

NOW CONCERNING TONGUES

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From time to time as occasion permits in the next number of Sunday evenings I would like to give myself to a series called “Now Concerning...” Now concerning to focus on issues which are a concern to us within the body of Christ. Or maybe personal concerns which you have which by way of suggestion you could say to me “Pastor, I would like to hear a sermon concerning...” and I will prayerfully evaluate this and see what direction the Lord might take in my life and whether or not to come before the congregation by way of sermon. This even the subject, “Now concerning tongues.”

I have some preface comments to make as we begin to look at this. One is that I am very keenly sensitive to the balance between truth and love. So that anytime it becomes important to speak on a matter regarding biblical teaching or doctrine over which Christians have had differences that somehow there has to be a balancing part that one came come down hard on the side of something he affirms to be true yet if in coming down so hard upon that neglects the element of love the doctrine is worthless.

On the other hand there’s the balance that truth has with love. For love exists on the subjective or emotional side, whereas truth is ever leading it into the side of it’s real or the objective side. In looking at this subject, Now concerning tongues... I’m aware deeply for the need for balance. How awkward it would be if on the subject and if upon the expression of the Spirit of God in our lives it can have such potent force in our personal prayer life how devastating it would be if it becomes instead only a doctrinal argument.

When we look at the subject of tongues it’s sometimes been said that we who have had an experience of the baptism in the holy Spirit and a personal life which has been marked in prayer by speaking in tongues that perhaps we have the experience first and then we try to find the support in the scriptures for what we have experienced. I have trouble with that question sometimes. Then it dawned on me recently again in reading the book of Acts that this is precisely the very procedure that we used in Acts 15 when the early Christians were having a very difficult time in deciding whether or not to admit gentiles into the church. Peter recounts before the church council in Acts 15 that he had gone down to Cornelius’ house and that there he had really seen the Holy Spirit at work. He didn’t go to Cornelius’ house because he understood the scripture was telling him to go to Cornelius’ house but he went to Cornelius’ house and then the scripture began to verify the experience which he had.

Of course in that Jerusalem counsel as well Paul and Barnabus stand forth and they give testimony of the work which has been happening with them on their missionary journey. Then finally after the experiences of Simon Peter and Paul and Barnabus related to the Jerusalem church then James who evidently is the brother of the Lord residing over the church counsel says, “Now we have heard what the other brother has said. And now lets see what the scripture says.” As he looked in the scripture and quoted, what he quoted confirmed the experience that God had led them into.

Just as it is true sometimes that it is possible for us to have an experience before we have the scriptural understanding so it’s possible on the other hand to have the scriptural understanding but not have the experience.

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Let me cite an example of this which is really remarkable, I ran across it just this week. I don't know what I'd never run across it before but there it was as big as life. In Mark 7 Jesus tells the disciples that all foods are clean. That it's not indeed what a man puts in himself but it is what comes out of a man that defiles. Mark specifically says "By this saying Jesus declared all foods clean." When you think back to the background of the gospel of Mark and recognize that as many biblical scholars feel that Mark is simply writing down what Peter preached. That really the gospel of Mark is a long sermon by the apostle Peter written down by the under man, Mark.

Then we'll have to recognize that this doctrine came through to Simon right in the time of the Lord's ministry. But when did the doctrine become an experience for him? It isn't until Acts 10 when he goes to Cornelius' house, (as he's preparing to go) that the Lord runs this vision by him three times. It's after he has the vision and goes to the house and he's still protesting all the way. He says to Cornelius, "I don't know if I should be here or not. All my life I've never eaten anything which is unclean. But now I'm here." Doctrinally he knew that the Lord had declared all foods clean. But he didn't have the experience yet of confirming the doctrine.

Quite obviously that any experience which we have if it is valid must sooner or later be validated by the scripture. I'm not trying to get into a trap of saying, go ahead and have any experience that you want to. It doesn't matter what the scripture says. That's not the intent. But just to say that sometimes the Holy Spirit working in our lives actually plants an experience within us before we have the scriptural understanding. And on the other hand sometimes we have head knowledge of scripture but haven't yet had the experience. The great thing that we want to do as believers is put the both together. To be a believing and a practicing church.

