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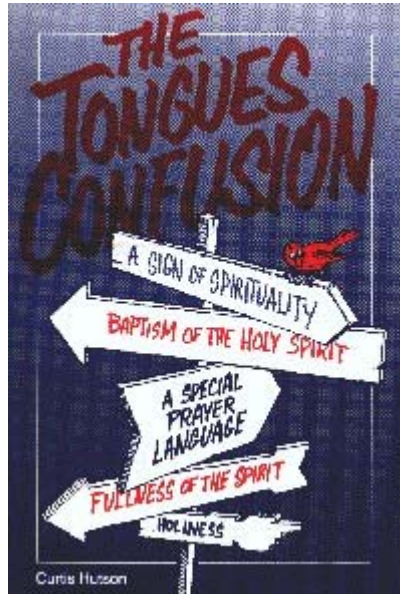
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Email:

rlister@picknowl.com.au

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The Tongues Confusion

The Meaning of It
The Motive Behind It
The Method for It
The Misunderstanding About It

by Curtis Hutson

"Now, brethren, if I come unto you tongues, what shall I profit you, except I speak to you either by revelation, or by prophesying, or by doctrine? things without life giving sound, what shall I do, except I harp, except they give a distinction how shall it be known what is piped?"

For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself? 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 the air." --I Cor.

The subject of tongues is worth study because it is in the Bible, and we need to study it because it deals with this important subject for two great reasons.

First, the tongues, or charismatic movement, is experiencing rapid growth. Many sincere Christians have been led into deeper experience, well-meaning and sincere Christians have been led into fanaticism. Due to a false understanding, thousands of believers seek for the experience of tongues in stead of for the power and fullness of the Holy Spirit to win the world.

On the other hand, many more thousands of Christians are so repulsed by the fanaticism of the tongues movement, that they turn entirely away from any study of the fullness of the Holy Spirit. They are so afraid they will get out on a limb that they never bother to study.

I want Christians everywhere to be filled with the blessed Holy Spirit of God. There should be no great soul-winning churches, no revival, without the power of the Holy Spirit. Zechariah 4:6 states, "**Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.**"

Now there is a second great reason for studying the question of speaking in tongues. It is such widespread difference of opinion among sincere believers that the truth should be known. Every honest Christian should approach the study of tongues with an open mind.

open mind and without prejudice. Surely God must be grieved when those who read and believe the Bible think so harshly of one another and differ so radically on an important subject as being filled with the Holy Spirit.

In this study I will not talk about experience; we will only see what the Bible says. If an experience does not agree with the Bible, the experience is wrong, not the Bible. If a principle is not the principle; the Bible is. And doctrine is not settled by one's experience; the Bible has to say.

Several years ago a popular weekly television program featured a detective who solved cases correctly, his name was Sergeant Friday. In every story a situation developed and Sergeant Friday said to a witness whom he questioned, "Just the facts, Ma'am. Just the facts." With God's help, I shall do just that. We will see what the Bible says about the meaning of it, the motive behind it, the method for it, and the misunderstandings.

THE MEANING OF IT

The word translated "tongues" in Acts 2:4 is the Greek word **glossa**. I have looked through my Strong's Concordance where the word appears in the New Testament. Sometimes it refers to a literal, human tongue--the physical organ in the mouth; and sometimes it refers to "cloven tongues like as of fire," and 33 times the word means "language." Everywhere in all the Bible does "tongues" mean a heavenly language that only God understands. It never means something mysterious nor unknown to mankind. In Acts 2 it was not a heavenly but normal, human languages known and spoken by people present on the scene and the nationalities of those in whose language they were allowed to speak.

"And they were all amazed and marveled, saying one to another, Behold, these which speak Galileans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Cilicijans, Iudaeans, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God. " -- Acts 2:7-11.

