

## CHAPTER 7

### THE DURATION OF TONGUES IN THE ASSEMBLY

#### *1 Corinthians 13:8*

In 1 Corinthians 13:8 Paul makes this important statement: “Whether there be tongues, they shall *cease* [stop].” Tongues will cease! Paul thus predicted that this gift would stop and become inoperative. The big question which must be answered is *when?* *When* will tongues cease?

It would have been helpful had Paul been more specific: “Tongues shall cease one hundred years from now!” or “Tongues shall cease in 2000 A.D.” The apostle, however, gave no such date. Obviously, at the time when Paul wrote to the Corinthians (approximately 55 A.D.), tongues had *not yet* ceased. At that time, God was still giving this gift (1 Corinthians 12:10).

*When* would tongues cease? *When* would the gift of tongues no longer be operative? *When* would God stop giving this gift?

Three approaches can be used in solving this

problem: the contextual approach, the historical approach, and the purposive approach. These will be briefly considered.

### *THE CONTEXTUAL APPROACH*

Many students of the Scriptures have tried to answer the *when* question by studying 1 Corinthians 13:8 in light of the following context (verses 9-13). The key problem has been the identification of "that which is perfect" in verse 10. Since this is not the approach followed in this study, the reader is referred to helpful material found in Thomas<sup>7</sup> and Dillow.<sup>8</sup>

### *THE HISTORICAL APPROACH*

There is overwhelming evidence that tongues did in fact *cease* early in the history of the Church. No mention of tongues can be found in any of Paul's later Epistles. The testimony of the orthodox Church Fathers lends strong support to the fact that the gift of tongues ceased. As Richard Quebedeaux has observed: "Evidence for the appearance of glossolalia, at least from the late second century to the eighteenth or nineteenth century, is scarce and frequently obscure. . . . Origen, in the third century, and Chrysostom, in the fourth, both disparaged the accounts of speaking in tongues, and rejected its continued validity. Augustine, early in the fifth century, asserted that glossolalia was a sign adapted only to biblical times."<sup>9</sup>

The comment by the great preacher Chrysostom is worthy of note: "This whole place is very obscure [commenting on the references to tongues in 1 Corinthians] but the obscurity is produced by our ignorance of the facts referred to and by their cessation, being such as then used to occur, but now no longer take place" (*Homilies*, XXIX, 1).<sup>10</sup>

For further historical documentation along these lines, see Smith,<sup>11</sup> Sellers,<sup>12</sup> Whitcomb,<sup>13</sup> and Dillow.<sup>14</sup>

### *THE PURPOSIVE APPROACH*

What was the purpose of the gift of tongues? If the purpose for tongues is known, then it is possible to determine *when* tongues ceased. The purposive argument may be thus stated: *Tongues ceased when they no longer served the purpose for which they were given.*

This same purposive approach is helpful in considering other temporary gifts. For example, God no longer gives the gift of *apostleship* because, according to Ephesians 2:20, the apostles were foundational men. Since a solid foundation was already laid in the first century, apostles are no longer needed. They have served their purpose. When Christ began to build His Church (Matthew 16:18), He first laid the foundation and then proceeded to erect the superstructure. Today He is working on the "steeple stage," as the Church waits expectantly for His return!

Likewise, the gift of *prophecy* is no longer given

today. Prophets were necessary in the days when the New Testament was incomplete. The Church now possesses a completed Bible, and prophets are no longer needed. They have served their important purpose.

What the Church needs today is a new confrontation with the all-sufficient written Word of God (the sixty-six canonized books). Though apostles have passed off the scene, the doctrine (teaching) of the apostles remains (cf. Acts 2:42; 2 Thessalonians 2:15). Though God has ceased gifting men as prophets, there remains the God-inspired message of the prophets, namely, the completed New Testament Scriptures (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:19).

Paul used a purposive illustration in 1 Corinthians 13:11:

When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

When a person reaches manhood, for instance, he no longer needs a baby bottle. Childish things have served their purpose and are no longer needed.

What about tongues? Has the gift of tongues served its purpose? Is this gift still needed today? What is the purpose of tongues?

These important questions will be answered in detail in Chapter 9, "The Purpose of Tongues in the Assembly." It will then be demonstrated that the gift of tongues served its God-given purpose in the early

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days of the Church and then *ceased no later than 70 A.D.*