

Session to Session

... promoting the strengthening and
growth of Biblical Presbyterianism
in America ...

April-May 1991, Vol. 5, No. 2

If At First You Don't Succeed, Try, Try, Again!

by J. Arch Warren

At the 18th General Assembly in Atlanta last year, the Administrative Committee of the General Assembly proposed sweeping changes in the function of the Committees of Commissioners which would reduce their role to "Advisory".

The rationale as presented in the 1990 Commissioners' Handbook was threefold:

1. The Committees of Commissioners from the presbyteries are not in a position to evaluate recommendations from the Permanent Committees with the kind of careful diligence that is required.
2. Yet, the Committees of Commissioners should be continued, since as outsiders to the Permanent Committees they can provide objective "advice" that may prove helpful.
3. But, the proposed changes need to be made, since they would save time and money, and would facilitate the work of the General Assembly.

The changes were not adopted last year. But now they are back again in a new dress but with the same underlying intent: "Get the Committees of Commissioners off the backs of the Permanent Committees."

A new approach has been designed to achieve last year's thwarted goal. This year the Administrative Committee seeks to change the Rules of Assembly Operation so that the Permanent Committee chairmen will make their report directly to the Assembly without prior modification by the Committees of Commissioners. Under the proposed changes, a minority report from the Committees of Commissioners would be allowed only if requested and permitted by a majority vote of the Assembly.

These changes, according to the rationale of the Administrative Committee, will streamline the Assembly, make it more efficient, and increase ruling elder participation.

But questions remain. Concerns are not quieted.

First of all, how does what seems to be an increasing spirit of elitism among the Permanent Committees square with the mutual respect among elders in presbyterianism? "Listen to me," they say. "We know best. You ruling and teaching elders that make up the Committees of Commissioners really can't

understand. The issues of Christian education, home and foreign missions and seminary training are too much for you. Don't question us. Simply trust us to do what is best for the church." Does that kind of attitude reflect the spirit of presbyterianism?

Secondly, what's the rush and why the persistence in changing these matters? Is it wise to force the Assembly to decide these issues on the first day of its convening? The General Assembly has functioned well for eighteen years following the original pattern which was intentionally designed to maintain a "balance of powers" between the presbyteries and denominational committees. Surely the system won't collapse if more time is taken. Why not offer the church at large a period of time for effective deliberation? If the proposal has merit, a majority of elders should be able to discern it.

Thirdly, if Permanent Committees are intended only to implement policy rather than to enact policy, why is the Permanent Committee on Administration driving so hard to make these recommended changes? Are the presbyteries asking for these changes? Or is the compulsion coming from the other Permanent Committees themselves? Is not the compulsion arising from the fact that the Permanent Committees want greater freedom in determining policy rather than merely enacting policy?

Continued on page 2

Tongues Today? Part II

by O. Palmer Robertson

Anyone who teaches or preaches the word of God understands that spiritual edification occurs as a speaker understands and believes the truth that he speaks. The preacher knows full well that he is not edified by the mere exercise of his gift for preaching. He must understand and believe what he says if edification for himself is to occur.

If this were not the case, a totally different concept of the way of edification would have to be envisioned. For if the Spirit can use merely the exercise of a verbal gift for the speaker's edification apart from his understanding what he says, then the same effect could be experienced by the hearers as well as by the speaker. If the one who spoke in a tongue could be edified even while not understanding what he was saying, could not the congregation expect to be edi-

Continued on page 2

Session to Session

Try, Try Again, continued from page 1

Fourthly, how can commissioners who, according to the Administrative Committee, are unable to "evaluate" the work of the permanent committees with "careful diligence," turn around and "insure objectivity" in their review of the permanent committees' work? If the "objectivity" of the Committees of Commissioners functions without capacity to evaluate, what's the worth of this kind of objectivity?

Pressing so relentlessly for changes will have to be viewed as an effort to further centralize and consolidate power in the permanent committees. It will reduce the General Assembly itself to a rubber-stamping "pep rally" for the Permanent Committees. These changes may be forced through the Assembly, but they will only tend to separate the church at large from the committees of the Assembly. The long-term effect of this kind of separation could seriously impede the church's fulfillment of its mission.

