



(Last login: 02/14/2021)

About:

Lehman Strauss taught Old Testament history for eight years at Philadelphia Bible Institute, and served as pastor of the Calvary Baptist Church, Bristol, Pennsylvania, from 1939 to 1957. He was pastor of Highland Park Baptist Church (Highland Park, Michigan) until the end of 1963 when he resigned to devote full time to an itinerant Bible conference and evangelistic ministry both in the States and abroad. Dr. Strauss was residing in Florida and writing his 19th book at age 86 when the Lord called him home in June 1997. His written materials are used by permission.

Speaking in Tongues

Introduction

This is not the final chapter to be written on the subject of speaking in tongues. Men (and women) will be having their say until our Lord returns to settle this matter once and for all time. It is difficult to say how, when and where the modern tongues movement began. In the many pamphlets and books I have examined opinions differ. We do know that the phenomenon of tongues-speaking is widespread, and it is likely that no issue in Christendom has caused as wide a split in its ranks in modern times as has speaking in tongues.

All Bible-believing Christians who study the Word of God are in agreement that the gift of tongues is present in the inspired Scriptures. In the New Testament two lists of gifts appear in which the gift of tongues is included. In 1 Corinthians 12:8-11 “kinds of tongues” and “the interpretation of tongues” are said to be sovereignly bestowed gifts of the Holy Spirit. In 1 Corinthians 12:28-30 “tongues” appears in the list of gifts. We call them “spiritual gifts” from the Greek word *charisma*, suggesting that the gift is a bestowment of God’s grace. It is not a natural ability that one might develop, but rather a special gift as those appearing in the above mentioned passages in First Corinthians.

The Holy Spirit is sovereign in the distribution of these gifts. Following the listing of the gifts, Paul adds, “But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He will” (1 Corinthians

12:11). No one person has all the gifts, nor are we to seek the gifts. We must be careful that we do not confuse the Spirit as a *gift* to the believer with the *gifts* the Spirit gives to believers. Every believer has received the gift of the Spirit, but not every believer has received the gifts which the Spirit bestows.

The Meaning of Speaking in Tongues

In my travels many persons have approached me with questions about tongues. Some of them ask about its meaning. The term that is used to identify the tongues movement is “glossolalia,” made up of two Greek words, *glossa* (language or tongue) and *lalia* (speech). It therefore means speaking in languages or tongues. Glossology is that department of anthropology which has to do with the study and classification of languages and dialects.

The word *glossa* appears in the Greek New Testament not less than fifty times. It is used to refer to the physical organ of the tongue as in James 3:5; once in reference to the flames of fire shaped like tongues (Acts 2:3); at least once in a metaphorical sense when referring to speech as in the statement, “my tongue (speech) was glad (joyous)” (Acts 2:26). As far as I understand the remaining usages of the word it always means a language.

When our Lord predicted the gift of tongues (the only mention of tongues in the four Gospel records) He said, “And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name they shall cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues” (Mark 16:17). The adjective “new” (Gr. *kainos*) can only mean they were going to speak in languages new to them, that is, languages they had not learned or used until that time. If I say the Russian language is “new” to me, I do not mean that I never knew there was such a language, but rather its use by me is new to me because I can neither speak it nor understand it when I hear others speak it. On the other hand the German language is not altogether “new” to me because I can both read and speak it with a small degree of understanding.

In Acts 2:4 Luke uses a different adjective when he says, “they began to speak with other tongues.” The word “other” (Gr. *heteros*) simply means that they spoke in languages different from the normal language they were used to. The context substantiates this. Notice the surprised reaction on the part of the hearers—“And they were all amazed and marveled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?” (Acts 2:7,8). Every man heard them speak in his own language (Acts 2:6). Here the word “language” is the translation of *dialekto* from which our word “dialect”

comes. The two words *glossa* (tongue) and *dialektos* (language) are used synonymously, making it obvious that the disciples were speaking in known languages other than the language native to them. In verses 9-11 the languages are then identified. It was a miraculous phenomenon which enabled the disciples to speak in languages which they had never learned. Here in this Acts passage we have tongues-speaking in its pure and unperverted form as God gave it.

