

CAN YOU SPEAK IN TONGUES?

By Jerome Savage

The subject of speaking in miraculous tongues has become a subject of keen interest among religious people of the world. This claim has been made by various Pentecostal groups for over one hundred years, but in the past ten years, many groups are claiming the modern practice of the New Testament feat and are claiming to possess such power by means of the Holy Spirit. Such groups as the Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, Roman Catholic, and even groups of young people across the world who have no special church ties claim that they are baptized with the same measure of the Holy Spirit as people were in the days of the Apostles.

An investigation of these claims is the purpose of this tract. We need to prove every spirit or doctrine (I John 4:1), and are told to prove all things in order to hold fast to the good (I Thessalonians 5:21). Let us therefore try this doctrine held by so many lately and see if the Word of God can approve it.

Is Man's Word Enough?

Let us say in the beginning that no claim of miraculous power to speak in tongues, heal the sick, or perform any other supernatural act should be accepted at face value. Just hearsay or some isolated case where I heard cannot be accepted as a factual happening. Human claims are not absolute facts in religion.

There must be an absolute standard by which all men evaluate and consider these claims. That standard is the New Testament. This great Book of God must sit in judgment upon human actions-not the other way, where human actions sit in judgment of the Bible.

There is no doubt about a person's honesty or sincerity when he makes a claim like this, but he could be honestly mistaken. Many millions imagine in their heart that they have cancer, or some other disease they have read about and may become sick over worry about that very disease. The feelings of one about these diseases can either be verified or denied only after a careful examination by a qualified doctor. We claim that the Bible is the place to check these claims to verify or deny this mania. Feelings alone will not suffice. An examination is necessary.

There Have Been Miraculous Tongues!

There is no evidence that the gift of miraculous tongues was ever associated with the worship of God in the Old Testament period. There are several references to this great miracle in the New Testament. They are:

1. On the first Pentecost following the resurrection of Christ, the Holy Spirit came upon the twelve apostles in a baptismal measure. These men had been told to wait for the promised power in Jerusalem after the Lord's ascension; and in Acts 2:4 we read, "And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." This was from God and fulfilled his promise to guide them into all truth (John 14:26 & 16:13). After inspiring these men with divine truth through the power of the Holy

Spirit, an effective way of communication had to be provided. Since the group of people assembled were from many nations (Acts 2:5) and spoke different languages, some miracle had to make possible their understanding in their own language. They heard these apostles, who were all Galileans, speak in their own tongue or language (Acts 2:8).

The apostles then spoke in other languages in order to teach the truth and it was to give understanding. It was not ecstatic gibberish (which came from emotions) that no one could understand. It was not an unknown tongue. The word unknown in the King James translation appears in italics, which means that this word is not found in the original Greek, but the translators added this word. Paul later deals with people speaking in a tongue or language where no one understood and he commanded that they were to keep silent, unless there were an interpreter who could give the meaning (I Corinthians 14:27).

Every tongue then had to (a) be from God for the purpose of teaching the truth and (b) be in some language that people could understand. As a result the Jews believed and were baptized and were added to the church (Acts 2:47).

2. Cornelius and his household. In Acts 10 we find the next instance of miraculous tongues. Cornelius was a great moral man who was devout (Acts 10:1-2), but was still in his sins (Acts 11: 14). After Peter was sent to him to guide him into truth, he began to "speak with tongues and magnify God." This occurred when the Holy Spirit fell on all of them that heard the word (Acts 10:44-48). The Jews who had accompanied Peter to Cornelius "... were astonished ... because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also" (Acts 10:45).

The purpose of this gift of tongues was to convince Jewish Christians that "... God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life" (Acts 11:18). God wanted all men to be saved. The gospel was to be for every creature (Mark 16:15). It was "... for the Jew first and also for the Greek" (Romans 1:16). Therefore, God brought the Gentiles into His great family by the same sort of miracle he had used for the Jews on the day of Pentecost, about ten years before.

As a result of Peter's preaching and this great miracle to convince the Jews that God would accept Gentiles, Cornelius and his household were baptized into Christ (Acts 10:47-48). They became Christians, and now all nations (Jews and Gentiles) were brought to a knowledge of the truth.

3. The next miraculous tongue speaking took place in Ephesus. Paul was on his journeys and entered the city and preached to certain men who had been baptized with John's baptism. "... they said to him, 'We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.' " Upon hearing Paul's message about Christ "... they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied" (Acts 19:1-6).

It should be noticed that this occasion differs from the first two in that the Holy Spirit's power was given through the laying on of the apostle's hands.

On the day of Pentecost (Acts 2), the Jews (apostles) received the gift of tongues directly from heaven. At the household of Cornelius (Acts 10), the tongues were given directly from heaven. But now these men at Ephesus received this gift indirectly. The first two time's tongues were given without human hands. The third time the gift was bestowed by the laying

on of hands. As a result of Paul's teaching, and this miracle, they were baptized with the baptism which the Jews and Gentiles had experienced. It was in the name of Christ (Acts 19:5).

