

## **What Should I Think About Tongues and Prophecy?**

This is a brief extract to hopefully help you begin to have a right understanding of what Paul believed would take place in 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 concerning the gifts of tongues and interpretation. These spiritual gifts served momentary purposes during the early church. Specifically to edify the body of Christ, confirm apostolic teaching, and functioned as partial and dim forms of divine revelation that would cease once the clear and mature revelation, the New Testament, was completed. The idea that these gifts continue today is an attack on the sufficiency of Scripture, the Authority of Christ, and the work of the Holy Spirit in every believer.

Succinctly stated, these gifts were never meant to be permanent and were to pass away once the New Testament had been completed. In fact it could be argued that Paul even thought these gifts were already passing away when he penned this letter. The following will briefly examine 1 Corinthians 13:8-10 under two headings: the Imperfect and the Perfect.

### **The Imperfect**

In 1 Corinthians 13 verse eight we are faced with the clear statement of the impermanence of these miraculous gifts! Paul says in verse eight that love never fails, but the gifts of knowledge, prophecy and tongues will. In verse 13 we see that faith, hope and love abide. A contrast is being purposefully made here by the Apostle with external and internal graces. Notice verse eight lists the gifts of prophecy, tongues and knowledge. All he says will be done away with and in verse 13 he lists faith, hope and love as abiding. Three will cease and three will remain (v.8, 13). Tongues, prophecy, knowledge and faith, hope and love, the later three remain to this day, the former cease. The point, a renewed heart, is not manifested by external gifts such as tongues and prophecy, but genuine conversion begins in the heart manifesting the proper fruit (Gal 5: 22-23) including faith, hope and love.

A brief side note must be made. Prophecy and tongues were never signs or proof of one's spirituality or spiritual achievement. These gifts were not a badge of personal honor indicating personal piety, which is a common view held by many today. Rather they were forms of divine confirmation on apostolic ministry and momentary forms of partial and dim divine revelation for the purpose of the edification of the church (1 Cor14: 1-19). This point is made in 14:12 where Paul declares that one should be zealous for spiritual gifts not based on personal gain or achievement (as taught today) but for the purpose of edifying the church. Paul tells us specifically not to seek for the spiritual gifts, but for the edification of the church. The church is edified only when she has been most consistent to the teachings of the Holy Scriptures and her members manifest toward God and one another the inward fruit of the Spirit.

Paul uses two illustrations to establish his point that prophecy and tongues which were being manifested in the early church were to cease! The first is seen in verse 11 and the second in verse 12.

### **The Childish in Contrast to the Mature (v.11)**

Anyone who has been around children sees them behaving, speaking and reasoning in childish ways. It is on display for all to see. This is because, their knowledge of life is limited, they engage in childish behavior and their speech is difficult to understand making communication with a child a guessing game at times. Paul is saying at one time he spoke, thought, and reasoned like a child, as we all did, but as he grew up and became a man, he did away with his childish behavior.

Paul's point is simply this: these prophecies and tongues were in a sense 'childish' and hard to understand, even uncertain at times. So when the full and mature revelation, the New Testament is completed, these childish things will cease. Would you entrust a five year old to communicate a very important message or would you prefer a face to face conversation with a mature adult? The answer is obvious. The same is true here. God, in past times, spoke in the Old Testament in many diverse manners and ways, which not even the prophets who spoke them fully understood (Heb 1: 1-2). So even though their prophecies were all true and without error, the prophets didn't fully understand the meaning of the prophecy. But God has not left us to similar dreams and visions, or even tongues and prophecy, as forms of His communication. Instead we have the entire completed, perfect, full and clear face to face communication of God in the New Testament, therefore the lesser forms of revelation must cease.

Paul is communicating two ideas: the arrival of mature communication realized in the New Testament and the removal or fading away of childish communication, tongues and prophecy. Consider the bright noon day sun shining on a puddle of water in the street. Over a period of hours the puddle will soon disappear and evaporate into the air. So it was with these early forms of revelation: they did exist and served their purpose, but when the bright rays of God's fully completed New Testament arrived, the childish forms of communication evaporated.

### **A Riddle in contrast to Face to Face (v. 12)**

Paul again uses another example to support his point of the necessity and reality of the cessation of spiritual gifts of prophecy and tongues. In Numbers 12 the Lord rebukes Miriam and Aaron who spoke against Moses and said "Hear now My words, if there is a prophet among you, I the Lord shall make Myself known to him in a vision. I shall speak with him in a dream. Not so with My servant Moses, He is faithful in all My household, with him I will speak mouth to mouth, even openly, and not in dark sayings." The contrast with this passage and 1 Corinthians 13: 8-12 is obvious. The Lord at one time gave revelations via visions and dreams, revelation that was partial, dim and hard to understand, but now, we have clear, face to face revelation in the Scriptures.

Furthermore we see the similarity between Moses and the Lord Jesus. God says that with Moses He will speak mouth to mouth, openly and not in dark sayings.