The following verses in the Book of the Revelation should be examined carefully (Revelation 5:9; 7:9; 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; 17:15). In each passage where the word “tongue” is mentioned it means one of the languages associated with the various nationalities and races. I see no reason why anyone should raise a question as to the tongues in those passages in Mark, Acts and Revelation meaning languages.

But the more serious problems arise in the interpretation of the twenty-one references to tongues in 1 Corinthians chapters 12-14. There are those who tell us that the tongues in First Corinthians are ecstatic utterances not known in any country on earth. They base their conclusion on the term “unknown” which appears in 1 Corinthians 14:2, 4, 13, 14, 19, and 27. But the reader of this chapter in God’s Word must not fail to observe that the word “unknown” in every place where it appears is in italicized letters, which means that it does not occur in any Greek manuscript but was inserted by translators. The Holy Spirit did not direct Paul to write that the tongue is unknown.

I find no warrant for changing the meaning of tongues in First Corinthians. In every other place where the word is used it means languages. Why then should the meaning be changed in First Corinthians? I know of no textual license that will warrant changing the meaning of the word. All the usages of tongues in Paul’s treatment of the subject refer to foreign languages. “So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into air” (1 Corinthians 14:9).

There is no reason for anyone to speak except to converse intelligibly. The Greek word *laleo* means “I speak.” The word is never used for mere sound or noise. Nor is it used for a mere mumbling or muttering of unintelligible gibberish. The tongues-speaking in the New Testament was in the native languages of hearing people. The supernatural phenomenon which took place at Pentecost was the exercise of a gift whereby many people from many countries, gathered at Jerusalem, heard God’s message in their own language. This was indeed a miracle of God.

It would be an arbitrary and strange interpretation of Scripture that would make tongues-speaking in the New Testament anything other than known languages. There is no trace of Scriptural evidence that tongues were ever heard by anyone as incoherent, incomprehensible babbling.

The Ministry of Speaking in Tongues

At this point in our study we shall pursue an examination of the reasons why God gave the gift of speaking in tongues.

First, to communicate the Gospel message. With unmistakable clarity Paul says, “Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not . . .” (1 Corinthians 14:22). The word “sign” (Gr. *semeion*) in the New Testament is often associated with the conveying of a Divinely-given message to unbelievers. This is the emphasis in John 20:30, 31 where we read, “And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name.” The signs (miracles) were never performed without purpose, but because of the message they communicated.

The true function of the gift of tongues is “for a sign . . . to them that believe not.” To exercise the gift when unbelievers were not present would be exercising the gift above the purpose for which it was given. The gifts were never given for the self-satisfaction or self-glory of the recipients. The one upon whom the gift was bestowed was merely an instrument through whom God wanted to communicate His message.

Because of the abuse and misuse of tongues in the Corinthian Assembly Paul states its purpose. The spiritual immaturity of the saints in Corinth called for instruction, so in the middle of his discourse on *tongues* he writes, “Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men” (1 Corinthians 14:20). The Greek word for “men” (*teleios*) means mature. In their misuse of speaking in tongues they were showing their immaturity, a behaviour pattern which characterized the believers at Corinth. The Apostle reminded them that they remained “babes in Christ” (3:1).

Their failure to grow up spiritually resulted from their neglected study of the Scriptures. The Epistle to the Hebrews stresses this point. “For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is

unskillful in the word of righteousness; for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Hebrews 5:12-14). Peter wrote, “As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby” (I Peter 2:2). One will find confusion and license where the study of God’s Word is neglected.

Now let us return to 1 Corinthians 14:20. Immediately upon rebuking them with the words, “Brethren, be not children in understanding,” Paul adds, “In the law it is written . . . ” (Vs. 21), thereby pointing out their weakness, namely, their failure to acquaint themselves with that which was written in the Old Testament Scriptures. They had failed to study God’s Word, therefore they had become victims of arrested development.

