

SPEAKING IN TONGUES

Chapter One

The Meaning of Tongues in the Bible

As we undertake this series of lessons on “Speaking in Tongues” we do so knowing full well the controversial nature of the subject. It is not our purpose to criticize, condemn or set in judgment on those who may differ with us. Our desire, as sincere Bible believing Christians, is to come to the true meaning of what the Bible teaches on the matter, so that we may put in practice that which we have learned. We have no doctrinal axe to grind, no theological hairs to split, no political fields to plough, and certainly no empire to build.

We seek only the truth. We have nothing to gain by promoting a certain doctrinal agenda. Therefore, if we disagree, may we do so in the true Christian spirit. If we are to arrive at a true and correct understanding of any Bible theme we must lay aside all of our religious prejudices, preconceived ideas, man’s opinions, dogmas and creeds. We must approach the Word of God with an open mind and an open heart, asking God to give us wisdom, knowledge and guidance in the matter.

All Bible doctrine must be examined in the light of God’s Word. The Bible must always be the divine ruler by which all doctrine is measured. The only way to accomplish this is by following the simple directions revealed in the Word of God.

“For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little.” (Isaiah 28:10)

The same measuring rod is repeated in I Corinthians 2:13.

“Which things also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.” (I Corinthians 2:13)

This verse tells us the only way to come to the correct understanding of any Bible theme is by comparing Scripture with Scripture. This can only be done by paying close attention to what the Scriptures teach, and then making a careful comparison of all Scriptures that have a bearing on the subject. Only then will one be able to arrive at the correct meaning of any Bible theme.

I can offer no better advice on how to study the Bible than the instructions given in I Corinthians 2:13. If this simple rule was followed we would not have the confusion and divisions that divide Believers today, and this is especially true concerning the subject of speaking in tongues.

Speaking in tongues is mentioned in the New Testament in the book of Acts, Acts 2:4, Acts 10:46, Acts 19:6, and in I Corinthians chapter 14. By comparing Scripture with Scripture we can easily see the purpose and reason for speaking in tongues in all these instances.

There are at least five Bible facts that, if understood, would clear up much of the confusion and will shed a great deal of light on the subject of speaking in tongues. They are:

- (1) The meaning of the word “tongue” or “tongues” in the New Testament.
- (2) The purpose of tongues on the day of Pentecost, Acts 2:4.
- (3) The purpose of tongues in Acts 10:46.
- (4) The purpose of tongues in I Corinthians chapter 14.
- (5) Are tongues necessary today?

Unless we come to an understanding of these five basic Bible facts we will never fully comprehend the true meaning and purpose of tongues as recorded in the Bible. First, it is very important to understand:

- (1) The meaning of the word “tongues” as used in the New Testament.

With the exception of just two places, when the word “tongues” is used it has only one meaning. The first exception is recorded in Acts 2:8.

**“And how hear we every man in our own tongue,
wherein we were born? (Acts 2:8)**

Here the Greek word for tongue is “dialektos,” and means “a dialect.” Webster’s dictionary defines the word “dialect” as being “a language considered as one of a group that has a common ancestor.”

The other exception is the word “tongues” recorded in I Corinthians 14:21.

**“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.”
(I Corinthians 14:21)**

In this verse the Greek word for tongues is “heteroglossos,” and means “a foreigner, or another language.”

Apart from these two references, in every instance where the word “tongue, or tongues” appear, without exception the Greek word “glossa” is used, which simply means “a language.” This holds true from the first time the word is used in Mark 16:17, until the last time the word is used in Revelation 17:15. If you doubt this, consult a good Greek dictionary and see for yourself. Tongues, whether acquired by the natural process of learning or the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit, all have one and the same meaning, a language, regardless of what language it may be.

Having seen the meaning of the word tongues, we turn our attention to another important part of our study.

- (2) The purpose of tongues in Acts 2:4.

We must first lay the foundation if we are to fully understand the purpose of the miracle of tongues on the day of Pentecost.

The first eleven chapters of Matthew was a message directed only to the Jews; the promise of the long awaited Kingdom age, foretold by the Prophets of old.