Notice the language of Acts 2. Verse 4 states, **"They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues "** It does not say they spoke with their own tongue; they simply spoke with other languages. Verses 7 and 8 say, **"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?"** Again the Bible does not say they spoke with some heavenly language and that everyone understood them because he was filled with the Holy Spirit. It simply says, **"we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?"** Then verses 9-11 list the nationalities of people whose languages were being spoken.

There are only three places in the book of Acts where people spoke in tongues: at Pentecost -- Acts 2:1-11; in Caesarea -- Acts 10:44-46; and in Ephesus -- Acts 19:1-6.

In Acts 10:46 we are told how Cornelius and his household were heard to **"speak in tongues, and magnify God."** And Peter responded by saying, **"Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Spirit?"** These were new converts, and Peter suggested baptism. The tongues spoken by Cornelius and his household were not miraculous tongues. It simply says that they spoke with tongues and magnified God. Cornelius and his household were members of the church.

band from Rome, and their natural language was Latin. It is possible that in household were soldiers, slaves, servants and government officials from many parts of the Roman world. Could it have been that in their heavenly ecstasy they spoke in his mother tongue in praising God?

It is a psychological truth that in moments of extreme delight or peril a foreigner will exclaim in his native tongue rather than in the language he has more recently learned. It may be that as it may, the tongues referred to in Acts 10:46 were known languages. The ecstatic utterance.

The third historical record of people speaking in tongues is in the book of Acts chapter 19:1-6. When Paul met these twelve men in Ephesus, he asked, "**Had ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?**" Their reply was that they had never heard of the Holy Spirit. Now how could followers of John the Baptist be ignorant of the Holy Spirit who preached the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:11)? Evidently the true message of John the Baptist had been lost as it was passed from one disciple to another; then when these men received a clear presentation of the Gospel, they were baptized (vs. 5). Verse 6 states, "**Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied.**"

Here again the Bible does not say they spoke with heavenly languages or ecstatic utterance, but that they spoke with tongues, or languages. Ephesus, a great city, was made up of people from different parts of the Roman world. The Bible does not indicate what languages were spoken. But it clearly indicates that more than one language was used: "**...they spake with tongues**" (plural). And verse 7 states, "**And there were about twelve.**" It is possible that a dozen different languages were spoken by the new Christians, filled with joy, and prophesied.

Aside from these three instances in the book of Acts, tongues are mentioned in a discussion of the gifts of the Spirit (I Cor. 12:1-14) and in I Corinthians 14. I Corinthians 14 will reveal that the tongues mentioned are not so-called spirit languages. The languages used were normal, human languages. It was not just a jargon of sound unfamiliar to any human ear.

In that chapter it is referred to as "an **unknown** tongue"; but "unknown" is a supplied word; it means it is a supplied word, placed there by Bible translators for the sake of clarity. The languages mentioned here are simply foreign languages unknown to the Corinthians. Verses 23 and 24 make this especially clear:

"If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak in tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they be said that ye are mad? But if all prophesy, and there come in one that is unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all."

Now, visualize the scene. A church service is in progress and people are speaking in many numerous foreign languages. Some uneducated or unlearned person, as the unbeliever, happens to walk into the service. He hears a number of people, all speaking in various languages; it is mass confusion, so he concludes all are mad! But if the church members would speak words easy to understand, instead of speaking in foreign languages that the unlearned do not know, then the unbeliever and the unlearned man would be convinced of all.

The use of the word "unlearned," in verses 23 and 24, shows that the languages mentioned were not supernatural. They could be learned by proper study. One can learn

Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues works of God. " --Acts 2:7-11.

When these precious unconverted people heard the Gospel, they trusted Jesus Saviour. And the Bible states in Acts 2:41, **"Then they that gladly receive were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls."**

The important thing on the day of Pentecost was not the speaking in tongue conversion of 3,000 sinners. And that places importance on soul winning, not in tongues. The tongues were secondary and incidental. They were only a means to the end was soul winning.

That is certainly consistent with Acts 1:8, where Jesus said,

"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 Judaea, and in Samaria, and in the uttermost part of the earth."

