

Tongues -Nonsense and Martin Lloyd-Jones

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In his zeal for revival, Martin Lloyd-Jones failed to give a proper contextual exegesis in his explanation of “sign gifts”—and thereby gave credibility to the Charismatic movement.

INTRODUCTION

I believe it is good to provoke one another unto good works. Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones provoked a lot of thought in my mind concerning the position he took on the sign-gifts and the conclusion that those who said they had ceased on the basis of I Cor. 13:8-10 really were teaching nonsense. So I appreciate his forthright statement even though I do not agree with it at all. But I appreciate his writings and have learned many things from him and his writing. However, I disagree most assuredly with him at this point, and I seek to refute what I conceive is a very erroneous position.

I realize that all men are fallible and that includes yours truly. I

also realize that no man has a corner on truth no matter how learned or how respected he may be in the eyes of other men. The priesthood of the believer is a ***MOST PRECIOUS DOCTRINE***. I rejoice in it. I like what Luther said in connection with it:

To ascertain and judge about doctrine pertains to all and to every Christian; and in such a way that let him be anathema who injures their right by a single hair.¹

I dare not surrender my right to come to the Word of God and seek to understand it by the help of the Holy Spirit. I also recognize that the priesthood of believers applies to other true Christians and therefore unlike some, I believe it is good to study the conclusions of other men down through the centuries, especially when their positions have stood the test of centuries and many others have been blessed when they adhered to those positions.

WHEN THAT WHICH IS PERFECT IS COME

We try to read widely. We try to read the writings which are worth reading. One professor we sat under some years ago when asked if he had read the recent best seller replied, "No, I do not have time to read such works." He proceeded to explain that there were so many good books he did not have time to read them, so he did not bother with the drivel of modern best-sellers.

We have read several of the works of Dr. Martin Lloyd- Jones, and we have appreciated many of his insights. We were shocked, however, by the position which he took on the Apostolic sign-gifts in his book *Prove All Things*. Here is what he had to say about the exegesis of I Cor. 13:8-10:

What the apostle is, of course, dealing with in I Corinthians 13 is the contrast between the highest and the best that the Christian can ever know in this world and in this life and what he will know in the glory everlasting. The 'now' and the 'then' are not the time before and after

the Scriptures were given, because that, as I have said, puts us in a position entirely superior to the apostles and prophets who are the foundation of the church and on whose very work we have to rely. It is inconsistent and contradictory—indeed there is only one word to describe such a view, it is nonsense.²

So Dr. Lloyd-Jones dismisses the view that “teleion” refers to the completion of the canon as “nonsense!” We want to examine his conclusion and see if his position is as well thought through as some people think.

It is always worthwhile to examine a man’s premise as well as his conclusion. Dr. Lloyd-Jones was dissatisfied with the state of the modern church. He believed that the church needed “revival.” Most serious believers and students of the Word of God would concur with that assessment. But he also believed that the sign-gifts are needed in the church if such a revival is to take place. Not every one would agree with that position. So it is always very important to notice where a man is coming from, for his premise many times is more important than his conclusion.

We also notice that many men, Dr. Lloyd-Jones included, will tiptoe around many controversial subjects, but others they blast with unmitigated scorn. Dr. Lloyd-Jones states at one point:

Do not misunderstand me—I am not saying all this in order that you may say the moment you hear of any claim, ‘Obviously nonsense! A repetition of Irvingism; have nothing to do with it.’ That is not my object.³

Here Dr. Lloyd-Jones is very sympathetic toward the charismatic claims of others. Don’t call them nonsense. So it is clear that when men have a point to make they tend to be kind toward their viewpoint and harsh toward the viewpoint with which they

disagree.

This is the importance of historical theology. It gives us a better perspective of the exegesis of men of all ages in the church. So that as we wrestle with the exegesis of a particular passage it is good to see how others have approached that passage also. We look at the Word of God and also the exegesis of Church history to see if the sign-gifts are for us today.

THE PROBLEMS OF THIS PARTICULAR PASSAGE

The problem of whether the gifts are with us or not is certainly not easily settled. It certainly will not be settled by doing what Dr. Lloyd-Jones does, and that is look at a few verses here and there with no attempt to give a contextual exegesis of them; and in many cases seemingly miss the import of them.

