

The Truth About Tongues

Introduction. A portion of our current religious culture has chosen emotionalism and sensationalism over a substantive examination of the Bible and application of truth to our lives. As a result, there is so much confusion regarding miracles and the activity of the Holy Spirit.

One of the key elements of this charismatic chaos grows out of a misunderstanding of the purpose of miracles in biblical times. There is great power in the completed revelation of the Holy Spirit in the scriptures and it is that very point that must be driven home in the heart of every believer.

I. Tongues Were Foreign Languages

- A. The New Testament gift of tongues is a miracle and consists of speaking in human languages that the speaker had not known or learned by natural means (Acts 2:8-11; cp. 1 Corinthians 14:27).
 - 1. In 1 Corinthians 14:2 the supplied word "unknown" in the KJV gave rise to a false understanding. Modern-day "tongue speakers" believe the passage to mean that the speaker spoke a tongue no one anywhere spoke nor understood — an "angelic" tongue.
 - 2. But Paul was not introducing the so-called "two-tongue" Pentecostal theory. He was addressing the problem with the Corinthians, and in so doing he made three arguments. First, the Corinthian tongue speakers were edifying only themselves. Second, the whole tenor of 1 Corinthians 14:1-14 is to show that God intended that others (not just God) understand what was spoken. Lifeless objects which give sounds can be understood. Third, tongues were a sign to unbelievers (1 Corinthians 14:22-23). If the tongue was used properly, and people who heard him realized the tongue speaker had not learned the foreign language, then tongue speaking would truly be a "sign to the unbeliever."
- B. Several years ago in Los Angeles, the Rainbow Revival Church sent out an instruction sheet as to how one may receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit.
 - 1. They claim that Jesus baptizes believers with the Holy Ghost while they are praising the Lord, and their words change from words of praise to unknown tongues, which is proof that they have received the Holy Ghost.
 - 2. They said trying to say the words of praise too perfectly hinders the Holy Ghost from speaking in His heavenly languages. One was also commanded not to try and stop stammering (which ironically was used in the Old Testament to indicate foreign languages — Isaiah 28:11; 33:19). In fact, the more you get the words of praise mixed

- up, the easier it is for the Holy Ghost to take control of your tongue and speak in unknown tongues through you.
3. They said to start seeking, say the words of the phrases below over and over very rapidly for 2 or 3 minutes, then go to the next line, repeating the phrases about the same length of time.
 - a) Glory to God, hallelujah glory to God, hallelujah glory to God.
 - b) Praise precious Jesus, prince of peace, praise precious Jesus.
 - c) I love you Jesus, I love you Jesus, I love you Jesus.
 - d) Jesus Savior save sinful souls, sanctify saints to serve Thee.
 - e) Praise God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost.
 - f) I beseech blessed baptizer bestow bountiful baptismal blessings.
 - g) Glory to Jesus, glory to Jesus, glory to Jesus, glory to Jesus.
 - h) While wholeheartedly worshipping, willing waiting, Jesus baptize me with the Holy Ghost.
 - i) Glory to God, gracious generous giver of good gifts, glory to God.
 4. So the individual commits a few phrases to memory and begins to say them over and over. His tongue gets twisted, but he must keep on trying. Finally he is muttering, stammering, and stuttering, and he claims it to be the Holy Spirit! If this is contemporary tongue speaking, and it definitely is, then it is not the New Testament gift of tongues.

II. Tongues Were For Revealing The Gospel

- A. The miracles performed in the New Testament were not merely intended to remove human suffering. Jesus did not heal all of the sick or raise all of the dead. The miracles of both Jesus Christ and His apostles were for the purpose of establishing the claim that Jesus was the Son of God (Mark 16:20; John 20:30-31; Acts 2:22; 14:3; Hebrews 2:3-4).
- B. The Holy Spirit was given to the apostles in order to reveal all truth (John 16:13). It was necessary that He teach them because the revelation had not yet been completed (John 14:26). Once God's word was completely revealed, there would be no need for miraculous confirmation of what had already been received.
- C. Additionally, the Holy Spirit came on Cornelius' household in a direct fashion in order to offer confirmation of the Lord's willingness to accept the Gentiles into the church (Acts 10:47-48, 11:15-18). The Spirit's purposes in these regards have been accomplished, thus the need of miraculous activity for sake of empowerment and confirmation has been fulfilled.