Hebrews 1:1-2 tells us that God spoke to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, but God spoke face to face with us through His Son! In the Old Testament, Moses stands as the great Prophet who spoke 'mouth to mouth' with God while other prophets received 'dark speeches' and 'riddles' through obscure 'visions' and

‘dreams’<sup>1</sup>. Jesus Christ is the greatest Prophet, the radiance of the Father’s Glory and the exact representation of His nature (Hebrews 1) and has spoken with His words, teachings and miracles being recorded by the Apostles. The phrase “see in the mirror dimly” refers then to the dark speeches, riddles, visions, dreams that were partial and not perfect communication from God, in contrast to the Scriptures that are likened to the face to face, clear, mature revelation from God. God spoke in many unclear ways in the O.T., but now speaks to us through the clear and perfect revelation of the Holy Scriptures.

## **The Perfect**

Is God still giving us new revelation? Do we have a final authority and rule to live by? Well, the answer to these questions is found in 2 Timothy 3:16 where we are told all Scripture is inspired, literally ‘God breathed,’ and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness. This single verse proves we have a final authority and rule and Word from God. Meditate on what this verse says. Both Old and New Testaments, not tongues, not prophecies, not even miracles, but the Holy inspired Word, the Bible<sup>2</sup>, is the *only, certain, infallible* rule of all saving faith and is therefore profitable, perfect and sufficient to bring God all the glory, man’s salvation, faith and life. Furthermore the work of the Holy Spirit is specifically linked to, and not separate from, what God has revealed in the scriptures. It is He that Jesus promises and describes as the Helper (John 14: 26) who will teach us all things. It is inconsistent and ridiculous to think that “all things” Jesus speaks of today means ‘things’ outside of what has been revealed in scripture. Can we really think the Holy Spirit is going to apply and reveal Truths to us that God has not revealed in Scripture? That would imply a discontinuity between the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, the One who reveals and applies the Truth. The Holy Spirit reveals only that which is consistent with 2 Timothy 3:16.

None of this makes sense unless you realize what the Bible is all about. The Bible is all about One person, One who is fully divine and was fully man, a man who declared to be the Truth, the only way to the Father, His name is Jesus. The Bible is not just a book on history, a book on science or a book on philosophy, it is the revelation from God concerning His Son and sinners’ desperate need to know Him. The Old Testament spoke of Him and pointed to His coming, prophets prophesied of Him, and in the N.T. we see Him, the eternal Word having become flesh, full of grace and Truth and having all authority, declaring men to repent and believe and to live Holy lives as He is Holy. The message today remains, there is one Lord and Savior, one Word, one Truth, one revelation that alone brings faith, repentance and holiness which is able to do so because it is the Truth as Jesus is the Truth. Jesus commands repentance, He commands faith, He commands obedience, He commands holiness, He commands your allegiance at all costs. He also demands righteousness. If the Lord Jesus is commanding faith, repentance, righteousness and a godly life, where are you going to look to find these answers? You go to the Scriptures. Jesus said, “I am the Truth,” and if you do not find Him, you will perish in your sins. If you do not follow Him in obedience you have little reason to believe you know Him. So, I ask you, to what form of revelation are you going

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<sup>1</sup> Chantry, Walt J. *SIGNS OF THE APOSTLES*. Observations on Pentecostalism Old and New.

<sup>2</sup> New American Standard Bible 1996

to look to find the Truth that can redeem and guide you unto Glory? You must look to the Scriptures alone and have the Scriptures as your Final Word from God for all matters of life and godliness.

The Holy Scriptures, specifically the New Testament, is what Paul refers to when he speaks of 'face to face' communication with God. It is the charismatic gifts he refers to being equivalent of looking through a glass or dim mirror. Why hold on and desire dim and partial communication with God when He has given us full and clear face to face revelation of Himself to us through the Scriptures? The Scriptures are the final authority for man and for the church. Additionally, Paul makes very clear in chapter four of Timothy that young Timothy is to preach the word, in season and out of season reproving, rebuking and exhorting. How is any born again believer or church of God to do this if the Holy Scriptures are not the final revelation and authority and is replaced by some unknowable, unascertainable, mystical babblings that are supposedly words from God? Seems hard to edify the church, one another and obey this command in 2 Timothy 4: 2 if God continually is giving new revelation. How would we know what we are saying is true?

Are we to really think that God has left His church, His bride to childish things such as those Paul lists? Are we really left to a partial, dark, incomplete measure and standard of how the church ought to function herself? Are we to really think that God sent his own Son the living Truth to uphold the righteous law of God and endure the wrath of His Father, to save those the Father has chosen and leave us with insufficient means to know and follow Him? It is the church that is the pillar and support and upholds the already, perfect revelation from God, the Truth.

## **Conclusion**

We have not the partial dim revelation from God anymore, but the clear, face to face words from God revealed in the scriptures. In conclusion, it is clear that Paul thought and knew these forms of revelation being manifested in the early church were momentary and were to pass away once the perfect, completed and mature face to face revelation was completed, in the New Testament!