I've so often been a part of church life, I still do this every year as a minister, where I check down a sheet of things of "Do you believe *this*, do you believe *this*... It's a doctrinal checklist of belief. Nobody asks me the questions. Do you pray? Do you love? Do you care? Are you patient? Are you joyful? Because we get concerned with the subject side rather than the experience side. It's just as possible to be heretics in life experiences as it's possible to be heretics in doctrine. It could be possible that a church could have the most wonderful doctrinal statement in the world but in it's inner life be coming apart, absolutely torn asunder, because there is really not the full fruit of the Spirit's work.

What I want to see us do is keep that beautiful balance. The scripture has promised us that out of our innermost being will flow rivers of living water. This is what Jesus spoke of in regard to the Spirit.

When we come to a subject like tongues for example we want to put that in context. That is not the great goal for which we strive. But it is simply one means of which the Spirit can use in our life to help those rivers of living waters come out from us. So that we are tender toward the Lord. So that in effect we have a spiritual catharsis he gives us so that rivers of joy can be released. The Holy Spirit is so delightful in allowing us the privilege of praying in tongues in that the doctrine of the Holy Spirit can be something that we can check all the things on that we believe about him – the Holy Spirit was instrumental in the creation of the earth, the Holy Spirit was the agent of conception in the womb of the virgin Mary so that the Christ child came into the world, the Holy Spirit is active in regeneration, we can know all these things, the Holy Spirit inspired the scripture, but going beyond that what the Lord allows is that we can experience the

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Holy Spirit, we can participate in what he is doing. That's one of the ways we can participate, the language of praise, confession and intercession. Tongues.

I have learned to understand that when the Lord gives a gift it is always a good gift. Sometimes we get concerned, particularly if we've not had experience of really praying in the Spirit which Paul talks about in 1 Corinthians 14 and praying in the Spirit meaning praying in an unknown tongue – "I would be afraid to do that. I don't know if it would be really good. Maybe it's a lesser gift." My response is that even the lesser gifts if they're from God must be pretty fantastic gifts. There is nothing which God gives that could ever be harmful for me. If you ask for a piece of bread will he give you a stone? If you ask for fish will he give you a serpent? If our heart is right before the Lord and if we're asking in accordance with his will and the scripture then what we experience is really of him and can but work for our healing and for our release.

It strikes me as we look at the scripture and the use of tongues in the scripture that we see tongues being related to or being a part of three different phases of our Christian experience. One is the relationship of tongues with what is called the baptism in or with the Holy Spirit.

I guess I'd have to look back on my experience of being brought up in a church that stresses the baptism of the Holy Spirit to look back and recognize that maybe I caught this one point of my life this false understanding of the Holy Spirit. I thought somehow that when you were saved you received Jesus but then you waited quite a bit of time in some instances to receive the Holy Spirit. That somehow he didn't come in the same "package" that Jesus came with. I always had a rough time identifying with the Holy Spirit as a child. Particularly I had a rough time identifying with God the Father. Jesus came across to me as someone who really loved me, whom I could come to. God the Father, sometimes I got this in my mind that he was someone who was just waiting to see if I was going to do something wrong. Jesus was for me. He was trying to help me not do something wrong but he was always having to hold back the Father's hand from zapping me real hard.

What a delight to note in the New Testament that it is God who so loved the world. That his attitude toward us is the same as the Lord. There is a mixture of both love and justice for judgment.

But the Holy Spirit seemed so hard to get as compared with Jesus who all you needed to do was ask him into your life and he was there. If you were repentant. It has come to me since then quite obviously that when you talk about the baptism in the Holy Spirit we're talking about something that is beyond the conversion experience but yet we're not saying by the term "baptism in the Holy Spirit" that when you come to faith in Jesus Christ and are converted that somehow you don't have the Holy Spirit.