He makes his one great statement: “The Scriptures never anywhere say that these things were only temporary—never! There is no such statement anywhere.”⁴ If this can be an argument, then all we have to say is that it proves far too much. It still leaves the church open to dreams and visions as *authentic revelation* for it *never once says anywhere in the Word* that dreams and visions have ended as authentic revelations. It never once says that the apostolic office ended. The inescapable fact is that although the Scriptures never actually say certain things, they do by inference teach certain truths.

It is certainly taught by inference that the apostolic office ended, and we believe with it ended also all apostolic gifts. Do apostolic gifts continue when there are no apostles? The inference certainly seems to be no. The Apostle Paul calls himself an apostle born out of due time. He is the least of all the apostles and the last of the Apostles. The reference to one being born out of due time refers to an aborted delivery. The meaning is that Paul was the last of the Apostles chronologically and he was, he says, a deformed addition

to the apostolic family so that he was not worthy to be called an apostle. Certainly by inference we can assume that the apostolic office had its last member in the person of the Apostle Paul.

HIS ARGUMENT

Dr. Lloyd-Jones uses various references to Christ (p. 26) and seeks to prove by the Savior's claims that great supernatural signs and works were to be expected because Christ was working them. But is not the Savior in a unique position? Are not the works of Christ an authentication of His Godhood? Biblical miracles authenticated the messengers of God while God's revelation was in the process of being communicated to man. Once the revelation was completed, the need for such authentication passed forever away.

Dr. Lloyd-Jones then comments on II Cor. 12:12. He says that Paul's position as an apostle was called into question by certain detractors and that Paul wrote, "Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds." He says the Apostle's ministry was authenticated in this way. All true, but all certainly not proving Dr. Lloyd-Jones's position. That is the very point which he seems to miss—that the signs of an apostle were wrought among them, not just the signs of a man baptized with the Spirit. It was a peculiar man, who did the signs and wonders through the Holy Spirit.

Then he gives his final illustration:

The author talks about the gospel (Heb. 2:3-4) which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will.⁵

To use this verse to substantiate continued miraculous activity is to miss the whole import of the verse. As Criswell and others have

pointed out, this is one of the strongest arguments *against* continued miraculous activity found anywhere in the New Testament. Criswell noted:

The author had not seen the Lord nor had he heard the message of the gospel from the lips of the Savior. He had heard it from those who had seen the Lord, second hand, second generation. But more important for us he had not seen the confirmation of “signs and wonders and divers miracles.” Even in the second generation they had died out.”⁶

A MOST IMPORTANT AND INDISPENSABLE DISTINCTION

God still works supernaturally, but not miraculously. This distinction to some is mere bubble-blowing, but we believe it is imperative to make the distinction to understand the Word of God and its relation to continuing revelation. If sign-miracles are continuing today, then all the things which accompany them *may* be continuing also: New Revelation; New Apostles; New Visions; New Dreams; angelic interventions, Resurrections from the dead; and more Scripture being written.

Sign miracles lasted while Scripture was still being revealed. The sign miracles were an important part of the attestation and authentication of the words of Scripture. They proved that the writer had an authority to be the mouthpiece of God; an authority *which no one has today!*

Sign miracles accompanied the foundation of the church. They attested the authenticity of the writers who wrote during the time in which the foundation of the church was being laid. When these writers passed from the scene and the Word of God became the basis and authority for the entire church, then all miraculous works ceased. There was no further need for them.

God still works supernaturally. God is still able to heal, and God certainly works to regenerate and to save and to call men to the ministry. All these things are supernatural but *not miraculous*. When God uses the term “wonder,” it is *always* connected to *signs*. It is signs and wonders. The very nature of signs and wonders is such that they cannot be an ongoing part of normal life; otherwise they cease to be wonders. They become part of the daily routine. A wonder is a rare thing, not a commonplace thing. True miracles were rare in history, not commonplace occurrences.

The Jews required signs. The nation of Israel was a nation of sign-seekers. Christ speaks often to *His generation* and identifies that generation as the one which sought for signs.

