Three Kinds of Tongues

Speaking in tongues has been the subject of great interest, as well as great controversy, in the church for the past three quarters of a century.

One of the chief causes of controversy is the failure to distinguish between the different kinds of tongues which are manifested through the Spirit-filled believer. Many people do not realize there is a difference between tongues as the initial evidence of being filled with the Spirit, devotional tongues, and the manifestation of tongues, in a congregation of believers. When this distinction is not made between these three kinds of tongues, much confusion can result.

We dealt with tongues as the initial evidence of the in-filling of the Spirit. There were five occasion in the book of acts where believer who were filled with the Spirit actually spoke in tongues. This is the sign gift to the believer and the church that a person has been filled with the Spirit.

This is the initial evidence recorded in the books of Acts. To recap they are:
1. The Day of Pentecost Acts 2:1-4
2. The believers in Samaria Acts 8:14-19

We teach tongues is the initial evidence but tongues are not the only evidence one has been filled with the Spirit. There may be other evidences more important in the long run. In His providence God has chosen tongues as the initial evidence that the Spirit has taken possession of the believer.

DEVO TIONAL TONGUES

The second kind of tongues we will call devotional tongues. Devotional tongues are given to a believer to help him in his worship and prayer life to God. Examples of this are found throughout the New Testament. There are scriptural basis for praying in tongues, praising in tongues, singing in tongues, and interceding in tongues.

1. Praying in Tongues

In Ephesians 6:8 we read: “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints—”. The same kind of phrase is used in Jude 20 when we are told to build ourselves up by “praying in the Holy Ghost” (or Holy Spirit). Many people believe that praying in the Spirit is the same as praying in tongues. This harmonizes with Paul’s statement in 1 Corinthians 14:15 when he says, “What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding.”

I do not know any other way to interpret Paul’s language except the he prayed in tongues. How else would he contrast “pray with the spirit”, with “pray with the understanding”? The context gives strong evidence that he is dealing with speaking in tongues.

Page 1
Praying with tongues is praying in the Spirit. Our understanding is by bypassed when we express the mind of God in a language we do not know. One’s prayers are generally limited to one’s vocabulary and understanding, but praying in the Spirit goes beyond these limitations. It is prayer that is not filtered and diluted by his experiences and perceptions. The Holy Spirit give to the believer the facility to pray in languages he has never learned. This released prayer that is unfettered by human prejudice and preconceptions.

Praying in the Spirit brings us into perfect harmony with heaven. Our two Comforters pray in harmony. The word comforter, parakletos in the Greek, is used in the Gospel of John three times to refer to the Holy Spirit. The same word is used in 1 John 2:1 speaking the Lord Jesus Christ. It says, “we have and advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous”. A comforter is a lawyer, a pleader, a helper, an intercessor.

The Holy Spirit is the Comforter here on earth indwelling the believer. Jesus is the Comforter at the right hand of the Father in heaven. Surely the interceding that Jesus does for us at the right hand of the Father will harmonize with the interceding that the Spirit does with us here on earth. Hebrews 7:25 says, “Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.”

Praying in the Spirit is the believer praying according to the mind of the Holy Spirit so that his praying comes into perfect harmony with what Jesus is praying at the right hand of the Father. These two {the Son and the Spirit} unite in prayer - one on earth and the other in heaven- to bring to pass God’s beautiful will for His people and His Church.

2. Praising in Tongues

Devotional Tongues may take the form of praise. The tongues on the Day of Pentecost proclaimed “the wonderful works of God” (Acts 2:11). At Caesarea, Peter and his Jewish companions heard the believers “speak with tongues and magnify God” (Acts 10:46). Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 14:14,15:

1 Corinthians 14:14 For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful. 15 What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding."

It is a beautiful thing to me to see a congregation of Spirit-filled believer praising the Lord! But often that praise reaches a point beyond the highest language of men. At that point the Holy Spirit transcends human language and give a utterance in tongues that give honor and praise and glory to God. This is rich devotional experience both for the individual and/or the entire congregation of believers.

