These Pentecostal claims were well known at the time. S.C. Todd of the Bible Missionary Society investigated eighteen Pentecostals who went to Japan, China, and India 'expecting to preach to the natives in those countries in their own tongue,' and found that by their own admission 'in no single instance have [they] been able to do so.' As these and other missionaries returned in disappointment and failure, Pentecostals were compelled to rethink their original view of speaking in tongues" (Robert Mapes Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited: The Making of American Pentecostalism*).² This has opened up discussion on the possibility of tongues being the language of angels, or a form of coded speech that the Spirit alone can understand. And this has led to distinctions between the public languages and private prayer language types of tongues.

Parham was a racist who rejected later developments in Pentecostalism because blacks and whites were present in the service together and falling over each other. He held to a view of Anglo-Israelism that believed that the tribes of Israel were the roots of the white European races and God's chosen people. He held to annihilationism, healing by sanctification, sanctification by faith, and various other errors. This is the father of modern day Pentecostalism.

The theological justification for modern day tongues

It is believed that every Christian can and should speak in tongues. Due to the influence of John Wesley, it was believed that the Christian could receive a second experience after salvation which would enable a real spiritual breakthrough. It is believed that there is a universal experience of being baptised with the Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues. Mark 16: 17-18 are usually quoted as proof for a universal experience of tongues, 'And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; 18 they will pick up serpents with their hands; and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover.'" You will notice that the casting out of demons, the tongues and faith healing are all familiar, but can you see the mention of drinking any deadly poison, and picking up snakes? These are not emphasized as universal experiences except by very few snake handling Pentecostals. Because Paul was bitten by a snake and not killed we understand these to be descriptive of events in the apostle's lives not universal. 1 Cor. 12:30 clearly tells us not all will receive the gift of tongues.

Here are all the verses that talk about the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which following Parham as seen as proof of the Spirit's baptism.

² <https://www.wayoflife.org/database/a-private-prayer-language.php>

“I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” (Matt 3:11).

“I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” (Mark 1:8).

“John answered them all, saying, “I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.” (Luke 3:16).

“I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’” (John 1:33).

“for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” (Acts 1:5)

“As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’” (Acts 11:15-16).

“For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body---Jews or Greeks, slaves or free---and all were made to drink of one Spirit.” (1 Cor 12:13).

Firstly, a technical point, our English translations are all being PC when they translate ‘with’. The Greek word is ‘in’. This would lean the language towards an immersion understanding, so this little word has been left as ambiguous. The last references pertain to salvation, and the other five to Pentecost. What is the connection to baptism in the Spirit, and how it relates Pentecost and salvation? Let me add another question to the mix, for although the outpouring of the Spirit in Acts 8 in Samaria is not mentioned, nor the receiving of the Spirit by some of John the Baptist’s disciples; how do we tie, these other outpourings, Pentecost and personal salvation together?

We will begin with 1 Cor 12:13. Our verse comes to us in a section where Paul is talking about the church as the body of Christ. A truth he learnt on the Damascus road. Verse 13 makes explicit how we are saved into that body, how we become a Christian. By the same Spirit, there is no different Spirit for slaves and free, Jews and Greeks, we were baptised into the one body, not a divided body. Paul uses the language of baptism to describe the moment of our salvation. It is clear from this verse that Paul does not view the baptism as a second experience consequent to salvation, but salvation itself. Paul is seeking to use the theological reality of their oneness in Christ to call them to an external unity as well. This linking of the baptism of the Spirit to the moment of our salvation is not unique to Paul we see this same link in Peter in Acts 11:15-18. Notice there that he equates their experience of the Spirit to Pentecost, and then in v18, it is directly linked to salvation, where God is said to have granted them repentance.

This highlights a difficult question. If we are to see our salvation as the baptism in the Spirit, are we to call Pentecost, Samaria, Cornelius’ household, and Eph 19:6 as baptisms in the Spirit? And if the answer is yes, does that not fly in the face of what we have just established?

