

A Look at Tongues

The Holy Spirit Today

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Well, we return to God's word today to continue our study of the work of the Holy Spirit in the church and in the world today in the present age. We've had an extended study. It's gone a little longer than I planned but that's alright. One of the reasons that we're spending so much time on this topic is that we recognize the dominant position that charismatic theology holds in the professing Christian world today. We are a minority report in our rejection of those things and we want to be careful as we go through the Scriptures to help you understand why it is that we believe what we do. It would be easier, frankly, for all of us I suppose, it would certainly be easier for me to just say we don't do that, that's not what we practice, we disagree with it, and just kind of move on and not really deal with the substance of understanding why do we believe what we believe, and it's my conviction that's only grown as we've gone through this that it is urgent, it is important, it is imperative for us to deal with these things with some manner of thoroughness in order to be able to set a foundation that will stand over the course of time.

You know, I'm getting older. I've mentioned this in the past and I want to lay a foundation for Truth Community Church that will live on after I'm no longer here, and that comes in part by imparting to those of you that are younger, those of you that are coming up in the midst of understanding and growing in your faith in the midst of these things so that these things can be settled in your mind, that you would embrace them not simply because they're what your church teaches or what your pastor teaches but that you look at Scripture for yourself and you are persuaded and convinced for yourself that what's being taught to you is true because there are great forces at work that would undermine this and that would draw us away and that would tempt us not to hold the line on these matters which are of such great fundamental importance. One of the foundational principles of the Reformation is Sola Scriptura, Scripture alone, we measure things by Scripture alone, and we taught on that recently. You can find the message available online. But the point of that is that we measure everything in our faith and everything that we believe and everything that we do in the Christian life that Scripture alone is our standard. That is fundamental and the whole idea, the whole thing that drives charismatic theology at root is an experience-based theology and experience is brought to bear and, "I've had these experiences," then they want to go to Scripture and find some justification for them. That is exactly the wrong way to do it. We have to come to Scripture first, say what does Scripture say, and then shape our worldview and shape our

understanding of spiritual gifts and those things from a study first of Scripture, not by our experience.

There is a fundamental statement that I came across very early in my Christian life, within 30 days of my conversion, that has shaped the foundation of all of my life, of all of my ministry, that has driven everything that I do in life and putting it in my own words that I would ask you to consider and to understand and believe, is that your experience is not the judge of the Bible, the Bible is the judge of your experience, and that shapes everything and that is at the core of what we are trying to do in this series titled "The Holy Spirit Today," is to let the Bible speak, to let the Bible help us understand the nature of true spiritual gifts, and then we evaluate what we see out in the world as a result of that rather than letting our experiences tell us what the Bible must be or even worse, even worse, letting our experience be the authority by which we judge our spiritual life. We have addressed that in the realm of healing over the past two weeks. Today we're going to look at the topic of tongues, today and next week. Then in the following, a little further down the road, we'll look at the matter of prophecy and the whole idea of, you know, does God speak to me personally today? Does God have private revelations for me today? And we want to lay Scripture out and consider all of these things.

Now what we've seen so far, generally speaking ever so briefly, is that the miraculous signs of miracles and healings, of having people who had the ability to heal by their spoken word, tongues and prophecy, the miraculous signs ended with the age of the apostles, with the passing of the apostles, and we gave a biblical rationale for that. The reason that that is true is because the signs were never an end unto themselves, it was never about just physical healing for the sake of physical healing, the signs had an attesting purpose, they authenticated the messengers that Christ appointed to go out into the world to declare the Gospel and to bring the fullness and the finality of God's revelation to the church and to men. Once that revelation had been completed, once the apostles had done their work, once the apostles had passed from the scene and their work was finished, the nature of the signs, the reason for the signs died with them. There was no reason for the signs because now there had been a completed revelation from God given and in the present age, we judge things not by signs but we judge them by the written word of God. God has given us a fixed, final, authoritative, complete standard of his revelation in the Scripture and this is all that we need. 2 Timothy 3:16 and 17 makes this very clear that in the Scriptures you find that which will make "the man of God adequate, equipped for every good work." So God intends for his people today not to look for signs and wonders to find him speaking there, rather we are to look to his word and find him speaking there, find him speaking here, and that we have covered over the past several weeks.

