

Tongues: To Speak or Not to Speak

“Methodists, Presbyterians, Roman Catholics—everyone is speaking in tongues! The only group that the Holy Spirit bypassed is the independent, fundamental Baptists.”

--Jimmy Swaggert

The Charismatic movement, with its insistence upon signs and wonders, continues to attract adherents from every walk of life. Most ardent Charismatic enthusiasts insist that the Biblical phenomenon of “speaking in tongues” has experienced a contemporary revival. Therefore, it is incumbent that Christians examine the Scriptures in order to gauge the legitimacy of the current claims.

- I. The Old Testament Prophecy of the New Testament Gift
 - A. God confounded the universal language by creating various language groups at the tower of Babel (Gen. 11:7-9).
 1. The languages were distributed according to the descendents of the sons of Noah—Shem, Ham, and Japheth.
 2. Note that the confounding of the languages was an act of divine judgment upon a people who were in rebellion against God.
 - B. God had warned Israel that the sound of an invading army’s foreign speech was to be interpreted as an indication of divine judgment (Deut. 28:49).
 - C. God stated that the foreign speech heard by Jews in captivity was to be interpreted as divine judgment (Isa. 28:11, 12).
 - D. NOTE THAT THE OLD TESTAMENT LINKS THE SOUND OF FOREIGN SPEECH WITH GOD’S JUDGMENT UPON HIS PEOPLE ISRAEL.
- II. The New Testament Purpose of the Gift of Tongues (I Cor. 14:20-22)
 - A. Enthusiasm for the gift of tongues had given way to grievous abuses of the legitimate gift.
 - B. In correcting the tongues abuse at Corinth, Paul explains the original purpose of the gift:
 1. Tongues are for a sign to unbelievers, NOT believers (22).
 2. Paul quotes Isaiah 28:11, 12 to substantiate the nature of the sign.
 3. Isaiah 28 indicates that tongues is a sign of divine judgment.
Simply stated, the gift of tongues is a sign to unbelieving Jews of the divine judgment of God upon them for rejecting Jesus!
 - C. In the book of Acts, Jews were always present when the sign gift of tongues was utilized.
- III. The Properties of Genuine New Testament Tongues (Acts 2:1-12)
 - A. The NT gift of tongues is a supernatural miracle of the Holy Spirit (1-4).
 1. The believers were neither *expecting* nor *pleading for* the gift.
 2. They did not have to learn nor practice the gift.
 3. The gift was not given in an atmosphere of emotionalism.

4. The initial dispensing of the gift came with a visible manifestation (3).
 5. The gift was regulated by the Holy Spirit, not the will of man (4).
- B. The NT gift of tongues is ALWAYS the ability to speak in a recognizable foreign language.
1. Tongues at Pentecost were foreign languages (6). The word “language” here is *dialekto* from which we get our word “dialect.”
 2. The Apostles miraculously spoke the language of the listeners (8). The word “tongue” is another translation of *dialekto*.
 3. At least 11 different languages were spoken on the Day of Pentecost (9-11).
 4. The word “tongues” in verse 11 is the Greek word *glossais* which has reference to the physical tongue or human language.
 5. LEGITIMATE NEW TESTAMENT TONGUES IS THE SUPERNATURAL ABILITY TO SPEAK IN A RECOGNIZABLE FOREIGN LANGUAGE UNKNOWN TO THE SPEAKER.
- IV. The Policies Regulating the Use of Tongues (I Cor. 14)
- A. Prophecy (preaching) is superior because it edifies the church (1-6).
 - B. Understanding is of paramount importance (7-12).
 - C. Interpretation is essential to make tongues beneficial (13-17).
 - D. Frequent tongues speech is less valuable than a few words spoken in an understandable manner (18, 19).
 - E. Every aspect of public worship must accomplish edification (26).
 - F. No more than three tongues speakers were to participate in any given service (27).
 - G. Tongues speakers must take turns—not random outbursts (27).
 - H. One interpreter must be present for the speakers (27).
 - I. If no one is present to interpret, tongues must NOT be exercised in church (28).
 - J. Women must NEVER speak in tongues in a public church service (34).
- V. The Contemporary Problems Regarding So-called Tongues Speech
- A. There are no provable examples of so-called tongues actually being a recognizable foreign language unknown to the speaker.
 - B. Anyone can learn to babble. Strange babbling can be an emotional or learned response. If tongues is mere babbling, there is no way to test the legitimacy of a claimed supernatural experience.
 - C. The crowd in Acts 2 recognized the miraculous nature of the tongues spoken there *because* the tongues were recognizable foreign languages not known to Galileans.
 - D. The so-called tongues experience has unified apostate groups including cultists and Roman Catholics.
 - E. Paul’s plain regulations regarding the use of tongues are not heeded by the modern Charismatic.

