

***The Truth About Tongues***  
***1 Corinthians 12:10***

**INTRODUCTION**

1. For the past few weeks we have been examining the church.
2. And in our examination of the church we said that the church is the body of Christ.
3. And as a body it has a function.
4. We have been looking at 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 to see what that function is.
5. We have already looked at "the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, faith, gifts of healings, the working of miracles, prophecy, and the discerning of spirits.
6. And now we are looking at "tongues" and "the interpretation of tongues."
7. This gift was the Spirit-given ability to speak a foreign language unlearned by the speaker. The gift of the interpretation of tongues was the Spirit-given ability to understand the foreign language spoken.
8. Both were a part of the early church and the age of the Apostles.
9. For our study this morning, we will see:a)
  - a) What tongues are
  - b) What tongues are not
  - c) What the purpose of tongues were for
  - d) What process tongues were to follow when used
  - e) Has tongue ceased?
10. Let's look at the first -- What tongues are:

## I. What Tongues Are

It is clear in the NT that the true gift of tongues was:

### A. A Known Language

1. "Tongues" Gr.glossa, "languages"
2. J "This term always refers to a known language" (John MacArthur, Tongues, p. 16).
3. It can also refer to the physical member, the tongue (Lk. 16:24), but for the most part, when used of speaking, it refers to a known language.
4. 3 Webster defines "tongues" as a "language" as well as the Scriptures
  - a) 1 Cor. 13:1 - Though I speak with the *tongues* of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become as sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.
  - b) Rev. 7:9 - After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and *tongues*, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands.
  - c) Rev. 11:9 - Then those from the peoples, tribes, *tongues*, and nations will see their dead bodies three and half days, and not allow their dead bodies to be put into graves.

### B. Hi Foreign Language

"The gift of tongues was the Spirit-given ability to speak a foreign language that had not been learned by the speaker."

There are only 3 occasions where tongues is used in the book of Acts:

1. At Pentecost-Acts 2:1-12
2. At Caesarea - Acts 10:44-48 (to Cornelius' house)
3. At Ephesus-Acts 19:1-7

## II. What Tongues Are Not

### A. An Unintelligible Language (gibberish)

"The gift of tongues was always the speaking of an intelligible language, not gibberish. The idea of tongues being foreign to the hearer was part of the ecstasy of the Greco-Roman world."

John MacArthur, "At the time of the Corinthian church, the Greco-Roman world had a multitude of gods. In their worship of these gods, it was common for a person to go into ecstasy, which literally means "to go out of oneself They **would** go into an unconscious state where all kinds of psychic phenomena would occur. They believed that when they were in an ecstatic trance, they actually left their bodies, ascended into space, connected up to whatever deity they were worshipping, and would begin to commune with that deity, they would begin to speak the language of the gods. This was a common practice in their culture. In fact, the term used in 1 Corinthians to refer **to** speaking in tongues (glossais lalein) was not invented by Bible writers. It was a term used commonly in the Greco-Roman culture to speak of the pagan language of the gods that occurred while the speaker was in an ecstatic trance. This language of the gods was always gibberish" (p. 79).

#### B. A Personal Private Prayer Language

Larry Christenson, (In his book *Speaking in Tongues and Its Significance for the Church*) writes "One speaks in tongues, for the most part, in his private devotions. This is by far its most important use and value" (p.28).

1. 1 Cor. 14:1-2 (notice "tongue" singular may have reference to the gibberish of the pagans) "When the Apostles, on the day of Pentecost, spoke in tongues, everyone heard them in his own language" (Acts 2:6).
2. 1 Cor. 14:14- For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful.
3. Notice "tongue" is singular, spirit could be translated "breath, wind or have reference to the human spirit"

Joe Marino, (In his book *More of God*) writes "Fortunately, God does not leave us to wonder what it means to pray in the spirit. In 1 Cor. 14:14 Paul says, "For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful." Clearly then, according **to** Paul, to pray in the spirit (or when the spirit prays) is to pray in an unknown tongue, and our understanding is unfruitful... we don't understand what the words mean" (Jpp.2-3).