Last time, over the last two weeks we looked at healing. We saw that there is no reason to believe that there is any man who has the power independent in his own ability to heal today. God heals through prayer at times according to his will, but he has not gifted a man with the gift of healing to go out and be able to heal at his command. Now, today what we're going to look at is we're going to examine the nature of tongues in light of Scripture. Tongues in light of Scripture and it seems like over the course of maybe the

past 30 or 40 years and I'm not necessarily the right one to say what I'm about to say, but it seems like maybe that tongues have decreased in emphasis while matter of prophecy and doing miracles and faith healings has increased by way of emphasis in other circles but there's still this perspective on tongues and people wanting to say that they speak in tongues in a private prayer language, for example, and that God gives them this gift that helps them draw closer to God and other things that are applied to the word "tongues," that's what we want to look at over the next two weeks. And why are we doing this? Look, we're not doing this just because we want to win a theological argument. That would not be a very lofty reason to do it. That would not be a lofty reason to be able to study these things. Ultimately we do these things for the glory of God, we want to glorify God in teaching the full counsel of the word of God, we do it for the sake of Christ, but beloved, what I want you to see is that we also do it for the sake of souls. You know, there are souls that are in darkness because of a perverted view of the nature of the gifts. There are people who live in fear out of a sense of the conflicting things that they hear coming out of the charismatic camp. There are people who live in fear because of the nature of private messages from God that are supposedly delivered to them and these people need the light of Scripture to help them understand how to find their way through these things. Christians need to grow. Non-Christians need to be delivered from false teaching. There is a lot at stake in that and that is why we are spending the time on this that we are doing in addition to just setting a foundation for the future of our own church. We realize we're not being exhaustive in everything that we say, we realize that we're not answering every possibly objection to what we're saying, but we're trying to be somewhat thorough and trying to lay down basics to give you something to build your understanding on as we go forward and that's what we want to do today as we take a look at tongues.

First of all, what I want to do today is, first of all, to consider the nature of biblical tongues. That's the first point for this morning if you want to take notes. The nature of biblical tongues and then we're going to consider the limitation on biblical tongues or the limits on biblical tongues, and we'll just lay out a biblical perspective this morning and then deal with how that applies and what we see in the world today, we'll try to do that next week.

Let's look, first of all, at the foundational text for biblical speaking in tongues and that would be found in Acts 2. Turn there in your Bibles to Acts 2 and if you'll indulge me in a brief but very important personal story, I don't like to do that and I don't do it very often, but it will help you understand the spirit from which I come from and why this is so urgent and important to me personally.

I had been a Christian for 30 days and I had not yet been in a church, I had not yet been under Bible teaching, I was just kind of finding my way and reading the Bible on my own and through a series of providential occurrences that are not important, the details of which are not important, I found myself in a radio studio with two Pentecostal men who were talking to me and trying to teach me from the Scriptures and they came to me and they asked me, "Have you been baptized by the Holy Spirit?" Well, you know, I mean, I'm a Christian for 30 days and I said, "Well, I think so." They said, "Well, have you

spoken in tongues?" And so immediately the issue of tongues was placed at the forefront and made front and center as an urgent matter for me to consider as I was standing there talking to them, and through various things I said, I said, "You know, I'm not real sure about this. This is new to me." And one of the men opened his Bible and went to Acts 2 and he read verse 4. Look at verse 4 with me, and he said, "they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance." And he closed his Bible and kind of slapped his hands, figuratively speaking, and he said, "There you go. They all spoke in tongues. Don't you see you need to speak in tongues if you are filled with the Holy Spirit? If you're a Christian, you will speak in tongues."

Well, that's a pretty intimidating thing to tell a new Christian who all of this is new to him. There was a great deal of fear and confusion in my mind as I drove home from that radio station in a blizzard, no less. I remember it all so well. I wish I had a film of it all. I remember driving home and thinking, "Lord, if tongues are the way it's supposed to be, I'm happy to speak in tongues." All I wanted was what the Lord wanted and what was true, that's all that I cared about, and if tongues were true, then I wanted it. As I'm driving home in this blizzard, remember, I didn't even know any other Christian. I was by myself, spiritually speaking, at that point of time in my life, and I remember for a moment I opened my mouth and tried to gurgle out a couple of things to see if anything would start happening. You know, you kind of get to prime the pump and get it started. Nothing happened and so I'm really really confused and I go home and I get home at 1 in the morning, 2 in the morning, something like that, and all I know to do is to turn to the word of God. That's all that I knew to do. I knew I could turn to the word of God and get the truth straight from that. And what happened as I looked at God's word? We'll look at this later, but through the concordance in the back of my Bible that I had at the time, God directed my attention, providentially directed my attention to 1 Corinthians 12.