Paul very clearly says in 1 Corinthians 12 that it is by the Spirit that we have access into one body. Jesus says in John 3:5 that unless one is born of water and of the Spirit he cannot enter the kingdom of God. And Jesus further said to the disciples in John 20 when for the first time he stands in their presence he breathes on them and he says, "Receive the Spirit."

And yes, this is a totally different experience than what they will shortly be experiencing in Acts 2. In Acts 1 he says "Remain in Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high." Yet he spoke this after he said, "receive the Spirit," and breathed on them. Yet it was before the Spirit came upon them on the day of Pentecost.

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What's happening? What's happening in John 20 evidently the promise of the Lord's words in John 3:5 that one must be born of the Spirit. Part of the beauty of conversion is that when we receive the Lord we receive propenually the whole package. We receive the seed of all the developments of our later Christian life and will grow. It's helping to understanding that when we come to faith in Jesus Christ the Spirit of God is active and involved and indeed in our lives. But yet the book of Acts goes beyond this and shows us an experience which happened which really does two kinds of things. As I understand the totality of the baptism in the Holy Spirit maybe three things.

What the baptism of the Holy Spirit did as it's seen in the book of acts is it brings a kind of communication with God that previously was not there. It brings a praying in the Spirit. It brings a freedom. It brings a release to God in prayer that is remarkable. They spoke in tongues extolling God. Tongues is the language of prayer, the language of praise. Notice it does not say they spoke in tongues to other men. They heard them speaking in tongues glorifying the God of Israel. Every time you find a definition of tongues whether it's in two places in Acts or one place in 1 Corinthians, 1 Corinthians 14, Acts 2 & 10 – you will find when the definition is given that the phrase is used that it's extolling God or glorifying God. When Peter stood up to preach on the day of Pentecost he did not preach in tongues. He spoke in Aramaic or Hebrew. Because then it was time to speak to men. But the tongues were means by which address to God was given.

Sometimes as in Acts 2 the languages were known. Other times evidently they weren't. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14 that there are many kinds of languages, most of which are not known by the person who speaks or the person who hears. There was that release of praise and prayer to God that was associated with the baptism in the Spirit.

But there was also beyond that something that happened within the life of the person who experienced the baptism in the Spirit. There was joy. How many times in acts do you find the phrase, "They were filled with the Holy Spirit and with joy." This of course keeps the subject of tongues away from anybody ever wearing it as a doctrinal badge. Or kind of a rite of circumcision. ("I've spoke in tongues, haven't you? There must be something wrong with you if you haven't. Don't you see I'm more spiritual than you?") That's not the object. The object is to bring an inner joy which is contagious.

There are some doctrines which are taught and some doctrines which are caught. I kind of like the ones that are caught maybe better sometimes. In some ways I have to think my way through them more than other times. But this is an experience to be shared not to be argued about. This is to be caught.

A third thing that I see this experience doing is it is an initiatory experience that opens up a whole realm of supernatural experience and ministry toward others that appeared in the book of Acts to be the gateway by which new power that Jesus had promised was released for communication with others.

In conversion of course the Holy Spirit is called the agent of conversion. We are placed into conversion, into the element of Christ. If you think of water baptism for a moment you can get this picture a little bit better. When I baptize someone I am the agent of their baptism. The element I am placing them in is the water. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12 that by one Spirit we're

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all baptized into one body. What's happening? The Spirit is the baptizer who puts us into the life and the body of Christ. But John the Baptist declared "When he comes he will baptize you with the Spirit." And in Acts 19 in reflecting upon this experience with some believers who had already come to the Lord Jesus Christ then the scripture was quoted when indeed they received the baptism in the Spirit and the speaking in other tongues. The phrase was used that indeed this is what John the Baptist promised that when Jesus came he would baptize you. When Christ comes he becomes the baptizer and the element that we are placed into is the Spirit.

