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TONGUES

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Introduction

For years the subject of speaking in tongues confused me. I have had people describe it to me as the most wonderful experience they have ever had. Others have suggested that the modern experience is not tongues at all but something fleshly or even demonic. I once heard of an incident where speaking in tongues reportedly helped to lead someone to Christ. But, I heard other reports such as the one in which a person spoke in tongues in a church service and another person who understood the language heard the speaker cursing God! A friend of mine attended a meeting where people were supposedly speaking in tongues. Being fluent in German, he rattled off a nice long prayer in German. Someone immediately stood up to interpret. Unfortunately, the interpretation had nothing to do with what he had spoken. I have heard of cases where people reportedly started speaking in tongues spontaneously. Others seem to have been taught to repeat meaningless syllables. Faced with these, as well as other contradictory reports, it is not surprising that I was confused.

I thank God that He eventually showed me the source of my confusion. I realized I had been basing my understanding of tongues on my own and others' experiences rather than on God's Word. It was only as I started searching the Scriptures that I began to get a clearer understanding of the nature and purpose of tongues.

Experiences can be counterfeited. In fact, the Devil is a master at using counterfeit experiences to lead us astray from simple and pure devotion to Christ, even disguising himself as an angel of light (II Corinthians 11:3,14). The apostle Paul warns that even if “an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed” (Galatians 1:8,9). It makes no difference how wonderful an experience may be, if it doesn’t match God’s Word, we must reject it. Paul also warns the Colossians not to listen to one who is “taking his stand on visions he has seen . . . not holding fast to the Head” (Colossians 2:18,19). How do we hold fast to the Head? Verses six and seven tell us: “So then, just as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live in Him, rooted and built up in Him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught (Colossians 2:6,7). They were to hold fast to the truths they had been taught, not to visions or other experience. We should do the same.

Does this mean that experience is wrong? Of course not. The Christian life is a love affair with Jesus Christ. Love is experiential, not just theoretical. But Jesus gives the pattern for us to follow in John 8:32, “you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free.” Verse 31 shows what the truth is: “Your Word is truth.” God’s design is that we go from truth to experience, not from experience to truth. We must be careful to test our experiences with an honest, accurate interpretation of the Scripture, and not twist and pervert the Bible to fit our experience. There is hardly a more scathing condemnation in the Bible than Jeremiah’s rebuke of the false prophets of his day who had “perverted the words of the living God” (Jeremiah 23:36).

In this booklet, I would like to present my conclusions to the questions I had about the gift of tongues. Please examine the verses yourself. Let us follow the admonition of Isaiah: “To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn” (Isaiah 8:20 NIV).

What Are Tongues?

The first question I would like to address is, “What is the gift of tongues?”

Speaking in tongues is mentioned in five passages in the New Testament: Acts 2:1-13; Acts 10:44-46; Acts 19:1-7; Mark 16:17-18; and I Corinthians 12-14. (Please, get a Bible and read each of these passages before continuing.) These passages indicate that in the Bible, speaking in tongues was the supernatural ability to speak in a foreign language that the speaker had never learned. The Scripture makes it clear that the language spoken was a human language that could be understood by men. How do we know that speaking in tongues was a human language and not, as some teach, a heavenly language or an ecstatic utterance?

1. The clearest and most detailed description of speaking in tongues is in Acts 2:1-13. Verses seven and eight make it clear that the disciples were speaking languages understood by the listener: “utterly amazed, they asked: ‘are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites, residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappado-

cia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and parts of Libya near Cyrene; residents from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!”

2. The speaking in tongues referred to in I Corinthians 14 was also a human language. Paul, in referring to their speaking in tongues, says, “There are perhaps a great many kinds of languages in the world, and no kind is without meaning” (1 Corinthians 14:10). Clearly, the Corinthians were also speaking languages “in the world” that had a definite meaning. Also, the word translated “barbarian” in I Corinthians 14:11 actually means foreigner.¹ A foreigner is one who speaks a foreign language known on earth.
3. The Greek word “glossa” or “tongues” is consistently used in the New Testament and the Greek Old Testament to refer either to the physical tongue or to a language. Never can it be translated “ecstatic utterance.”²
4. I Corinthians 13:1 does not say that men ever could or should speak with the “tongues of angels” any more than they could ever know “all mysteries or knowledge” (I Corinthians 13:2).

¹ *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Joseph Henry Thayer, DD, Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publishing House, p 95.

² *Ibid.*, p 118

What Is the Purpose of Tongues?

We have seen that Biblical tongues is the supernatural ability to speak in a foreign language. What, then, is the purpose of tongues?

Although a number of verses are often used to show the purpose of tongues, the clearest statement in Scripture is found in I Corinthians 14:2-22. Here Paul is concluding his rebuke of the Corinthians' misuse of tongues (I Corinthians 14:1-19) and is laying out a clear, positive statement of the purpose of the gift. To abolish any question concerning the truth of his statement, he refers back to the Old Testament law. "Brothers, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults. In the Law it is written: "Through men of strange tongues and through the lips of foreigners I will speak to this people, but even then they will not listen to me," says the Lord. Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers; prophecy, however, is for believers, not for unbelievers (I Corinthians 14: 20-22, NIV).