It is said of John the Baptist in Luke 1:15,16,

"For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb. And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God."

To put the emphasis on speaking in tongues would be like having someone put a million dollars in a brown paper bag, and you dump the money into the trash over the paper bag. The paper bag was the instrument in which the money was carried. The money is the important thing, not the bag.

The tongues on the day of Pentecost were the instrument through which the message was delivered that resulted in 3,000 souls saved. The salvation of 3,000 sinners was the important thing, not the tongues that delivered the message. Winning souls was the important thing, not the tongues behind speaking with tongues in Acts, chapter 2.

Aside from the three instances recorded in the book of Acts, one other place in the New Testament mentions speaking in tongues. It is in Paul's discussion of the gift of tongues in I Corinthians 12:1-14. Verse 10 lists, among other gifts, **"divers kinds of tongues"**. The church at Corinth is the only New Testament church that spoke with tongues mentioned in connection with the churches in Macedonia, Achaia, Judea, Samaria, or any other place.

I Corinthians, chapter 14, does not contain a list of exhortations to speak in tongues. It contains a long list of restrictions against the practice. Paul is not encouraging the church at Corinth to exercise the gift but to refrain from its use. He is not giving a set of regulations to speak in tongues but rather laying down strict regulations to restrain its use.

Before giving a number of these regulations found in I Corinthians 14, I should draw attention to the fact that the tongues in I Corinthians 14 are different from the tongues in Acts 10 and Acts 19.

In Acts 2 the disciples simply preached the Gospel in the languages of those

heard the Gospel, trusted Christ as Saviour and 3,000 were saved. The tongues of Pentecost were not unknown languages to the hearers.

The tongues mentioned in I Corinthians 14 were unknown to the congregation; foreign languages not known by the people in the church, thus they were unknown.

Now, notice several regulations Paul lays down in regard to speaking in tongues.

First, no tongues or foreign languages were to be used in the church except what was present understood what was being said.

"If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three; 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 Cor. 14:27

Second, there should never be more than two or three in any service speaking in tongues or tongues. **"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"** (vs. 27).

Third, only one person was to speak at a time. Any time two or three were speaking at the same time it was clearly out of order. **"...let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course"** (I Cor. 14:27). If tongues were ever spoken in a service, it had to be "by course," never two speaking at the same time.

Fourth, any religious service where speaking in tongues caused confusion of God: **"For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints"** (I Cor. 14:33).

Fifth, under no condition was a woman to speak in an unknown tongue in the church.

"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 Lord, your Lord and God, who is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the saviour, himself the church, which he hath cleansed with the word of water by the word, that he might present it unto himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish." -- I Cor. 14:34, 35.

That is a strange statement for the Apostle Paul to make, since in I Corinthians 14 he had just given instructions how women were to dress when they prayed or sang in the church. Now, in I Corinthians 14:34 and 35 he says they are not to speak at all, but to be silent.

Has he forgotten what he has just written? Is he stupid? Has he lost his mind? These verses forbidding women to speak in the church are found in the middle of a chapter on speaking in tongues. He is giving regulations on the use of tongues and he says the women are to keep silent. They are not permitted to speak!

Dr. W. A. Criswell said:

"In front of the ancient city of Corinth was the deep blue sea. Behind Corinth was the steep, high Acro-Corinthus, an Acropolis far more prominent than that in Athens on which was built the Parthenon. Crowning the imposing Acropolis of Corinth was a magnificent temple to Aphrodite (Latin, 'Venus').

"The Greek goddess of love and beauty was worshiped with sexual orgies.

temple prostitutes who were used in these orgies of worship worked into ecstatic frenzies as they followed their heathen, immoral rituals.

"The sight of frenzied women speaking in unknown tongues in their immorality was a common one in the days of Graeco-Roman culture. The abhorrence of such speaking is explicable and obvious. Paul assumes that strangers walking by an assembly of God's people, seeing and hearing women talking in unknown tongues, would immediately say: 'What have we here? A colony of Aphrodite? Let us go in and enjoy the sensual pleasure.' 'No,' the apostle, 'a thousand times no!'