4. The miraculous tongue gift was also given to certain members of the church at Corinth. I Corinthians 12:8-10 lists nine spiritual gifts, which were, evidently, given to these Corinthian Christians. Not every Christian had all nine gifts (I Corinthians 12:30). Also, there was no single gift (like tongues) that all possessed. He compared these gifts to different parts of the body (I Corinthians 12:19). The purpose of these gifts were to edify and build up these Christians; so teaching in other tongues or languages is mentioned as one of these nine gifts. Paul goes into much detail in the Corinthian letter to make sure that these Christians used this gift of tongues for teaching with understanding. He said, "Let all things be done for edification" (I Corinthians 14:26). Remember that the word unknown in this chapter is added every time by the translators and means not understood (never means jabbering or a non-language). In every case of tongue speaking, it was for man's benefit that he might (intelligently) understand, what was said. It was associated with teaching people how to be saved and be built up spiritually.

Never Intended to Be Permanent!

These miraculous works of the Spirit (nine gifts of I Corinthians 12:8-10) were never intended to be permanent in the church. They were to be given in part. "But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away" (I Corinthians 13:10). This new and perfect thing would be a much more excellent way (I Corinthians 13:13). All of the gifts mentioned in the Corinthian church were to pass away, or cease. He said in I Corinthians 13:8 that prophecies would fail, tongues would cease, and Divine knowledge would be done away. Now, when would these gifts cease? When that perfect thing (the complete will of God) should come (I Corinthians 13:10).

But What About Claims of Tongues Today?

Their claims must be false. There are at least four reasons we come to this conclusion:

1. There is no Holy Spirit baptism available today. The apostles and household of Cornelius were given this gift of tongues directly from heaven in baptismal measure. But each was for a specific purpose. And there was never another single case of Holy Spirit baptism referred to in the entire New Testament! These were special cases so for special reasons this was done. This direct operation of the Holy Spirit was never promised or intended for all men in all ages.

The apostle Paul says, "There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Ephesians 4:4-5). What was this one baptism? Is it water baptism or Holy Spirit baptism? The apostle commanded and administered water baptism in fulfillment of the Lord's commission given in Matthew 28:18-20. They were to do this unto the end of the world. On both Pentecost, (Acts 2), and at Cornelius' house, two baptisms were administered-Holy Spirit and water baptism! But by the time Paul wrote the Ephesian letter there was only one baptism. Which baptism had ceased? Which one was to be administered to every creature until the end of the world?

Water baptism was used in every case of conversion in the book of Acts. Whereas the Holy Spirit baptism was used only twice- once on the Jews at Pentecost and then on the Gentiles when Cornelius was converted. Thus all flesh (Jews and Gentiles) had been given the gospel by a special miracle from God. Since all people had been given a chance, the need for the baptismal measure of the Holy Spirit ceased, and the baptism of water for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16; I Peter 3:21) continued.

2. Apostles can no longer lay hands on people and impart this special gift. Of all the people who had these special miraculous gifts, only the laying on of the apostles' hands would give them these special powers. Philip was a spirit-filled evangelist from Jerusalem who could work miracles. But when Philip went to Samaria, because he was not an apostle, he had to wait for the apostles Peter and John to come and lay hands on certain people (Acts 8:14-19).

Since the death of the apostle John at the close of the first century there has been no possibility of men receiving miraculous spiritual gifts through these means. When the last man on whom the apostles had laid their hands died, miraculous gifts in special measure by the hands of men (like healing incurable disease, cleansing lepers, restoring sight to the blind, drinking poison, raising the dead or speaking in a tongue or language they had never heard or known so that people could understand) ceased to exist.

3. Paul said by inspiration that miraculous gifts would cease when the Perfect thing was revealed unto men. Paul plainly taught all nine of those spiritual gifts would be done away when "that which is perfect is come" (I Corinthians 13:8-10). The purpose for these gifts was to confirm and establish the gospel and to edify the Christian until such time as (a) the revelation of the gospel was complete (b) the church was growing strong within, and (c) church leaders could be developed by normal means.

Once the New Testament was completed and circulated, the need for these special gifts, such as tongues, ceased. God does for us through his inspired word what he once did through miracles before the truth was written down for us to know. Now we have in the Bible the "perfect law of liberty" (James 1:25) which will give us "all things that pertain to life and godliness ..." (II Peter 1:3).

4. What purpose could tongues serve now in the plan of God? Spiritual gifts were helping hands to an infant church. Just as parents give support and special assistance to a baby to teach him to walk, the Heavenly Father gave special direct help to the first century Christians as they learned to walk. But when a baby begins to learn to walk, the parent gradually withdraws direct support and encourages his child to develop more strength and skill. To keep on holding the child's hand directly would stop his growth. So it is with God's dealings with His church. He has removed the miraculous, direct helps from her grasp and walks by our side, giving us direction and aid and warning in His word. We do not need special miraculous helps, for our Lord is not a respecter of persons and has given every Christian adequate instruction in His wonderful word, the Bible.

Conclusion

The very obvious and necessary conclusion from the facts presented in this book is that miraculous gifts, such as speaking in tongues, are not available to men today. Thus whatever

else may be said of modern day claimants of such powers, it cannot be said that such claims are based on scriptural authority. It therefore becomes our duty to refute such false claims and to brand those who make the claims as false teachers. They may fool you, but not the Lord. **Beware!**

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