**“These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them,
saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into**

any city of the Samaritans enter ye not:
But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”
(Matthew 10:5, 6)

Verse 7 tells us the message they were to preach. “**And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand.**” With this message from the disciples, Jesus is setting the stage for the final offer of the Kingdom to Israel.

The final offer of the Kingdom was rejected (Matthew 12:24) by Israel.

“But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of devils.” (Matthew 12:24)

By this declaration they rejected the Kingdom, and Jesus says in Matthew chapter twelve, verses thirty one and thirty two:

**“Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men.
And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, (age) neither in the world (age) to come.”** (Mathew 12:31, 32)

This is confirmed in John chapter one, verse eleven. “**He came unto his own, and his own received him not.**”

In the following chapter (chapter 13) Jesus begins to unveil a plan hidden from the foundation of the world.

“That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world.” (Matthew 13:35)

This plan is called by Paul, in Ephesians chapter three, verse two, “the Dispensation of Grace.” “**If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward.**” Paul confirms what Jesus said in Matthew 13:35 in Ephesians 3:5 and 6.

**“Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit;
That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel.”** (Ephesians 3:5, 6)

This part of God’s plan, the dispensation of Grace, was not revealed unto Israel, as a nation. When Jesus begins to unfold this prophetic revelation by parables, in

Matthew chapter thirteen, the disciples were confused. **“And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables?” (Matthew 13:10)** Jesus answered them, in verse 11, **“Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given.” (Matthew 13:11)**

At the very heart of this new revelation was a new message, never before revealed to man, a message to all mankind.

“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28)

“Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” (John 3:3)

It was not until the day of Pentecost that this message was fully understood by the disciples. This brings us to the purpose of the “miracle” of tongues on the day of Pentecost.

As with all great Bible themes, there are key verses that will shed a great deal of light on the subject. The first of these verses is found in Acts chapter two, verse five. **“And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven.”** This verse is confirmed by naming the nations that were present.

“Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and Proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.” (Acts 2:9-11)

The second verse is found in Acts 2:4.

“And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.” (Acts 2:4)

The picture becomes even more clear in the following verses.

“Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. 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 2:6-8)

What did they hear? **“...we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.” (Acts 2:11)** By the miracle of one language, **(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) the Jews from every nation under Heaven heard, for the first time, in their own language, the language wherein they were born, the plan and purpose of God for the "dispensation of grace," that salvation was now offered to the whole world. **"And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved."** (Acts 2:21) This was a message never before heard by these Jews.

By the miracle of tongues God was able to accomplish at least three of His primary objectives.

(1) By the miracle of tongues undeniable proof was presented that this message was from God, (Acts 2:7, 8). Only God is able to perform such a miracle. This miracle cannot be imitated by man or the Devil. Therefore, they must accept this message as being from God.

There would never be, in the history of man, a more appropriate time or place for such a miracle. This, of course is a reversal of the confounding of tongues mentioned in Genesis chapter eleven, verse seven.

"Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." (Genesis 11:7)

(2) To fulfill the first part of the commission of making this truth known to the Jew first.

"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." (Acts 1:8)

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." (Romans 1:16)

"Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile; But glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also the Gentile." (Romans 2:9, 10)

(3) The time element.

The time element is important. How long would it have taken these Galileans to have traveled to each of these countries and provinces, mentioned in Acts 2:9-11, and to learn the many different languages of each country? Not to mention the time it would take to convince them that this new message of grace was of God. Then, too, apart from "the miracle of language" these Jews would have never accepted this new message as being from God.

This should convince a person of the wisdom of a Sovereign God in using the miracle of language to begin one of the most marvelous ages, apart from the Kingdom age, known to man.

It would help greatly if we keep in mind to always rightly divide the Word of truth as we study the Word of God.

Chapter Two

The Miracle of Tongues

In our previous lesson we covered two important facts relating to speaking in tongues, in the New Testament; “the meaning of the word tongues” and “the purpose of tongues” on the day of Pentecost.