God still works supernaturally, but not miraculously, as far as sign-miracles are concerned. We believe this distinction must be made; otherwise we open ourselves to the fanaticism of wildfire dreams and visions all claiming authenticity. There is a difference, as Hodge pointed out a century ago, between the supernatural works of God and the miraculous works of God in this present world. God upholds all things supernaturally by the Word of His power, but as Trench said, God’s sign miracles were to a particular people at a particular time in history. Trench notes that the sign-miracles affected only those who were present at the time of the miracle. This is emphasized and re-emphasized all through the Gospels. This evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, Jesus said, and there shall be no sign given it except the prophet Jonah. The inescapable inference is that as the Jewish influence wanes in the New Testament, the sign miracles, which were all important to the Jews, fade away.

The Apostle Paul continued doing miracles as God’s amanuensis. As God’s penman for divine revelation, his miracles authenticated his written message. When revelation ceased (as it assuredly did), the signs, which were necessary to attest its authenticity and to

attest the unique position of the writers of God's inspired communication to men, also ceased.

God's supernatural dealings with men continue under His sovereign control; dictated by His sovereign dispensal; and in accordance with His sovereign will. But sign-miracles, which authenticated the men and women of God's revelation, all ceased with that revelation. When it was complete there was no need for sign-miracles, which were definitely limited; definitely attached to God's apostolic messengers; and nowhere to be seen in all of church history after the apostolic period.

THE CRUX OF THE ARGUMENT

As have many others, Dr. Lloyd-Jones reserves his severest attack for the passage in I Cor. 13:8-10. He argues, as have many others, that the word "perfect" refers to the perfect state, and if you say otherwise it is nonsense. It is then of interest to look at the history of the exegesis of this verse.

Some modern writers have indicated that it is only since the modern charismatic movement started around the turn of the twentieth century that men began to hedge on the meaning of the word "teleion" in I Cor. 13:8, and sought for some other meaning other than the perfect state of the believer in heaven...It is of interest then to note that none other than Chrysostom who died around the turn of the fifth century, did not believe that teleion meant the perfect state. He understood the "future tenses here" to refer to a time when faith having spread abroad, these special gifts would then be no longer necessary. Lange in his commentary notes that this has been the construction put upon this passage "by a large portion of the Protestant church." He later adds: "What ever may be the exegesis given this passage the prevailing belief is that these gifts, especially those of a miraculous nature, were destined

only for the apostolic period, and have already ceased.”⁷

Lange himself, who seemed to lean toward Postmillennialism, understood teleion to mean the time when the gospel would have filled the earth with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. He states categorically that teleion is “not the state of believers after death.”⁸

Barnes gives some light on this difficult text by noting that the proposition is couched in a general form. “It means that when *any* thing which is perfect is seen or enjoyed, then that vanishes”⁹ (emphasis his). Teleion certainly carries in it the idea of moving toward completion. The prophetic word always carries in it the message for the immediate audience, the subsequent hearers, and the ultimate consummation. This development many of the older writers saw in Paul’s reference to the child growing into a man. “Lalein” means to use the voice without any necessary reference to the word spoken, and is applicable to the prattle of children. “Phronein” denotes the internal state of the mind, heart or will and means not only to think but also to be inclined toward a particular direction. “Logizesthai” implies a continual process of thought or course of reasoning and means to purpose and work toward a conclusion. The older writers like Bengel and others referred these three stages of development to the three gifts mentioned by Paul—tongues, prophecy, and knowledge—and indicated that as these gifts gave way one to the other with the development of the believer, he grew from spiritual childhood to spiritual manhood.

Whether such a comparison can be made or not is debatable, but certainly not nonsensical, since this comparison lies in the immediate contextual setting. Dr. Kling writing before the modern pentecostal or charismatic movements had made their appearance intimated that while total revelation will come later, the written revelation which God gave in the Bible was a complete

revelation. So in that sense when that is complete is come, then that which is in part shall be done away, and the complete revelation of the Bible will one day be swallowed up in the total revelation which will come when we shall know as we are known.

