

TONGUES — A SIGN FOR TODAY?

1 Corinthians 14:23 – 40

Dr. Jon McNeff, Senior Pastor

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REVIEW:

- All Christians have all the Spirit all the time – Romans 8:9
- Tongues are known languages – seen in Acts 2, 10, and 19 – not unintelligible utterances
- Unintelligible utterances are not condoned – Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 14 to correct the misuse of tongues – they had digressed to usage of unintelligible utterances – Paul does not condone this –
 - 1.) No example in Scripture of Christians speaking to God in anything other than a known tongue;
 - 2.) Gifts are not given for the benefit of the believer;
 - 3.) Tongues were not given as a “prayer language” a “deeper walk” or “second blessing”;
 - 4.) verse 23 – “*Therefore, if the whole church assembles together...*” – the gist of the passage addresses the whole church – this is not a passage that addresses a private devotional gift.
- The purpose of tongues – warning to Israel – verse 21-22
- “...*tongues are for a sign...*” – to whom? – “*to unbelievers*” – any specific unbelievers? – yes – the ones of verse 21 – “*this people*” – the Jews – those who “*will not listen to Me*” – Paul states that tongues are for a sign to unbelieving Jews – quotes from Isaiah 28 where Isaiah told the Jews of coming destruction at the hand of the Assyrians – also stated in Deuteronomy 28:49 and Jeremiah 15:5.

I. HOW DOES GOD SPEAK?

A. The procedure for tongues – 26-28

1st day of the 20th century – Charles Parham, a 27-year-old preacher in Topeka, Kansas, laid his hands on student Agnes Ozman – “halo seemed to surround her head and face” and she began to speak Chinese – did so for three days, couldn’t write English, only Chinese – spread to others who spoke in 21 languages they didn’t know – one moved to India thinking he could speak Indian, but ended when he found he couldn’t – Pentecostal historian Vinson Synan says it was all a fiasco – fanciful tales, but not true – carried on with William Seymour, the “Apostle of Azusa Street” (*Counterfeit Revival* Hank Hanagriff – p. 142).

If tongues are to be manifest – I Corinthians 14:26-40 is clear about how it is to be done.

1. They must edify

Verse 26 – “*What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.*” – verse 40 – all things are to be done “*...properly and in an orderly manner.*”

Evidently they were coming together and competing for “air time” – everyone wanted to show off their “gift” – that’s why Paul instructs them regarding edification – the purpose of gifts is not to be used as a prideful display of spirituality – it is to edify the body.

In Acts 2 the expression of tongues brought recognition of sin and repentance – in Acts 10 it brought unity to the early church by affirming to the circumcised believers with Peter that Cornelius and his house were true believers – in Acts 19 – they authenticated the message of Paul and gave him a platform for preaching in Ephesus for the next two years.

2. One at a time

Verse 27 – “*If anyone speaks in a tongue, it should be by two or at the most three, and each in turn...*” – 99% of modern tongues movement would be removed if this instruction were followed – one person at a time – no more than three per service – followed by interpretation.

3. There must be an interpreter

Verse 27 – “*...and one must interpret;*”

4. The message is evaluated

Verse 28 – “*...if there is no interpreter, he must keep silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God.*” – if there wasn’t a discernable message that could be understood they had to keep silent – why? – there is no place in the church for a prideful display of a gift or an indiscernable message.

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B. The procedure for prophecy

Moves to discussion on prophecy – contrasted with tongues – verse 29 – *“Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment.”* – James Ryle, pastor of the Vineyard in Denver, and spiritual advisor to Bill McCartney and the Promise Keepers staff – in *Hippo in the Garden* – saw God bring His pet hippo into the garden – hippo is modern-day “seers” – garden is the church – hippo has big mouth like seers – hippo ranks first in God’s creation (according to Ryle) and modern seers rank first in authority in the church

1. It speaks for God

Prophecy is the public proclamation of God's Word that brings conviction for the non-believer and encouragement for the believer – It operates within the doctrinal confines of the Christian faith (Romans 12:6) – it brings conviction to non-believers (1 Corinthians 14:25) – it builds up, encourages, and comforts believers (1 Corinthians 14:3), it is not new revelation (1 Corinthians 14:37, 38)

Prophets were one of the early offices of the church that disappeared as their function set down doctrine:

- They are mentioned as critical to the early church in sending out Barnabas and Saul (Acts 13:1), at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:32)
- They are not mentioned at all in the pastoral epistles – elders and deacons assume the role of leadership there
- Prophecy was a spiritual gift given to the early church (Ephesians 4:11; 1 Corinthians 12:28) – the early church was built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets (Ephesians 2:20)
- Prophets here were in a leadership role – no mention of pastors, elders, etc.
- Sometimes they spoke new revelation (Acts 11:21– same as Old Testament prophets – sometimes they re-spoke the words of the Apostles

2. Three at the most

Verse 29 – not to have competing prophecies that would bring confusion.

