

FORBID NOT TO SPEAK IN TONGUES

By Allon Maxwell

The "Pentecostal" church at Corinth, had many serious problems.

Not the least of these was their lack of knowledge about the vital differences between real gifts of the Holy Spirit and the false gifts which had crept into their midst.

There were false apostles amongst them, who Paul bluntly described as agents of Satan, disguised as servants of righteousness. ([2 Corinthians 11:13-15](#))

These false apostles had introduced another Jesus and a different Gospel.

Those who had allowed themselves to be led astray by this false teaching, had received a different spirit which was not the Holy Spirit. ([2 Corinthians 11:3-4](#))

There was disorder and confusion in their meetings, resulting from the exercise of the false "gifts" which accompanied this false spirit.

One major source of this disorder was the unhealthy preoccupation with the false "gift" of tongues which was dominating their meetings.

Their childish behaviour, ([1 Corinthians 14:20](#)), had left them open to well-deserved accusations of madness. ([1 Corinthians 14:23](#))

God could not possibly be the author of this confusion, or of the "gifts" which caused it. ([1 Corinthians 14:33](#))

There was a great need to restore decency, order, and peace. ([1 Corinthians 14:40](#))

However, even though it was obvious that not all at Corinth was of the Holy Spirit, Paul's cure for the problem was not to forbid speaking in tongues altogether.

([1 Corinthians 14:39](#)) That would also eliminate the genuine, if it was present.

Instead, he placed limits on it, which imposed responsibility on the Corinthians to "grow up" in their discernment of what was from God and what was not.

If we accept that Paul was inspired by the Holy Spirit, we must also assume that these limits are actually God's limits, rather than Paul's. We must also accept that these limits are still valid today, as God's way of dealing with the Corinthian problem, should we encounter it.

PAUL'S CONTROLS

1. No one is to speak in tongues without interpretation. The one who speaks in tongues is also responsible to pray for the ability to interpret.
If he cannot interpret and no one else can either, then the speaker is to remain silent.
2. Even with interpretation, there are to be no more than two, or at the most, three, each in turn.
The madness of all praying in tongues at once, is not to be tolerated at all.
Nor is the madness of all singing in tongues together, to be tolerated.
The mere addition of music to something already condemned by Paul, only serves to compound the confusion!

3. The Spirits of the prophets (and surely also speakers in tongues) are subject to the rational control of the speakers. ([1 Corinthians 14:32](#)) The loss of rational control is a clear sign that the gift is not from God.

With these controls, it will be possible to remove most of the counterfeit from any Corinthian situation. Outside Paul's limits it is obviously not from God.

There remains now only the problem of a counterfeit tongue accompanied by a counterfeit interpretation.

This would have to be dealt with in the same way as the potential problem of counterfeit prophecy.

The hearers are charged with the responsibility of weighing what is said. ([1 Corinthians 14:29](#))

We are not to surrender our minds in blind acceptance that all "spiritual gifts" are automatically from God. Instead, we are encouraged to test the spirits to see whether they really are from God. ([1 John 4:1](#))

Neither Tongues nor Prophecy are to be forbidden or rejected out of hand. Instead, all is to be put to the test as to whether it is from God, or not.

The good is to be retained and the false rejected. ([1 Thessalonians 5:21-22](#))

Those who search for God with all their heart will perceive the Divine wisdom in this. God invites the active participation of His children in the search for truth.

We are required to worship with our minds as well as our hearts.

HOW DO WE DECIDE WHETHER TONGUES, ACCOMPANIED BY INTERPRETATION, IS REAL?

The gift of distinguishing between true spirits and false, ([1 Corinthians 12:10](#)), if present, (and if valid!), would certainly help.

However, I do not believe that we are helpless without this gift. Nor do I believe that it is meant to stand alone, or bypass other clearly defined Biblical standards for measuring the validity of "spiritual gifts".