#### C. Unintelligible Praying

"Nowhere in Scripture do we have any illustration of unintelligible praying or praying in tongues. In fact, Jesus told the disciples when they prayed they were not to use 'vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words'" (Mat.6:7).

1. "Vain repetitions" Gr.battalogo, the verb logeo means, "to speak," and the prefix batta is not even a word. It is a figure of speech. In English we call it an onomatopoeic expression.
2. What Jesus is literally saying in Mat.6:7 is: "When you pray, don't say batta, batta, batta, the sound of the stammering stuttering gibberish that the pagans offer to their gods."

John MacArthur writes, "When Jesus went into the Garden to pray to the Father, He didn't talk in a heavenly language. When deity communed with deity, it was in a language that was clear. When Jesus stood by the grave of Lazarus, He prayed before He raised him from the dead. John heard every word of that prayer and wrote it down exactly as He said it — clear and intelligible. John 17 is the intimate prayer between Jesus and the Father. It's all clear — translated beautifully into English from the original language. The point is this: there is no biblical evidence whatsoever of a private prayer language. We are to pray in an intelligible, understandable way"

### **III. What the Purpose of Tongues Were For**

#### **A. A Judgment on Israel**

1. 1 Cor. 14:21
2. Isa.28:1 1-12 - For with stammering lips and another tongue He will speak to this people, to whom He said, "This is the rest with which You may cause the weary to rest," and "This is the refreshing"; yet they would not hear."

"In this prophecy to Israel, God was saying, 'Israel, I have spoken to you in clear words, but you haven't listened to Me. Therefore, as a sign confirming your unbelief, I will begin to speak to you in a language you won't be able to understand.'" "The gift of tongues was part of God's judicial act of telling Israel that He was turning aside from her to the church. He had offered the Israelites the Kingdom, but they had refused it. They had refused and executed their King, their long-awaited Messiah. As a judicial sign of Israel's violation. God spoke to His people with other tongues and other lips. The gift of tongues had a primary significance to Israel" (MacArthur, p.23).

"Once God's judgment had fallen on Israel, the gift of tongues would have no significance at all. God's judicial act against them came in 70 A.D. when Titus Vespasian, the Roman conqueror, swept down and destroyed Jerusalem. And the gift of tongues, which was a sign to unbelieving Israel of God's judicial act against them, also came to an end because it was no longer needed" (p.23).

#### **B. A Sign to Unbelievers**

"A sign points to something. Tongues were designed to point to God's activity among His people."

1. 1 Cor. 14:22 - Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers.
2. Acts 2:7-8, 11 - Then they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another "Look, are not all these who speak Galileans? And how is it we hear, each in our own language in which we were born?... We hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God."

#### C. The Coming of the Holy Spirit

1. Acts 2:1-4
2. Acts 10:44-48
3. Acts 19:1-7

#### D. The Revelation of God

Acts 2:11 - "...we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God."

### **IV. What Process Tongues Were to Follow (1 Cor. 14:27-35)**

- A. Two or Three at the Most Could Speak but Only in Turn (v.27)
- B. There Must Be An Interpreter (w.27-28)
- C. If There Were No Interpreter They Were to Keep Silent (v.28)
- D. Only Men Were to Speak in Tongues and Prophecy (w.34-35)

### **V. Has Tongues Ceased?**

#### A. 1 Cor.13:8

1. The different words used
  - a) "Prophecies, they will fail...knowledge, it will vanish away"  
"Fail and vanish away" Gr.katargeo (verb), "to be made inoperative."
  - b) "Tongues, they will cease"

"Cease" Gr.pauo, "to stop"

## 2. The different voices used

- a) The passive voice is used when referring to the cessation of prophecy and knowledge.
- b) The rule of grammar states that when a passive verb is in a sentence, the subject receives the action. In the case of prophecy and knowledge, something will act upon them to cause them to stop. That is not true for tongues. A different voice is used.
- c) The verb that says tongues will cease is in the middle voice. There are differences among the active, passive, and middle voices. In the active voice we would say, "I hit the ball." In the passive voice we would say, "The ball hit me." And in the middle voice (if the English had a middle voice) we would say, "I hit myself." In other words. The Greek middle voice is reflexive, indicating that the subject is acting upon itself. The middle voice also indicates intense action on the part of the subject.