Look at that with me here. I'm way ahead of myself. I'm off my notes already and I'm not even 10 minutes into the message. That's alright, though. But we're about to make a really profound and important point here. I am alone as a brand new Christian, people who knew more than I had said you must speak in tongues and all I can do is turn to the word of God in simple faith and look for clarity in it, and what did I find in 1 Corinthians 12, beginning in verse 29? 1 Corinthians 12:29 says, "All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they? All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they?" The expected answer to that question is, no, they do not, and in that great profound moment of my spiritual life which animates and motivates me to this very day, the simplicity of the word of God refuted what people who had their own radio program were telling me. They told me everyone must speak in tongues and read Acts 2:4 to support their position, and yet here it was in plain black-and-white as clear as it obviously could be that not everyone speaks in tongues in the Christian life. Whatever else that meant, whatever else tongues were, whatever else the right answers were, I knew that it was not true that every Christian would speak in tongues because Scripture said the exact opposite, and in that moment of clarity, in that moment of illumination from the Holy Spirit, God gave me a clarity of mind, the Scriptures showed me that what they had said

to me was not true and I could go to bed with a clear conscience, with a clear heart, not thinking that I was missing something because the Scriptures told me that that was not true. And I want you to know something, that in that moment, the precious nature of God's word was sealed permanently to my heart. I was alone. I had nothing by which to deal with what I had been told earlier in that radio station, and yet here in the simplicity of opening a Bible in an apartment in which I lived alone in, God's word met my need, gave me understanding and showed me what the truth was, and settled a matter that has never troubled me since, and God's word in that moment on that night, became so profoundly precious to me that I knew the only thing that was worthy of my life was to give my life back to this book which had been so precious to me and so timely to me in my great time of need. That is the power of the word of God. There is clarity in the word of God and it behooves us as Christians to take it seriously and to let God's word tell us the truth and to make sure that we are seeing it from the perspective of God's word, not through what others would say to us. So this matters to me. This goes back to the original core of my Christian experience and it's a lesson not for me, not about tongues, but of the sufficiency of the word of God and how wonderful it is to have a book that we can completely rely on, that transcends experience, that transcends time, that meets us in our time of need and points us in the right way, that is perfect, able to convert the soul.

Well, that's a little bit of background and helps you see the perspective from which I approach it here this morning. Let's go back now and circle back to Acts 2 and take a look at this in light of everything that we need to consider here. Acts 2:1 says, "When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance." Now let's pause for a moment there. This critical text, these first four verses in the book of Acts, record the coming of the Holy Spirit. Jesus had ascended into heaven a few weeks earlier, he had promised his disciples that he would send the Helper to them, and he promised them and he told them to wait until the Spirit came.

Well, how do you know when the Spirit comes? How were they to know? And what the Spirit did in his coming was he came in a supernatural way to mark the supernatural fulfillment of the promise that the Lord had given to them. He arrived, beloved, with outward signs and with supernatural effect and the question is, you know, you say, "Well, what were these tongues? What were the tongues that they were speaking? How can we know? Was it just kind of gibberish? Were they just babbling random syllables end-to-end? Were they doing something else?" Well, all you have to do is keep reading. Read it in the context to understand what they were doing.

Look at verse 5 with me, "Now there were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men from every nation under heaven. And when this sound occurred, the crowd came together, and were bewildered because each one of them was hearing them speak in his own language." They were hearing known human languages. They were hearing actual human language

being spoken that they knew beforehand and that they could understand as it was being said. That is critical to understand.

Verse 7, "They were amazed and astonished, saying, 'Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born? Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs--we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God.'" They recognized immediately that these uneducated Galileans were speaking fluently in languages that they had not studied before and as native speakers, they recognized that something supernatural was taking place.

So the biblical gift of tongues as set by this foundational text was this: the biblical gift of tongues was the supernatural ability to speak in foreign languages that the speaker had not previously learned. Let me say that again because that's a mouthful: the biblical gift of tongues was the supernatural ability to speak in foreign languages that the speaker had not previously learned and that is what happened in the book of Acts when you read the full passage in its context. So the way that you approach it is this, the way that we think about this is we go to the Bible, we go to a text and we say what does it teach us about the nature of tongues. We see here that tongues is a word for language and we use the word tongue that way sometimes, but the word tongues here is being used to refer to known human languages as it is borne out by the fact that people from many different regions heard their own language being spoken by others who had not studied that language in the past, who had not naturally acquired that language.