Jamieson, Faucett, and Brown also allude to this progression of revelation in their commentary. "A primary fulfillment of St. Paul's statement took place when the Church attained its maturity; then 'tongues' entirely 'ceased,' and 'prophecies' and 'knowledge' so far as they were supernatural gifts of the Spirit, were superceded as no longer required when the ordinary preaching of the Word, and the Scriptures of the New Testament collected together, had become established institutions."¹⁰

Vine also states that "teleios" refers to the "complete revelation of God's will and ways, whether in the completed Scriptures or in the hereafter."

It is of interest also to note how the word teleion is used in the Septuagint. It speaks of Solomon "finishing" the temple. So the word here does not mean that a perfect state was reached but rather that a work was finished. When a work is finished, then that which is unfinished by the very nature of the case ceases to be. The unfinished gives place to the finished product. The Word also in Ephesians 2:20 carries the same thought of a building being finished. It is surely instructive to notice that the apostles and prophets were part of the foundation. The foundation in any building once completed is never laid again. So it is a good Scriptural inference, and not nonsense, to say that the foundation gifts along with the foundation men all ceased when the foundation was completed.

As Gresham Machen points out, Christ no longer walks with us today as He did in New Testament times. He was the Chief Corner Stone, the only foundation which can never be replaced or superceded. The Apostles and Prophets were also part of the

immediate foundation and once laid can never be repeated. Certainly God's foundation is perfect, and Christ can never be improved upon either in this world or the world to come.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS STUDY

Why haggle over such things? This is the attitude of many today. Some I know will not even take the time to read such a short study as this, especially since we disagree with a famous man. We write from the standpoint of concern. We appreciate many of the things which Dr. Lloyd-Jones writes in his work *Prove All Things*. We appreciate other of his writings which we have read. We are not simply grinding an axe when we disagree with him. We do so because of what we have seen happen to those who take this position.

We have known personally several people who have wrestled with the problem of whether or not the gifts are for today. One dear friend who had a fairly large church who was a five-point Calvinist (so certainly not the overly emotional charismatic type) began to look at the modern charismatic movement. He ended up going into it wholeheartedly and completely. Did he then see revival? Did the gifts prove to be a blessing to him and his people? Alas, such is not the case. My last contact with him through a mutual friend confirmed my worst fears. He had Roman Catholic priests in his services who were still active in the Church of Rome. He was fellowshiping with men in modernistic denominations, and he cut off all fellowship with us.

Another minister went the same way and ended up in fellowship with the impure Harlot religion of antichrist while ecstatically praising and rejoicing in the "gift" of tongues. So we see from just a personal perspective that the issue is no small matter, at least as far as some people are concerned. Whether the gifts are with us today or not proves to be a very loaded question and simply will

not go away by ignoring it.

We believe that the weight of Church history is not to be despised. The Holy Spirit has been with the true Church down through the ages. Yet when Chrysostom looked for the gifts in the Church in the fourth century, he said he had to go back to apostolic times to find them, for they were not evident after the apostolic age closed.

Certainly every Bible believer admits that the Canon of Holy Scripture has closed. We have no revelations today which are authenticated by being included in the Canon of Scripture. This subject must be addressed by all those who say that the Holy Spirit is working now as He did in the Book of Acts. The Holy Spirit is *certainly not inspiring men to write Scripture today!* And indeed it is nonsense to say so. Some things are *temporary* even though the Scriptures do not say so. The time of giving the revelation of the Scriptures was temporary. Having been put in written form now for all ages, the temporary time-span in which they were revealed and written down has *forever ended!*

Some things are definitely spoken of as ceasing. The Bible does not say that giving shall cease. But it does say that tongues shall cease. To make this cessation to occur in glory is nonsense, for giving will also cease in glory. There is a distinction made between the permanent gifts to the Church and those which revelation *clearly states shall cease*, and this is especially true of the tongues where the middle voice is used in the Greek, which could be translated “cease of themselves.” The tongues ceased of themselves when the revelation of God was completed.

Once you open up the church today to the wildfire (which is radically different from the Holy Spirit’s fire of the foundation establishment), you end up in the worst forms of fanaticism and compromise. Our range is limited, but in our personal knowledge *everyone* we have known who came to regard the sign-gifts (not the permanent gifts of Romans 12) as being operative

today has gone into fellowship with Romanism, Modernism, or both. We do not know personally of one exception to this form of spiritual disaster.