In Acts we find five different instances of persons receiving the baptism in the Spirit – Acts 2, 8, 9, 10, 19. Acts 2 is the birth of the church. A 120 persons upon whom the Spirit descends who spoke with other tongues and then spoke in prophecy, that is spoke in preaching. Address to God and address to man. Acts 8 involves Samaria where Phillip went and preached the gospel to the Samaritans. Many people were healed and there was much joy in that city but it was Peter and John who coming up to the city and laid their hands on persons that they might receive the Holy Spirit. The term "receive the Holy Spirit" is evidently the same experience of Acts 2, which is the baptism in the Spirit. Nothing is said about their speaking in tongues. In Acts 9 we find Saul of Tarsus, Ananias laying hands on him and the scales dropped away from his eyes and he's being filled with the Spirit. And again, nothing is said about his speaking with tongues. In Acts 10 at Cornelius' household and they're saved and they're simultaneously filled with the Spirit and speak in tongues. In this passage note the contrast already between Acts 2, 8, 9, 10. That Acts 2 the disciples had already believed but it's some days later until they receive this experience. In Acts 8 the Samaritans believed but it's some days later when they receive this experience. In Acts 9 Paul believes and simultaneous with his believing he receives the experience. In Acts 10 Cornelius believes and he receives the experience and then he's baptized. In Acts 19 at Ephesus again the experience of the baptism in the Spirit comes contemporaneous with salvation so that they believed, are baptized in water and are baptized with the Spirit and speak with other tongues.

So there are two patterns. There's the pattern of tarrying. And there's the pattern of instant reception. How good it is to see the Lord is bringing us in these times of consciousness of really immediately receiving upon conversion.

I wish I could just talk about the role and ministry of the Holy Spirit and talk on the broader issue because I think at this point it might be potentially more edifying. But I promised I would speak on tongues. As part of that ministry of the Holy Spirit now I'm going to cut back into it to a question that's often asked. If indeed the baptism in the Holy Spirit is a valid experience and it's so taught in the New Testament, then what is the role of tongues with the baptism of the Holy Spirit and should a person when he receives the baptism in the Holy Spirit speak in other tongues? And particularly in light of the fact that in the five instances in Acts only three times a person speaks in other tongues. What do you say about that?

Here again I would try to keep combination between truth and love. That I would feel that prayerfully and after several years of wrestling with this I myself have reached the position which I feel very confident in and feel that it as scriptural justification. But while I have reached this I would still want to say that in the body of Christ if we're doing anything in this church it is learning that what we have in Christ in unity is greater than any differences we possess. So there's room for both in all of our lives.

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Let's take the two instances in Acts for example where tongues are not mentioned in reference to the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Samaria, Acts 8. What happens at Samaria? Philip goes down and he preaches to the Samaritans. They believe and in action, many people who are paralyzed are healed, and demons are cast out. Simon Magus who is a magician, into the occult, sees all of this and he too believes and is baptized. When Peter and John come down they lay hands upon the Samaritan believers and something happened that is significant enough note the Simon Magus would like to purchase it. Remember Simon Magus has seen people healed of paralysis and he has seen demons cast out. But there is nothing said about his wanting to purchase that.

I'm suggesting by way of inference that something must have happened more than just a broad smile on the face of the Samaritan believers as Peter and John lay their hands on them that something happened in an external way that caused the excitement of Simon Magus. If he were so inclined I'm certain he would have wanted to buy what had happened on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. Just a suggestion.

In Acts 9 Paul's receiving this experience. We do know as he says in 1 Corinthians 14 when he critiques the Corinthian church who are all the time excessively in their public meetings speaking in tongues, he says, I speak in tongues more than you all. One would have to say that at some point in his life he began to speak with other tongues. I'm struck with this in Acts, that there appeared to be a constellation of events that occurred at the beginning of the believer's life. There is belief in the Lord Jesus Christ, water baptism and the baptism in the Spirit. Sometimes it's belief, baptism in the Spirit, baptism with water. But these three events are together.

Why in every situation are tongues not mentioned? Signs in Acts of individual conversion or group conversion. Out of 28 times in Acts where there are conversions noted only 11 of those times is it noted that they were baptized in water. One would not at all from any logic of scripture say that because Luke does not mention they were baptized in water that this means therefore that the early church didn't teach it or believe it.

