

Discovering Your Ministry Within The Kehilah: Living A Spirit-Filled Life Part 8-G

Discovering Your Spiritual Gifts

In my last post (prior to You Have Potential), I gave you a PDF copy of C. Peter Wagner's definitions of all **28 Spiritual Gifts** and the **"Wagner-Modified Houts Questionnaire"** to help you discover what your gift-mix might be. Most of the gifts are pretty self-explanatory. I hope that you have completed the questionnaire. Again, if you have any questions at all, please contact me.

In today's last post of the series **"Discovering Your Ministry Within The Kehilah: Living A Spirit-Filled Life,"** I'm taking an in-depth look at the spiritual gift of tongues. This is perhaps the most controversial gift in our culture and I want to look at it more closely. Fair warning: This post is twice the usual length of my previous posts, so I will refrain from posting another installment for a few additional days.

The Basics of the Controversy

I'm attempting to provide a balanced approach to this issue and have relied on C. Peter Wagner's book *"Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow"* and Charles C. Ryrie's book *"The Holy Spirit."* C. Peter Wagner is a Christian theologian, missiologist, missionary, writer, teacher, and church growth specialist. He served for 30 years as Professor of Church Growth at the Fuller Theological Seminary's School of World Missions¹ until his retirement in 2001. Charles C. Ryrie is a Christian writer and theologian who served as Professor of Systematic Theology and Dean of Doctoral studies at Dallas Theological Seminary² and is the editor of *"The Ryrie Study Bible."*

Let me remind you of Wagner's definition of the gift of tongues:

The special ability (1) to speak to God in a language they have never learned and/or (2) to receive and communicate an immediate message from God to His people through a divinely anointed utterance in a language they have never learned.

Clearly, the second part of the definition was evident in Acts 2, **"They {the talmidim} were all filled with the Ruach HaKodesh and began to talk in different languages, as the Spirit enabled them to speak."** (Acts 2:4) The passage goes on to say, **"Now there were staying in Yerushalayim religious Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd gathered; they were confused, because each one heard the believers speaking in his own language. Totally amazed, they asked, 'How is this possible? Aren't all these people who are speaking from the Galil? How is it that we hear them speaking in our native languages?'"** (Acts 2:5-8) This appears to be a clear case of the Ruach enabling the

¹ I could find no definitive statement on the FTS web site, either in their published **Statement of Faith** or **What We Believe and Teach** pages which address the issue of Spiritual Gifts or Tongues.

² The "Full Doctrinal Statement of the Dallas Theological Seminary ~ Article XII—The Holy Spirit" states on the issue of the gift of tongues: *"We believe that some gifts of the Holy Spirit such as speaking in tongues and miraculous healings were temporary. We believe that speaking in tongues was never the common or necessary sign of the baptism nor of the filling of the Spirit, and that the deliverance of the body from sickness or death awaits the consummation of our salvation in the resurrection (Acts 4:8, 31; Rom. 8:23; 1 Cor. 13:8)."*

talmidim to speak and more importantly preach in a known language. The 'religious Jews' were fulfilling their obligation to go to Jerusalem to celebrate Shavu'ot (see Deut. 16:10) heard the talmidim speak in their native language without the talmidim ever having to learn that language. Both Wagner and Ryrie seem to agree on this point.

There are two main issues which seem to divide the Kehilah over the first definition of the spiritual gift of tongues and to some extent the companion gift of interpretation of tongues. First, is the gift of tongues still for today? Secondly, if it is still valid today, is the gift of tongues the initial physical evidence of having received the baptism of the Ruach?

The first part of the definition has been called private tongues or your prayer language. Wagner points to this passage from 1 Corinthians as authoritative: ***"If the gift of tongues is exercised, let it be by two or at most three, and each in turn; and let someone interpret. And if there is no one present who can interpret, let the people who speak in tongues keep silent when the congregation meets - they can speak to themselves and to God."*** (1 Corinthians 14:27-28)

Harold Bredesen lists five functions for the use of a prayer language:

1. Tongues enables our spirits to communicate directly with God above and beyond the power of our minds to understand. {see Romans 8:26}
2. Tongues liberates the Spirit of God within us.
3. Tongues enables the Spirit to take its place of ascendancy over soul and body.
4. Tongues is God's provision for catharsis, therefore important to mental health.
5. Tongues meets our needs for a whole new language for worship, prayer and praise.³

According to Ryrie⁴, the modern phenomenon of speaking in tongues had its beginning in 1901 with Miss Agnes Ozman in Topeka, Kansas. Tongues were considered to be the evidence of having been baptized with the Holy Spirit. This teaching and experience spread rapidly but was largely confined to the thousands of Pentecostal churches that came into being with their millions of members. Beginning in 1960 with an Episcopal rector, Dennis Bennett, tongues began to break out in some mainline denominations, some parachurch organizations, and among Roman Catholics. He states that *"speaking in tongues is a genuine scriptural gift is undebatable. The question is this: Is what is called tongues today this genuine scriptural gift?"*