The proposed actions also could further erode an already dreadfully eroded ruling elder participation in the General Assembly. If one thinks the commissioners are disturbed by parliamentary wrangling and inefficiency, the discovery that their work is basically advisory rather than substantive certainly will weaken the zeal of the ruling elders to come to General Assembly. Why give up a week of vacation to cheer on the permanent committees?

The Administrative Committee is in a unique position to demonstrate servanthood to the church. It can show what it means to exercise restraint; or it can press on toward its goals without showing sensitivity to those brothers who are genuinely alarmed. The church will be affected by the committee's response. It will be waiting for indications that it has been heard. Ω

J. Arch Warren is teaching elder at the Zion Presbyterian Church in Columbia, Tennessee.

Tongues Today? continued from page 1

fied in the same way? If the sensations associated with uttering a sound like "quesrylespoyou" have the capacity for edifying the speaker, why could not those same sensations vibrating in the ears of the hearer have the effect of edifying?

But an audience is not edified one whit, no matter how zealous the speaker may be, if the message is unintelligible. Paul makes this very point. No one is edified when no one understands (I Cor. 14:2). Edification through a verbal gift is linked intrinsically to understanding the utterance.

In accordance with this principle, it must be concluded that tongues edified as they communicated the truth of God first to the speaker and then to the hearer. Apart from understanding, there was no edification. It was the revelational experience of the truth of God directly to the tongue-speaker that caused him to be edified. The experience of the tongue-speaker was a revelational experience in which God brought to him knowledge that had the effect of edifying him. At this point it is essential to look closely at verse 14. For Paul appears to contra-

dict this principle when he says: "For if I pray in a tongue my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful" (I Cor. 14:14).

This statement seems to indicate that the one who prays in a tongue fails to understand what he is saying. It appears that Paul is asserting that his non-rational "spirit" expresses itself quite effectively as he speaks to God in a tongue. But his "mind" is "unfruitful," which seems to indicate that he fails to understand the words he himself has uttered in the tongue.

However, this on-the-surface understanding of the phrase rests on a false dichotomy between the human "spirit" and the "mind" as these concepts appear in the New Testament scriptures. The human "spirit" (*pneuma*) and the "mind" (*nous*) cannot be separated so radically from one another. An example of the closeness of their interworking may be illustrated from an incident in the life of Christ. Some of his opponents began to "think within themselves" that he was blaspheming (Mk. 2:6). But Jesus "knew in his spirit" what they were thinking. The word for "know" derives from the root for "mind" (*nous*) as it is found in I Corinthians 14:14, while the word for "spirit" (*pneuma*) is the second word found in the same verse in I Corinthians. According to the gospel, Jesus possessed "rational knowledge" in his "spirit," which clearly indicates that the "spirit" does not contain simply the emotional side of man. "Mind" and "spirit" in man communicate with one another. It is a false dichotomy contrary to the scriptural teaching about man that suggests that man's "spirit" (*pneuma*) is an irrational, purely emotional aspect of man, while his "mind" (*nous*) refers to his reasoning capacities.

When Paul says, "My spirit prays" (I Cor 14:14), he means that from within his soul he offers prayers to God. But this praying "in his spirit" is not without full rational understanding. As a consequence of this understanding as he prays, he is edified. But at the same time, his "mind" that instrument by which he would formulate his thoughts for the purpose of communicating them to others, remains "unfruitful." It bears no fruit. No one else in the assembly is edified with him, because no one else understands what he has spoken in the tongue. He is edified well enough. But no one else is edified because his thoughts are not being communicated to them in a way that they can understand. No one else can join in his prayer because no one else understands the utterance of his "tongue." But if the inspired utterance of his spirit is translated into a language known by the people, then they too can be edified along with the speaker.

This understanding of verse 14 finds strong confirmation in the immediately following verses:

If you are praising God with your spirit, how can one who finds himself among those who do not understand say 'amen' to your thanksgiving since he does not know what you are saying? You may be giving thanks well enough, but the other man is not edified (I Cor. 14:16, 17).