There may be others who look at the experience and say, But why don't the epistles teach the baptism in the Holy Spirit? We would expect – and of course this is a principle of biblical interpretation – that by and large doctrine should not be dealt with from the historical portions of scripture but rather from the systematic position parts of scripture.

We all believe as Christians in the virgin birth of the Lord and in the trinity. Yet both of those doctrines are developed from historical parts of the scripture not necessarily from the epistles. The epistles, by the way, have nothing to say about the virgin birth. That doesn't mean they deny it. It means simply that it was not a problem with the early church and therefore the letters did not deal with that subject.

What about persons who have received according to their testimony the baptism in the Spirit but tongues were not a part of it. I say let's not argue. Let's thank God for whatever gift of grace he has done in the person's life. I would say also it's difficult to compare experiences with experiences. I'm sure that had Nicodemus had come to the Lord – we sometimes say, “But what about a guy like Billy Graham? He doesn't bear any testimony of being ‘baptized in the Spirit,’ but you wouldn't say that Billy Graham isn't filled with the Spirit?” Of course I wouldn't say that. Obviously the Spirit of God is upon him, has anointed him, and has given him tremendous

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insight and his hand's upon him in a mighty way. But I would be careful on the other hand if I'm going to stick to the balance of truth to compare experience with experience. The important thing is to find beyond the realm of experience what the scripture teaches. While I'm sure that in Nicodemus we could have found someone who from the salvation point of view appear to be a very good man. Yet what was needed was a commitment of his life to a truth that he Lord was saying.

So we always need to be careful in dealing with experience.

The baptism in the Holy Spirit is not designed to make us contentious. It is not designed to make us proud. It is designed to help us be better servants. It is designed to help us be more joyful. It is designed to help lubricate our lives with the flow of God's Spirit. In that reference then it is something we all could want. We all need. We all need to be initiated into the life of the Spirit.

One word of counsel. It was a part of my regular experience in the church growing up that regularly a question was asked: How many of you have received the baptism in the Spirit? And of course many people raised their hands and some including me always had their hands down because I hadn't. I used to feel very guilty. I'd feel like the Lord really didn't love me because I hadn't received this experience. Later in looking at the New Testament I began to find, particularly in the epistles that the question is so much in the epistles to the church "When did you receive?" but "Are you full?" be filled with the Spirit! And again if we're looking at the Spirit's work in our life in a broad dimension we would have to say again tongues is but one way that the Holy Spirit is working – an important way, a valid way. But I think a way that should have some sort of normality within Christian experience. We all can experience this.

But above and beyond that is not did you once in your life have an experience like this? But it is, Are you full? Is your life overflowing?

I have found, and this gets into a second purpose for tongues that in the pressures of life that come grinding in there needs to be kind of a divine lubrication, a divine joy that just keeps bubbling up in the midst of the pressure. I find, for example, when Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14 when he's writing to the Corinthians and says, I speak in tongues more than you all, he turns around and he says to the Corinthian believers that they shouldn't all of them be speaking in tongues in public worship services. This was confusing to the outside. Therefore if they were going to speak in tongues in public, let them do it one at a time, two or three at the most and that's in. But, he says, in private I do this as a regular practice. He says the reason why he doesn't encourage this in public is that tongues in public don't edify anybody because they can't understand what's going on. That's why if it happens it needs interpretation. But on the other hand he says he that prophecies, or he that speaks the word of God, edifies the congregation because he can be understood. But he who prays in an unknown tongue edifies himself.

I know, as bad as I am about physical workouts that when I work out I'm not benefiting you. On those few occasion that I have gone to the gym or more recently ridden the bicycle my wife gave me for Christmas I have not be edifying this church. I've not been building up your body. I've been building up my own. Hopefully.

Really tongues has this purpose. You say, "This is a real mystical area with me. I'm not sure I want to buy all this mysticism." I guess I used to operate on the assumption that when one was baptized in the Spirit or when an individual in private devotions spoke in tongues that he would

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become unconscious. And that unconsciousness was a necessary pre – requisite for this experience.