From the first time tongues are mentioned, on the day of Pentecost, in Acts chapter two, and the second time tongues are mentioned, some eight years later in the household of Cornelius, in Acts chapter ten, we note that as long as the gospel was to the Jews or Jewish proselytes, tongues are not mentioned at all. This is true when:

- (1) Three thousand were saved, Acts 2:41.
- (2) Five thousand were saved, Acts 4:4.
- (3) The ones who were saved, Acts 8:5, 6.
- (4) The ones who received the Holy Ghost, Acts 8:17.
- (5) When the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit the second time, Acts 4:31.

Search as you may, you will not find tongues mentioned while the gospel was given to the Jews only.

“Tongues” are not mentioned again until the door of salvation is opened to the Gentiles; which brings us to the third Bible fact that must be considered.

- (3) The Purpose of tongues in the household of Cornelius, Acts chapter 10.

As far as the Gentiles are concerned, Acts chapter ten becomes the most important chapter in the New Testament. Up until this time salvation was offered only to the Jews.

Here is the order in which the Gospel of Christ was to be given.

“But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.” (Romans 1:16)

In spite of the commission to “take the gospel to the whole world,” it would seem that the “all Jewish church” in Jerusalem had no intention of going any further than “to the Jews only.”

“Now they that were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen traveled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only.” (Acts 11:19)

According to the Scripture in Matthew, it was to Peter that God entrusted the power of opening the door of salvation to both Jew and Gentile.

“And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom

of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” (Matthew 16:19)

We saw, in our first lesson, that Peter’s first use of the keys opened the door of the new message of salvation to the Jews only. We come now to the second use of the keys when Peter opened the door of salvation to the Gentiles.

In spite of the clear instructions from the Lord Jesus Himself (Acts 1:8) why did it take eight years, a severe persecution (Acts 11:19), a special vision (Acts 9:10-13, and a stern rebuke from God (Acts 9:15), before taking the gospel to the whole world? This question is partly answered in Acts 10:28. It was the prejudice of the Jews toward the Gentiles.

“And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean.” (Acts 10:28)

This question was fully answered in Acts chapter eleven.

**“And the apostles and brethren that were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God.
And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him, Saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them.” (Acts 11:1-3)**

What evidence could Peter give for such outrageous conduct? Why not use the sterling conduct of this man, Cornelius, as recorded in Acts chapter ten, verse two.

“A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always.” (Acts 10:2)

What more could one ask for proof of this man’s devotion to God than what is revealed in this one verse, and repeated in Acts 10:22?

“And they said, Cornelius the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews, was warned from God by an holy angel to send for thee into his house, and to hear words of thee.” (Acts 10:22)

This man’s godly conduct was known among the nation of the Jews, according to this Scripture in Acts 10:22, but he was still not accepted by the Jewish Believers at Jerusalem. If these credentials were not acceptable, then what would it take?

This brings us to the “true purpose of tongues.” The Scripture says **“For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom.” (I Corinthians 1:22)** If the Jews require

a sign, what sign would prove to these Jewish Believers that God had also visited the Gentiles? There is one sign, and only one sign that would be recognized and accepted.

“While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. (Acts 10:44, 45)

Here we have the proof in Verse forty-six. **“For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God.” (Acts 10:46)**

This declaration now becomes the normal order for the “age of grace.” The Holy Spirit is given to all who believe, without delay, meditation or any other requirement than simple faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

When the news reached the saints in Jerusalem, that the Gentiles had also received the Word of God, Peter was called before the board to give an account.

“And the apostles and brethren that were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him, Saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them. But Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them.” (Acts 11:1-4)

Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning; how that he was given a vision, and no less than three times he questioned God’s wisdom in His plan for the age of grace.

“And I heard a voice saying unto me, Arise, Peter; slay and eat. But I said, Not so, Lord: for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered my mouth. But the voice answered me again from heaven, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. And this was done three times: and all were drawn up again into heaven.” (Acts 11:7-10)

If Peter had stopped his defense with verse fourteen, he probably would have been ostracized, or at the least banded a heretic. The evidence Peter gave, witnessed by six others, was the only unquestionable proof that would have ever been accepted by these other Jewish Believers.

