

1 Corinthians 12:10 in the Navajo Bible

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[N]ááná' Diyin God bibee adziilii bee éedahózinii álílee k'ehgo ázhdoolíígíí haidiyii'aah, nááná' Diyin God bá hojilne' doogo haidiyii'aah, nááná' éí ní'ch'i danilíinii nijí'kaah bízhneel'áa doogo haidiyii'aah, nááná' éí álílee k'ehgo saad bee yá'jít'i doogo haidiyii'aah, nááná' éí saadígíí bee ata' hojilne'go haidiyii'aah[.] (1 Corinthians 12:10)¹

[T]o another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. (1 Corinthians 11:30)²

Introduction

The gift of tongues is miraculous because it comes from a supernatural source, not because it seems like magic when you hear it. This leaves open the possibility of including gibberish, but does not require it.

The words *álílee k'ehgo* ("miraculous") occur twice within this verse – once in the expression *álílee k'ehgo ázhdoolíígíí* ("miraculous powers") and once in regard to language, where *álílee k'ehgo saad bee yá'jít'i doogo haidiyii'aah* ("speaking with miraculous words") corresponds to "speaking in different kinds of tongues" (NIV).

There is disagreement about what speaking in tongues meant at Corinth. At Pentecost there can be no question that the "tongues" referred to were actual languages. But at Corinth the situation is less clear. In a perfect world it would be possible to preserve this uncertainty in the translation, as NIV has done ("different kinds of tongues" could be interpreted either way), but Navajo is a language that likes to be specific. So the translators have come down on the side of "tongues" at Corinth not being real languages. That's one of the alternatives.

The Gift of Tongues

The real question is not what they did then, but what we should do now. If we say that, whatever happened at Pentecost, at Corinth people were speaking in ways that one understood or could ever understand so we should do that too, bear in mind what Paul's response to all of this was. Paul didn't tell the church at Corinth they should never speak in tongues, but he told to do things in such an orderly way that it couldn't have

¹ Navajo Bible quotations are from *Diyin God Bizaad. The Holy Bible in Navajo*. Revised edition. New York: American Bible Society, 2000.

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been much fun. The Corinthians like the disorderly hubbub of their charismatic worship services. Paul didn't. This is why he said,

If anyone speaks in a tongue, two- or at the most three- should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. (1 Corinthians 14:27)

Appealing to the church in Corinth to justify the sorts of spontaneous disorder sometimes found in modern charismatic worship services is a bit like appealing to the churches in Galatia to support the idea that Christian males should all be circumcised. It's true that the Galatian churches practiced circumcision, but that doesn't mean we should. More important than the question of what the Galatian churches were doing is the question of how Paul reacted to it. Coming back to Corinth now, yes, the church in Corinth had adopted a wild and disorderly worship style, but what was Paul's reaction to it? Let's just say it was not an entirely favorable response.

The Spirit's Presence

How do we know what's true?

Feeling the Holy Spirit's presence in a worship service can take more than one form. Having more volume does not mean that people have more of the Spirit. It just means they're talking louder. When the Holy Spirit is present He produces warmth and a willingness to forgive. People stop resenting each other and learn to get along. The Spirit makes our hearts burn within us as we think and teach about Jesus (see Luke 24:32). Another thing the Holy Spirit produces is fruit. In our exercise of the gifts of the Spirit, the more and more closely they resemble the fruit of the spirit, the more confidence we can have that they are genuine.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. (Galatians 5:22-23).

In this list there is joy, it is true, but also peace and patience, gentleness and self-control. Self-control is prominent among the things Paul argues for in his counsels to the church in Corinth.

How do we know what's false?

The problem is not that the Holy Spirit does what He does. The problem is that there is an enemy who would love to weaken the church by imitating what the Spirit does. Not everything of a supernatural character is from God.

Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' ²³ Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!' (Matthew 7:22-23)

I'm not suggesting that it's wrong to exercise the gifts of the Spirit! We need them. But it's important to exercise the gifts of the right Spirit. Deception in spiritual

things has always taken, as one of its forms, the idea that something is from God when it really isn't. So I'm not trying to protect the church from the Holy Spirit, but I am trying to protect it from a very shrewd and clever enemy. In the parable of the weeds, Jesus tells of a farmer who planted good seed only to find his field full of harmful weeds (see Matthew 13:24-43). When they were first planted, the weeds looked like they would grow up to be grain. But as they grew it became clear that instead of being grain, they would crowd out the grain and take its place with something of no value. This is what I want to protect the church from. Not everything that looks or sounds like it's from the Holy Spirit actually is.

Conclusion

The real gift of tongues has real value for the church. It has value because people can use the words spoken to convey spiritual truth to people who need it. When Nicky Cruz became a Christian, he was coming out of the New York gang culture. He came from Puerto Rico and spoke mostly Spanish. English was something he struggled with. When he gave his testimony to congregations here and there he always used a translator. Once, however, his translator did not come and he was left to present his testimony alone. He tried to get started in his limited English and it wouldn't come. Then he prayed and tried again, and it did come. He spoke with freedom and his message had a wonderful impact on the people who were gathered. That's the genuine gift. Are the gifts real? Absolutely! Would Satan like to cause confusion by imitating them? He certainly would. For convenience I now repeat the passage under discussion.

[T]o another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. (1 Corinthians 11:30)

Notice that three of the gifts Paul mentions here have to do with our use of words. "Prophecy" means speaking for God. That's one use of language. "Speaking in different kinds of tongues" is another use of language. And the interpretation of tongues is yet another. Something "miraculous" is mentioned twice in the Navajo (*álílee k'ehgo ázhdoolítigíí* [miraculous powers], *álílee k'ehgo saad bee yájítti' doogo* [speaking in different kinds of tongues]), only once in NIV. Let us pray that God will help us keep things in perspective and always use our words to honor Christ and build up His church.