Now, if you've ever tried to study a foreign language, you realize that it's a lot of work and it's a lot of practice to get vocabulary down, to get grammar down, to get syntax down, to get inflections down, to get punctuation down, and going on and on, and it takes an extended period of intense study to acquire a human language that you've never studied before. If you've ever studied languages, you know that to be true. Well, here are people who bypassed that entire process and began speaking in a language that they had never studied, that they had never known, and they were speaking it with a fluency that was utterly undeniable and inexplicable apart from a sovereign supernatural act of God. That is the biblical gift of tongues and native speakers recognized the language being spoken as legitimate.

Now, beloved, here's what you need to understand going forward. As you read through the rest of the New Testament and you find passages that address the issue of tongues, you need to understand that this passage has set the standard by which we are supposed to understand what tongues means in the rest of Scripture. What follows in 1 Corinthians, what follows elsewhere in the book of Acts is building on the foundation that has been laid in this passage. That's really crucial and critical for you to understand and to realize. Unless, you know, unless Scripture came along and utterly completely redefined it and said, "We mean something else by tongues," that would be different, but when tongues is used without qualification, we're to understand it in light of this foundational passage that

the history that proceeded after Acts 2 is using a common basis of understanding what tongues meant.

That's really critical and you can see this as it unfolds elsewhere in the book of Acts. Look at Acts 10, beginning in verse 44. Now, when the tongues appeared in Acts 2, it was a Jewish audience that was gathered together. As you know, the Gospel expanded beyond the Jews, it went to Gentiles, it went to Old Testament saints, and how were the apostles supposed to know and recognize, how were the people of the early church going to recognize that these other groups had received the same salvation that they did? What was going to be the common point of manifestation that would show that the salvation received by the Gentiles and Old Testament saints was the same as the salvation and the same Holy Spirit that had been received in Acts 2?

Well, look at Acts 10, beginning in verse 44. Peter had been preaching and while he "was still speaking these words," in verse 44, "the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message." And watch this, "All the circumcised believers," that is, all of the Jewish believers, "who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also." How did they know that it was the gift? How did they know that it was the Holy Spirit? Verse 46, "For," for this reason, because "they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God." In other words, they said, "The same phenomenon that occurred to us when we were saved, when the Holy Spirit came upon us in Acts 2, it's happening here as well. When we as Jews received the Holy Spirit, we spoke in languages, known human languages that we had never studied before. Now we look at these Gentiles who were strangers to the covenant, who were outside the promises of God, they're doing the exact same thing." So the supernatural speaking in other languages that they were doing in Acts 10 verified that they had received precisely the same Holy Spirit that the Jews had received in Acts 2. It was undeniable. It was a supernatural attestation to the spiritual reality that had taken place. They couldn't see the Spirit indwelling them, the Spirit's presence in the hearts of those who had believed was invisible, so how were they to know, then, that these people had truly received the Spirit? God graciously, wisely, miraculously gave the Gentiles the same ability in Acts 10 that had been given to the Jewish believers in Acts 2. It had to be the same thing because they were seeing the same thing and they drew the conclusion, "This is the same manifestation, therefore, it must be the same Spirit, therefore, they have the same salvation that we had, that we received." So the tongues in Acts 10 were also known human languages because it was the same gift pointing to the same Spirit and the same salvation.

Now look at Acts 19. Acts 19, beginning in verse 1. This circumstance is a little bit different. People coming from a different aspect, not Gentiles but those who had been under the ministry of John the Baptist. "It happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus, and found some disciples. He said to them, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?' And they said to him, 'No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.'" So it goes on and it says in verse 3, "he said, 'Into what then were you baptized?' And they said, 'Into John's baptism.'" These were Old Testament saints who had gotten revelation from John the

Baptist but had not received the final full message of the Gospel of Christ. So they said, "We've believed as far as we've been taught." But the Spirit they knew nothing about.