3. Singing in Tongues

But in the same passage, he suggest a third king of devotional tongues - sing in the Spirit. Paul says, “I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding.” In Ephesians 5:19 Paul exhorts believer to “speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord,”.
The Psalms refer to Hebrew hymns recorded in the book of Psalms. The hymns were evidently songs composed by the first century saints. “Spiritual songs” were undoubtedly songs in tongues. These are songs of spiritual praise and worship given to the believer by the Holy Spirit. The language of these songs may not be understood, but the spirit and power of such singing can be unforgettable.

4. Intercession in Tongues

Finally, there is intercession in the Spirit, found in Romans 8:26,27:

26 Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. 27 Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God. Romans 8:26-27

The NIV reads:

26 In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. 27 And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will. Romans 8:26-27

The intercession of the Spirit transcends human speech. The Holy Spirit pleads in prayer for the things that God wills to do. When one intercedes in tongues he is surely engaged in supernatural intercession. There have been times that I have agonized and prayed not know who or what I have prayed for but I knew it was on target “because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will”.

4. THE MANIFESTATION OF TONGUES

In 1 Corinthians 14 Paul makes a clear distinction between devotional tongues and the manifestation of Tongues. He leaves not doubt about his speaking with tongues. He declares, “I speak with tongues more that you all”. But he indicates that his tongues speaking was primarily in his devotional life. He does not eliminate the manifestation gift of tongues as part of his tongues speaking, but he does emphasize his devotional exercise of tongues - praying and singing in the Spirit.

The major part of 1 Corinthians 14, however, deals with some corrective teaching on the manifestation gift of tongues. The Corinthian Church had become embroiled in controversy over the manifestation of tongues. It seemed that some wanted to be free to speak in tongues anytime they felt like it. Other evidently were forbidding speaking with tongues (1 Corinthians 14:39). This matter was dividing the Church. Pal proceeds to deal with the problem. This biblical treatise on the manifestation gift of tongues is God’s measuring rod for all Churches today. Especially Pentecostal Churches where there is little or no order. The truth Paul wrote here did not correspond with the practices of many Corinthians, but they are diving principals for all time. Man is often tempted to measure God’s word by his experience, but this is getting the cart before the horse. We must ever measure our experience by the Word of God.

(1) Edifying the Church

Paul begins by declaring that the object of manifestations of the Spirit is the edifying of the Church. The body of Christ should always be edified when tongues are manifested in the congregation of be-
lievers. One cannot judge the appropriateness of his manifestation by whether or not he is edified individually. He must judge by whether or not the whole church is edified.

(2) Interpretation Required.

He asserts that there must be an interpretation. Without an interpreter the manifestation gift of tongues is lost. The body of believers must know what is being said in tongues. In verse 28 he states emphatically, "If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and God."

(3) Keep Silent.

Paul places the burden for interpretation squarely on the shoulders of the one speaking in tongues. If there is not interpreter, he is to keep silent. He may speak to himself and to God - this would mean speaking quietly in tongues so as not to disturb the gathered people of God. Or, he should pray for the interpretation himself. It may be preferable to have different speakers give the tongues and the interpretation, but it surely is not out of order for the same person to give both manifestations.

Some argue that they cannot keep silent when an utterance in tongues is given to them, but Paul makes it clear that this is not true. While the Spirit gives the utterance, the believer does the speaking. He is to judge whether he is to speak aloud to the church or silently to himself and to God. Paul would certainly have been out of order making the statements that he does in 1 Corinthians 14 if that were not true.

The Holy Spirit does not make robots out of God’s people. When He indwells a person, that person does not become a mindless instrument in the hand of the Spirit. There is a reciprocal operation of the Spirit and the individual. One who says, "I cannot keep quite! I have no control! I cannot help myself!” needs to examine his actions to determine what kind of spirit is using him. God only has obedient volunteers. He never violates man’s will.

And so, Paul first says that the manifestation of tongues must have an interpretation. But then he says that if there is not interpreter, the speaker is to keep silent. There is, of course, the added counsel, "let him speak to himself and to God." This reveals the possibility of speaking in tongues quietly, in such a way that it does not disrupt the congregational meeting.

