

Have Tongues Ceased?

by
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In *I Corinthians chapters 12, 13 and 14* Paul corrects the Corinthian saints concerning their misuse of spiritual gifts. His teaching in this passage does not prohibit or discourage the exercise of spiritual gifts, it simply establishes order and gives understanding to their use for the edification of the body of Christ. The first **11 verses** of *I Corinthians 12* emphasize and demonstrate that all of the nine gifts mentioned in the chapter are given by the Holy Spirit. He is the source of these special enablings for the good of the body. All of these are supernatural and are not natural talents or abilities.

Some things all Christians possess in common. Some experiences are held in common by all believers. We are all sealed by the Holy Spirit. We all possess eternal life and an eternal inheritance. We all possess the right to approach God in Jesus' name. The provision has been made for all of us to enjoy answered prayer, joy unspeakable and peace that passes understanding.

There are other spiritual gifts that are given to some and not others. Who will possess what gift is completely up to the Sovereignty of the Holy Spirit. These nine gifts are a sampling of such gifts given by the

Holy Spirit. Every believer does not possess them, but they are given for the edification of the whole body.

Listed among these nine gifts of the Holy Spirit is the gift of tongues given to be interpreted to proclaim an edifying message to the whole congregation. This is not to be confused with the miracle of tongues given as evidence of having received the Holy Spirit in His fullness. (*Acts 2:1 – 39 / Acts 19:1 – 7*) The promise of receiving the infilling with the evidence of speaking in tongues is for all believers. The gift of tongues differs in that it is given by the Spirit to certain individuals for the good of the whole congregation. Many in the Church today declare that this gift, along with the other miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit have ceased and been done away with after the death of the Apostles and the completion of the New Testament.

Has the Holy Spirit retired any of His gifts? All the gifts of the Holy Spirit, including the nine mentioned here in ***I Corinthians 12***, are to be accepted as for the edification of God's people today. The Holy Spirit is still the same and has not retired any of His gifts. The apostles died, not the Holy Spirit. The only Scriptural evidence offered by those who claim that tongues have ceased is ***I Corinthians 13:8 – 13***. *“Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away. When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known. And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.” NKJV*

Many claim that the “perfect” thing is the completed Word of God, the New Testament. Once that was complete, speaking in tongues, prophecy and any other supernatural manifestation were done away with according to the fundamentalists. Though we agree with our fundamental brethren that the Word of God is complete and there is no more revelation to be added, we do not believe that this passage is a reference to that truth.

Those who oppose the supernatural gifts of *I Corinthians 12* through *14* say that Paul describes speaking in tongues as “childish.” If Paul felt that way about speaking in tongues, do you think he would have declared, “*I thank my God I speak in tongues more than you all.*”? *I Corinthians 14:18* Do you think he would have commanded “*do not forbid to speak with tongues*” if he felt such a gift to be frivolous? *I Corinthians 14:19*

The problem with interpreting *I Corinthians 13:8* – *13* as a reference to the completion of the New Testament is that it doesn’t hold up in the light of this same passage. Paul is stressing that love is to be an essential and prominent element of the Christian’s experience in this life and in eternity. The gifts of the Spirit that are good and useful in this life will not be needed on the other side, in Heaven. Love, however, transcends this life, so all that we do, including ministering in the gifts of the Spirit, should be motivated by love.

To interpret the perfect thing to be the completion of the New Testament we would have to also say, according to *verse 12*, that we all have perfect knowledge since we have the New Testament. Though it is true we have the full and perfect revelation of God’s will in the Word of God, we are continually learning more and more of that revelation by the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives. (*Ephesians 4:13 / II Corinthians 3:18 / II Peter 3:18*)

That which is perfect is a reference to our future state of eternal perfection at the coming of the Lord. Paul uses the analogy of the difference between the knowledge of a child and the knowledge of an adult to stress the vast difference between our present understanding of God and our future one when we reach eternity. Now, in this life, we see or understand only in a measure. Then, in heaven, we shall see clearly. Paul uses another analogy and explains the difference between our present knowledge in this life and our knowledge in Heaven is like that between seeing the reflection of someone in a dim, dull brass mirror and seeing them face to face. The reflection in the dim mirror is helpful to discern many things about the individual in the mirror, but it doesn't compare with the clarity that comes from seeing that person face to face.

It's a shame that both the Fundamentalist and Pentecostals have elevated speaking in tongues to such a prominent place in our discussions. It is only one of many ways that the Holy Spirit manifests Himself among God's people. It is neither superior to nor inferior to any other manifestation. Nevertheless, we should obey Paul's clear exhortations concerning the gifts of the Holy Spirit. *"Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy... Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues. Let all things be done decently and in order."* **I Corinthians 14:1, 39, 40 NKJV**

We must also obey **I Corinthians 14:29** *"Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge."* NKJV We judge the validity and value of one's gifts by judging them in the light of Scripture, the completed, perfect Word of God. The Holy Spirit who inspired the Word of God will never move someone to act or speak contrary to what He has already revealed to be the will of God.

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