Paul says in verse 4, "'John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus.' 5 When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus." And what happened? These people coming out of the Old Testament dispensation having received the message of John the Baptist but having not yet received the finality of the Gospel since the resurrection of Christ, what happened to them? Verse 6, "when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying. There were in all about twelve men." The Spirit came upon them in the same way and manifested in the same way through the speaking in tongues the fact that the true Spirit has truly indwelt them as shown by the fact that they are manifesting the exact same gift as had the Gentiles in Acts 10, as had the Jewish believers in Acts 2. A complete identity of the manifestation in order to show that God had brought everybody together in one body. Jews and Gentiles now in one body. Old Testament saints completed in Christ now brought together in the same one body, indwelt by the same one Spirit manifested by the same one gift of speaking in tongues, speaking in known languages that they had not studied before.

So, beloved, what tongues were doing in the book of Acts was showing Israel that the new covenant had come; that the Holy Spirit had come; that there is a transition taking place away from the Old Testament economy into the New Testament, the new covenant economy where the Spirit will indwell all believers going forward. So we see this transition having taken place.

Now later on, tongues served in a transitional way to edify the church when they were translated. Go back to 1 Corinthians 12 with me now. 1 Corinthians 12:7 and you can kind of see now that these groups have been brought together in one body, the Scriptures are not yet complete, the full New Testament has not yet been written, and so there was an ongoing measure of revelation taking place in the early church while the completion of the canon was pending and tongues were a part of that for the early church. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:7, "But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." He goes on to say, "For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues." So here they are, 1 Corinthians, this is important to realize, 1 Corinthians was one of the earliest letters that Paul wrote and I'll talk about that more in a little while, but the canon was not yet complete here and so the Spirit is at work in the early church bringing them to maturity, helping them, leading them, but it's the same Spirit, it's the one Spirit and as he gives them tongues at this point in the ministry of the Spirit of God, note that it also emphasizes that he's giving to them also the interpretation of tongues so that as a foreign language was being spoken, it would be interpreted for the benefit of those who were there so that they could understand the message that was being spoken. And in that way,

in that transitional period, God provided for the needs of the early church to build them up in their understanding and in their spiritual growth and that was the purpose, that was the nature of biblical tongues, recognizing, beloved, recognizing that there was a transition that was taking place in the first century, recognizing that the Old Testament economy with the temple and with the sacrifices had been established for so long but now God was moving his people into a new era, moving them into a new dispensation, moving them under the terms of a new covenant that would be marked by, in part, the indwelling Holy Spirit.

That's a massive change taking place. New revelation being given to help men understand what was happening and that was the nature of it, a supernatural gift of languages being given that was undeniable attestation that this was a true supernatural work of God because no one can fake that. People don't do that, people don't suddenly start speaking in foreign languages that they've never studied with fluency. They don't do that, do you know why? Because they cannot do that and, therefore, it took a supernatural act of God to make that happen and God is attesting, the point in tongues, again, secondary to an attestation of the reality of the greater work of the Spirit that was happening in their midst. And it was undeniable. There was no human explanation for it, which will be important as we consider some things next week.

Now, so that's the nature of biblical tongues, known human languages being spoken by people who did not naturally acquire them. Now, I want to go into a second part here and this is all going to make sense but it's really kind of setting the stage for next week as much as it is completing the message for this week. Point 2 that I want to talk to you about today is the limitation of biblical tongues or the limits on biblical tongues, you could say. The limits on biblical tongues and why are we approaching it like this? I was hoping you could tell me. No, I wasn't. That was rhetorical, not a request for information. We're approaching it from this perspective to help you see something really important, that the gift of tongues that God gave to the church during this transitional time was not a spiritual free-for-all, it was not a random occurrence that everybody was just going to go out and speak in tongues however and whenever they wanted to, and that we'd all just get together and talk in tongues however we wanted to. God carefully in detail prescribed the proper use of tongues in the church so that it would be channeled in the proper direction rather than creating chaos amongst the people of God, and you find these limits largely stated in the book of 1 Corinthians 12, 13 and 14, and there are like five or six limitations that I want to point out to you from this text.