Speaking in tongues was a gift bestowed by the Holy Spirit, but it, or any other gift, can be misused. Speaking in tongues was no mark of spirituality, because the Corinthian church was unspiritual, having manifested carnality (3:1-3) and even gross sin (5:1). And so Paul points them to a Scripture they should have known, saying, “In the law it is written, With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that will they not hear me, saith the Lord” (12:21).

Paul is here referring to a prophecy God had given through Isaiah. The nation of Israel had failed to heed God’s message which He gave through their own prophets, so the Lord told them that at a future time they will hear His message through tongues (languages) other than their own. “For with stammering lips and another tongue will He speak to this people “ (Isaiah 28:11). Thus Paul sees in this Isaiah prophecy the gift of tongues as a sign to Israel. The words “this people” in Isaiah 28:11, in its context, can refer only to Israel. The abuse of tongues-speaking in Corinth did not arise from the belief in speaking in tongues, but rather in the neglect of the Scriptures which teach its proper use.

This purpose of the gift of tongues, namely to communicate God’s message to Israel, is verified in the three passages in Acts where speaking in tongues is mentioned. In Acts 2 tongues-speaking was used as a missionary or evangelistic tool in fulfillment of Isaiah 28:11. There was no need for the disciples to learn other languages before they could communicate the Gospel. God overcame the language barrier through the miracle-gift of tongues. On the day of Pentecost there were “Jews out of every nation under heaven” (Acts 2:5). And when the disciples “began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:4), the hearers responded with the

question, “And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?” (Acts 2:8). Observe that they were “Jews” from other countries who spoke many languages and dialects, and yet each heard the Gospel in his own tongue. Isaiah’s prophecy was being fulfilled.

In Acts 10:46 the second mention of speaking in tongues occurs. The occasion again was to communicate the Gospel, this time for the purpose of effecting the conversion of Cornelius and his house. This event cannot be totally disassociated from Pentecost because Peter, when relating this experience, said, “And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning” (Acts 11:15). At the house of Cornelius tongues-speaking was a sign to Jews at a time when the Gospel was being communicated (Acts 10:44-46).

In Acts 19:6 there appears the third passage in Acts in which speaking in tongues is recorded. Again its purpose was missionary and evangelistic. When Paul came to Ephesus he encountered twelve disciples of John the Baptist. He asked them, “Did you receive the Holy Ghost when (not since) you believed?” (Acts 19:2, see the R.V.). These at Ephesus considered themselves to be Christians because they had heard through Apollos the message of John. You see, there is a belief unto salvation and a belief that does not result in salvation. The latter is a mere academic, intellectual belief that even Satan and the demons have (James 2:19. cf. Mark 5:7). Doubtless there are people today who have an historical faith in Jesus Christ as a man and even the Son of God, but who have not been saved. Paul suspected that such was the case with the disciples of John whom he met at Ephesus. When he learned they were not saved, he told them they must trust Christ for their salvation. We can understand the confusion they might have experienced, therefore some evidential sign was necessary. “And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came upon them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied” (Acts 19:6). Again the purpose for speaking in tongues is obvious, namely, to communicate the Gospel message.

These are the only instances of tongues-speaking recorded in the Bible, except the passage in First Corinthians. None of the later Epistles mention speaking in tongues. The gift was used only in the transitional period between Law and Grace. The sign gifts continued through the period of the Apostles while the New Testament was in the process of being written.

Second, to confirm the Gospel message. It was not merely a *communicating* sign but a *confirmatory* sign as well. When the Apostles used the gift of *tongues* it was because they did not have what you and I have

today, the completed Word of God, God's full and final revelation to man. When they went about preaching the Gospel, their message was confirmed by the exercise of the sign gifts. Tongues-speaking vindicated both the message and the messenger. "Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds" (2 Corinthians 12:12). If one could find an Apostle living today who saw the bodily-resurrected Lord Jesus, he would not be exercising the sign gifts because he would have what you and I have, and what Peter, Paul and John did not have, the completed written Word of God. Now that we have the Scriptures we do not need miracles to confirm God's message.

