

1 Corinthians 12:30 in the Navajo Bible

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Da' t'áásh ałtso hadaałt'é ánída'oodlúıłgo baa dahideest'á? Da' t'áásh ałtso álílee k'ehgo yáti' yee yádaałti'? Da' éısh t'áá ałtso ata' dahalne'? Doo lá t'áá ałtso da ni. (1 Corinthians 12:30)¹

Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? (1 Corinthians 12:30)²

Introduction

In this passage Paul is discussing spiritual gifts. He compares the church to the human body, which is one although it has many parts. Or we could say, it is one especially because it has many parts – all working together (see vs. 19).

Do All Have the Same Gifts?

The questions Paul raises in vs. 30 (quoted above) are rhetorical. They do not expect an answer, and yet the sense of the passage makes clear what the answer must be. In any event, the Navajo translators supply the missing answer to Paul's rhetorical questions (*Doo lá t'áá ałtso da ni* ["Not all!"]). In this they go beyond the text, but not beyond the sense. Here is the entire passage for context:

Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. ²⁸ And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues. ²⁹ Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? ³⁰ Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? (1 Corinthians 12:27-30).

What Paul is saying here is that all believers are part of the body of Christ (the church), but not all make the same contribution to it. We are not all the same. And this is as it should be. God does not want all the members of His church in any one place to be the same. We should not imitate each other. If we did, the church would not be well rounded, but one sided. A church like that is not in God's plan.

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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By His Holy Spirit God gives us the gifts He wants us to have, so the church will be complete and so its witness can be effective in reaching out to all different kinds of people. Our unity is not in the gifts we have, but in the One from whom we receive them.

So Paul's point is, No! Not all do this, or this, or this. And they don't need to. Indeed, it would not be good or useful for everyone to have the same gifts. The only thing all of us must do unitedly is to follow Christ. But in doing this we should follow Him with the gifts He gives us – not the gifts He gives someone else. We must not try to imitate each other. We all have different gifts and should respect people who have gifts different from the ones we have. In the Greek Paul says this by asking questions which do not demand an answer. By adding the words, *Doo lá t'áá attso da ni* ("No, not all!"), the Navajo translation supplies an answer for us, and the answer it gives is the correct one.

Discussion

We should be careful how we interpret Paul's meaning. There are those who believe they are not fully validated Christians until they speak in tongues. This position is not biblical and the fear or uncertainty such people experience is misguided.

The one place where everyone received the same gift – and it was the gift of tongues – was in Acts 2. This in turn is the one passage where we can be most sure that the gift consisted of actual, understandable, human languages, rather than ecstatic speech which means nothing. There were no interpreters on the day of Pentecost. And that's the point. No one needed an interpreter, because the words being spoken were in the languages of those who heard. The message came through and 3000 people were baptized in one day. This was a useful gift and the results show that it was from God. But make no mistake, there are substitutes for the genuine gift of tongues.

Conclusion

Let us not settle for a substitute gift in place of the genuine gift of tongues and let us not feel guilty if we receive other gifts instead of this one. Take what God gives you and use it to build up His church. If your gift is building up the church and making it a better place, the gift you have is genuine, whatever it might be.