Paul makes three clear statements about the purpose of tongues. First, we see that tongues are a sign or attesting miracle. A sign is a miracle to show that the speaker conveys God's message. Secondly, they are to be spoken to "this people." A reference back to Isaiah 28:11, the verse quoted, shows that "this people" refers to the Jewish people. Finally, the purpose of tongues is to speak to unbelievers.

Does this purpose of being a sign to unbelieving Jews agree with how the gift of tongues was used in the rest of the Scripture? Let's look at all the passages on tongues.

1) 1 Corinthians 12-14.

Although the Christians were using the gift of tongues in many wrong ways, Paul corrects them and states, as we have already seen, that the purpose of the gift was a sign to unbelieving Jews (1 Corinthians 14:22).

2) Acts 2:1-3

A. Was it a sign? Yes. It was a sign to all those in Jerusalem that Peter's message was from God (Acts 2:6-12).

B. To Jews? Yes, all those present were Jews (Acts 2:5).

C. To unbelievers? Yes. Those gathered were not believers in Christ (Acts 2:37-40).

3) Acts 10:44-46

A. Was it a sign? Yes. When the Gentiles spoke in tongues, it was a sign to Peter, the six brethren with him (Acts 11:12) and all the believers back in Jerusalem that the Gentiles could be saved and receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:45-48, Acts 11:1, 15-18). It was unthinkable to a Jew that any Gentile could be right with God without first becoming a Jew. However, after hearing about the sign of speaking in tongues, all the Jewish believers were forced to conclude "Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life" (Acts 11:18).

- B. To Jews? Yes. Peter, the six brethren with him, and all the brethren back in Jerusalem were Jews.
- C. To unbelievers? Yes. In this case, Peter, the Jewish brethren with him, and all those back in Jerusalem were unbelievers in the sense that they did not believe that a Gentile could be saved without first becoming a Jew. Tongues was the sign that God used to convince them of this truth.

4) Acts 19:1-7

- A. Was it a sign? Most likely, yes. Paul had just moved into the province of Asia to preach the gospel there. The speaking in tongues by these new believers was assuredly a sign to the Jews in that region.
- B. To Jews? Yes. Paul was a Jew and those traveling with him were Jews. Immediately after these men spoke in tongues, Paul “entered the synagogue and continued to speak out boldly.” He probably took these men right with him or at least testified about them.
- C. To unbelievers? Yes. Certainly the Jews in the synagogue were not believers in Christ.

5) Mark 16:17

- A. Was it a sign? Yes. Mark 16:17 says, “These signs will accompany those who have believed.”
- B. To Jews. Probably yes. We know that all signs were primarily for Jews (1 Corinthians 1:22).

C. To unbelievers? Yes. The purpose of a sign is to attest to unbelievers that this is the message of God.

So, we see that in every instance of the use of tongues in the New Testament, the purpose was to be a sign, or attesting miracle, to convince unbelieving Jews of the truth of God. In every case, the purpose precisely conforms to the purpose for the gift that Paul so clearly states in 1 Corinthians 14:22.

Prayer Language?

An alternate teaching concerning the purpose of the gift of tongues has gained favor with many Christians. In contrast to Paul's clearly-stated purpose for tongues and to the unanimous example of the use of tongues in the New Testament, this teaching says that tongues is a divine or angelic language given by the Holy Spirit for the purpose of private prayer and personal edification. Let's examine several verses commonly sighted to support this teaching and see if this is so.

1 Corinthians 14:2. *“For one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God; for no one understands but in his spirit he speaks mysteries.”* Doesn't this verse show that the purpose of the gift is to speak to God?

To correctly understand I Corinthians 14:2, we must look at the context of the surrounding verses. In I Corinthians 14, Paul is correcting a *misuse* of the gift of tongues by the Corinthians. So, if we wish to understand Paul's correction, we must first get an overview of

what the Corinthians were doing. A close look at the chapter shows several things:

1. They were speaking in tongues in public. Verse two itself shows this: “for no one understands.” Others were present, but did not understand. Verse five shows that the whole church was present.
2. No one (except God) understood the speaker (verse 2).
3. The reason no one else understood was because no one present knew the particular language being spoken. Paul makes this clear in verse 11: “if then I do not know the meaning of the language I shall be to the one who speaks a barbarian (foreigner) and the one who speaks will be a barbarian to me.”
4. No one (except the speaker) was edified (built up) because no one knew what was being said (verse five).
5. The speaker was showing off his spiritual gift. This is implied by Paul’s exhortation in I Corinthians 13:4, “Love does not brag.” (The Berkeley version says, “Love is not out for display.”)

What is Paul’s response to the Corinthians’ manner of speaking in tongues? In verses 1-5, he gently and constructively reproves them by comparing their method of speaking in tongues to the gift of prophecy. Even though they may be speaking mysteries in their spirit, no one, except God, understood. Their method of speaking in tongues was without profit unless it was interpreted (verses 5 and 6). On the other hand, “one

who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation” (verse 3).

So we see that in these verses Paul is not giving a positive statement about the purpose of the gift of tongues (as he does in verse 22) but is correcting their *misuse* of the gift. In essence, he is saying: “*The way you are doing it is not speaking to men because no one but God understands the language.*”

1 Corinthians 14:4. “*One who speaks in a tongue edifies (builds up) himself, but one who prophesies edifies the Church.*” Does this verse teach that the purpose of tongues is for personal edification?

