

San Juan church of Christ

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What Does God's Word Say About...

Speaking in Tongues

Some believe that one who is able to "speak in tongues" is proof that the Holy Spirit dwells in them. The first century church did not have the complete written word of God as we do today [the Bible]. The word of God was at first "spoken through the Lord, was confirmed to us [apostles] by those who heard [believers]. God also testifying with them [believers] both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will," (Hebrews 2:3-4). The Holy Spirit distributed miraculous gifts to each member of the Lord's church according to the will of God. Paul defined what these gifts were, and their purposes. "But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given the word of wisdom...to another the word of knowledge...to another faith...to another gifts of healing...to another the effecting of miracles...to another prophecy...to another the distinguishing of spirits... to another various kinds of tongues and the interpretation of tongues," (1 Cor. 12:4-11).

Speaking in tongues enabled a person to speak in a known language that had not been learned through ordinary means (Acts 2:6, 11). Speaking in a tongue was not an overpowering emotion or a sudden intense feeling producing words of gibberish. Each miraculous gift (including the ability to speak in tongues) was given for "the common good," (1 Cor. 12:7). The gift was given so the individual could minister to the body [church]. All the spiritual gifts were not designed to be selfishly used, or build up a person. They were designed to build up the body [church] of believers. The Spirit made the decision as to who was to receive the different gifts. The Spirit decided, and the believer received. To claim that we must speak in tongues is to require that a believer receive a gift that God did not always give. Speaking in tongues was a valuable tool to teach those who spoke different languages to understand what the will of God was.

These gifts were not intended to last forever. They had a purpose: to build up the body [church] of Christ until we had the complete written word of God. Once the revelation of God was complete, the need for miraculous gifts disappeared. The reason for the various miracles was to "confirm" the word, (Hebrews 2:3). Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 13:8-12 that the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit "will be done away...they will cease...when the perfect comes." The expression, "the perfect," is from the Greek word meaning Teleios, which means complete, brought to a conclusion, or full grown. In other words, when the "gifts of the Holy Spirit" were used to bring the word of God to completion, then they were "done away." The gifts were "the parts," but the completion was the inspired and confirmed word of God.