There are those who feel that any utterance given by the Spirit must be given in a loud voice. According to Paul’s exhortation, this is not true. One may speak quietly to himself and to God. If the words are meant only for our Father, we can whisper quietly to Him. It is crude to speak intimate words of love and affection in a loud and boisterous tone. The love words may be for God alone - and He is not deaf.

It would be like the person in the congregation who had something to say to the person sitting next to him. He would not shout out and disrupt the service. That would be out of order. If you had a word to say to someone next to you, and urgent word that you had to speak, you would turn and whisper so that no one could hear except the person to whom you were talking.

It is important, then, for the person who had an utterance in tongues to determine whether the utterance is a manifestation to the church or a private devotional expression of tongues. Then he can judge what kind of expression to give to this utterance. Furthermore, the climate of the service will deter-
mine his response. If it is time for corporate praise and worship, he may be able to pray or praise in tongues without disrupting the church. In fact, it may add to the climate of celebration. But if someone is preaching or teaching, he must take into account the welfare of the whole church. Will it edify the church? If not, let him keep silent.

Limitations on the Number of Manifestations.

Another limitation that Paul places on the manifestation gift of tongues has to do with the number of such manifestations in any one service. 1 Corinthians 14:27 says, “If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be two or at the most three, each in turn, and let one interpret.” There are two interpretations of this passage. **First**, some hold that there should be no more than two or three who speak in tongues before there is an interpretation. Second, the more common accepted view is that there should be no more than two or three manifestations of tongues in any service. If a person speaks with tongues, the church should wait for an interpretation. If no one else give the interpretation, then the person speaking in tongues has an obligation to give the meaning of what he has said.

Paul indicates that there may be two or three messages in tongues and interpretations, but never more than that. It seems that the Corinthians had gone far beyond this limitation. They needed to set some boundaries on the exercise of this gift. It is both wise and safe, it seems to me, to limit manifestations of tongues and interpretations to no more than three in any one service. In fact, it is probably true that seldom should there be as many as three. Without infringing on the sovereignty of the Spirit we must maintain these scriptural guidelines.

Tongues and interpretation can become a kind of toy as it had with these charismatic Corinthians. They became engrossed with tongues until that usurped the preaching of the Word. Paul issued these guidelines in order to correct and excessive emphasis on “The surprises of the Spirit”.

(5) Manifestations to be Judged.

Also, these manifestations are to be judged and evaluated. No manifestation of the Spirit is to be considered infallible. It is the duty of the congregation, and particularly the leadership of the congregation, to judge whether a word is from the Lord. Both prophecies and tongues (with interpretation) are to be judged to make sure that the word from the Lord has not been diluted or distorted by the messenger. There is nothing out of order for the Pastor to step in and correct the utterance that may not be what he feels is the clear word form the Lord.

Paul makes it clear in 2 Corinthians 4:7 “But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us”. Sometimes these “clay pots” garble the message God is trying to communicate. Manifestation gifts do not give infallibility to the human instruments. Therefore, we are to judge. It is not only the privilege, it is the obligation of the Church to weigh and evaluate all manifestations. We will come to the guidelines later for evaluating and judging the manifestations of the Spirit.

(6) Forbid Not to Speak with Tongues.

We conclude this chapter by looking at verse 39b: “Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues.” There were some member of the Church at Corinth who wanted to stop all speaking in tongues. The word from Paul is “do not forbid to speak with tongues.” The statement makes it clear that Paul was not trying to eliminate
speaking in tongues. The answer to abuses of this gift is not the elimination of this gift. We are strictly forbidden to go this route.

We must strike a biblical balance between abuse and abolition. We must be open and sensitive to this manifestation of the Spirit. It is a sad situation when a church never has a manifestation because the people are afraid that abuses will arise. When leaders are so frightened of spiritual manifestations that the stifle, if not stop, them, the church suffers tremendous loss. The leadership must teach the people to be sensitive and responsive to the manifestations of the Spirit. The manifestations will appear where they are celebrated and not just tolerated.