Signs were for the Jews rather than for Gentiles. "For the Jews require a sign . . ." (1 Corinthians 1:22). Repeatedly it was the Jews who asked for a sign. "Then certain of the Scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from Thee" (Matthew 12:38). Again, "The Pharisees also with the Sadducees came, and tempting desired Him that He would shew them a sign from heaven" (Matthew 16 :1). "Then answered the Jews and said unto Him, What sign shewest Thou unto us, seeing that Thou doest these things?" (John 2:18). "They said therefore unto Him, What sign shewest Thou then, that we may see and believe Thee? What dost Thou work?" (John 6:30). All these who asked for a sign were Jews, and their insistence upon signs will at last be their sad undoing.

During the Tribulation the Antichrist will appear, "whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders" (II Thessalonians 2:9), and at that time many Jews will be deceived into receiving the Antichrist as their Messiah.

Let us who are Christ's not be seeking signs as did the unbelieving Jews. We who are the Lord's have the Holy Scriptures, so let us "walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7). Whenever the gift of *tongues* was exercised Jews were present, tongues-speaking being used either to communicate the Gospel or else to confirm to the Jews that the Gentiles were worthy of salvation and should therefore have the Gospel also. Such confirmations are seen in Acts 10:45 and 19:6. "And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and *confirming* the word with signs following. Amen" (Mark 16:20).

If anyone denies the message of God's written Word today, there is no other court of appeal. In the days of the Apostles, the New Testament being yet unwritten, the Holy Spirit supported their message by accompanying it with signs. But after those holy and inspired men completed writing the New

Testament, such confirmations were no longer necessary. The rich man in Hell asked Abraham to send Lazarus from the dead that he might witness to his five unsaved brothers, hoping that such a sign (or miracle) would lead them to repent. But Abraham replied, “If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead” (Luke 16:27-31). The Pentecostal sign ushered in a new age before the New Testament was written. But if men reject God’s inspired Word now, they need not look for any supernatural signs.

A significant New Testament passage which adds to the fact that the sign gifts were given to confirm the Gospel message is Hebrews 2:3,4: “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard Him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost according to His own will?” If the Epistle to the Hebrews was written between 65 and 70 A.D. it would be obvious that the people to whom the message was “confirmed” with signs and gifts were that generation immediately following our Lord’s death.

The Mistakes About Speaking in Tongues

As an introduction to this part of our study, I want you to see Paul’s introduction to the subject of spiritual gifts. And incidentally, this is the only place in the entire Bible where spiritual gifts are discussed. The Apostle writes, “Now concerning spiritual *gifts*, brethren, I would not have you ignorant” (1 Corinthians 12:1). In the Authorized Version the word “gifts” is in italicized letters, telling us that it did not appear in any of the Greek manuscripts but was inserted by translators. Paul actually said to the Corinthians, “I don’t want you to be ignorant about *pneumatica*” (the spirituals), meaning of course the spiritual gifts.

Now the Corinthians were not ignorant of the *fact* of the spiritual gifts, for the Apostle had already said to them, “Ye come behind in no gift” (1:7). When he said, “I would not have you ignorant”, he was not speaking about their ignorance of the *existence* of the gifts, but rather about their ignorance of the right *exercise* of the gifts. They were well informed as to what the spiritual gifts were, but they were ignorant about the proper use of the gifts, as is evidenced by the mistakes they made in their exercise of them.

Before Paul launches into a discussion of the spiritual gifts, he reminds them of how easily they were led astray. He says, “ye know that ye were gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led” (12:2). In

substance he is saying, “Before you tell me about your experience let me remind you of your lack of spirituality (3:1), and therefore your inability to discern between the Holy Spirit and false spirits” (2:15). Because they were carnal, “babes in Christ” (3:1), their exercise of the gifts were self-induced by fleshly energy, not by the Holy Spirit. All Christians do not use their gifts properly, so that a Christian’s use of a gift might not be in accord with the Word of God. Mistakes can be made by any of us in the exercise of a gift.