When it comes to speaking in tongues, let your women keep silent in church. It is a shame [mark this word 'shame'] for women to speak in unknown tongues in church.'

"That interdiction still stands, unremoved. The hysterical, unseemly speaking of women in public worship is a reproach to the name of the Lord."

Sixth, Paul encourages the church to speak in a language understood by the

"I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all: Yet in the church I would rather speak live words with my understanding, that by my voice I might convince them, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue. " --I Cor. 14:18, 19

These are tremendous odds -- 5 to 10,000! This would be enough to stop tongues forever in the judgment of any ordinary fair-minded person. The proper place in the church.

Recently I wrote on the margin of my Bible five reasons why tongues were not used in public worship services.

1. It could not be generally understood and therefore required the service interpreter to be of any value.
2. It repelled unbelievers and did not edify believers who could not understand what was being said.
3. It led unbelievers to conclude that those who spoke in this unintelligible language when they could have used known languages, were out of their minds.
4. It might lead the hearers to conclude that God is the author of confusion. Those who spoke in tongues claimed to do so by the power of the Holy Spirit.
5. It actually thwarted God's purpose which is that His witness should be heard by all.

Why use such a round-about way to get the truth to people? God never used tongues and neither did the apostles.

THE MISUNDERSTANDINGS ABOUT IT

There are several misunderstandings regarding speaking in tongues. Some say it is evidence of the fullness of the Holy Spirit. Others say it is a prayer language. Still others say it is a way to speak to God in tongues. Still others insist that speaking in tongues is a sign of spiritual maturity. When one becomes spiritual enough he will speak with tongues.

Is speaking in tongues the evidence of the fullness of the Holy Spirit? Let us

Bible says. There is not a single statement--either before or after Pentecost--Bible speaks of the gift of tongues as the evidence or part of the evidence of the Holy Spirit. This is a doctrine not founded upon a single clear statement of the Word of God.

Pastor Donald Gee, a well-known writer of the Pentecostal movement, said in *Speaking in Tongues, the Initial Evidence of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit*

"The doctrine that speaking with other tongues is the initial evidence of the Holy Spirit rests upon the accumulated evidence of the records in the book of Acts where this experience is recorded. Any doctrine on this subject necessarily be confined within these limits for its basis, for the New Testament contains no plain, categorical statement anywhere as to what must be the sign."

Those who teach that speaking in tongues is the evidence of the fullness of the Holy Spirit get such an idea from history, from books or from human experience, not from the Bible since it says nothing about it.

There are good reasons to believe that speaking in tongues is not the evidence of the Holy Spirit.

First, as I have mentioned, the Scripture nowhere says that speaking in tongues is the evidence of the Holy Spirit.

Second, another evidence was promised. Acts 1:8 states, "**But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto us in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.**"

Here the Bible says that when they were filled with the Holy Spirit they would have power to witness. That is exactly what happened in Acts, chapter 2. Filled with the Holy Spirit, they preached the Gospel and 3,000 souls were saved!

It is said of John the Baptist in Luke 1:15,16, "**For he shall be great in the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb. And many of the children of Israel shall turn to the Lord their God.**"

Notice it says nothing about John the Baptist speaking in tongues. It does say "**of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God.**" When he is filled with the Holy Spirit, he will be a great soul winner. If there is an evidence of the fullness of the Holy Spirit, it is soul winning, not speaking with tongues.

Third, there are examples in the Bible of those who were filled with the Holy Spirit but did not speak in tongues: Jesus--Luke 3:21,22 and Acts 10:38; John the Baptist and the converts at Samaria--Acts 8:14-17; the Apostle Paul--Acts 9:17.

The great soul winners of our day are men who have been filled with the Holy Spirit but never spoke in tongues.

