

LTBS 19th JULY 2020

SPEAKING IN TONGUES AS A MYSTERY UNTO GOD

“For he who speaks in another language speaks not to men, but to God; for no one understands; but in the Spirit he speaks mysteries” (1Cor 14:2)

The challenge facing us in this discussion is a hermeneutical one. The issue of the meaning of a biblical text has been a subject of serious hermeneutical concern through out the Christian age. Hermes in ancient Greek mythology was the interpreter of the gods. He is the messenger that the gods use to convey meaning and carry out their orders. Hermeneutics is then the science of interpretation. If the meaning of Paul’s discourse in 1 Corinthians 14.2 is found, it is because proper and accurate hermeneutics has been done. How can we accurately find meaning of biblical text especially the text before us?

1. For so many, meaning is settled when their ‘pastor’ or ‘head’ speaks. This is as a result of the view that the man is a spokesman for God and cannot make mistakes as an oracle of Almighty God. Take for instance, one Pastor and G.O. wrote that Christians should *‘Refuse to be sick.’* In this write up, this pastor proclaims the philosophy that has made many to believe that just because God’s Spirit dwells in a Christian, sicknesses, diseases, and infirmity cannot find place in their physical bodies, though this is not the experience of his members or any other person who has the Holy Spirit given to them as believers. Using Romans 8:11, which reads: *“But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit indwelling in you.”* he convinced many of his listeners to stop believing in physical pains and sicknesses in their bodies because believing these is to believe a ‘lying vanity’ and to incur God’s displeasure. He said Leviticus 17:11 that proves that the life of humans is in the blood does not apply to a born-again individual. [1] Some misguided by this meaning of the biblical texts used by this pastor have lost their physical lives and the lives of those dear to them as they refuse treatment for physical infirmities. It is simply not true that when you become born-again, your genotype changes to one supplied by the Holy Spirit as the pastor claims. If you have sickle-cell anaemia, it won’t change because you have the Holy Spirit indwelling you. The pastor could not differentiate spiritual life and physical life in the word of God. In other words, this pastor did not know the meaning of the passages he was reading. One needs to be truthful and say like the Ethiopian Eunuch that **“how can I, (that is understand the Scripture being read) unless someone guides me?”** (Act 8:31)

A scholar, Eric Lyons, summarizes the solution to the problem of understanding the Bible with a suggestion that:

“It often has been said, “The Bible is its own best commentary.” When we read something that we do not understand in one section of the Bible, frequently other passages in the Scriptures will “interpret” the “unclear” sections for us. Someone questioning the identity of the “seed” of Abraham who would be a blessing to all nations (Genesis 22:18; cf. 26:4) can read Galatians 3:16 and learn that the “seed” mentioned in Genesis is Christ. If a person wanted to know what the water baptism Jesus and the apostles commanded involved, he could study Romans 6:4, Colossians 2:12, and Acts 8:38, and come to the correct conclusion that New Testament water baptism is a burial in water, and not the mere sprinkling of water on a person. Instead of approaching the

Scriptures with the mindset of, "What do I think about...", or "What do you think about...", we first need to ask ourselves, "What does the Bible say about itself?" If there is one section of the Scriptures that we do not understand fully, we always should examine other passages in the Bible that deal with the same subject first.[2]

2. Rather than take the pastor as authority to speak for God when the Bible has been written for all to know the mind of God, it is important for us to follow some steps in trying to get at the meaning of the text in the Bible that we are reading:

What are the steps in Exegesis (biblical interpretation)?

The suggested steps to biblical interpretation called exegesis include a contextual approach. We are to ask these questions:

- a. What does the text say?
- b. What is the circumstance surrounding the text –that is, who is speaking, to whom and on what occasion and for what purpose?
- c. Are there other biblical passages that throw more light on the meaning of the text?
- d. What is the total context and the conclusion? –This is when we add all the data together and reasoning correctly about the data in order to get at the proper meaning of God’s word. Let us go back to the text for this study -1 Corinthians 14:2. Before we should attempt to determine what it means to us today, we must first search out why the book was written and what was going on that necessitated the writing by Paul.