(1) ***It is a mistake to assume that speaking in tongues is synonymous with the baptism of the Holy Spirit.*** It is unscriptural teaching which says that all who are baptized by the Holy Spirit will speak in tongues. The Scriptures state emphatically that all saved persons have received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body . . .” (1 Corinthians 12:13). All the believers at Corinth received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, however all did not speak in tongues. The question asked in verse 30, “Do all speak with tongues?” is so phrased so as to convey the expected answer, “No.”

The baptizing work of the Spirit is not an experience in the believer subsequent to salvation. Rather it is that act of the Holy Spirit which joins the believing sinner to the Body of Christ. More emphatically, there is no other means whereby one can become a member of the Church which is Christ’s Body. All saved persons have been baptized by the Holy Spirit, but not all saved persons speak in tongues. The baptizing work of the Spirit places the believer in the Body positionally.

Be careful that you do not confuse the baptism of the Spirit with the command to be “filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18). All believers share equally in this position in Christ and thus share equally in union with Him. There is only one experience of baptism by the Holy Spirit but there can be many experiences of being filled with Spirit. Paul said that not all of the Corinthian Christians spoke in tongues (1 Corinthians 14:5), and yet he stated clearly that all had been baptized with the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13).

(2) ***It is a mistake to assume that speaking in tongues is an evidence of being filled with the Spirit.*** All believers are commanded to “be filled with (controlled by) the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18), but nowhere in Scripture are believers commanded to speak in tongues. A Christian can be under the influence and control of the Holy Spirit and not speak in tongues. There are numerous instances when the disciples were filled with the Spirit but did not speak in tongues. See Acts 4:31 and 13:9-11. To be Spirit-filled is to be Spirit-controlled. Are we to believe that the thousands of mightily used men

and women of God who were among the world's best missionaries of Christ's Gospel and Bible teachers were never filled with the Holy Spirit because they never spoke in tongues? Perish the thought!

Can one know if he is filled with the Spirit? Look at one verse in the Bible where the command to be filled with the Spirit is recorded. "And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God" (Ephesians 5:18-21). Three things are mentioned as evidence of being Spirit-filled; a joyful heart, a thankful heart and a submissive heart. Nothing is said about speaking in tongues. To sum it up in one word, *Christlikeness* is the manifestation of being filled with the Spirit, and the Scriptures do not tell us that our Lord ever spoke in tongues.

(3) ***It is a mistake to assume that speaking in tongues is the fruit of the Spirit.*** The fruit of the Spirit results from being filled with the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is mentioned in Galatians 5:22, 23 and includes nine characteristics. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." None of the sign-gifts are included in this nine-fold cluster of fruit. The Christian who is filled with the Spirit will manifest the fruit of the Spirit apart from ever having spoken in tongues. As a matter of fact, in Ephesians and Galatians, where the fullness and fruit of the Spirit are discussed tongues-speaking is not mentioned once. Moreover, in the list of gifts mentioned by Paul, gifts that the ascended Lord bestowed upon His Church, the sign gifts are omitted. "And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers" (Ephesians 4:11).

All Christians should be filled with the Spirit and all are to exhibit the fruit of the Spirit, but not every Christian has all the gifts. Spirituality does not depend on speaking in tongues. God's goal for every child of His is to be Spirit-controlled, but that goal does not include speaking in tongues. No Christian need ever feel that he is lacking in spirituality because he has not spoken in tongues. Quality of life is the best evidence of the fullness and fruit of the Holy Spirit. John the Baptizer was filled with the Spirit from his mother's womb (Luke 1:15), yet this Spirit-filled man did no miracles and never spoke in tongues (John 10:41). But he was so Christ-like that people

who were looking for the Messiah were led to ask of him, “Art thou the Christ?”