Again, we must interpret this verse in the context of the chapter and Paul’s correction of their misuse of tongues in the church. Because no one present knew the language being spoken, the speaker was the only person who was edified. Paul is simply stating that their method of speaking in tongues left only one person edified whereas if they would prophecy, the whole church would be edified.

To conclude from this verse that the purpose of tongues is for personal edification is reading way more into the verse than it says. It does not say that the gift was for personal edification, it only says that the speaker was edified.

An example of this might be with the gift of evangelism. Anyone who proclaims the gospel in the power of the Spirit is always tremendously edified. However, to say that the purpose of the gift of evangelism is personal edification and then go witnessing to trees for several hours a day would obviously be incorrect.

Certainly anyone who exercises his spiritual gift is edified and encouraged when he sees God using him or

speaking through him. To say, however, that the purpose of *any* spiritual gift is personal edification is contrary to a number of verses. I Corinthians 12:7 says, “But each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” I Peter 4:10 commands, “as each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” I Corinthians 14:12 says, “So also you, since you are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek to abound for the edification of the church.” How we use our spiritual gifts is not an option; we are commanded to use them to serve and edify others. To use our spiritual gift solely for the purpose of personal edification would be disobedience to God’s Word.

Paul rebukes the Corinthians’ misuse of tongues precisely *because* the speaker was the only one edified. And actually, since apparently even the speaker did not understand the language, his edification would be limited to the encouragement he received from knowing that he was using his spiritual gift. Surely he would have been even more edified if he had understood the message himself.

We see then from verses one through five, that the Corinthians’ method of speaking in tongues (in the church without an interpreter) has two major problems: no one except God understood and no one except the speaker was edified.

1 Corinthians 14:14-15. “*For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. What is the outcome then? I shall pray with the spirit and I shall pray with the mind also; I shall sing with the spirit and I shall sing with the mind also.*” Does this teach that the purpose of tongues is for prayer?

Again, the context shows that Paul was correcting their misuse of tongues. They were praying in the church meeting in a language no one else understood. No one else was able to agree with the prayer or be edified by the prayer (verses 16-17).

In addition to this, Paul had another problem with praying in a language unknown to him: “my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful.” To Paul, prayer in tongues was only half prayer. Were he to pray in tongues, only half his faculties would be utilized (the spirit only).

Paul’s concludes in verse fifteen, “What is the outcome then? I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also.” Paul decides that he will pray with both his spirit *and* his mind at the same time in a language he understood so that all his faculties could be involved in prayer to God. So these verses, rather than teaching that the purpose of tongues is for prayer, actually discourage the use of tongues in prayer as less fruitful, both for the person praying and for those listening.

Romans 8:26. *“And in the same way the Spirit also helps our weaknesses; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.”* Doesn’t this verse support the idea that the purpose of tongues is as a private prayer language?

A close look at this verse reveals that it does not refer to tongues. In fact, the verse does not state that the Christian makes any sound at all. It is not *we* that groan, but the *Spirit*. The Greek word that is translated “too deep for words” literally means “not to be uttered,

not to be spoken.³ So we see that the groaning referred to in Romans 8:26 does not consist of any audible sounds at all but is a silent groaning or longing of the Spirit Himself as He intercedes for us before the Father. The surrounding verses support this. Verse 22 says that the creation “groans” and suffers the pains of childbirth. Obviously, this is a silent groaning. The groaning that Christians do is in verse 23, “even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.” This is again an inward, silent yearning and longing. Finally, the Spirit is said to intercede for us with unspoken groanings (verse 26). To say that this verse is referring to speaking in tongues is totally unsupported by anything in the verse itself or in the context. In fact, speaking in tongues is never mentioned in the whole book of Romans, even in Chapter 12, where Paul talks about the gifts of the Spirit.

I Corinthians 14:18-19. *“I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. But in the church, I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue” (NIV).* If tongues is not a prayer language, why does Paul say this? Doesn’t this show that Paul must have spoken in tongues privately since he did so more than the Corinthians?

Just because Paul spoke in tongues more than the Corinthians does not mean that he did so privately to God. Paul was traveling from nation to nation where many different languages were spoken. He was constantly speaking in foreign languages (tongues). Some

³ *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Joseph Henry Thayer, DD, Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publishing House, p 25.

scholars think that he may have spoken as many as fourteen languages. Also, we know that as Paul was moving from country to country with the gospel, he would preach to the Jews first. He may often have spoken supernaturally in languages he did not know as a sign to the Jews he was preaching to.

I Corinthians 14:23. *“If therefore the whole church should assemble together and speak in tongues, and ungifted men or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are mad?”* If tongues are a sign to unbelieving Jews, why does Paul say in I Corinthians 14:23 that unbelievers would think that people speaking in tongues were insane?

The answer to this question is quite simple. Paul is again saying, “The way you are *improperly* speaking in tongues will cause unbelievers to think you are mad.” First of all, they appear to have been speaking in tongues at the same time (1 Corinthians 14:29-31). Also, the unbelievers evidently did not know the foreign language being spoken. In order for the gift of tongues to fulfill its intended purpose as a sign to unbelievers, the unbelievers must know the language being spoken and must realize that the person speaking does not naturally know that language.

Is Prayer in Tongues Forbidden?