As you can see the issues are complex, and one of the reasons for this is because when we look at Pentecost, and the mini Pentecosts that follow, we are looking at a unique historical event that happened during the transition period between the OT and the NT. One way to view it would be to see Pentecost is on a large scale what our salvation is on a small scale. When you get saved, you are immersed in the Holy Spirit. Well, Pentecost is that event that was prophesied, the great beginning of the new era of the Spirit, where the realities of Christ’s resurrection would begin to dawn in this old age. Pentecost was the grand

beginning of that event. Peter interprets the significance for us by telling us it was in fulfilment of Joel 2:28-32. And just as every major change in the plot of God's redemptive history has been marked by an increase in miraculous activity, and unique miracles bound to that event, we don't expect them to be everyday affairs. Just as, we do not look for another cross, or resurrection, we should not look for another Pentecost.

Pentecost has some unique features which mark it as a once off beginning point of the new age. The Holy Spirit does not often come in a manifest form, so when He does it is important to note. For example, when He came as a dove over the baptised Jesus we are being told of a new Noah and a new Ark. That Christ is gathering a new people for a new creation and that He is the one who will act as our Ark of refuge to protect us from the judgement waters.

Firstly, we see the Spirit appearing in the form of wind. For most of us this is unimportant, but the word Spirit and wind are the same in Hebrew. And at many turning points, at many new beginnings we see the Spirit/wind present. When God first created the wind was hovering over the waters. When God cleared away the waters after the flood it was with a wind. When He parted the red sea it was a wind; and at the parting of the Jordan river to take possession of the land there was the presence of God over the water in the ark when the priests feet touched the water, and now when God is starting the new covenant, the beginning of the new creation of God breaking in, and the building of a new people and temple, there is the Spirit as wind.

Secondly, we see the Spirit in the form of fire. Fire is a significant symbol, and a favourite symbol of God's presence. In Genesis 15 when God made a covenant with Abraham, God appeared as a firepot, and a flaming torch. In Exodus 3 when God appeared to Moses in the bush, it was with fire that did not consume the bush. When the Lord went before the nation of Israel, it was as a pillar of fire (Ex 12:8). When God descended on Mount Sinai to give the Ten Commandments, it was as a fire (Ex 19:8, 24:7). When God's presence was in the tabernacle in the desert it was as fire (Ex 40:38). The fire upon the disciples signifies that God is present with his disciples, that they are a new temple for God to dwell in. And more significant still is the fact that there is an individual tongue of fire on every single disciple. In other words every single disciple is a temple of God. This is the point that Paul is making in 1 Cor. 6:19-20 (ESV), "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body."

The last phenomenon that we want to look at is the languages. All the disciples were enabled to speak in other languages/tongues. This tells us several things about the Church being the new people of God. As we look a few verses ahead the first thing we are told by Peter is that this is the promise of the Holy Spirit being poured out on all flesh, Acts 2:17 (ESV), "And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams;" The significance of the disciples speaking in tongues is not that all Christians should now speak in tongues, or that because Peter quotes Joel as saying that daughters will prophesy that women should preach in Church. The significance is that every NT believer gets a portion of the Spirit, and not just the prophets priests and kings. In the OT the Spirit was poured out on prophets like Moses, Kings like David, and the priests were anointed as well. Pentecost changed all that. The Spirit is no longer for the select few, but for all the people of God. All are now prophets, priests and kings. John sees great significance in this fact and tells us that the anointing that we have received gives us the ability to discern true and false teachings, 1 John 2:20 (ESV), "But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge." He is the one who teaches us the Scriptures as we read them. God has given teachers to the body of Christ to

feed us, but he has also given us the ability to feed ourselves. Unless we realize that we are prophets and that God does work inwardly in each one of us, we will never become mature, but we will always wait to be fed by others instead of depending upon the Spirit within. You will never be a Moses or Jeremiah, but you can be taught of God yourself. This is a wonderful teaching that was rediscovered in the Reformation and took away the mindset that we were dependant upon the Roman Catholic Church for the true interpretation of Scripture. No, if we have the Holy Spirit, with enough hard work and study we too can understand at least part of Scripture.