(4) ***It is a mistake to assume that speaking in tongues is an evidence of one’s faith.*** To the contrary, the persons who seek signs and sign-gifts show their lack of faith. It is a sin for any Christian to seek for signs before he will believe God’s Word. As was pointed out earlier in this study, “tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not” (1 Corinthians 14:22). So you see, the Christians at Corinth were showing that they were weak in faith, and possibly some who identified themselves with the believer had never been saved. The person who seeks any sign, whether it be speaking in tongues or any other sign-gift, is either a babe in Christ or an unbeliever.

Thomas is an illustration of a disciple weak in faith who would not believe without seeing. After our Lord arose from death, He appeared to the disciples. “But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe” (John 20:24, 25). Thomas was like the Corinthians, weak in faith, demanding to see the sign (miracle) before he would believe.

Eight days later the Lord appeared again. “Then saith He to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side:and be not faithless but believing.” (John 20:27). The doubting Thomas needed a sign, so the Lord appeared to him so that he would not continue without faith. And then He said to Thomas, “Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed; blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed” (John 20:29). The Christian who will study the Bible and believe what it says will walk by faith, not by sight or sound.

(5) ***It is a mistake to seek the gift of speaking in tongues.*** It is clear that not all in the church at Corinth spoke in tongues. Why didn’t they? The Apostle says, “Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit . . . for to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues: But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He will” (1 Corinthians 12:4-11). Please note that the gifts were given “as He (the Holy

Spirit) will,” not as we will, “as it hath pleased Him” (vs. 18), not us. The reason why all the Christians did not have the gift of tongues is because all of the gifts are divinely bestowed. The Spirit divides and distributes to each believer his own gift. Not one of us is capable of choosing his own gift. The Spirit will not give a gift according to our desire and the way we pray. Don’t try to tell God which gift He should give to you. We are but members of the Body, and no one member has any right to tell the Head what to do.

It would have been a mistake for the Corinthians to seek the gift of tongues because it is the least of all the gifts. Where the gifts are listed twice in 1 Corinthians 12, in each instance tongues and their interpretation are placed last (verses 8-11 and 28-30). Note the careful wording in the latter passage: “First . . . secondarily . . . thirdly . . . after that . . .” The least to be desired comes at the bottom of the list, the scale being according to importance and usefulness. The minor place of tongues is further stressed in 1 Corinthians 14:1, 5, 6, 19. The modern cult of tongues would have you believe that this gift is the only one that really counts and that every Christian ought to have it. The Corinthians erred in overemphasizing the gift of tongues as the most coveted gift of all. To them tongues was the prestige gift, hence its misuse and abuse at Corinth.

Paul charges them with such misuse of the gifts in 12:31. When he writes, “But covet earnestly the best gifts . . .” he is not exhorting or commanding them, as the imperative mood might indicate. Rather he is issuing a statement of fact, as is suggested in the indicative. In substance he is saying, “You are selfishly desiring the more spectacular or demonstrative gifts.” The word “covet” is not used in a good sense, but in a bad sense, that of self-seeking. “You are not satisfied to be a foot, concealed in a stocking and shoe; you want to be an eye. You want to be seen and heard.” And then the Apostle adds, “Yet shew I unto you a more excellent way. Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity (love), I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal “ (1 Corinthians 12:31,13:1).

A young man who claimed to have the gift of speaking in tongues told me that the biblical basis for his doing so was 1 Corinthians 14:4, namely, self-edification. But this is both selfish and wrong. Paul did say, “He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself” (14:4), but then he added, “Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the Church” (14:12). The gifts were given for the edification and profit of the entire Body of Christ, not merely one member. “The members should have the same care one for another” (12:25). Self-edification

is contrary to the principle of love as taught in Chapter 13, for “love seeketh not her own” (13:5). The gifts were given for the common good of all (12:7).