Now as most of you know, spiritual gifts are the focus of 1 Corinthians 12 through 14 and it is a very difficult passage to deal with. Many issues await the interpreter in 1 Corinthians 12 to 14. To just give you one measure of the complexity of these three chapters, John MacArthur's commentary on 1 Corinthians has 118 pages of explanation of chapters 12, 13 and 14. So there is a lot there and we're not going to try to cover everything, we're not going to try to go verse by verse through these three chapters. Rather, what we want to do is to just lay down some markers that are obvious to set context for your understanding of the gift of tongues and what we're trying to do here is to set context from the whole counsel of God's word. You know, I think I can say this

without fear of legitimate contradiction: the challenge in dealing with those who teach charismatic theology is they love to pick one or two verses out of context and just run with that and import all of their presuppositions and assumptions into one verse as if their one verse was proving everything that they said, and using blinders and ignoring what God's word says elsewhere. We don't want to do that. The whole counsel of the word of God should inform what we think about these things and that's what we're going to try to do here in the remaining time that we have this morning together.

So I'm going to list out five limits on the gift of tongues for you to consider here. First of all, I want you to consider their limit in the canon. Their limit in the canon. Now when you talk to charismatics, man, they'll beeline for 1 Corinthians 12, 13 and 14. If I were them, I would too. They'll go to the book of Acts but do you know what they won't discuss? Do you know what they won't tell you? Do you know what they may not even be aware of themselves? It's that with the exception of one disputed passage in the Gospel of Mark, Acts and 1 Corinthians are the only places where tongues are talked about in the New Testament. The Apostle Paul wrote 12 other letters besides 1 Corinthians, he doesn't mention tongues in any of them. His apostolic swansong is found in the pastoral epistles of 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus where he is making provision for the church and its leadership after his imminent passing, he knows his time has come. You would think that if tongues were central to the functioning of the Christian church after his departure he'd make a big issue of it because it was so important and critical for everybody to get it right. Nary a word. Not a word about that.

When Jesus in the book of Revelation addresses the seven churches in the last word of God's revelation, he speaks to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3, not a word about tongues. That should impact you if you've never thought about it and say, "Now wait a minute, that's interesting. That's almost kind of weird because I'm told by some that everybody ought to speak in tongues. If this is just a critical aspect of Christian experience, then why does so much of the New Testament not say anything about it? Why when Jesus gives his last words to the churches in Revelation not say anything about it? Why does the Apostle Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, not say anything about it?"

Well, we need to realize that that kind of silence is inexplicable if speaking in tongues was central to the functioning of the church. You'll find all kinds of instruction about the Spirit, you'll find all kinds of instruction about the "one anothers," you'll find all kinds of instruction about loving one another within the body of Christ, because that is central, that is true, and you'll find that emphasized as a common theme throughout all of the epistles, the emphasis on the word and sound doctrine and teaching riddled throughout the pages of the New Testament. Tongues, by contrast, the absence is glaring by comparison.

So there is a limit in the canon that cautions us against placing, just speaking in very very general terms, that cautions us against placing too great of an emphasis on tongues. A balanced consideration of the fullness of the New Testament giving equal weight to all

the parts of the New Testament would never take you there. Never. It would take you to areas of unity and election and God's work in salvation and sanctification.

Secondly, the limitation of biblical tongues, first of all, there's a limit in the canon on it; secondly and we're kind of working from the outside in, we're going from the outside big picture into increasingly precise detail, secondly, the limit in distribution. The limit in distribution and this is what I alluded to earlier when I got ahead of my notes. The limit in distribution means this, that tongues were never intended for every Christian. Never.

Go back to that passage that I read earlier just so that we'll have it fresh in our minds at this point in the message, 1 Corinthians 12:30. We can just touch base on this lightly here. 1 Corinthians 12:30 says, "All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they?" The Greek grammatical construction there expects the answer, no. It's a rhetorical device that is designed to make you say no to the question being asked. In other words, do all people speak in tongues in the Christian church? No, they don't. That's the sense of what Paul is saying here and so we see that tongues were never intended for every Christian. This was not meant to be a universal expression for all time of those who truly have the Holy Spirit indwelling them.

What are the fruit of the Spirit in reality? What is the fruit of the Spirit in the Christian church? Where do you find that stated? Galatians 5, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, against such things there is no law." What we look for now as the mark of the Spirit are these character traits and these attitudes that flow from the holy nature of God as being the mark of his presence in a life and that's true for every Christian. Tongues, it says not all of them. Not all speak in tongues. There was a limit on the distribution even then and if you go back to 1 Corinthians 12:11, you can see this. 1 Corinthians 12:11 where it says, "one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills." So the Spirit gave gifts in different measures, in different quantities, in different combinations, he gives gifts to different people as he wills. Not all of them receive the gift of tongues, even in this time of transition. There was a limit on the distribution and it was the mark of the work of the Spirit of God.