The many languages shows a reversal of the curse upon man at Babel. In Genesis 11 we see that man became proud and disobeyed God's commandment to fill the earth. God punished them and split them up into nations and alienated from each other by language. In Acts 2 we see a reversal of Babel. And in the many languages we see God's intention to make a single humanity from every nation of the world. A united people, not a divided people. In Babel they were united to set themselves up in the place of God, in Acts, and the Church age we will see unity, but not against God, but in him. The Church is a people who are from many nations and cultures a people from all backgrounds and language groups. It is the most ambitious unifying program known to man, as God seeks to make a single family out of all the peoples of the world. Acts 2 under girds our call to be unified in Christ. It reminds us that there is no place for personal pride or animosity.

These many languages also anticipate the Gospel going out into all the world, we see a mission oriented Spirit being poured out. From the word go the Spirit is communicating with people from all nations. This should galvanise our efforts and concentrate our focus once again on the aim of taking the Gospel to all nations. The out pouring of the Spirit on Pentecost sets the agenda for a multinational Church, something we must never lose sight of as we think of ourselves as the Church.

But what about Acts 8, 10, and 19; don't they prove that we are supposed to expect a repetition of the very thing you have just said we should not expect? No, the various repetitions of Pentecost in Acts 8, 10, and 19 are tied to Acts 2, and are not a pattern that we should expect to be an everyday affair. Here are some of the reasons. Luke has structured the book of Acts to show the progress of the Gospel according to the pattern of 1:8, Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, the ends of the earth; the progress of the Gospel reaching the nations, and a church of one nation becoming the church of many nations. Acts 8 documents the Samaritans becoming one with the church and not relegated to second class citizenship in the church, which Jewish Christians would have tended to do. Acts 10 throws open the doors for Gentiles to be included, without circumcision, and all this by Peter's ministry, with an accompanying vision. Acts 19, with the disciples of John is harder to see the significance of. But let me suggest, that they are the cream of the crop of the dispersion, the truest Israelites since they followed John's teaching, but that was not enough, even they needed to be incorporated into Christ, so that there was only one body. God deliberately staggered the Pentecost effect to help the early church overcome prejudice, tradition, years of isolation, etc. They were slow, as we all are, and God demonstrated their inclusion in the church by these unique, not to be repeated events. God eased their transition period which apart from His working, they never would have been able to negotiate on their own. To make this a model and pattern for what God has promised to do in every church, and every believer's life is to misunderstand the broader concerns of the book of Acts.

Also, if you look at the various outpourings, you will notice that they all experienced tongues (2:4; 10:46; 19:6), we are not told that there were tongues in Samaria, but given Simon's

response of wanting to buy the ability to lay his hands on people that they receive the Spirit, we assume that there was something that he saw, some outward effect that grabbed his attention. However, as we look at 1 Cor 12:30, we see that Paul indicates that not everyone gets the gift of tongues. This disparity between everyone speaking in tongues in Acts, and not everyone having the gift of tongues in the early church should highlight the unique nature of the Pentecost events, and that it should not be viewed as normative. As you can see, this points towards the present view of various branches of Charismatic teaching that every Christian can prophesy and speak in tongues being nonsense.

In conclusion then, I reserve the term of Baptism in the Spirit, for two things only; for the unique Pentecost event where Christ fulfilled the promise of giving the Spirit to His people. Secondly, it is a description of our salvation so that every Christian is seen to be baptised in the Holy Spirit. And these two things are linked as one. For Jesus poured out His Spirit on His Church, and when you are saved, you are united to His body. So then, just as the mains in a house are built once, but every new extension is tied into the mains of the house, so also every new believer is plugged into the gift of Pentecost. So you may not experience all the manifestations that heralded the arrival of the Spirit, however, you do experience all the benefits of being baptised in the Spirit.

So let me ask you, are you baptised in the Holy Spirit? Have you trusted in Christ for your salvation? Paul clearly tells us that when we see that we are sinners who deserve to be judged and we believe upon Christ as the one who took the punishment for our sins and repent and return to God as our Creator, we receive forgiveness, adoption, and are baptised by the Spirit into a union with Christ and His body. If you are a believer then good news you are already baptised and the full armoury of God's strength is already available to you to pursue holiness, and have victory in Christ.