If it is to be presumed that a *speaker* can give thanks "well enough" without even understanding what he is saying, could

not the *hearer* just as well join in to give thanks in his heart without ever understanding what the speaker might be saying?

It would be far more consistent with the true mode of edification through a verbal gift to conclude that the one speaking in the tongue understood what he was saying since he gave thanks adequately. But the hearer could not join him because he did not understand.

It may be that Paul intends to describe a verbal gift which edifies the speaker despite his lack of understanding, but which cannot also edify the hearer. But the evidence points in another direction. The speaker gives thanks well enough because he understands his divinely inspired utterance, even though it comes to him in a language he has never studied. But the utterance "bears no fruit" of sanctification among the audience because it is not understood to them.

This perspective on verse 14 may be supported by a further consideration of verse 5. Paul says, "He who prophesies is greater than he who speaks in a tongue—*unless he interpret*" (I Cor. 14:5).

The point is strongly made. Interpreted tongues are equivalent to prophecy.

But what was God's intent in prophecy? Why did he institute this form of communication?

God's intent in prophecy was to communicate his verbally inspired, infallible and inerrant word to his people. God would not settle for less, because he wanted his people to have a secure deposit of the truth.

In the same way, God's original intent in inspiring a person to speak his word in a "tongue" was to give expression to his verbally inspired, infallible and inerrant word. Tongues interpreted could be equivalent to inspired prophecy only because tongues themselves were a revelational gift. By speaking in tongues a person was delivering the very word of God, infallible and inerrant in all its parts.

This original intent for tongues could be maintained only if the gift of interpretation also functioned as a gift equivalent in its inspiration to the gifts of tongues and prophecy. Only a translation made under the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit could retain the verbally inspired, infallible, and inerrant character of the Word of God. Anyone who has attempted a translation of the Bible from Greek to English would understand the necessity of an inspired gift if the preciseness and authority of the original word from God was to be maintained. No claim could be made by any translator of scripture that his product was equivalent to the verbally inspired, infallible and inerrant word of God as originally given unless he could affirm unequivocally that God himself had been directly and infallibly inspiring the change from one language to another.

In any case, Paul indicates in these verses that tongues interpreted are equivalent to prophecy. If prophecy is revelational and tongues interpreted are equivalent to prophecy, then tongues also must be a form of revelation that God used for his church.

For this reason, the "tongues" being experienced today cannot be regarded as the same as New Testament tongues. For

God completed his revelation interpreting the work of Christ's redemption through the apostles and prophets appointed by him to provide a foundation for the church that would remain undisturbed throughout the present age.

Secondly, tongues were foreign languages. Acts 2:6 makes the point very clearly: "Each one heard them speaking in his own language." The testimony throughout the rest of the book of Acts gives no indicator that a different kind of tongue was manifested in the experiences of the church after pentecost. To the contrary, the evidence supports a continuation of the same kind of "tongue-speaking" as occurred on the day of pentecost. In Acts 10 Peter justifies the baptism of the Gentiles who had spoken in tongues, for "the Spirit came on them *just as it did on us*" (Acts 10:47). In reporting his action to the church at Jerusalem, Peter calls special attention to the same point: "The Holy Spirit came on them *just as it did on us at the beginning*" (Acts 11:15). The experience of the Holy Spirit at Caesarea corresponded to the Spirit's baptism that came on the apostles at the day of pentecost. If the gift of speaking in tongues in Acts 2 involved speaking in a foreign language never studied, then the same explanation would apply to the experience of tongues manifest among the Gentiles in Caesarea. In this light, it may be assumed that the same explanation would apply to the gift of tongues as manifested in Ephesus (Acts 19:7). It may be worth noting that the experience of tongues in Ephesus occurred *after* Paul's visit to Corinth (cf. Acts 18:1-19). While no specific description characterizes the tongues-speaking in Ephesus, the identical language used to describe the phenomenon in Ephesus and in previous narratives in Acts strongly suggests that the nature of the "tongues" in Ephesus corresponded to the "tongues" mentioned by Luke throughout the book of Acts.