Let us consider the background to 1 Corinthians 14. The church at Corinth had problems and Paul wrote them to help them correct these. One of the problems included the abuse of the use of spiritual gifts possessed by members of the church. Chapters 11-14 addressed these abuse issues.

The key to understanding 1 Corinthians 14:2 may be verse 22 **“So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophesying is not for unbelievers but for those who believe.** (1Co 14:22 EMTV)

Speaking in tongues is an ability to speak a message from God in a language the messenger does not know and did not learn and is a sign according to this passage. A sign is a mark of the authenticity of the messenger. It is designed to elicit wonder, awe, and reverence for the giver of the message, and also respect for the message. LTBS from Acts 2:7, 8, 12:

“And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak in different languages, as the Spirit gave them utterance...And they were all amazed and were marvelling, saying to one another, "Behold, are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born? ... So they were all amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What might this mean?" (Act 2:4, 7, 8, 12 EMTV)

Please recall that this event was said to be the work of the Holy Spirit. The apostles were speaking according to how the Holy Spirit gave them utterance! (Act 2:4) The Holy Spirit enabled the apostles who were Galileans to speak languages they don’t speak and have never learned. Their mastery of these languages mentioned in Acts 2:9-10 languages from about 13 places, was a sign to these people that this was an unusual event and must have come from God! A sign is a device to catch people’s attention and divert it to the message of salvation. Right from the beginning of

Christianity this has been the use of the gift of 'tongues.' In the Acts 2 narrative, the first recorded account of the phenomenon, the multitude gathered were surprised and awed at the fact that men who were known to be Galileans were able to speak the different languages of the multicultural addressees or listeners from at least 13 different places and language groups!

Beloved listening friend, would it be belabouring the fact that what people speak today is completely different from what the Bible so describes. If it is different from what the Bible says it was, then what people do today and call tongue speaking is fake and misleading. The speakers of today are asked to just say anything that comes to their mind. Sometimes their pastors pray for them to speak in tongues! All these are different from what we read in the Bible. Dear listener, we urge you to believe in the Bible narrative for this is God's word and it is true. What you experience today and what you see that is different from the word of God is exactly that: A different thing! If it is not Panadol, it is not the same thing as Panadol! People have been confused to think that God is speaking through them. They are mistaken! Although some of the listeners in Jerusalem tried to pass this divinely engineered event off as a drunken imitation of their native languages, the miracle was soon verified as being too good and too awesome to be dismissed as a mere rambling of drunken men. Apostle Peter, debunking this ignorant suggestion, proved that the apostles were indeed specially selected to deliver a soul-saving message with the attending attention getting and awe-inspiring sign. Note that the messenger is not as important as the message he bears. God used men without high credentials – fishermen et al., to make the weight of the message more glorious. LTBS from 2 Corinthians 4:7

“But we have this treasure in clay vessels, so that the extraordinary character of the power may be of God and not of us;” (2Co 4:7 EMTV)

In the Old Testament God used even an animal, a donkey to illustrate this principle –the donkey spoke human language – a feat which it would never have been able to do being an animal. LTBS from Numbers 22:28-30:

“Then the LORD opened the mouth of the donkey, and she said to Balaam, “What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?” And Balaam said to the donkey, “Because you have made a fool of me. I wish I had a sword in my hand, for then I would kill you.” And the donkey said to Balaam, “Am I not your donkey, on which you have ridden all your life long to this day? Is it my habit to treat you this way?” And he said, “No.” (Num 22:28-30 ESV)

Dear listening friend, when God made a donkey to speak human language, He communicated. God used human language strange and unknown to the speakers but known to the hearers to speak to the listeners in order to persuade them to leave a life of sin. In a way, we are also using the word of God to persuade all who speak meaningless jargons and pretend it is coming from God to repent from this sinful practice and find salvation from the Lord. Do not allow God to say to you at His coming, ***“depart from me you who practice iniquity”*** (Mat 7:23)

Beloved, why do so called 'men of God' hide under 1 Corinthians 14:2 to practice iniquity? When the force of truth makes them uncomfortable, instead of repenting, they claim that what they are speaking is a mystery and no one can understand it! They therefore hide their fake speaking in tongues under the fact that it is a mystery! What is this mystery that Paul talked about in this passage? Let us examine the context of what Paul said to get the meaning. The Bible explains itself in this case.