Now, some will ask a good question, they'll say, "Well, what about Mark 16? What about Mark 16?" Turn back there with me, if you will. Mark 16. I realize we're covering an awful lot of ground today. Mark 16, beginning in verse 16, it says, "He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned. These signs will accompany those who have believed," notice the plural there, "These signs will accompany those who have believed: in My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues." Well, there you have it. There's the silver bullet that destroys everything I've been trying to say for the past 45 minutes or so, right? Well, not so fast. Not so fast. As we've stated in the past and is very well-known among biblical scholars, Mark 16:9-20 almost certainly was not part of the original text of Scripture. This was a section that was added on subsequently by copyists later on and because that text is disputed, beloved, no one should base an essential doctrine on any disputed text in Scripture. You should be able to find a teaching replicated elsewhere rather than

depending on one disputed text to make your whole point because in every likelihood, this was never part of the original inspired manuscript to begin with. You can find marginal notes in your Bible to explain that.

But what if you do accept Mark 16? Does everything collapse under that and does this show that everyone is now going to speak in tongues and everything that I've said collapses in the face of a silver bullet argument from a disputed text? No, beloved, even if you accept Mark 16, our position is still entirely unchanged. The apostolic community, broadly speaking, plural as a community we see that the apostolic community did speak in tongues after Jesus' ascension. There were tongues that were spoken and we saw that and affirmed that from Acts 2, 10 and 19, but that doesn't mean that every believer in every age will speak in tongues. If you let Scripture interpret Scripture, even if you accept Mark 16 as an original text, it is interpreted by the revelation found in 1 Corinthians that says not all speak in tongues. So you can understand Mark 16 from the sense that says the apostolic community, the early church, those who believed, they did speak in tongues, some of them, but we see as revelation goes on that not all were ever intended to speak in tongues. That was not God's will. That is not what happened. Mark 16 does not change the argument at all.

Now, so we've talked about the limit in the canon, the limit in distribution. Stay with me now as we consider the limit in motivation. The limit in motivation and for that I ask you to go back to 1 Corinthians 13. As we said, spiritual gifts is the topic of consideration in chapters 12, 13 and 14. In the middle in chapter 13, between 12 and 14 at the 13th floor of the book, you might say, you find the famous love chapter. Now I realize that a lot of people will read this and they'll read it at their marriage ceremony, that's fine as far as it goes, we'll talk about love generally and what's the nature of love from chapter 13, and that's all okay as far as it goes, but beloved, what you must see is that this love chapter is qualifying the whole nature of the exercise of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12 through 14. This chapter on love is telling us how the spiritual gifts are to be used, the motivation for them, why we do what we do with the gifts that the Spirit gives to us, and in this chapter Paul shows the surpassing importance of love over any other spiritual gift, specifically over tongues and prophecy even.

Look at verse 1 of 1 Corinthians 13. He says, "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing." He's speaking hypothetically here. He says, "Let's go to the uttermost extreme. If there were such a thing as angels having human language and I spoke in them, if I knew everything that there was to know about the mysteries of God and I could prophesy on them, if I gave all my possessions to feed the poor, if I gave my body to be burned in martyrdom for the sake of Christ and I didn't have love as I was doing any of those things, it would be utterly worthless." It would be meaningless because the point of the gifts is that they would be exercised in love for fellow believers

and if you extract love and you extract that focus on others in your exercise of the spiritual gifts, you have completely lost the reason that they are given in the first place.

Beloved, two things to say about this. 1. Whatever extent God has gifted you as a Christian in all the different ways that Scripture talks about, the things that you excel at in the spiritual realm, God has given that to you not for your own sake, not that you could profit from it, but that you would employ it in serving others in love, and if you do not do that, then your gift does not matter. Your gift is meaningless, it has no value before God. If you do not love in the context of a local church as you exercise your gift, Paul says, "You are a zero. You don't even matter," to quote John MacArthur from the 1980s.