The Bible nowhere teaches that the purpose of the gift of tongues is to be a private prayer language. On the contrary, the Bible seems to actually forbid all mindless prayer. Look at Matthew 6:7: “and when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition, as the

Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words.”

The Greek word here translated “meaningless repetition” is “battalogo” and means, “to stammer, hence to babble; to use vain (empty) repetitions.”⁴ The New International Version translates this verse, “Do not keep on babbling like pagans.” It seems then that Jesus is *forbidding any prayer in which the mind is not rationally involved.*

Notice that Jesus is not speaking out here against Jewish, rote forms of prayer but against those of the Gentiles (pagans). George Gardiner, in his book *The Corinthian Catastrophe*, describes the type of prayer often used by the pagans in the “mystery religions” of Jesus’ and Paul’s time:

“The historians of the mystery religions of Greece picture devotees caught up in emotional hysteria, shaking and falling prostrate on the ground and babbling in ecstatic speech.”⁵

Joseph Dillow in his book *Speaking in Tongues* writes:

“Speaking in ecstatic speech had an important place in pagan worship. The words were believed to be revealed by a god or a spirit to a priest or devotee while he was in a highly excited or ecstatic state. Through this, the worshiper believed that he was having a privileged, intimate contact with his

⁴ *The Analytical Greek Lexicon*, Zondervan Publishing House, page 68.

⁵ Gardiner, George E., *The Corinthian Catastrophe*, Grand Rapids: Kregal Publications, 1974

god not possible when he spoke to it in his native tongue.”⁶

Actually, the “prayer language” that many are promoting today may be closer to this “pagan” form of prayer than to any example of prayer or tongues found in the New Testament.

Jesus continues His instruction on prayer in Matthew 6:9-13 and teaches the disciples the correct method of prayer: “This, then is how you should pray, ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name, Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one’ ” (NIV).

If we analyze this prayer, we see that Jesus is teaching that true prayer involves a rational communication of worship and of material and spiritual needs. Jesus did not teach them to pray in tongues. Should we think that a form of prayer we don’t understand is superior to the type of prayer that the Lord taught us? All of Jesus’ instruction in the gospels about prayer teaches that prayer is a rational communication of worship or needs. The same is true of Paul’s prayers, and of those found in the book of Psalms. In fact, the same is true of every teaching about prayer and every example of prayer in the Bible.

I’d like to ask one other question concerning the idea that tongues is a prayer language. If praying in tongues is so important as a pure form of prayer and praise,

⁶ Dillow, Joseph, *Speaking in Tongues: Seven Crucial Questions*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975, pp. 39-40

why don't the other apostles and Paul admonish us to "be diligent to pray in tongues every day"? Out of the twenty-one letters to the various churches, only I Corinthians even mentions praying in tongues and then with only a few verses that discourage it because it leaves the mind unfruitful.

What Are Modern Tongues?

We have seen that the Biblical gift of tongues was a human language given by God as a sign to unbelieving Jews. We have also seen that the Bible does not teach that it is a more spiritual form of prayer, but actually forbids all mindless praying. It would be hard to deny, however, that many who claim to speak in tongues have had a definite experience. How do we explain these experiences? Do they fit the Biblical description of tongues or are they something else?

In my observation of the modern tongues movement, I have found that tongues are seldom, if ever, used in the Biblical way (that is, as an unlearned language spoken to unbelieving Jews). In fact, I know of no evidence that modern "tongues" are languages at all. After a thorough investigation of modern "tongues" speech, Donald Burdick in his book, *Tongues: To Speak or Not to Speak*, concludes:

"On the basis of such investigations and analyses stretching from 1911 to the present we may conclude that the cumulative evidence indicates that present day glossolalia is not foreign-language speaking. Such a conclusion is based on:

1. The high frequency of repetition in tongues speaking.
2. The similarity of tongues-speech to the speaker's language background.
3. The excessive use of one or two "words."
4. The absence of any language structure.
5. The markedly greater length of the interpretation as compared with the tongue utterance.
6. The inconsistency in interpretation of the same clause or phrase.
7. The predominantly King James style employed in interpretation.

In addition, no sample of tongues-speech, which has been carefully analyzed by qualified specialists, has proved to be an unlearned, non-native language. It is because of such factors as these, that competent linguists who had made investigation do not regard glossolalia as speech in actual languages."⁷

If the modern day "tongues" is not a language, then what is it? Although in the case of non-believers, some "tongues" speaking may be demonic in origin, my opinion is that the phenomenon is probably most often psychological in origin. It has been demonstrated that anyone, if they are in the right state of mind and emotional excitement, can duplicate this phenomenon, even if they aren't religious at all. George Gardner, who for years was a leader in the tongues movement states:

⁷ Burdick, Donald W., *Tongues: To Speak or Not to Speak*, Chicago: Moody Press, 1969, pp. 68-79

“The desire for experience, coupled with instruction, motivation, and the approval of the peer group produces ecstatic speech. Give me a group of people who will do what I tell them to do; sing, relax, anticipate and go through the right motions and it will be only a matter of time before some will speak ecstatically.”⁸

If the modern ecstatic experience is not the Biblical gift of tongues, the question could be asked, “Why are many lives changed for the better after having this experience?”