The following four verses give the answer to the question “What was the purpose of tongues, in Acts chapter ten?”

“And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning. Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he

said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost. Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God? When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life. (Acts 11:15-18)

Again we see the infinite wisdom of God at work in His great plan of salvation for all. By performing the miracle of language, that only God could perform, leaves absolutely no room for doubt that salvation has been offered to the Gentiles. It was a sign that even the most hardened skeptic could not deny.

In our third lesson we will take up the fourth Bible fact of the purpose of tongues in the Church at Corinth, where we shall see the vast difference between the “tongues” mentioned in Acts and “tongues” mentioned in I Corinthians chapter fourteen.

Now, let us go back and review briefly the first three Bible facts that must be understood before we can fully understand the New Testament teaching of God’s plan and purpose of tongues in the first place.

First, we saw that the Bible definition of “tongues” simply means “a language.” Second, we saw that the purpose of tongues on the day of Pentecost was God’s way to deliver a new message to the Jews representing every nation under heaven.

“And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven.” (Acts 2:5)

Acts, chapter two, verses nine through eleven records a detailed list of the nations that represented some seventeen different languages and dialects. By this miracle God was able to deliver the new message of grace to the whole nation of Israel at one time. That message was, **“And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”** (Acts 2:21) To such a diverse group God performed two miracles, one of “speech,” the other of “hearing.”

“And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. And they were all amazed and marveled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans?” (Acts 2: verse 4 and verse 7)

“Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.” (Acts 2: verse 6 and verse 11)

Third, we saw that the miracle of tongues was the only evidence that would convince the Christian Jews in Jerusalem that salvation had been extended to the Gentiles.

“While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them that heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? (Acts 10:44-47)

This truth is confirmed in Acts chapter eleven, verses seventeen and eighteen.

“Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God? When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.” (Acts 11:17, 18)

Chapter Three

The Gift of Tongues

Before we get to the fourth Bible fact, the purpose of tongues in the Church at Corinth, I would like to call your attention to another Bible fact that is often overlooked. Nowhere in the book of Acts where tongues are mentioned is there any reference to the presence of an interpreter. Furthermore, no mention is made that an interpreter was even necessary.

It is a completely different story when we come to the “gift of tongues” in I Corinthians chapter fourteen.

“If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course; and let one interpret. But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God.” (I Corinthians 14:27, 28)

This truth alone tells us that a definite distinction must be made between the purpose of tongues mentioned in Acts, and those mentioned in I Corinthians.

There was a number of serious problems that plagued the Church at Corinth; not the least of which was the abuse and misuse of the gifts of the Spirit, and especially the gift of tongues.

Paul wrote this first epistle to the Corinthian Church to try and correct some of these problems, such as who had the authority to baptize, (chapter 1); the grave indifference towards immoral conduct, (chapter 5); going to law before the unbelievers, (chapter 6); and a total disregard for the meaning and purpose of the Lord's Supper, (chapters 10 and 11). However, Paul spent more time in trying to correct the abuse and misuse of the gifts of the Spirit, especially the gift of tongues, than any of the other problems.

If I had to pick a church by which to pattern my spiritual conduct, the Church at Corinth would be at the bottom of the list.

**“And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ.
I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able.” (I Corinthians 3:1, 2)**

There prevailed in the Church at Corinth, as in many churches today, a self-centered, holier than thou attitude. Their two major points of doctrine centered around “have you been scripturally baptized?” and “do you speak in tongues?” Paul says of this conduct:

“For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?” (I Corinthians 3:3)

Nowhere is this carnal nature revealed so plain as it is in the abuse of the gift of tongues. To correct this problem, Paul begins his instructions with these words, **“Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant.” (I Corinthians 12:1)**

Paul understood that no matter how plain and simple his instructions were there would still be those who would ignore, or totally disregard his instructions. This is why he closed his instructions with these words. **“But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant.” (I Corinthians 14:38)**

Paul seems to say, “I have given you the commandments of God. If you do not believe the words I have given you, you will just have to remain ignorant.”