(6) ***It is a mistake for a woman to speak in tongues.*** “Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak . . .” (14:34). The prohibition here has a direct relation to the problem with which the Apostle is dealing, namely, speaking in tongues. Earlier in the same Epistle he told the women how to dress when they prayed or prophesied in the church (11 :3-10), therefore he would not forbid them here in Chapter 14 that privilege which is countenanced in Chapter 11. The setting of 1 Corinthians 14:34 has reference primarily to women speaking in tongues. It is clear and unmistakable that speaking in tongues was a gift limited to men and is never to be exercised by women. Now he is not saying that women may not teach or testify or pray, but that they may not speak in tongues. Elsewhere Paul writes, “But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence” (I Timothy 2:12). The point of this passage is that a woman’s ministry must not usurp authority over the man. She may teach women or children, but not men.

If this admonition were heeded today much of the present tongues movement would be eliminated. Women are the worst offenders in the modern confusion of tongues. The word “speak” in 14:34 is the same word used in verse 28, therefore it cannot mean mere “chatter” that would disturb a service in the church. The purpose of this entire section on speaking in tongues is to curb the wrong use of the gift. Verses 27-33 give instruction for men in the matter of speaking in tongues. “If any *man* speak in an unknown tongue . . .” (14:27); verses 34-36 are directed to “women” exercising the gift of tongues. And if any women wanted to take issue with Paul, he would ask them one question, “Which book in all the inspired Scriptures was written as the result of the Holy Spirit revealing the woman?” (Verse 36). It is a mistake for a woman to speak in tongues.

(7) ***It is a mistake to assume that the sign-gifts are given to believers today.*** Now I am not arbitrarily closing the door on miracles. God does intervene in supernatural ways performing miracles when and wherever He pleases to do so. The matter before us now is whether or not the Bible teaches that certain gifts were temporarily given. The evidence of God’s Word must be the final source of authority. I am stressing this because there are many persons who are not students of the Bible, therefore their only source of knowledge and understanding is subjective, namely, reason or experience.

Whatever appeals to their reason, or whatever experiences they have had, settle a matter for them once and for all time.

It is not uncommon to hear someone say something like this: “I cannot believe in Hell because I cannot conceive a loving God sending anyone to such a place of torment.” Such persons might listen to clear and sound expositions on the biblical doctrine of Hell, and yet they will reject what the Bible teaches because of their inner feelings and rationale. And so their rationalization becomes their final authority.

Now I am not suggesting that there is no validity in experience or reason. I am quite sure that there are times when one’s reason and experience are correct and therefore reliable. But neither reason nor experience can be accepted as final authority. Someone will argue: “I have had the experience of speaking in tongues; I find this experience in the New Testament; therefore my experience is true.” Any trained Christian philosopher will tell you that such an argument is not valid because it makes experience the basis of truth, so if one does not experience all of the experiences he does not have all of the truth. True Christian philosophy moves from truth to experience, therefore any valid Christian experience must be determined by the right interpretation of Holy Scripture. Experience, which is related to our emotions, can be deceptive, but a correct interpretation of God’s Word can never deceive.

We come now to the question, Is the gift of tongues a part of God’s program for the Church today? If it is, then we would be wrong if we closed our minds to it. If it is not, then we are wrong if we insist upon the exercise of tongues-speaking.

Let us turn to 1 Corinthians 13. Now keep in mind the fact that the subject in Chapters 12-14 is spiritual gifts with the main emphasis on tongues, because tongues was the one gift that the Corinthians were abusing. Chapter 12 concludes with “tongues” (12:30) and Chapter 13 begins with “tongues” (13:1). Obviously from the behavior of the Corinthians they were lacking in the fruit of the Spirit, namely, love. And so in Chapter 13 the Apostle dwells upon the essential ingredient of love which supercedes the gifts, and without which the Christian is nothing at all.

Among the Corinthians there were quarreling and division, but the needed fruit of the Spirit, love, was missing, so Paul writes, “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity (or love), I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal” (13 :1). In Corinth the tongues-speaking amounted to so much noise because carnality had invaded their exercise of the gift. Even today there is a kind of spiritual prestige associated

with tongues-speaking. For a Christian to show off any gift that God has given manifests pride that is lacking in love. Where love is lacking, the exercise of any gift is worthless.