I think by the way this is what accounts for such a lag in my life and really ever coming through to a satisfying personal experience in this regard. I'd come down to the altar and pray. People would pray over me. I'd sing another chorus. I'd raise my hands longer. All the time I was hoping that if I worked hard enough in one moment I would lapse from consciousness into unconsciousness. And all of a sudden it would happen, I'd get the thing over with and that would be it. It was coming across to me as a badge I needed to wear in the society in which I ran. Later as I grew up and really began to read the scripture I was struck by the absence of a word in the New Testament that was used in mystery religions of the first century. The word "ecstasy." Ecstasy describes as the condition for example of someone who was a priestess as the oracle of Delphi who had worked themselves up into a trance and momentarily had their consciousness suspended and became ecstatic. We see instances of that today of people in India who walk on coals and so forth. They literally almost enter into another dimension.

Paul though to the Corinthians of all people who tended most to be ecstatic said the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. There is no point in which you become zapped into unconsciousness. Incredibly what I've found is that this like the rest of my Christian life is a divine and human participation. As I yield to the Lord those words that are in my own life and hearth which are flooding through my prayer life which don't make sense, which are not on the rational level, but because I have the need to relate on an irrational level, on an emotional level.

I'll never forget a sermon I heard preached about two years ago. He subject as Spiritual Intercourse. He said in human relationships there is a need in relating to another person – specifically and only within marriage – of going beyond the verbal level to a level which is non verbal but which is the most intense communication of all. And on the spiritual level it seems to me that this is the release that God has provided us through praying in the Spirit. That all of a sudden what we've never been able to verbalize comes out in a gush of sometimes intercession. I realize I'm praying for people but I don't know specifically how the Spirit is guiding my prayer. But yet I know that as the spirit groans through us, as Paul says groanings which can't be uttered. He intercedes for us according to his will. There are times in praise when I said Hallelujah one too many times and it becomes trite. I said Praise the Lord once too many times and it becomes vein repetition. Somehow I need to get beyond that and find a freedom in God to reach out and say... whatever.

It's not becoming unconscious but it's yielding up one's life to he Lord. I find incredibly that when I first began to practice in my own life personal prayer in tongues that this had been in me all along. All the years I had been a Christian, but I had never given assent to it because I thought *that's me*. Not realizing that that also was God.

It's striking that there are times when we do speak in tongues individually when it's very conceivable that we're speaking in languages known to men. I've been in one service in my life where this happened. Where a blond gal from Minnesota who I had typed as a non spiritual type in a chapel service gave an utterance in tongues which was interpreted. Sometimes, by the way, we get hung up on the word "interpreted." I didn't say "message." Message is really not a scriptural term. It's utterance. She gave an utterance in tongues and it was interpreted and a friend of mine from Taiwan sitting in the balcony of the chapel is moved, incredibly moved. What had happened was spoken in Mandarin dialect of Chinese in the familiar rather than in the

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formal tense. It was familiar to him, in a language of personal consolation and confront and he interpretation had been a direct translation. The language was known to neither.

So I have in my life seen one instance of that. I've often wondered in a service how many if all the languages of the world are represented how many more occasions there might be of that.

He that prayeth in an unknown tongue edifieth himself. Paul says seek love. Don't make tongues your aim. Seek love. But desire the spiritual gifts as well. They'll help you. They'll help you exercise the flow of love better in your life, toward God, toward others and toward yourself.

One other function that we see in relationship to tongues in the New Testament is when it is used in public worship. Paul in reference to this says in 1 Corinthians 12 "Not all speak in tongues." In fact it's apparent in reading 1 Corinthians he doesn't expect too many to do this at all. Then he wants specific controls on it. Why? Because he is conscious of the visitor or of the stranger who will not understand and instead of being turned on will be turned off to the gospel. I realize there are various ways of looking at this. "Just let anything happen and if it isn't of the Lord God will still redeem the stranger who's come in and he'll be rescued." That's one way of looking at it.

The other I think is Paul's way. To be very conscious and sensitive to the person who comes who may not understand what's happening. That's why always after expression of this public exercise of the gift I will follow by a word of teaching. I don't feel that's contrary to the Spirit at all. He wants understanding in the exercise of his gift.