Paul gives the reason for their ignorance of the Word of God. He says, **“Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led.” (I Corinthians 12:2)** This confirms what Paul said at the beginning of his epistle, and reminds them that they had nothing whereof to boast.

**“For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called:
But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things**

which are mighty.” (I Corinthians 1:26, 27)

In this lesson I am in no way criticizing or condemning the Corinthian Believers for their lack of understanding the Word of God. They did not have the complete revelation, as we have it today. Today we have the complete, perfect revelation, the Bible. Therefore there is no excuse for us making the same mistakes.

Paul devoted almost all of three chapters in I Corinthians, not so much an endorsement of the gift of tongues, but to identify and correct at least five areas of abuse and misuse of the gift of tongues. The first was:

(1) Giving priority to the lesser gift of tongues over the more important gift of prophecy. To correct this problem, Paul began by showing the importance of the gift of prophecy over the gift of tongues.

“Follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophecy.” (I Corinthians 14:1)

In the following verses he gives the reason why only one person, the one speaking in tongues, would be edified, built up, or would receive any blessing from exercising the gift of tongues.

“For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries. (I Corinthians 14:2)

“He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church.” (I Corinthians 14:4)

On the other hand the whole assembly received a blessing from exercising the gift of prophecy. **“But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort.” (I Corinthians 14:3)**

Paul makes it perfectly clear that tongues were for the edification of the person who was speaking in tongues, while prophecy edifieth the whole Church. This truth is confirmed in I Corinthians 14:19.

“Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue.” (I Corinthians 14:19)

Paul says that he “had rather speak just five words that could be understood that he might help others, than ten thousand words that would only edify or build up himself.” It would help if we would keep in mind the instructions given in Philippians 2:3.

“Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.” (Philippians 2:3)

(2) The second error made by the Corinthian Believers was teaching that all Believers must have, or at least practice the gift of tongues.

“If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad?” (I Corinthians 14:23)

The words “and all speak with tongues” tells us that it must have been the practice of some in the Church to teach that all Believers must possess the gift of tongues. The Corinthian Believers may be excused for this error, for they did not have the complete and perfect revelation from God. However, there is absolutely no excuse for this error to be taught today by any person in possession of the Bible, the total, inspired Word of God.

I Corinthians, chapter twelve, verses eight through ten lists “spiritual gifts,” and verse eleven, a verse that is so often overlooked by many, says, **“But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.”**

Here in plain language the Bible teaches that the selection of the gift is not up to the individual, but it is up to the sole discretion of the Holy Spirit.

God knew there would be some who would consider themselves to be more spiritual, or more worthy than others of one of the gifts; a gift they considered more superior than the other gifts; so it is with good reason that the Lord did not leave it up to the individual to choose their gifts.

I could spend a lot of time trying to show the reason why it is up to the sovereign discretion of the Holy Spirit to choose what gift to bestow upon each Believer, but I could never come close to the reason as it is clearly defined in the Word of God. Paul uses the analogy of the body to show that every member is necessary if we are to function as a complete body.

**“For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many are one body: so also is Christ.
For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.
For the body is not one member, but many.
If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?
And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?
If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing?
If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling?
But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.
And if they were all one member, where were the body?
But now are they many members, yet but one body.
And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.**

**Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary:
And those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness. For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked.” (I Corinthians 12:12-24)**

God gives this explanation that there should be no division in the Body of Christ over who had the most important gift. There is therefore no room for boasting that one gift was more superior than another. One should be thankful just to be a part of the body.

(3) The third error was that all were speaking in tongues at the same time. We do not know how many were in attendance. Even if only a few spoke in tongues at the same time there would be nothing but confusion and bedlam.

“If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad?” (I Corinthians 14:23)

To correct this error, Paul says there was to be a limit of no more than three at any one meeting who were to exercise this gift; and then only one at a time.

“If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course; and let one interpret.” (I Corinthians 14:27)

(4) The fourth error was that they were exercising the gift of speaking in tongues without an interpreter present.

“But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God.” (I Corinthians 14:28)

(5) Before I make any comment on the fifth error mentioned by Paul, let me read word for word what the Bible says about the subject.