Now the New Testament is filled with these exhortations. I want you to see just one other one. Look at 1 Peter 4 with me. 1 Peter 4, beginning in verse 8. He says, "keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaint." And in that context of love, he says this in verse 10, "As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." Has God gifted you? Then you are to understand that he has done that so that you can be of loving service to others in the body of Christ and that if you remove the motivation of love, you have removed the purpose of the gift. The gifts are not to be exercised apart from love for others in the midst of your exercise of them. That's going to become very important next week. The gifts are to be exercised in love. The first question is love, not your giftedness. The first question is others, not your giftedness. Gifts given to be exercised for the benefit of others in the motivation of love, that's the purpose of the gifts. That's the limit on them. Gifts are not given so that one man can exalt himself in the presence of others. Gifts are not given so a man can benefit from it privately. They are given for the benefit of others to be exercised in love.

Now quickly here. I know this has taken a long time. Fourthly, we're looking at the limitations. We saw the limit in the canon; the limit in distribution; the limit in motivation; now the limit in practice. The limit in practice. Tongues were not to be indiscriminately spoken but rather there were guidelines placed on the exercise even within the gathered body of the church. 1 Corinthians 14:13 says, "Therefore let one who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret." If there is going to be tongues, there must be interpretation. Look at verse 26, "What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. If anyone speaks in a tongue, it should be by two or at the most three, and each in turn, and one must interpret." In other words, there must be order to the way that this is done. Speak not at the same time but speak in alternation and there must be interpretation as you do. Verse 28, "if there is no interpreter, he must keep silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God." Don't be speaking tongues if there is not someone to interpret and give edification to others by what you are saying. Don't do that, he says. In verse 34, "The women are to keep silent in the churches." The women were not supposed to be speaking in tongues during the services and ultimately in verse 40 he says, "all things must be done properly and in an orderly manner."

Now, those of you that have been in charismatic churches, those of you that have watched the videos of their laughing revivals from many years ago and other places that have watched anything of their gatherings on television, is any of this followed? It's chaos. It's pandemonium. Tongues were never given to cause confusion or uncertainty. There was to be an order leading to considered, intelligent, cognitive edification in what was being done, not being swept away by emotions, not falling over in a silly way just because somebody waved their hand at you. There was to be an order to this that led to an improvement of the spiritual mind that could be articulated in logical propositional thought.

They were limited in their practice, and finally, the final limit that I want to address for today is their limit in duration. Their limit in duration. From the outset, tongues were designed to be temporary. They were designed to be temporary. 1 Corinthians 13:10 says this. I said 1 Corinthians 13:10, I need to take you to verse 8. 1 Corinthians 13:8, "Love never fails," again the priority of love here, "but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part; but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away." Now that perfect, whatever that perfect is, it could be the completed canon, it could be the return of Christ when we're in his presence. That's not so important for the point that we're making here today. What I want you to see is this, is that Scripture anticipates the cessation of tongues which tells us that they were never meant to have an enduring priority in the church. The enduring priority of the church was love done for edification to the benefit of others but tongues were designed to cease and what we can say today 2,000 years later from this perspective is this, biblical tongues have ceased. They have ceased. The tongues in which a man speaks fluently in a foreign language that he had never studied before, you do not see that happening. Instead, what you find is the idea of tongues being re-interpreted into some kind of prayer language that is unknown even to the speaker, something that they can do privately on their own for their own self-edification, that they get their own joy out of, and when you start to see that, you say, "Wait. Time out. Time out. This is not language. This is not known recognized language. You're doing this for your own benefit. You openly state, 'I pray in tongues in private for my own benefit,' and that has nothing to do, that contradicts the spirit of the gifts and why God gave them in the first place."

We're gifted in order to serve others with what we do. No charismatic speaks in a real language, a known human language that they have not studied. They're doing something else. What is it that they're doing? What are we to think of modern tongues today? We'll save that for next time but we will address it next time, Lord willing.

Let's pray together. As we close our time together, my friends, my beloved, I just encourage you with this, I encourage you not to seek an experience in the traditions of men, not to seek an emotional high, not to seek something for your own private benefit, but rather to seek the Lord Jesus Christ as he was pleased to reveal himself in the pages of Scripture. It is in the word of God that you find Christ, not in your personal experience. It is in the word of God that you find strength for your sanctification, not in your personal experience. It is the word of God that will never pass away. So seek Christ

and when you find him, beloved, I encourage you, I invite you, indeed still more, Christ commands you to repent and to follow him, to receive him for your eternal salvation.

Father, with all that we've covered here today, so much information in such a short period of time, help us by your Spirit to process it, to understand it, and to draw the right conclusions from the teaching of your word that we might ever worship you in spirit and in truth. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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