So the issue comes down once again to the doctrine of separation. Is it necessary to separate from Romanism and from Modernism? That is the crux of this whole matter.

The issue of separation is always answered by those enamored with the Charismatic movement as something which is totally *unimportant*. Fellowship with the massing priests of Romanism and the Christ-Deniers of Modernism ceases to be an issue at all.

Several modern writers on revival have come right out and said that the Charismatic movement is of God, that here we have all the streams of grace uniting, and this is where the last great revival is occurring. One writer also added that everyone was uniting today—Roman Catholics, liberals, evangelicals, high church and low church, and that even the “fundamentalists” would ultimately join this happy throng.

There may be exceptions out there, but we have never met one yet, and with each advancing year we hear of yet another of our friends who has capitulated to this position; left their little group and joined the great ecumenical apostasy. Two of the men with whom we went to seminary both at one point took some stand for the truth. Both of these men served on the mission field with at least evangelical independent mission boards when they got mixed up in the Charismatic movement of our times and did not completely repudiate it but returned home and joined the United Methodist Church! One of these men left an independent mission board which took, and still takes, a strong stand against the Charismatic Movement, to join the United Methodist Church where one-third of the delegates this past year voted in favor of ordaining perverts

to the ministry!

One of these is a man who sought to know the power of God in his life. He was not just a trifler. He earnestly sought to know the power of God on his life and ministry. Sad to say it is this type of man many times who is not satisfied with a moderate plane of spiritual existence who seems to be the one who falls into the error of compromise.

At the time of the reading of Dr. Lloyd-Jones's book we were teaching a class on the Great Characters and Classics of Church History. In this class we look at the lives of close to 100 of the outstanding leaders of Church History. In *every one* of those we studied, *not one* testified to the charismatic gifts as being operative in their lives or ministries! *Every one* of these great leaders, many of whom saw a spiritual awakening under their ministries (such as Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones longed for in his ministry) did not speak with tongues or claim the sign-gifts for their ministries. Men of deep and profound spiritual power from Alleine to Zwingli were mightily used of God without any evidence whatsoever of the things Dr. Lloyd-Jones claims are necessary for revival.

We have noticed several modern writers who write long and hard on revival, who usually want to bring in the charismatic emphasis at some point. They seem never to have known real spiritual awakening in their own ministries, such as was known by the men of church history who never pushed the emphasis that is being pushed today. We also note, and intend to do some further study on it, that many of the famous missionaries of the 19th century were strong separatists from apostasy. Our modern writers on revival many times lack the stand that should be taken against apostasy, but the earlier men did not lack that stand at all. We noticed that all of the God-used men of Scotland in the 19th century separated from the Church of Scotland and that many lost their buildings and support on the field, but chose to identify with the separated witness of the Free Church of Scotland. We noticed also that

Canadian Presbyterian missionaries who were on the field when the United Church of Canada was formed also lost everything by refusing to join the ecumenical apostasy which was then appearing in embryonic form in the United Church of Canada. It is worthy of note that missionaries who were blessed of God in a singular way did not remain with their denominations when they started going apostate and the crunch of separation appeared—not one; nor did they advocate Pentecostalism as the means of revival.

God still blesses those who separate from ungodly entanglements and seek the power and demonstration of the Holy Spirit upon their ministries. The blessing may be martyrdom, but revival usually arises out of the ashes of the martyrs. God is sovereign, and He blesses the Church in sovereign majesty, not according to the whims and desires of men. So the Reformation, which was a period of unsurpassed revival in the history of the Church, also saw many precious souls experiencing that time of unparalleled revival by being burned at the stake.

What many envisage as revival is merely the strange and bizarre happenings which sometimes accompany spiritual awakenings rather than the return to the Word of God and the power of the Holy Spirit, which emphasize the passive graces as well as the active. We need the power of God today and that power according to the Word of God resides in the Gospel of saving grace, which is the power and wisdom of God today and which arises out of a life bathed in prevailing prayer.

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