Literally, then, verse 8 says, "Tongues will stop by themselves." That's the meaning that the middle voice gives to the verb pauo. The LXX uses the middle form of pauo 15 times to translate the Hebrew word that means "to complete," "to stop," "to finish," "to accomplish," "to end." It has a finality to it. And the reflexive middle voice gives it the idea that it ends all by itself.

## B. What Do We Learn From History

1. History records that the gift of tongues ceased in the apostolic age. The first revival of tongues within the confines of the evangelical church of Jesus Christ since the apostolic age was in 1901. Where had it been for eighteen hundred years? Does 1 Corinthians 13:8 say that tongues will cease and then start up again? No. Tongues ceased—never to begin again. Their purpose was accomplished.

The significant obscurity of tongues in the writings of the early church Fathers The post-apostolic Fathers were the church leaders who lived immediately after the apostolic age. If you study their writings, you'll discover something significant—they don't discuss the gift of tongues. Cleon Rogers, a scholar and missionary, wrote, "It is significant that the gift of tongues is nowhere alluded to, hinted at, or even found in any writings of the Post-Apostolic Fathers" ("The Gift of Tongues in the Post-Apostolic Church," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 122:134).

- a) Clement of Rome (A.D. 88-97) wrote a letter to the Corinthians in A.D. 95 discussing their spiritual problems. He didn't mention tongues,

because apparently the gift had ceased. The gift of tongues, then, wasn't an issue by A.D. 95.

- b) Justin Martyr (A.D. 100-165) was a great church Father who traveled throughout the churches and wrote many things defending Christianity, but he never mentioned tongues. He made lists of spiritual gifts that did not include the gift of tongues.
- c) Origen (A.D. 185-253) was a widely read scholar without equal in the minds of some. In all the volumes he wrote, there is no mention of tongues. And in his apologetic against Celsus, he explicitly argued that the signs of the apostolic age were temporary and that no contemporary Christian exercised any of the ancient prophetic gifts.
- d) Chrysostom (A.D. 347-407) was perhaps the greatest of all the ancient Christian writers. In his *Homilies on First Corinthians*, he makes the following comment on chapter 12: "This whole place is very obscure; but the obscurity is produced by our ignorance of the facts referred to and by their cessation, being such as then used to occur, but now no longer take place" ("*Homilies on First Corinthians*," *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol.12, ed. Philip Schaff [New York: Christian Literature Co., 1888]). In other words, by the end of the fourth century Chrysostom indicated that because tongues didn't exist anymore, the gift was difficult to define or understand.
- e) Augustine (A.D. 354-430) made the following comment on Acts 2:4: "In the earliest times, 'the Holy Ghost fell upon them that believed: and they spake with tongues,' . . . These were signs adapted to the time. For there behooved to be that betokening of the Holy Spirit. . . . That thing was done for a betokening, and it passed away" ("*Ten Homilies on the First Epistle of John*," *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 7, ed. Philip Schaff [New York: Christian Literature Co., 1888]).

The greatest theologians of the ancient church considered the gift of tongues a remote practice. By the fourth century they didn't understand what it was anymore.