**“Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law.
And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.” (I Corinthians 14:34, 35)**

If you have a problem with this Scripture, you will have to take it up with God. This plain teaching cannot be dismissed or ignored. It must be dealt with from a fair and honest perspective.

If we accept the Bible as being the final authority on all matters, as all good Christians should, then we must believe that God said what He meant and meant what He said.

Only two of the nine gifts of the Spirit are in focus in I Corinthians chapter fourteen, “the gift of tongues” and “the gift of prophecy;” so this could only be referring to one or both of these gifts.

Of the forty verses in I Corinthians chapter fourteen, twenty-eight verses deal exclusively with correcting the abuse and misuse of tongues. Only three verses are given to the encouragement of prophecy. From the preponderance of evidence when Paul said “let your women keep silence in the churches” there is no doubt Paul had in mind speaking in tongues.

Chapter Four

Are Tongues for Today?

In this, our fourth lesson on “speaking in tongues” we will be answering three of the most important questions relating to this subject.

- (1) What was the purpose of tongues in the Church at Corinth?
- (2) Are tongues necessary today?
- (3) If not, why not?

These three important questions must be answered from the Word of God. The Word of God must always be the divine ruler by which all doctrines are measured.

To answer the first question, the purpose of tongues at Corinth, we must not confuse the miracle of tongues in Acts with the gift of tongues in I Corinthians. There is no scriptural evidence that an interpreter was necessary to interpret the language in any of the three instances where tongues were used in the book of Acts. The record is clear.

**“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)**

The same is true in Acts chapter ten, verse forty-six, and in Acts chapter nineteen, verse six. However, this is not the case in I Corinthians 14:28.

“But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God.” (I Corinthians 14:28)

As far as we know, the Church at Corinth was the only Church that practiced this gift. It is not mentioned in any of the epistles to the other Churches. This alone tells us that the gift of tongues was unique to the Church at Corinth.

There are two verses that give a clear revelation as to the purpose of tongues in I Corinthians chapter fourteen. Here, in plain language is what the Bible says.

“He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church.” (I Corinthians 14:4)

This verse alone plainly gives the answer to the purpose of “tongues” in the church at Corinth. The word “edifieth” means “to confirm,” “to build up,” “to embolden.” No other Scripture is necessary to show the purpose of tongues in this church. The only person to profit from speaking in tongues was the person exercising the gift. This verse also identifies the ones “that believe not,” in verse twenty-two.

“Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not: but prophesying serveth not for them that believe not, but for them which believe.” (I Corinthians 14:22)

Verse four plainly states that the only person who profited, or received any spiritual benefit at all from speaking in tongues was the person who exercised the gift. **“He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself.”**

This verse alone tells us who needed the sign, (verse 22) **“to them that believe not.”** It becomes very important that we identify “them that believe not” in this verse. We see from the next verse that it could not be referring to the unsaved.

“If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad?” (I Corinthians 14:23)

Therefore we must pay close attention to what the Bible teaches, and not read into this verse something it does not say. The seemingly contradiction can be easily cleared up by comparing Scripture with Scripture.

It is no secret that within the Church today there are those who fully trust, as well as those who have doubts and fears. This is nothing new. We read in the Word of God an actual account of someone who doubted.

“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 a follower of the Lord. The Scripture says, “Thomas, one of the twelve.” To say that Thomas was not a true Believer would be quite a stretch.

How many times have we, as Believers, had doubts and fears? Jesus gave the only answer that is pleasing to God.

“And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.

Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.” (John 20: 28, 29)

Another way to know that “them that believe not” is not referring to the unsaved, but to the doubting Believer, is that the word “believe” is used twice in I Corinthians 14:22. This verse divided the Corinthian Believers into two groups, the Believers who had full trust and confidence, and those who did not.

Two Greek words are used to denote the difference. The Greek word for BELIEVE used in “tongues are for a sign not to them that BELIEVE,” is the Greek word “pisteuo,” which means “full assurance, trust, to rely upon.”

The Greek word used for “them that believe not” is the word “apistos,” which means “a doubter, or one who does not fully trust.”