Just because an activity results in a changed life does not necessarily mean that it is a good activity. For example, one thing that first attracted me to Christian fellowship was some of the good-looking Christian women. As I tried to get to know a few of these women, I was impressed with the joy and love of the believers. I started to read the Bible, pray, and fellowship with other believers. Now my life is completely changed for the better. Would it be right then to conclude that pursuing pretty women results in a more godly life? Just as I look back and see that it was factors other than pursuing these women that changed my life, so it may be with those who have been involved in the modern tongues movement. Perhaps they have changed because of other factors, such as increased Bible reading, more prayer, more consistent fellowship or a greater desire to know God. We must judge experiences like these by the Word, not by the apparent results.

⁸ Gardiner, George E., *The Corinthian Catastrophe*, Grand Rapids: Kregal Publications, 1974, p 53

Are There Negative Effects?

As with any error, I believe that the errors of the modern tongues movement can produce a number of negative spiritual effects. I have listed ten of them:

1. The error of putting experience above the Word leaves a person vulnerable to deception by the devil. If we judge what is true by our experiences instead of the Word, the path is wide open for the acceptance of all kinds of false teaching.
2. The error of emphasizing experience over God's Word can also lead to a lack of serious study of the Scripture. Since the Word was given to make us "adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:17), a neglect of it can lead to stunted spiritual growth.
3. The belief that mindless prayer is a better form of prayer implies that our minds are unspiritual or less spiritual. This is similar to the pagan teaching that logic and reasoning stand in the way of communion with God. Eastern religions employ mantras (syllables repeated over and over) to disengage all thought and supposedly enable the person's spirit to have freer communication with God. The Scriptures, however, teach that our minds are not unspiritual, but rather "we have the mind of Christ" (I Corinthians 2:16). Every example in the Scriptures of God communicating to man is always through the mind, not intuition or the Spirit only. Likewise, every example of prayer in the Scriptures is a rational communication of needs or of praise to God. Even a brief look at the logical arguments used by Paul in the

books of Romans and Galatians shows that using our minds is not at all unspiritual, but actually indispensable to understanding God's revelation to us. The mind then is not a roadblock to communication with God but an indispensable part of both talking to God and understanding His words to us.

This error of thinking that using the mind is less spiritual can encourage us to base decisions on intuition or on an inward peace rather than on the commands and principles of God's Word. The Scripture, however, commands us, "do not be foolish but understand what the will of the Lord is." It is foolish to base our decisions on anything except a rational understanding of the Word of God. The problem with determining God's will by intuition or inward feelings is that the heart is "more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick, who can understand it" (Jeremiah 17:9). If our hearts are so deceitful, should we trust some mystical feeling when determining God's will? The sword of the Spirit is the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17). Without the Word, the Spirit has no sword. So, we see that the Spirit uses a rational understanding of God's Word to guide us, not inward impulses.

4. To justify the use of tongues as a private prayer language, verses must be distorted and taken out of context. If we allow such incorrect methods of interpretation in the case of tongues, it opens up the rest of Scripture to misinterpretation. Disaster soon comes when we start interpreting the Scripture according to our own desires or precon-

ceived ideas. I once visited a meeting of a zealous tongues-speaking Christian group. The people were joyful, the music was encouraging and the prayer was fervent. I really enjoyed the meeting until we got to the message. As the leader was teaching, I began to notice that none of the verses he was sharing addressed his subject. By the end of the message, I was appalled to realize that every one of the 40 or so verses he had shared was taken totally out of context; none of them had anything to do with the subject (he spoke on a subject unrelated to tongues). Although, I'm sure that not all who claim to speak in tongues have such an extreme problem with misinterpretation of the Scripture, I think this example shows the danger involved. If we allow sloppy interpretation with one area of the Scripture, it will eventually spread to other areas.

5. Speaking in tongues is often perceived to be a quick way to achieve spiritual maturity and holiness. The Scriptures, however, make it clear that there is no shortcut to maturity. True maturity comes only through a day by day process of studying the Word, believing it, and obeying it. The trials and victories of daily life are what forge our character. Hebrews 5:14 says that spiritually mature people are those who "because of practice (obedience) have their senses trained to discern good and evil." The deceptiveness of a quick shortcut to maturity can often distract a person from learning the real lessons that God wants to teach him.

6. Ecstatic speech can be an escape mechanism. Instead of facing the responsibilities and realities of obeying God in a world of trials, it can be much easier to escape into the emotional uplift given by this experience.
7. Speaking ecstatically can be a tremendous waste of time. God commands us to make the most of our time (Ephesians. 5:16). Ask yourself this question: What would happen if Christians who regularly spend time caught up in emotional ecstasy would rather use that time to proclaim the gospel, or meditate on the Word, or pray? Would not the Kingdom of God be much farther advanced?
8. The idea of a second experience of the Spirit after salvation (often incorrectly called the baptism of the Holy Spirit⁹ and accompanied by ecstatic speech) can be an encouragement to pride. It is almost inevitable that those who have had this experience would exalt themselves over those who (in their view) do not have all the fullness or power of the Spirit. However, all such boasting is unjustified. The Corinthians were exercising all the spiritual gifts (I Corinthians 1:7), yet were still mere spiritual infants (1 Corinthians 3:1). Here was a church that was filled with divisions, condoning immorality, suing one another, being immoral with prostitutes, getting drunk during the Lord's Supper and listening to heresy about the resurrection. Yet they were so zealous to

⁹ A study of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit is found in the Appendix at the end of this booklet

speaking in tongues. This indicates that even if a person has the true gift of tongues, he is not necessarily more spiritually mature than others. True spirituality is demonstrated by how much a person loves, not how many gifts or experiences he has had (I Corinthians 13).