## 2. The supposed occurrences of tongues since the apostolic age

### a) Outside mainline Christianity

- (1) Montanus and Tertullian During the period of the early church Fathers, the only people in the church who were reported to have spoken in tongues were the followers of Montanus and Tertullian. In the middle of the second century, Montanus, a pagan priest who had been recently converted to Christianity, announced to everyone that he was the spokesman for the Holy Spirit. Believing that Christ was soon going to set up the kingdom with headquarters

in his hometown of Phrygia, he tried to justify speaking in tongues as an occurrence of the end of the age. He was accompanied by two female priestesses, Prisca and Maximilla, who also spoke in ecstatic speech. Montanus was thrown out of the church as a heretic. Tertullian, a disciple of Montanus, advocated speaking in tongues as well. He lived from A.D. 150-222. There are other occasions of tongues, or ecstatic speech, during this period—but not in Christianity. Tongues were characteristic of pagan religions (e.g., the priestesses of Delphi, pagan witch doctors, and various seers), but they were not present in Christianity. After Montanus and Tertullian, the next eruption of tongues wasn't until the late seventeenth century.

- (2) The Camisards of Cevennes The gift of ecstatic utterance was claimed by a group of persecuted Protestants in southern France around 1685. They believed that their little children, who knew only the local dialect, were able to speak in perfect French while in a trance. The group was soon discredited because of their night raids and military reprisals against their enemies. And because all their prophecies went unfulfilled, they were branded as heretics and not considered to be a part of mainline Christianity.
- (3) The Jansenists Around 1731 extremists of the Roman Catholic reformers called the Jansenists were holding night meetings at their leader's tomb, during which time they supposedly spoke in ecstatic languages.
- (4) The Shakers were the followers of Mother Ann Lee, who lived from 1736-84. She regarded herself as the female equivalent of Jesus Christ—God in a female body. She founded the first Shaker community in America in New Lebanon, New York. Lee claimed she had received a revelation from God that sexual intercourse was corrupt, even within marriage. It is said that to teach her followers to mortify the flesh and resist temptation, she instituted the practice of men and women's dancing together in the nude while they spoke in tongues!
- (5) The Irvingites -- Around 1830 Edward Irving started a little group in London known as the Irvingites. This group began to speak in tongues but was soon discredited for several reasons. Their revelations contradicted Scripture, their prophecies went unfulfilled, their supposed healings were followed by death, there were rumors of immorality, and some of the leading members were accused of fraud. All these groups that supposedly spoke in tongues were not part of genuine Christianity. At the start of the twentieth century, however, speaking in tongues moved into mainline Christianity.



b) Within mainline Christianity

- (1) Pentecostalism - The first time tongues became part of mainline Christianity since the apostolic age was in 1901 at Bethel Bible College in Topeka, Kansas. Agnes Ozman received what she called "the baptism of the Holy Spirit" accompanied by ecstatic utterances. The practice became part of the holiness movement of the church in America. In 1906, ecstatic utterances came to Azusa Street in Los Angeles, California. Out of these two events in 1901 and 1906 grew the mainline Pentecostal denominations that many of our brothers and sisters in Christ are a part of today. Unlike many of their predecessors, Pentecostals believe the Word of God and preach it. But this particular movement within mainline Christianity didn't begin until the start of this century.
- (2) The charismatic movement - In 1960 in Van Nuys, California, the modern charismatic movement (characterized by tongues outside of Pentecostal denominations) began in an Episcopalian church. It soon spread across mainline denominations of all kinds.

I have pointed all this out to show you that the true gift of tongues is not something that has gone on throughout history. The Holy Spirit, through the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:8, said that the biblical gift of tongues would cease. It did, and there's no good reason to believe it has come back.

## **CONCLUSION**

A. What is going on today?

1. Learned behavior
2. Abuse of the gift
3. Lack of instruction
4. Satanic counterfeit

B. How should we respond to this?

1. Love
2. Teaching

Joseph Dillon says, "We must not make the tragic mistake of teaching the experience of the Apostles but rather we must experience the teaching of the Apostles. The experience of the Apostles is found in the transitional book of Acts while the teaching of the Apostles is set forth clearly in the epistles which are our guide for our Christian experience today."