Context Considerations: Paul addressed the issue of the use of spiritual gifts from chapters 11-14. He laid a foundation that all the gifts are from God through the Holy Spirit and are therefore not to be regarded as making the gifted individual superior to others. He used the physical human body to illustrate and prove that those regarding one gift as being better than another missed the point and are thinking carnally. LTBS from 1 Corinthians 12:27-30:

“Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. And those whom God has appointed in the church are: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, kinds of tongues. All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?” (1Co 12:27-30 EMTV)

In this passage, Paul was impressing on the minds of Christians that God arranged the differences in spiritual gifts in the church to suit His will and they are complimentary not competitive. Paul counselled love as the greatest gift of all –it is available to all Christians and will outlast all the temporary miraculous spiritual gifts (13:8-10). After this Paul focused on a specific gift that was ostentatious and grossly abused –the ability to prophesy in a language that is foreign to the prophet or messenger popularly referred to as ‘speaking in tongues.’ The difference between regular prophesying and ‘speaking in tongues,’ is the language of the revelation. Prophecy is speaking forth a message from God by inspiration in a language believers understand, while ‘tongues’ is also an inspired prophetic utterance used before non -Christians in a language unknown to the speaker but understood by the recipients producing marvel and awe in the listeners and to give credential to the speaker as a herald of the King of Kings.

Both speaking in tongues and prophecy are both prophetic utterances coming from God. Prophecy as a gift is used in the church to reveal God’s mind to Christians while tongues are used to reveal God’s will to non-Christians. When tongues are used in the church to speak to Christians, they must be interpreted so that everyone can know what the speaker is revealing from God! If not, the speaker should keep quiet! LTBS from 1 Corinthians 14:18-19:

“I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all; but in the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, in order that I may instruct others, rather than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue.” (1Co 14:18-19 EMTV)

The Corinthian Christians with this gift were using it indiscriminately and were ignoring the purpose for which miraculous spiritual gifts were to be used in worship: namely edification. As Paul said, the gifts should be used **in the church** to instruct others! The gift of prophecy naturally was used in worship as the New Testament was not completely written and the church needed instructions from God directly. Those with this gift edify the church because they use a language everyone understands. This is the reason why the gift of prophecy is to be desired over ‘tongues’ and over other revelatory gifts. LTBS from 1 Corinthians 14:1:

“Pursue love, and desire the spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy.” (1Co 14:1 EMTV)

The early Christians not having the complete revelation of God as we have it today had to rely of these prophetic messages coming directly from heaven. If it comes in French and no one understands French, it is not useful, and it is a mystery or

strange utterance and should not be engaged in in the church for no instruction has taken place!

In 1 Corinthians 14:2 Paul now said that if one is revealing a message in a language foreign to the hearers, he is not communicating the gospel or the saving message but mysteries. The word mystery refers to the 'secrets' of God or the unrevealed gospel which God did not reveal in earlier times but gave men gifts to fully reveal in the Christian dispensation. A clear text to support this view is Matthew 13:11. **"And he answered and said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given."** Note that 'mystery' has to do with the things concerning the kingdom of heaven. In Ephesians 3:1-11, the sense is also an attestation of this meaning. LTBS from Ephesians 3 verse 9 where Paul indicates that God's intention is that the once-hidden-truth of the kingdom of heaven (mystery) be revealed so that all may know and become partakers of the fellowship with God. The word 'mystery' (musterion –Greek) has been used twenty seven times in the New Testament and has the primary meaning of something hidden. Paul in many texts however assured Christians that what was hidden has now been revealed and no one should be in ignorance concern the 'mystery.' LTBS:

"and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things," (Eph 3:9 ESV)

Again, hear Paul explaining that the mystery of God has been revealed in 1 Corinthians 2.7-10. LTBS:

"But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God." (1Cor 2:7-10 KJV)

This text said that 'God hath revealed them unto us...' In Ephesians 3:3-5, 9, Paul again asserts the same truth: **"How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.... And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ:"** (KJV)

The words Paul used give room for no mistake: **"He made known unto me" "to make all men see" "ye may understand" "it is now revealed"** etc. The central truth is that God's 'musterion' has been revealed in the first century church because God wants all men to have fellowship of the 'musterion.'