9. The modern tongues movement has caused division. It has split churches, severed congregations, and caused untold havoc. Often those who have this experience tend to feel superior to those believers who don't. Some even have an evangelistic fervor to spread their teaching and proselytize members of other churches. The New Testament nowhere even hints that any attempt should be made to convert people to tongues. Even the true gift of tongues is the least of the gifts. We should seek the greater gifts: apostle, prophet, and teacher (I Corinthians 12:28).
10. The tongues movement tends to reduce the content and magnitude of our salvation. The teaching that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is a second experience after salvation takes away from the first experience of salvation. Salvation is then considered to be much less glorious and wonderful than it actually is. This disregard of what transpired at salvation can lead to other errors, such as the belief that a true Christian can lose his eternal life.

Are Tongues the Evidence of Receiving the Spirit?

Although many feel that speaking in tongues is the normal evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, there is not one verse in the New Testament that teaches this. Those who promote this teaching derive it from examples in the book of Acts where people spoke in tongues after they received the Holy Spirit. When looking at different examples in the Scripture however, we must be careful not to conclude that because something happened to one person or a group of people, it is the norm for all. Even though people spoke in tongues after receiving the Holy Spirit in three cases in the book of Acts, there are at least 19 cases in which people believed and received the Holy Spirit where there is no mention of tongues.

If tongues is an evidence of the baptism of the Spirit, would not “tongues of fire” on peoples heads be just as much an evidence (Acts 2:3)? How about a violent rushing wind? Wouldn't these also be evidences since they happened to some believers? What if we applied to other situations this idea that the experience of some believers is the norm for all? Would it be right to say that it is the norm for Christians to see a vision of the Lord Jesus and be blinded when they believe in Christ since this is what happened to Paul? (Acts 9:1-9). What if we applied this to healing? Must everyone have a healing as an evidence that they have believed in Christ since many were healed when they believed? The obvious answer is no. There are many Scriptural examples of people believing without seeing a vision of the Lord or being blinded or healed. Clearly, we cannot say that an experience of a person or a group of people is the norm unless the Scripture states that is the norm.

Actually, the Scripture teaches that it is *not* the norm for all believers to speak in tongues. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:29-30: “All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they? All do not have gifts of healing, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they?” Both the grammatical construction and the context demand a “no” answer to these questions.

Another verse that shows that speaking in tongues was not the normal experience of all believers is Acts 11:15. Peter is here explaining to his Jewish brothers back in Jerusalem how the Gentiles had been saved and received the Holy Spirit. “And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, just as He did upon us at the beginning.” Notice that Peter said “as He did upon us at the beginning” not “as He always does in all the churches.” Peter could not point to a continuous flow of tongues experiences among the churches, but had to refer back to Pentecost. Clearly, these experiences were the exception rather than the norm.

What then is the evidence of being baptized in the Spirit? The best evidence is the promise of the Scripture. The Word of God says that all who have heard the Gospel and believed it, have been “sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise” (Ephesians 1:13). Galatians 3:14 says that we receive the promise of the Spirit through faith in Christ Jesus. 1 Corinthians 12:13 says that all who are part of Christ’s body have been baptized in the Spirit. Clearly, this takes place when we believe. We can be absolutely confident on the basis of God’s Word alone that if we have believed in Christ, we have been baptized with the Holy Spirit.

An additional evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit is the fruit of the Spirit: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control” (Galatians 5:22-23). Ephesians 5:18-20 also gives a list of results of the Spirit’s work in our lives: “And do not get drunk with wine, for this is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father, and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.”

What Should Our Attitude Be?

What should be our attitude toward those who supposedly speak in tongues? First of all, don’t assume that all who claim to speak in tongues are truly born again. Many people base their confidence of going to heaven on this or other experiences. Tragically, many of these will be shocked to find out on the judgment day that they never knew Christ. Jesus warns in Matthew 7:22, “Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you, depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.’” Notice that Jesus said, “I never knew you.” These were not Christians who lost their salvation; they were never truly Christians. We should remember Jesus’ words when we meet someone who claims to speak in

tongues and present the gospel to them if it seems that they have not truly believed.

There are, however, a large number of people in the Charismatic¹⁰ movement who are truly born again and love the Lord. Even though we may not be able to work together in the gospel with them as closely as we would with those we are more like-minded with, we are still commanded to love them, to be at peace and to maintain the unity of the Spirit (Ephesians. 4:2,3).

We must have a humble, respectful attitude toward all believers, no matter how many doctrinal disagreements we may have. Since we will live together for all eternity we might as well start loving each other now. Remember that arguments and quarrels will not convince anyone of what is right; in fact, they are useless and ruin those who hear (2 Timothy 2:14). If someone is interested in your thoughts about tongues, a discussion of the Scriptures in a humble, loving way can be profitable. However, probably the best way to convince a person of the truth about tongues is to be a living example of a Christian who is truly walking in the power of the Spirit. Often people get involved with tongues because of a desire to better know God and to experience more of the blessing and power of the Holy Spirit. If your life demonstrates these things, you are a living testimony of the fact that all true Christians already have the power of the Spirit, even though they don't speak in tongues. "So then let us pursue the things

¹⁰ Actually, every true Christian is a "Charismatic." The word "Charismatic" comes from the Greek word "charisma" which means "gift." Since all Christians have a spiritual gift (1 Peter 4:10), all are "charismatic."

which make for peace and the building up of one another”(Romans 14:19).