No mention is made of a tongue-speaking occurrence at Corinth in the book of Acts (cf. Acts 18:1-18). But according to Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, the phenomenon of tongues obviously had a prominent role in their church life.

What was the nature of this phenomenon at Corinth? It would seem rather strange indeed if before and after Corinth as described in Acts one kind of "tongue" manifested itself while at Corinth a totally different phenomenon appeared—and that without any elaboration in Acts of a supposed difference. In both Acts and Corinthians the same terminology is used. Acts 2:4 speaks of "other tongues," and I Corinthians 14:21 similarly refers to "other tongues." The Greek is almost identical in both places, and may be translated "other languages" in each case. Furthermore, I Corinthians 14 employs an Old Testament quotation clearly speaking about foreign languages to explain the phenomenon in Corinth (I Cor. 14:21; cf. Isa. 28:11, 12; Deut. 28:49). As a result, it may be concluded that either Paul is making an application of an Old Testament passage that does not strictly apply, or that the tongues of I Corinthians 14 were foreign languages as anticipated in the Old Testament passage cited by Paul. Still further, the tongues of I Corinthians 14 were translatable, which would suggest that they were foreign languages. Even if it

Session to Session

Tongues Today? continued from page 3

were concluded that these "languages" of I Corinthians were the "tongues of angels," they still were languages that were translatable into human equivalents.

Strong cumulative evidence supports the conclusion that the tongues of the New Testament times, both in Acts and in Corinthians, were foreign languages. The effect of this conclusion is to place a large portion of modern tongue-speaking activity outside the realm of valid New Testament experience from the outset. Whatever may be going on today, it is not the kind of worship-experience described by the scriptures of the New Testament. Ω

Don't miss a single issue of *Session to Session!*
Mail this coupon to *Session to Session*
Wallace Memorial Presbyterian Church
7201 Sixteenth Place, Hyattsville, MD 20783-4399.

Yes...

Include me as an individual supporter of *Session to Session*. Enclosed is \$10.00 for the first year.

Yes...

Include us as a "supporting Session" for *Session to Session*. Enclosed is \$100 for our Session members for the first year. Also enclosed is a list of the names and addresses of our Session members.

name _____

address _____

city _____ state _____ zip _____

Make checks payable to
Wallace Memorial Presbyterian Church

Notes from the Managing Editor

Dr. Robertson's discussion of the question of tongues in the church today will continue in our next issue.

The editors would appreciate receiving suggestions for topics for future articles in *Session to Session*. We are in the process of making long-range editorial plans, and are particularly interested in knowing what sorts of articles would be useful to ruling elders.

The greatest expense in most publications is marketing: getting the word to potentially interested readers. If you would be interested in helping us get the word out about *Session to Session*, please let us know. We need your help.

Session to Session is dedicated to promoting the strengthening and growth of Biblical Presbyterianism in America. It is published bimonthly by the Session of Wallace Memorial Presbyterian Church, located in the Washington, D.C. suburb of Hyattsville, Maryland. Individual subscriptions are available for \$10.00 per year. Church Sessions donating \$100 per year will receive subscriptions for all elders. Send all inquiries to Session to Session, Wallace Memorial Presbyterian Church, 7201 Sixteenth Place, Hyattsville, MD 20783-4399. 4-5/91

Executive Editor: O. Palmer Robertson
Managing Editor: Kenneth A. Myers
Advisory Editors: George E. Devlin, F. Kingsley Elder, Douglas A. Felch, Sinclair B. Ferguson, W. Robert Godfrey, Joseph H. Hall, Norman E. Harper, William B. Herrington, Glen C. Knecht, Joseph A. Pipa, Jr., Robert R. Rich, and William H. Smith

Session to Session

Wallace Memorial Presbyterian Church
7201 Sixteenth Place and Erskine Street
Hyattsville, MD 20783-4399

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■
■ NON-PROFIT ORG ■
■ U.S. POSTAGE ■
■ PAID ■
■ HYATTSVILLE, MD ■
■ PERMIT NO 95 ■
■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■