Beloved listening friend, let us conclude this study of today by looking again at the verse being twisted to accommodate the fake speaking in tongues: 1 Corinthians 14.2 **"For he who speaks in another language speaks not to men, but to God; for no one understands; but in the Spirit he speaks mysteries."** (MSG) Paul in this text said the man who 'utters' a message from God when no one understands him is not revealing the 'mystery' that God gave him a gift for but is uttering mysteries still as no one understands. God the giver of the message is the only one who understands. The Corinthian brethren were to see the utter foolishness of the situation where one is

prophesying in a foreign language but nothing is gained by the proclamation. Later in the chapter Paul said, **“I’ll rather utter five words that I understand so I can teach others than ten thousand words in a foreign language that no one understands.”** He ILLUMINATED the situation with several arguments showing the **vanity** of the practise:

- The trumpeter blowing uncertain sounds does not communicate.-1Cor 14:7-8
- One speaking a foreign language without interpretation is speaking into the air –an expression to mean ‘he is uttering senseless words’ -1Cor 14:9-11
- An unbelieving visitor to worship cannot say ‘Amen’ to prayers offered in a foreign tongue -1Cor 14:16
- Visitors will mock when believers speak as barbarians, and they will say that the gifted believers are insane or mad. -1Cor 14:23

After showing the ridiculous nature of using the gift that way, Paul now gave instructions about the proper use of the gift of speaking foreign languages:

- a. All should reveal (prophecy) to edify –(14 vs 1, 3, 31)
- b. All foreign language (unknown tongue) messengers must speak their message one –by –one, not together or simultaneously, and should interpret, or be silent (14 vs 27, 28)
- c. Prophets should be in control of their spirits and the utterances of their messages.
- d. All gifted people should acknowledge that Paul’s instructions are the commandment of the Lord.

In conclusion, does this passage permit the interpretation and practice we observe in many Pentecostal circles? -Of people walking around in worship uttering emotional ‘nothings’ (jargons) fuelled by deep ignorance and misinterpretations? The answer is obvious for several reasons:

- a. Biblical ‘tongue speaking’ is a prophetic utterance, a message from the Holy Spirit to man concerning things of the Kingdom of Heaven in a human language. The so-called ‘speaking in tongues’ of modern ‘spiritual’ churches are emotive and ignorant ramblings of deceived men/women who do not know the truth about their actions.
- b. To purport to speak for God when the Holy Spirit did not reveal anything to the person is a gross act of disobedience and to insult the Spirit of the Almighty God. It is also an act of unbelief and utter disregard for the things of God! It is saying “God said” when He did not speak! Jeremiah in his days spoke concerning those who fell into similar deception: LTBS from Jeremiah 23:31-32:
“Behold, I am against the prophets, saith the LORD, that use their tongues, and say, He saith. Behold, I am against them that prophesy lying dreams, saith the LORD, and do tell them, and cause my people to err by their lies, and by their vain boasting: yet I sent them not, nor commanded them; neither shall they profit this people at all, saith the LORD” (Jer 23:31, 32 RV)
- c. To speak ‘mysteries’ today when the Holy Spirit has already said it was pointless and not to be done in the assemblies of the saints (1Cor 14:27, 28) is to manifest a spirit contrary to the spirit of Christ and to join the rank and file of deceivers whose destiny is the fire that burns eternally. Let us respect God and His words!

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Our study of the Holy Spirit's gifts continues the same time next week if the Lord tarries and by His grace. May the Lord bless you and family this week and grant you insight into His words. From all of the crew of LTBS in the studio, we say, "Do have a wonderful week!"

Bibliography

- [1] "REFUSE TO BE SICK" from Rhapsody of Realities May 2008 by Chris and Anita Oyakhilome.
- [2] Eric Lyons, "The Bible Explains Itself" in <http://www.apologeticspress.org/articles/1753>.

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