There is an altogether different word used when referring to the unsaved. It is the Greek word “apeitheo. It means not only to “disbelieve willfully and perversely,” but “disobedient” as well.

Therefore, we may quote I Corinthians 14:22 in the following manner without changing its meaning in any way. **“Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, (those who fully trust, adhere to and rely upon) but to them that believe not.”** (those who are still untrusting and doubting.)

We come now to the fifth question; Are Believers commanded to exercise the gift of tongues today? A plain answer of “yes” or “no,” without Bible authority, is not sufficient. On a subject with such far reaching implications, one must not be swayed by speculation, opinions, traditions, or even an experience. This is especially true when in conflict with the Word of God.

We can best answer the question “are tongues for today?” by answering another important question. When the apostle John wrote the final verse in the final chapter in the book we call the Bible, did the Bible then become the complete and perfect revelation to man from God? If your answer to this question is no, then you have a greater and more serious problem than whether or not speaking in tongues is for today.

However, if you do believe the Bible is complete, the inspired and infallible Word of God, there is scriptural evidence that tongues are no longer necessary.

**“Charity 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.”
(I Corinthians 13:8)**

It is important to note that the Scripture says three, and only three, of the prominent gifts will one day come to an end. Prophecy shall fail and knowledge shall vanish. In the Greek “fail” and “vanish” have the same meaning; “to be rendered entirely useless, abolished, to do away with, without effect.

As for tongues, “they shall cease.” The word “cease” means “to come to a stop, to pause, to quit, cease, or come to an end.”

I Corinthians chapter 13, verse 10 gives us the exact time that prophecy and knowledge will be rendered useless. The word “perfect” in this verse means when that

which is “complete” is come. **“But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.” (I Corinthians 13:10)**

For those who tell us that the word “perfect” is referring to the coming of Christ is to ignore two very important facts. First, what happened to the other six gifts? Certainly, when the Lord returns, these gifts will no longer be necessary.

Secondly, and this is most important, something “perfect and complete” came approximately thirty-seven years after I Corinthians was written. In the absence of the written revelation for the Church age, the gifts of prophecy, tongues and knowledge served a very distinct and special purpose.

Prophecy and knowledge was the means by which God revealed His plan and purpose to the early Church. As we have seen, tongues were given to those who needed some further affirmation or sign.

Now His plan and purpose, every thing we need to know, is found in His complete and perfect revelation, the Word of God, the Bible.

If you do not believe the Bible is complete and perfect in every detail, there is nothing more to say. You are on your own. However, there is a word of caution from the Word of God.

“For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book. If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book.” (Revelation 22:18)

Today with a complete and perfect revelation, the Bible, complete and perfect from beginning to end concerning God’s plan for mankind, prophecy, tongues and special knowledge serves no purpose.

The false, religious cults of the day all started with the claim of some special revelation from God; but the only true revelation from God is contained in His Word, the Bible. The only way to know GOD’S PLAN FOR THIS AGE is to follow His instructions.

“As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.” (I Peter 2:2)

“But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever. Amen.” (II Peter 3:18)

“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” (II Timothy 2:15)

Instead of following the instructions given in the Word of God to “study to show ourselves approved unto God,” there are those who want to take a short-cut by making some wild claim of having received some special revelation from God. Some claim that God spoke to them in a dream, or appeared in a vision, thus fulfilling the prophecy in second Peter, chapter two, verses one and two.

“But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.

And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of.”

(II Peter 2:1, 2)

Those who claim to have a new message from God must be treated according to the instructions given in Second John, verses nine through eleven.

“Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son.

If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed:

For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.” (II John verses 9-11)

It cannot be made more plain than what Paul teaches in Galatians, chapter one, verses six through nine.

“I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel:

Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ.

But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.

As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.” (Galatians 1:6-9)

There is something far more important than understanding the purpose of tongues, and that is an understanding of salvation. Jesus made it plain, in the gospel of John, how to have Eternal life.

“Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. (John 3:3)

“Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.”

We find this same truth in John 3:18 and I John 5:12.

“He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” (John 3:18)

“He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.” (I John 5:12)