III. Tongues Would Cease

- A. In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul emphasizes that the gifts were a means to an end and not the end itself. He also establishes the necessity of love in the expression of spiritual gifts (13:1-3), the character of the love (13:4-7), and the superiority of love over the temporary gifts (13:8-13).
- B. He said that love will never "fail"; i.e., "come to an end" as the terms "done away" and "cease" demonstrate (13:8). However, the gifts of "prophecy," "tongues," and "knowledge" will "vanish away" (13:8). These gifts are all mentioned among the nine gifts enumerated in 12:8-10. These three miraculous gifts were not the only ones to cease, but are mentioned as representatives of miraculous spiritual gifts as a whole. Paul's argument is conditioned on the understanding that "faith," "hope," and "love" are superior in comparison to miraculous spiritual gifts.
- C. Paul employs the use of two terms that interact with one another. "In part" is contrasted with the term "perfect" in 13:9-10. Paul uses the words "know" and "prophecy" in order to represent miraculous spiritual gifts in their entirety.
- D. The term "perfect" in v. 10 refers to what is complete, full, or mature. Since the terms "part" and "perfect" are being contrasted, they must be used together to establish the definition of the concept Paul intends in this context. Likewise, the phrase "in part," clearly references God's revelation through "prophecy," "knowledge," and "tongues," therefore we can certainly know that the counterpart of the term in the use of the word "perfect" refers to the completed revelation. So, just as one references partial revelation of God's will, the other term must be defined as God's perfect or complete revelation of God's will.
- E. During the life of Paul, miraculous spiritual gifts and faith, hope, and love all existed. Paul pronounces the future of each item; i.e., miraculous gifts would "fail," "cease," and "vanish away," whereas "faith," "hope," and "love" would "abide." Therefore, there would be a time prior to the return of Christ in which miraculous spiritual gifts would cease to exist (13:13). We know that "hope" would exist after the cessation of miraculous spiritual gifts and, yet, Paul argues that in eternity we will no longer have to hope, for we will possess in actuality our spiritual reward (Romans 8:24).
- F. The apostle even uses two illustrations in order to make this point clear.
 - 1. He speaks of his own development from a young man into adulthood. Miraculous spiritual gifts were intended for empowerment and confirmation of the gospel in the infancy of the church. When the revelation of the gospel was complete, then the

need for the spiritual gifts had been accomplished and miraculous spiritual gifts ceased.

- a) It is also noteworthy that only the apostles could transfer the ability to practice spiritual gifts through the laying on of their hands (Acts 8:14-25; 2 Timothy 1:6).
 - b) This shows why tongue speaking is impossible today. Only the apostles had power to bestow spiritual gifts. Since there are no apostles today, there can be no spiritual gifts today.
2. Paul also taught that presently they saw "dimly" but the time was coming when by virtue of the full revelation brethren would see "face to face" or clearly. "Face to face" is not referring to seeing God or Jesus in the judgment, but the phrase points to the complete revelation of God's will. Those who argue for a closed canon and yet affirm the existence of miraculous spiritual gifts are in a self-contradiction that reveals a problematic position. To follow the Spirit is to surrender to the word of God.

Conclusion. Tongue speaking today is not of God. Pentecostals claim that all believers must speak in "tongues" to know they are saved. However, when examined by the Bible, Pentecostal "tongues" are not actual languages.

The idea that all believers must speak in tongues is false (1 Corinthians 12:29-30). Not all men were apostles. Not all were prophets or workers of miracles. And, not all believers spoke in tongues. Various gifts were given to various believers, all combining to make up the "body" (1 Corinthians 12:4-27). Tongue-speaking was not a sign to believers, but unbelievers (1 Corinthians 14:22). Yet, our Pentecostal friends want us to believe tongues are a sign to the believer. Which do you think is true?