Summary

We have seen that in every example and instruction in the Bible, speaking in tongues was always the speaking of an unlearned, human language through the supernatural power of God. We have also seen that the purpose of tongues in every example and instruction in the Bible was to be a sign (an attesting miracle) to unbelievers, and to Jews in particular. This chart summarizes the purpose of tongues in all the passages in which they are mentioned in the Bible.

	A Sign?	To Jews?
Old Testament Instruction		
Isaiah 28:11	Yes	Yes
New Testament Instruction		
1 Corinthians 14:21-22	Yes	Yes
Mark 16:17	Yes	Yes
Examples		
Acts 2	Yes	Yes
Acts 10 & 11	Yes	Yes
Acts 19	Yes	Yes

Although we may not know the answer to every question concerning tongues, this chart shows that one thing is clear. Biblical tongues was intended as a sign to unbelieving Jews however, whatever, and whenever it was used. All Old and New Testament instruction says nothing else! Every example, without exception, confirms nothing else!

Suggested Reading

Burdick, Donald W., *Tongues: To Speak or Not to Speak*, Chicago: Moody Press, 1969

Dillow, Joseph, *Speaking in Tongues: Seven Crucial Questions*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975

Gardiner, George E., *The Corinthian Catastrophe*, Grand Rapids: Kregal Publications, 1974

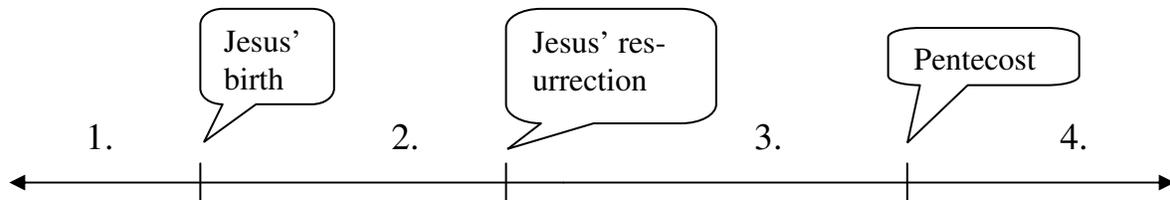
Sellers, C. Norman, Biblical Conclusions Concerning Tongues, 2300 NW 135th Street, Miami, FL 33167, 1972

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APPENDIX

The Baptism of the Holy Spirit

God has given His Holy Spirit in different ways during different times in history. A major change occurred on the day of Pentecost—50 days after the resurrection. The following time line and verses describe the working of the Holy Spirit at different times in History and the change that occurred at Pentecost. The numbers in the time line correspond to the numbered headings in the outline.



1. During the Old Covenant

The spirit came upon people differently in the Old Covenant than He does now in the New Covenant. He came only upon certain individuals (usually prophets, kings, or priests) for a certain task. He could also leave the person.

- A. Numbers 11:24-30—Only a few believers had God's Holy Spirit (Moses and then 70 others)
- B. 1 Samuel 10:1-12, 16:14, and Psalm 51:11 — God's Spirit did not permanently indwell a person in the Old Covenant.

- C. Joel 2:28-29 — Joel predicts the coming of the Holy Spirit in a new way in which all believers would have the Spirit, even sons, daughters, and servants.

2. During the Life of Jesus

The Holy Spirit worked in the same way during the gospel period as he did in the Old Covenant.

- A. Matthew 3:11, Mark 1:8, Luke 3:16, John 1:33 — John the Baptist predicts a future coming of the Holy Spirit in a new way, which he calls the “baptism of the Holy Spirit.”
- B. John 7:39 — John the apostle states that believers would not get the Spirit in the new way until after Jesus was glorified.
- C. John 14:17-18 — Jesus tells the apostles that the Spirit who has been with them will, in a future day, forever be in them.
- D. John 16:5-8 — Jesus says that He will send the Spirit after He has gone back to “Him who sent Me” (back to Heaven).
- E. Luke 11:13 — The disciples at this time were still under the Old Covenant as far as the giving of the Spirit (remember the Spirit only came on certain individuals in the Old Covenant). This is why they needed to ask for the Holy Spirit.
- F. The above verses show that the Apostles had not yet received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This was not because of a lack of faith or desire on their part, but because the Spirit could

not be poured out in a new way until after Jesus had gone back to heaven and been glorified.

3. The fifty days between the resurrection and Pentecost

- A. Luke 24:49 — Jesus commands the apostles to wait in Jerusalem for the promised coming of the Holy Spirit in a new way.
- B. John 20:22 — Jesus breathed on them and said: “receive the Holy Spirit.” This was in the same way as in the Old Covenant. It was a temporary giving of the Spirit to strengthen and encourage them until the baptism came a few days later.
- C. Acts 1:5 — The baptism of the Holy Spirit is predicted by Jesus to come in a few days.

