

Sermon Subject: THE GIFT OF TONGUES

SCRIPTURE: I Corinthians 12:1-11.

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant. Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led. Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed; and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost. Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations (Weymouth, "effects") but it is the same God which worketh all in all. But the manifestations of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues; But all these worketh that one and the self-same Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.

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Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues. Let all things be done decently and in order.

In this modern age the gift of tongues is the object of a vast amount of skepticism and unbelief. The majority of Christian denominations believe and teach that the gift of tongues ceased with the apostles, and is received in the church of Christ no more. On the other hand, the attempts of some denominations to exercise the gift of tongues in confusion, disorder, and ignorant gullibility, have done little to reestablish the gift of tongues as a legitimate gift which may be expected by intelligent believers today as well as in ancient times. Yet the promise is that "these signs shall follow the believer," ... they shall speak in new tongues," and there is no time limit placed upon this promise. Latter Day Saints believe that neither the gift of tongues -- nor indeed any of the spiritual gifts -- were done away after the time of the apostles, but were intended to continue in the church to the end of the world.

First perhaps, we should make clear what we mean when we speak of the "gift of tongues," so that you will not be thinking of one thing while we speak of another. The gift of tongues is a spiritual gift. It is given, not by the will of men, but by the Spirit of God, and the will of God. That gift is not a mere emotional upheaval or ecstatic excitement within the person speaking, but is a definite manifestation of a power from outside himself. This power does not render the speaker unconscious, nor does it seize hold of him and take over control of his body or his mind. Rather does it quicken, stimulate, enlarge and augment his own mental and spiritual powers, so that with ease he can speak that which would normally be impossible for him. The gift of tongues does not proceed from morbidity, from insanity or disease. It is properly exercised by normal men in full vigor of strength and health, in full possession of all their senses and faculties. It is preceded by no frenzy, and followed by no exhaustion.

Many modernists who have never experienced or observed the gift of tongues properly exercised, take the attitude that the New Testament gift of tongues was meaningless jumble of inarticulate sounds, uttered by mentally unbalanced people in the throes of a religious frenzy or deep spiritual emotion. We do not think so, nor do we think that the meager scriptural accounts will bear out this theory. The gift of tongues was and is literally a supernatural gift of speaking in a language which is unknown to the speaker. Such a gift is not meant to relieve

men of the study and labor of learning other languages. It is more than a mere fluency or facility in acquiring and using strange languages. In a gift of tongues, the one exercising it speaks by a power not his own, in a language unknown to him, and at the end of that experience he is just as unfamiliar with the language as before.

To sum it up then, the gift of tongues is a spiritual gift. It comes from without, not from within; it proceeds from God, through the ministry and power of his Spirit. The Spirit of God is light, intelligence, truth, and power; therefore the gift of tongues to be genuine must be more than a mere ecstatic, emotional, unintelligible jargon of senseless gibberish. It must be given for a purpose; it must convey meaning; therefore it must be in the words of some language which can be interpreted to bring light and truth and intelligence and meaning. Such a gift is not an everyday occurrence, nor is it something to be turned on and off at the will of men. It comes only to those who are fitted by nature and spiritual temperament and preparation to use it to the edification of the body; and it comes only at such times as God has a particular purpose to be achieved in manifesting it.

The account of the happenings on the day of Pentecost leave little doubt that the gift of tongues enabled men to speak in languages unknown to them. On the day of Pentecost, devout Jews from "every nation under heaven" were gathered at Jerusalem; and when the Holy Spirit fell on the assembled church "every man heard them (the saints) speak in his own language. And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?" And then follows a lengthy list of the various nationalities represented, all of whom heard simple Galilean peasants speaking in a multitude of languages completely strange and foreign to them.

The gift of tongues seems to have been diffused throughout the early New Testament Church. As we have noted, this gift was first given in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. Later, the gift of tongues, was given to Cornelius and his company as Peter preached to them, convincing Peter that God's Spirit could bless Gentile as well as Jew. (Acts 10:46) When Paul came to Ephesus and found certain disciples who had received John's baptism, but who had not yet received the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost, he re-baptized them, laid on hands, and the converts spake with tongues and prophesied. (Acts 19:6) The Church at Corinth evidently was inordinately fond of the gift of tongues, because the fourteenth chapter of Paul's first Corinthian letter deals principally with the proper exercise and regulation of this gift. Paul does not condemn the gift of tongues; he concludes the chapter with the injunction: "Wherefore brethren, covet to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues. Let all things be done decently and in order." It is the unwise, disorderly exercise of the gift of tongues, without wisdom or restraint, which Paul is trying to prevent.

Let us notice briefly some of the controls or safeguards which Paul suggests should be thrown around the exercise of the gift of tongues. First, all spiritual gifts, including the gift of tongues, should be edifying to the church; that is, they should "build up" the church. A gift in an unknown tongue which is unintelligible to the congregation is not edifying unless an interpretation is given; therefore prophecy is to be preferred to tongues. But if a tongue is given, the congregation should pray for the interpretation, that they may be edified.