What about an utterance in tongues. Sometimes we have the tendency to pull out our stopwatch and see how long the person speaks in tongues. See how long the interpretation is and by measuring the time we can tell whether or not it was on target. We judge. If it was a short utterance we don't expect a long interpretation. Or if it's a long utterance we're not expecting a short interpretation. We get hung up.

It strikes me that Paul uses the word "interpretation" rather than translation. There's a whole lot of difference between those two words. When I see a painting for example, I don't translate a painting. I interpret it. my way of interpreting that painting may be shorter or longer than someone else. I've had times where the exercise of interpretation of tongues myself the Lord has granted me sort of an inner vision and inner eye to really sense what needed to be said. He didn't write the words on a computer tape that I could read off as they were coming to me. But he gave me something to see and out of it then flowed what he wanted. Interpretation not a translation.

By and large too I think we need to be very careful that in recognizing the exercise of tongues in public worship as in private worship is an address to God. He that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh unto God." Therefore when there is an interpretation we need to mark the difference between prophecy and interpretation. Prophecy always involves God speaking to man. But an interpretation we should expect the interpretation to be somewhat in the form of prayer. That is speaking unto God.

As you know in prayer, sometimes I am talking to God. Other times the Spirit that comes upon me. Just recently I had an incredible experience with the Lord in a moment when I needed it

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deeply in my life. I felt God speaking to me and I was verbalizing what he was saying to me. It was frightening. It was almost like personal prophecy. I was verbalizing what he was saying.

The reason why I say this is in the event that there is an interpretation of tongues in the congregation in the future I don't want you saying it wasn't valid because it wasn't addressed to God. It was addressed to the congregation. It may be that the form of prayer was God speaking to us through the language of prayer. But its purpose is to build up the body not to confuse it. That's why there is order. That's why there is exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's why there is naturalness rather frenzy. We're keeping away from ecstasy but we're opening the well springs of our life. That out of our inner man there flow rivers of living water.

There is another phrase in Corinthians 14 in reference to tongues in public worship. Where Paul appears to almost says in one breath something contradictory. I've wrestled with the meaning of this. 1 Corinthians 14:21 "In the law it is written by men of strange tongues and by the lips of foreigners will I speak to this people. And even then will they not listen to me," says the Lord. Thus tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers. While prophecy is not for unbelievers but for believers. If therefore the whole church assembles and all speak in tongues and outsiders or unbelievers enter will they not say that you are mad? If all prophecy and an unbeliever or outsider enters he is convicted by all, he's called to account by all."

What is Paul saying here? On the one hand he's saying tongues are a sign to the unbeliever and prophecy is for the believer. Then he turns around and says when an outsider comes in, don't speak all of you in tongues, but all of you prophecy. Huh? Does that strike you that that seems to be a direct contradiction within two sentences?

I present this as a tentative solution. In verse 21 notice he is quoting from the Old Testament. He is quoting from Isaiah 28:11-12. If you look at the context of Isaiah 28 you will find that what is happening Isaiah is pronouncing judgment upon Israel. Israel, to which God's word has come many times but has continued to be disobedient to the word of prophecy. So Isaiah is saying, by the lips of foreigners I will speak to you. What's he talking about? He is talking about the invasion of Babylon. He's not here in the context of Isaiah 28 speaking about someone speaking in other tongues as we know it. But by the lips of foreigners I will speak to you. In other words you, Israel did not believe the prophetic message. Therefore here's how I'm going to speak to you because you're unbelievers, you wanted a sign. Remember the people in Jesus' day wanted a sign and he wouldn't give it. He says, Ok you wanted a sign to know whether or not the prophecy is true. I'll give you a sign. It'll be a foreign nation tracking along through your land and by their lips will you know that my word of prophecy was true.