4. After Pentecost

- A. Acts 2:1-13 — The promised baptism of the Holy Spirit occurred on the day of Pentecost. The disciples supernaturally spoke in languages they had never learned as a sign to the Jews in Jerusalem.
- B. Acts 2:17 — Peter explains to the crowd that they were witnessing the fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy that God would pour out His Spirit on “all mankind”: that is on all believers, not just a few kings and priests (see 1-C above).

- C. Acts 2:33 — Peter here states that Jesus had been exalted (glorified) to the right hand of God and had received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, Whom He had poured forth. Peter clearly identifies what was happening as the fulfillment of Jesus' promise to send the Spirit.
- D. Acts 2:38-39 — Peter says the promise of the Holy Spirit is now for all who repent and believe, not just for a few.
- E. Ephesians 1:13 — Paul clearly instructs the Ephesians that now, after Pentecost, everyone who listens and believes is immediately sealed with the Holy Spirit, who is the “deposit” guaranteeing the rest of our inheritance.
- F. Ephesians 4:30 — All believers in the New Covenant are sealed by the Holy Spirit for the day of redemption. He will not leave us as He sometimes did in the Old Covenant.
- G. Galatians 4:6 — Every son of God has the Spirit. Galatians 3:26 shows that we become sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.
- H. 1 Corinthians 12:13 — The baptism of the Holy Spirit is here defined as the placing of a believer into the body of Christ. (Baptism is from the Greek word “baptizo,” which means to place into.) This obviously happens at salvation. Paul states that all believers have been baptized with the Spirit and all have drunk of one Spirit.
- I. Romans 8:9 — If a person does not have the Holy Spirit, he does not belong to Christ.

- J. Titus 3:5-7 — The act of being regenerated (born again) happens when we receive the Holy Spirit. Therefore, if we do not have the Holy Spirit, we are not born again. Verse six shows that everyone who has been born again has had the Holy Spirit poured out on him richly.
- K. Acts 10:44-45 — The Holy Spirit came upon Cornelius and his household at the point that they believed Peter's message.
- L. Acts 8:14-17 — This is the only instance after Pentecost where believers received the Holy Spirit a while after they believed. God waited until Peter and John came down from Jerusalem to give the Samaritans the Spirit. The reason may have been to unify the Samaritans with the Jewish believers. Samaritans and Jews had intense enmity for each other (John 4:9 and John 8:48). God had the Apostles come down to insure the unity of the church. We know that this was a unique case, however, because Peter and John did not have to follow every evangelist around to give the Spirit to those who believed. The fact that God waited until Peter and John came to give the Samaritans the Holy Spirit may also have been a fulfillment of Jesus' promise to Peter to give him the keys to the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 16:19). It is interesting that Peter was involved in opening up the kingdom of God to every religious category of people: Jews (Acts 2), Samaritans (who were half Jew and half Gentile: Acts 8), and Gentiles (Acts 10).

M. Acts 19:1-7 — These twelve men were “disciples” (followers). However, they were not followers of Jesus, but followers of the message, teaching, and baptism of John the Baptist. Paul told them about Jesus and they believed, were baptized, and received the Holy Spirit. Again we see that they received the Spirit at the same time that they believed in Jesus.

More Power?

The Bible never teaches that after Pentecost any believer needs a second blessing or second experience after salvation to receive more of the Spirit’s power. I have listed 10 points showing that every believer has all the Spirit’s power.

1. The Spirit is a person (John 14:16-18). Therefore, when we receive Him, we receive all of Him and all of His power. (Titus 3:6 and John 3:34). It is impossible to receive only part of a person.
2. Ephesians 1:3 — Every believer has “every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.” If we have it all, how could we get more?
3. Ephesians 1:18-19 — Paul prayed not that they would get more power, but that they would know and believe the power that they already had.
4. The way to experience the Spirit’s power is not through a second experience, but through walking in obedience to Christ and learning to be filled with the Spirit moment by moment (Ephesians 5:18, John 14:21).

5. John 7:37-39 — Jesus says that if we believe in Him, out of our innermost being will flow rivers of living water.
6. Titus 3:6 — The Spirit has been poured out richly on everyone who has been born again (regeneration).
7. Colossians 2:10 — In Christ we have been made complete. We don't need more.
8. 2 Peter 1:3 — Every believer has been granted “everything pertaining to life and godliness.” The more we know Jesus Christ and His Word, the more we experience the power that we already have.
9. Acts 1:8 — We receive the Spirit's power when the Holy Spirit comes on us (at salvation) and not at some later point.
10. There is not one verse that even suggests that after Pentecost believers need to have more of the Spirit or more of His power.

Conclusion

During the Old Covenant, the Holy Spirit came only on a few believers and then He could leave them. The prophet Joel promised a coming of the Spirit in a new way. John the Baptist also predicted this coming of the Spirit and called it the “baptism of the Spirit.” Jesus promised that after He had been glorified and gone back to the Father, He would send the Holy Spirit in a new way. This occurred on the day of Pentecost. Peter explained that what occurred at Pentecost was a fulfillment of Joel and Jesus' predictions and that from

now on God would give His promised Holy Spirit to all those who repent and believe. Now that the Spirit has been given, all believers are baptized with the Holy Spirit when they believe in Christ. There is no longer any need to wait or pray for the Holy Spirit. All who have believed in Christ have been baptized in the Holy Spirit.