Ryrie goes on to say, *"if God is still giving the biblical gift, then it must meet the criteria for the gift as described in the Scriptures. It must be an actual earthly language used by men with interpretation to edify the church and as a sign of verification and judgment to unbelieving Jews and regulated by the guidelines of 1 Corinthians 14:26-40."* He goes on to state that glossolalia (prayer language) *"is not a supernatural phenomenon. It is, in fact, a very natural phenomenon....When the full apparatus of linguistic science comes to bear on glossolalia, this turns out to be only a facade of language - although at times a very good one indeed. For when we comprehend what language is, we must conclude that no glossa, no matter how well constructed, is a specimen of human language. If this linguistic analysis is true, and if biblical tongues were uniformly actual languages, then one has to conclude that biblical tongues are not being experienced today."*

³ Harold Bredesen, "The Gift of Tongues," *Logos Journal*, (March 1978) pp. 19-24.

⁴ "The Holy Spirit," by Charles C. Ryrie, Chapter 17 ~ The Gift of Tongues

My Experience with the Gift of Tongues

Personally, I have never experienced the second definition of the gift of tongues. I used to be able to converse fairly effectively in Spanish in my younger days, but I took three years of Spanish in college and worked with farm workers who had limited English skills. I've also learned some Hebrew used in the Shabbat liturgy, but I could certainly not converse with a resident of Tel Aviv in Hebrew. I have heard about some people who have experienced what the 'religious Jews' heard when they have been in meetings where tongues were evident. They obviously were able to provide the interpretation since it was their native language as well.

My first remembrance of hearing about the gift of tongues was when I heard the reading of Acts 2 during the liturgy in church as a youth. I remember the tongues of fire sitting on the heads of those present in the Upper Room must have made for a pretty hot experience. I don't recall making the connection right away between the tongues of fire and the ability to speak in an unlearned language. One Sunday morning walking out of church in the late '60's, I overheard our parish priest talking to one of the elders that his sister had recently experienced the gift of tongues. My first thought was that she must be a very holy person because the only ones that I knew received that were the Apostles. It wasn't until 1979 that I heard anything more about this gift of the Ruach.

After reading Merlin Carothers book, "Prison to Praise," I was convinced that this was a gift I really wanted to experience. I wanted to develop a prayer language. By this time, I knew in my knower that I had already received the baptism of the Ruach as He was opening my eyes and intellect to the Word of God. I wanted the added dimension that Harold Bredesen described above.

At that time, my prayer time was during my morning commute to work. So, I prayed with some trepidation during my commute that He would grant my request. I say trepidation because I wasn't sure how it would be manifested and I was a little scared that I might get into a traffic accident if I suddenly began this ecstatic utterance that I had been reading about. Needless to say, I did receive my prayer language and I didn't lose control of my car. I'm no linguist, but my prayer language sounds somewhat like an Asian or American Indian (I am 1/16th Potawatomi) dialect.

Based upon my own experience and that of others, I do have to disagree with my classical Pentecostal brethren and repudiate that the gift of tongues is not the only initial evidence of having received the baptism of the Ruach.

For me, this is the bottom line: The issue of whether the gift of tongues is for today has nothing to do with our shared basic fundamental doctrine regarding salvation. Consequently, we should be free to agree to disagree. What we should do is agree with Rabbi Sha'ul when he wrote, ***"So, my brothers, eagerly seek to prophesy; and do not forbid speaking in tongues; but let all things be done in a proper and orderly way."*** (1 Corinthians 14:39-40)

I want to close this series on Discovering Your Ministry in the Kehilah: Living a Spirit-Filled Life with this quote from Beth Moore's "Praying God's Word Day by Day: A Year of Devotional Prayer" ~ September 8th devotional:

"Freedom becomes reality when we yield to the authority of God. We are filled with the Spirit as we yield to His Lordship.

Lord Jesus, You have promised that the Holy Spirit, whom the Father sent in Your name, will teach Your disciples all things and will remind those who follow You of everything You have said in Your Word.

Peace You leave with me; Your peace You give me. You do not give to me as the world gives. My heart need not be troubled or afraid (see John 14:26-27).

Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides You, who acts on behalf of those who wait for Him. You come to the aid of those who gladly do right, who remember Your ways (see Isaiah 64:4-5). Empower me to live obediently through Your Holy Spirit!"

In my next post, I will be starting a new series on God's Grace. In addition, I will also begin posting in late September an explanation of the Fall Feasts of the Jewish calendar.