If Christians would take seriously, within context, all of the teaching about tongues in 1 Corinthians, they could not fail to see that tongues-speaking would cease. Paul writes, “Charity (love) never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away” (13:8). There will always be the need for love, therefore love will never drop off. But when the canon of Scripture is made “perfect” (or complete), there will be no further revelation from God, neither in predictive prophecy nor in divinely revealed knowledge other than prophecy. The gifts of “prophecy” and “knowledge” will be entirely unnecessary with the completion of the Scriptures. And “if any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book” (Revelation 22:18).

Paul acknowledged the incomplete nature of the Scriptures in his day when he said, “For we know in part, and we prophecy in part” (13:9), or more literally from the Greek, “For in part we are knowing, and in part we are prophesying.” Then he adds, “But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away” (13:10). The word *perfect* is in the neuter gender, and therefore refers to the perfect (finished or completed) Word of God. If the word *perfect* referred to Christ it would be in the masculine gender. The sign gifts were “done away” (rendered inoperative) with the completion of the New Testament.

Now what about tongues? “Whether there be tongues, they shall cease” (13:8). Tongues shall cease (Gr. *patio*), that is, they shall come to a complete halt. Who needs tongues? Only the untaught, carnal babes in Christ, for Paul added, “When I was a child, I spake as a child . . . but when I became a man, I put away childish things” (13:11). The word “spake” in context can only refer to speaking in tongues. So that Paul himself came to the place of Christian maturity, through God’s revelation to him, where tongues were no longer necessary. And so in the same tongues context he admonishes the Corinthians, “Brethren, be not children in understanding . . . but in understanding be men” (14:20). Experientially, tongues cease when the Christian matures on a diet of the meat of God’s Word. Actually tongues is baby talk.

For the past two years I have made it my practice to ask many of the leading Bible teachers and scholars, some of whom having a rich working

knowledge of Hebrew and Greek, if they have ever spoken in tongues. Among them are college and seminary presidents and professors. To date I have not had one of about sixty men tell me that he ever spoke in tongues!

I have been asked if I ever spoke in tongues. No, I have not. God and I have gotten along nicely for the past forty-five years in English. I speak to Him in English and He hears and understands me. He speaks to me in English through His Word, and I understand Him.

How then can we account for the wide-spread practice of speaking in tongues? I do not have all of the answers to this question, but I will make three suggestions for your prayer consideration.

First, speaking in tongues can be self-induced. *Second*, speaking in tongues can be group-induced. *Third*, speaking in tongues can be satanically-induced.

Since the creation of man Satan's insidious master-plan has been to put a veil between God's children and God's inerrant Word. It began in the Garden of Eden when the Devil asked Mother Eve, "Yea, hath God said . . . ?" (Genesis 3:1), thereby raising doubt as to the authority and authenticity of what God has said. We know that this enemy has stepped up the pace of his strategy.

Our present generation is witnessing the growing menace of satanic activity in the realm of the miraculous. Where the Devil does not succeed in taking the Bible from us, he works hard at taking us from the Bible. And he succeeds in getting Christians to focus their attention on the claims of men and women to some supernatural experience, and in so doing those seekers after the experiences of others have neither time nor interest in searching the Scriptures for God's truth.

God does have a plan in His dealings with the human race, and that plan does not necessarily include the continuing repetition of the same miracles in every succeeding century. The miracles of God are rare occurrences in history. Enoch's bodily translation from earth to heaven was the only recorded miracle performed by God in over 1700 years between Adam and the flood.

The Church of Christ does not need a new Bible, nor new apostles, nor new faith-healers, nor new charismatic movements, nor self-styled miracle workers. What the Church needs is to return to the Word of God and proclaim the whole counsel of God in the power and love of the Holy Spirit.

And if my reader has never had a personal experience of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, I urge you to receive Him at once, “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Romans 10:13).

Related Topics: **Pneumatology (The Holy Spirit), Tongues**