How does that then relate to the congregation of Corinth. Here was a congregation that measured its spirituality by whether or not certain externals were present. Whether or not for example it had been a tremendously spiritual service by the number and the length of persons involved in utterance of other tongues publicly. Paul backs off of this and says if this is what you need to measure the spirituality of your service then you are claiming to be the believers but you're really the unbelievers. That function of needing a sign to confirm spirituality is not a function of true faith, for faith believes without the sign. It believes prior to the sign. But if you need a sign then it indicates that unbelief is there. And therefore it is for unbelievers. And you Corinthians are unbelievers.

But if you're going to be more normal about this thing and really be believers then prophecy.

NOW CONCERNING TONGUES

Just in kind of looking back over this isn't it delightful how the Lord places certain things within us that are best fulfilled in the privacy of our lives. That cannot be worn externally. But are meant to really build us up in our faith. Tongues in the New Testament never becomes the mark of spirituality. Love is the test. But that's not to diminish the role of tongues. For it is an access through the Spirit that we are granted to sometimes through that means enter into heavenly visions and dimensions. To enter into praise. To cease from our labor and enter into God's rest. To feel that's important.

We can't diminish that aspect of feeling. I want to feel something as a believer. God knows I need to feel tings. I'm pretty objective. But I don't want to get locked up in objectification. Something is real whether if feel it or not. I know intellectually that's true. But I want to feel it. I need to feel it. God not only needs to work on my thought life but he needs to work on my emotional life. By this means the Lord chooses if we come to believe through the foolishness of the cross that we experience devotionally many things through the foolishness of God. What is foolish to the world is in God's eyes wise. And who who designed our psychological and emotional makeup knows what best corresponds to releasing our spirit.

If marriage is a tension point or other relationships are a tension point or trials are a tension point what a beautiful thing to be able to find that release in the spirit. There's such a peace and joy that comes when in our inner life we learn to say thank you Spirit for ministering, thank you for prompting me to pray. Thank you for giving me a release which is beyond anything I can describe in words. But a release to come before your throne with praise and thanksgiving.

Our Lord, I realize that there are some areas of revelation where you have chosen to communicate to us in such a way that if we were to ever come to the truth of that experience for that doctrine we would need to come that way by love. Indeed in all things here is nothing we can be argued into or hassled into but only directed into and prompted into by love. Lord, I would ask for forgiveness for the times in my own life and the times perhaps in the life of us as a body as a church, when we may have been tempted to judge or look down on someone else or somehow feel that another was inferior because they had not had a similar experience to us which we felt was in scripture. I pray that we would learn with the spiritual gifts you give us that we would learn ever what it is to take a towel and wash each other's feet. And that out of not a spirit of argument but a spirit of total surrender and love and submission we could be clean and pure vessels in whom your Spirit would have total freedom. Lord, I think of the garbage that's thrown at us all the time. The garbage of life, the rot, the language, the concept, the reading material, the barrage of propaganda that we're under especially for our young people among us who are daily fed a stream of temptation that just doesn't quit coming. But by the power of your Spirit you would free them in their inner lives, even as you freed others to fight that tremendous onslaught with an unceasing spirit of praise and worship. That ere would come an anointing and a freshness if indeed through this gift we are built up and edified then this means that the things which the enemy is trying to tear down the morals he's attempting to destroy the mind he's attempting to decay and erode that through this means of personal experience you give us an opportunity to be built up in the faith. I pray, Lord, that each one of us young or old would avail ourselves of that opportunity to be built up in you. How true it is that just as we're here in prayer to you when we're moving away from you, when we're really cold spiritually we find it practically impossible or we don't want to pray in the Spirit. But as we move toward you, how easy it is. How wonderful it is. How upbuilding it is just to release songs of praise and

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prayer. Languages that are unknown and languages which are not known to you. I pray especially for that one individual who may be with us this evening who has really been drifting in their lie. Drifting a way from fellowship with you. Drifting into real coldness spiritually and indifference. One who's feelings may be hurt and wounded for one reason or another that the healing presence of your Spirit would flow in this moment and wipe away all of that which is there within the system that is clogging up the free channeling of your Spirit. And create a whole new man, a whole new person. We thank you, Lord, not only for grace but for access to grace, for the means of grace. We thank you that we may be built up in our spirit. We praise you.

[end of tape]