Evidently some of the gifts of tongues manifested at Corinth were not genuine; for we may infer from Paul's warnings and instruction that sometimes those who tried to speak in tongues were seized upon by some unknown power, and compelled to act in an unseemly manner, jabbering unintelligible gibberish which they were powerless to stop. Paul had short patience with that kind of manifestation.

The Spirit of God manifests light, truth, wisdom. It always respects man's agency; it does not take over his body and cause him to do that which is contrary to his nature or his will. Paul says, "The spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets," that is, the Spirit which dictates prophecy or prophetic tongues will always be under the control of the one exercising the gift. Ecstatic utterances which cannot be controlled or repressed, and which disturb the peace and quiet and order of the meeting are not manifestations of the Spirit of God. Neither is it a genuine gift of tongues when two or three men are all shouting in tongues at once. That is unseemly and out of order. Paul therefore admonishes, "If any man speak in another tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, (that is, only two or three in a meeting) and that by course, (that is one at a time) and let one interpret." When the gifts are given in decorum, in order, one at a time so that all may be heard by all, the church can be edified. There can be no edification when all speak at once and drown each other out.

Perhaps it would be helpful if we illustrate our belief about the gift of tongues by describing two or three occasions on which that gift has been given in the modern church. The first occasion to which we refer was a prayer meeting during one of the General Conferences of our church in Independence, when there were numerous visitors, several from other parts of the world. During the service, one of the ministers in charge arose, and began to speak in a gift of tongues, addressing the congregation as a whole. At a certain point in the message, the speaker turned and directly addressed a young man of Oriental appearance who sat near the front row; then he again addressed the audience. The message in the unknown tongue being finished, the speaker then proceeded to give the interpretation; but when he came to the portion that had been addressed to the Japanese boy, he did not interpret; he skipped that part, and after a momentary hesitation, went on to finish the interpretation of the closing part of the message which had been directed to the entire congregation. The minister through whom the gift came was not acquainted with the Japanese young man; had no knowledge of the Japanese language; but the part addressed to him came in the Japanese language, and needed no interpretation, for it was for him and him alone. The message to the congregation was interpreted so that they might be edified. That young Japanese student later became a missionary for this church, serving among the oriental people of the Hawaiian Islands.

On another occasion, your speaker was present to witness a manifestation of the gift of the tongues. The date was August 19, 1936. I ask you particularly to notice the year -- 1936 -- because as yet the second World War had not broken out even in Europe. The occasion was a sunrise prayer meeting for the youth of a large summer camp meeting or reunion. There were probably two hundred young people from thirteen to twenty-five years of age packed into every seat in the little country church where the meeting was held -- and some stand around the walls. About midway through the service, one of the ministers in charge arose and began to speak in a strange tongue. He spoke with emotion, but as calmly, as sanely, as intelligibly, as I am speaking to you at this moment. Unless you have had the experience yourself, it would be impossible for me to convey to you the thrilling power, the sense of conviction, the sense of illumination, of intelligence, which came flooding over the congregation as he spoke. It was an experience which no one present could possibly have taken lightly, or scoffingly, or skeptically. The message finished, there came the interpretation. These young people were told that dark clouds of fear and despair were hovering over the earth; that darker clouds would come; that all of those present would pass through trial, and some should perish, and lose their lives. They were admonished that if they lived close to God, it would not matter whether they lived or died when those times came. A few years later many of the young men who had had this promise indelibly impressed upon their minds by the manifestation of the gift of tongues --- which many of them had never before experienced -- were facing the perils of war

in Europe, Africa, and the Far Pacific -- were storming the Normandy Beach Head and Iwo Jima and Okinawa.

Another illustration of how the gift of tongues can be used to edify the church, is to be found in the life of Elder Hubert Case, one of the outstanding missionaries of the church, now living in retirement in Independence. He and his bride of a few weeks sailed from San Francisco in October, 1894, on a mission to the Society Islands. After arriving there they copied a Tahitian dictionary by hand, and by diligent study succeeded in learning enough Tahitian to carry on a conversation, and even to do some preaching. Then they visited the island of Raratonga, where the natives understood some Tahitian, but talked a completely different dialect. The first time Brother Case preached in Tahitian, and found that the people seemed to understand. On the second night he began to preach in Tahitian again, but found himself using words which were completely unfamiliar to him. His listeners told him after the sermon that he had preached in the Raratonga dialect, with which he was completely unfamiliar.

The gift of tongues is still enjoyed in the church today -- not at every meeting, but as God sees a peculiar and special need and chooses this way of manifesting his will in light and wisdom and intelligence to his people. It is manifested in decency and in order, with interpretation. It strengthens the believer, and confirms his faith. On occasion it is used to preach the gospel or give special instruction to those whose language is not known by the one exercising the gift.

There are other gifts of the Spirit, such as wisdom and knowledge and prophecy, which are much more important than the gift of tongues, though less spectacular. But there is still a place in the church for the gift of tongues, for the edifying of the church, for the conviction of the unbeliever, for the warning, encouragement, and strengthening of the members of the body of Christ. "Wherefore brethren, covet to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues." But "Let all things be done decently and in order."