TEST NO. 1 - THE DIVINE LOVE

Paul's primary test for the validity of any gift, is spelt out in some considerable detail, in [1 Corinthians 13](#). The quality of love described in this chapter is a measure by which mature disciples, who experience this love in their own lives, can detect it in others also.

Without this love, no gift has any meaning at all.

Without this love, God has had no measurable influence in the life of the person claiming the gift. The person is nothing. The gift is useless.

This love, along with the rest of the fruit of the Spirit, is the infallible mark of the Spirit's presence. (Tongues is not.)

Without this love, which is the foremost fruit of the Spirit, how can we believe that the Holy Spirit is present in any gift which is claimed.

TEST NO. 2 - OBEDIENCE

The Holy Spirit is given to those who love Jesus and obey Jesus. ([John 14:15 & Acts 5:32](#))

Those who do not obey, do not love Jesus at all. ([John 14:23-24](#)) John bluntly labels those who claim to know Jesus, whilst disobeying, as liars, devoid of the truth. ([1 John 2:3-6](#))

It should be obvious that no man or woman, wilfully devoid of the truth in this way, should be given credibility or support for any claim that they have received a gift from the Spirit of Truth.

TEST NO. 3 - BIBLICAL TRUTH IN THE SPEAKER

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth.

A mature grasp of Bible truth, amongst godly elders of the church, ([Titus 1:9](#)), will always be at the forefront of any recognition of false gifts.

The gift of tongues described in [Mark 16:17](#), is one of the signs by which Jesus confirms to the hearers, his approval of the Gospel message, spoken in His name.

However, if we recognise in the speaker, the presence of dangerous false teaching which denies the teaching of Jesus Himself, or the Holy Spirit's teaching about Jesus, with potential to lead the hearers astray, we may be sure that the gift is NOT a confirmation from Jesus, of anything!

We are not to give our blessing or our recognition, or our support, to such ministries or "gifts". ([2 John 7-11](#))

Bible truth about who Jesus is; about the Gospel of the Kingdom of God; about the real Christian hope of the resurrection; about sin and righteousness and Judgement; about remission of sins through baptism; and about life changing radical obedience to Jesus; are all too important to ignore, in assessing the validity of claims for gifts of the Holy Spirit.

False prophets, with a false message about fundamental Bible Truth, are not inspired by the Spirit of Truth, but by the spirit of error. ([1 John 4:6](#))

I have been told too many times by people who claim the gift of tongues that because I believe in the ONE TRUE GOD who Jesus calls Father, and reject the Trinity, I am not really a Christian.

Why should I accept the validity of any "spiritual gift", in anyone who labels as heresy, what I KNOW to be truth?

TEST NO. 4 - BIBLE PURPOSE IN THE MESSAGE ITSELF

A false prophet, with a false tongue, interpreted, but inspired by something other than the Spirit of Truth, can be expected to fail somewhere to measure up to the test of conformity with the Word of God.

Somewhere, somehow, we can expect that a false gift of tongues will fail in the fundamental purpose of edifying the church for the common good of all, in a real way. ([1 Corinthians 12:7](#))

Mature believers, familiar with the voice of the Shepherd, will quickly detect the voice of the stranger, and refuse to follow. ([John 10:1-5](#))

IS THERE A REAL THING AT ALL?

Because Paul did not forbid tongues entirely, it is, I believe, a valid assumption that there must have been real gifts of tongues present in Corinth, side by side with the counterfeit.

Otherwise, there would seem to be little point in allowing tongues to continue at all.

What Paul did do, was teach us how to discern between the true and the false, choosing the good and refusing the evil.

After applying Paul's standards, prayerfully, and so far as I know, in honesty and openness of heart before God, I am convinced that by far the majority of the speaking in tongues that I have personally encountered amongst Pentecostals, is false.

I encourage those who read this, to accept their own responsibility to search out THE TRUTH for themselves, from the one who gives the Spirit of Truth.