3. It is judged by other prophets

Verse 29 – *“...and let the others pass judgment.”* – through their knowledge of Old Testament Scripture – through spiritual and mature discernment – through the evaluation of other prophets

4. Later prophecy is preferred

Verse 30 – *“But if a revelation is made to one who is seated, the first one must keep silent.”* – to get the fresh revelation from the Lord – not necessary today since God’s revelation is completed – Ephesians 2:20 – the church was built on *“...the foundation of the apostles and prophets...”* – indicating that their revelation and teaching became the bedrock on which everything else was built.

5. It does not bypass the mind

Verse 31-32 – *“For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted...”* – the issue is learning, not the ego of man – that’s why *“...the spirits of the prophets are subject to prophet...”* – the prophet is responsible for his message and his spirit – this is not the “out of spirit” or “out of body” revelations of modern prophets.

6. It is confined to men

Verses 34-36 – *“The women are to keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but are to subject themselves, just as the Law also says.”* – the context is God speaking to the church through prophecy – in keeping with Old Testament law, Paul is saying that this leadership role belongs to men:

- In the Old Testament there were no female kings or priests
- None of the authors of the Old Testament books were women.

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- Only five women called prophetesses – one of them, Noadiah (Nehemiah 6:14) was a false prophetess – one of them, Isaiah’s wife, never uttered a word of prophecy, but was called a prophetess because she had a child whose name had a prophetic meaning (Isaiah 8:3). The remaining three – Miriam (Exodus 15:20), Deborah (Judges 4:4), and Huldah (2Kings 22:14) only gave one recorded prophecy apiece and never had an ongoing role or call as a prophetess.

7. It agrees with Scripture

Verses 37-38 – *“If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord’s commandment. But if anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized.”* – the *“...things which I write to you...”* refers to Scripture – a fitting conclusion – anyone who thinks he is a prophet or is spiritual, must recognize revealed Scripture – or he is not to be recognized.

II. HAVE BIBLICAL TONGUES CEASED?

A. Their purpose was fulfilled

If tongues were given as a sign to unbelieving Israel, then what happened when Israel did not believe? I believe that the genuine gift of tongues ceased – primarily because the reason for their existence – the warning for the nation of Israel – ceased to be an issue when Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 AD – over one million Jews were killed – thousands were crucified or fled the country – Herod’s marvelous Temple was torn down in fulfillment of Jesus’ prophecy that *“not one stone here will be left will be left upon another which will not be torn down.”* (Matthew 24:2) – like driving to LA – signs say 296 miles – 245 miles, etc. until you get to LA – then there are no more need for signs.

B. Paul said they would cease

1 Corinthians 13:8 – *“Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away.”* – Prophecy and knowledge will be *“done away”* – future passive indicative of *katargeo* – indicates something will happen in the future that will cause prophecy and knowledge to stop operating – probably when the *“perfect comes”* – verse 10 – probably the eternal state when none of it will be necessary.

But tongues *“will cease”* – future middle indicative of *pauso* – *“to cease permanently”* – most of the time it is used in the middle voice, denoting a willing cessation as opposed to the passive voice which indicates a forced cessation.

C. History indicates they ceased

The miraculous gifts are mentioned only in 1 Corinthians – written in 55, only 23 years after the crucifixion

- Romans and Ephesians were written in 56 and 60 respectively and no mention is made of miraculous gifts there
- In fact – Paul wrote 12 epistles **after** 1 Corinthians and never mentioned tongues again!
- Peter, James, and John never mentioned tongues – once the church was established, tongues were not mentioned – gone – also never *“alluded to, hinted at or even found in the Apostolic Fathers.”* (Cleon Rogers in Bib Sac)
- Chrysostom stated categorically that tongues had ceased by his time (4th century)
- Augustine wrote of tongues as belonging to the Apostolic Age
- In first 500 years of the church only mention of tongues was from followers of Montanus, who was branded a heretic – in 17th century, the Cevennol prophets in France (known for military force against Rome), the Jansenists (opposers of Reformation doctrine), and Shakers (founded by Mother Ann Lee who regarded herself as female Jesus Christ), all claimed to speak in tongues – but they were all considered extremists and heretics.

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D. No more need for revelation

1 Corinthians 14:37,38 – *“If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord’s commandment. But if anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized.”* – there is no continuing need for a further word from God – it is all packed in these pages.

Bottom line – tongues of today are not biblical tongues – we are to seek prophecy (proclamation of God’s Word).