Then there are the great evangelists and preachers of yesteryear who were filled with the Holy Spirit but never spoke in tongues: Dwight L. Moody, Charles G. Finn

Torrey, John Wesley, George Whitefield, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, Billy Wilbur Chapman, George Truett, Gipsy Smith and many, many others.

Since God gave another evidence of the fullness of the Holy Spirit, it is wrong for anyone to believe that speaking in tongues is the evidence when God says otherwise.

There is another misunderstanding regarding speaking in tongues. Some who speak in tongues say it is a prayer language, basing the teaching on I Corinthians 14:2, "A man will speak in an unknown tongue and he will not be understood by men, but by God." This verse will clarify your mind. This verse simply says if a man speaks in the church language, which no one understands, then he is not speaking unto men but unto God. The verse goes on to explain, "...for no man understandeth him." The Scripture says and does not mean that the tongues mentioned here were a language known to God. An unknown tongue is any foreign language unknown to you or unknown to the person who hears it spoken.

If I spoke in Chinese to an English-speaking audience who did not understand, I would not be speaking to men because they would not understand the language. I would be speaking to God, since He understands and knows all languages. What God hears here is simply foreign languages unknown to those present but not unknown to God.

Recently in a restaurant, I sat near several people who were speaking in a language unknown to me. As I enjoyed my meal, I wished I could understand what they were saying. But they were not speaking to me since the language spoken was unknown to me. The language they were speaking in was not unknown to God, and He heard every word.

There is no such thing as a special prayer language. God understands one language as well as the other. He is omniscient. There is no language unknown to God. He hears every conversation.

Several years ago I led a lady to Christ who knew very little English. When she prayed, she indicated that she could not speak the English language well enough. I suggested that she pray in her own native tongue, which she did. The tongue she spoke was unknown to me. I have absolutely no idea what she said, but I am sure God heard every word. When she had finished praying, a glow came over her face as she reached out her hand. The next Sunday I had the happy privilege of baptizing her, and she became a church member. There is no such thing as a special prayer language.

There are those who believe that speaking in tongues is a sign of spirituality. This is a misunderstanding. Only one church in the Bible ever spoke with tongues--the church at Corinth. It is clear from the Scriptures that this was not a spiritual church. For example, I Corinthians 3:2, 3,

"I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able: neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?"

Here the Bible specifically says the church at Corinth was carnal and not spiritual. They were not able to eat strong meat and must be fed on the milk of the Word (I Corinthians 3:2). Many of them were puffed up and offended with Paul (I Cor. 4:18). There was for them: a man living in sin with his stepmother and the church openly taking sides (I Cor. 5:1). Church members were going to law with one another before unbelievers.

Some of the church members ate meat offered to idols (I Cor. 8). There were heresies at the Lord's Supper, and some came to the communion drunk (I Cor. 11:22). Some church members denied the resurrection (I Cor. 15:12). The only church where members spoke in tongues was not spiritual but carnal. So, speaking in tongues should not be a sign of spirituality. Now, these closing words.

I would exhort every Christian to be filled with the Holy Spirit. You may as well back the tide with a pitchfork as to try to do God's work without the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

When you are filled with the Holy Spirit, then spend your time winning souls. The whole purpose of the Holy Spirit's coming into the world was to **"reprove and of righteousness, and of judgment"** (John 16:8). What does it matter if you speak with the tongues of men and of angels and never lead a soul to Christ! What would it matter if you could speak a dozen languages--whether by human wisdom or by miracle--if you never gave anyone the plan of salvation or told a sinner how to be saved?

Be filled with the Holy Spirit and win souls.

Contacting Sword of the Lord

This, and other booklets, can be obtained by contacting Sword of the Lord directly, please do not direct your queries to Roy Lister (me), though I will answer any questions regarding the subject matter of the material shown here.

Sword of the Lord Publishers
Po Box 1099
Murfreesboro
Tennessee, 37133
U.S.A

or by [email](mailto:102657.3622@CompuServe.COM) (102657.3622@CompuServe.COM)

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