

## What About Speaking In Tongues?

More than likely, you are aware of the fact that in our day a great number of people talk about speaking in tongues. Some claim that they have this ability, while others admit that they themselves have never spoken in tongues, but they know people that have/do. There are also sincere Bible believers who are convinced that no one living today speaks in tongues like Christians did in the first century.

At least seven New Testament chapters speak of the miracle known as “speaking in tongues.” Specifically, we read about speaking in tongues in the following Bible texts: 1 Corinthians 12:10,30; 13:8; 14:2,4,5,6,13,14,18,19,22,23,26,27,28; Mark 16:17; Acts 2:4,6,8,11; 10:45,46; 19:5,6.

With all that is being said today about tongue speaking, we need to make certain that what we believe, teach, and practice is really based on the Bible. Please consider a series of basic questions about speaking in tongues.

**1.** What does it mean “to speak in tongues?” Answer: It means to have the miraculous ability to speak in a tongue or language that one has never studied before. A “tongue” is a language (Revelation 5:9). On the Day of Pentecost, when the Lord’s church had its beginning in the city of Jerusalem, the apostles of Jesus spoke in tongues (Acts 2:4). When the apostles spoke in tongues, the people who heard them speak could understand what they said, because they were speaking in the *language(s)* of those people (Acts 2:6,8,11).

**2.** Who gave the power to speak in tongues? A: The Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4; 1 Corinthians 12:7-10).

**3.** Other than the apostles, did any other people speak in tongues? A: Yes (Acts 19:5,6).

**4.** Did *all* Christians in the first century speak in tongues? A: “*Are all apostles? Are all prophets . . . do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?*” (1 Corinthians 12:29,30). Obviously, these are all rhetorical questions, so the answer to each of them is, “No.” So, no, not all Christians spoke in tongues.

**5.** How did disciples of Jesus receive the power to speak in tongues? A: In the case of the apostles, they were able to speak in tongues after they were baptized with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4,5; 2:4). Other Christians spoke in tongues after an apostle

laid hands on them: “. . . *they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied*” (Acts 19:5,6; for other examples of the apostles laying on hands, see Acts 8:14-20 and 2 Timothy 1:6).

**6.** Was the power to speak in tongues proof that the tongue speakers had “super spirituality,” or that they would live sinlessly? A: No. In the New Testament, we read of only one local church in which tongues were used during assemblies: the church in Corinth. Yet, in the book of 1 Corinthians, the Bible declares that many in that church were “*carnal*” (3:3), or “*weak and sickly*” (11:30). Thus, speaking in tongues was no guarantee that they would live sinlessly, or that tongue-speaking persons were more spiritual than others.

**7.** What does “unknown tongue” mean (1 Corinthians 14:2,4,13,14,19,27)? A: It does *not* mean a mystical or mysterious tongue, or some so-called “ecstatic utterance” that nobody on the earth understands. It simply means a language that was previously unknown to the speaker, that is, a tongue that the tongue speaker had never studied before.

It is important to note that in the verses just mentioned, in the King James Version the word “*unknown*” is added before “*tongue*,” making the KJV text read “*unknown tongue*.” However, in the original Greek language of the New Testament, the word “unknown” was not in those verses in 1 Corinthians 14. Thus, the KJV translators put it *in italics*. The passages should read “*tongues*” (as in the NKJV), rather than “*unknown tongues*.”

**8.** What was the purpose of speaking in tongues? A: The Bible shows three uses of this miracle: (1) To confirm the word of God, i.e., to prove to the listeners that the one who spoke in tongues was speaking a message from God, and thus what he said was true (Mark 16:17,20); (2) To serve as an evangelistic tool, allowing the speaker to preach in a foreign language to those who needed the gospel, like the apostles did on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:4,11); (3) To help edify (build up, strengthen) the church (1 Corinthians 14:5,12,26).

**9.** Were tongues a sign to someone? A: Yes. To whom? “*Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not*”

(1 Corinthians 14:22).

**10.** If there was no one that could interpret the message, what was the one with the gift of tongues to do? A: “*But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God*” (1 Corinthians 14:28).

**11.** What does it mean that the tongue speaker was to “*speak to himself and to God?*” (1 Corinthians 14:28). A: As we just noted above, if there was no interpreter, a tongue speaker was not allowed to address the assembly. Why? Because there would be no profit in speaking in a language that the people could not understand. In such cases, the tongue speaker could say his inspired message to himself and God. He could say it to God because God understands any language. He could also speak to himself in tongues, because evidently he could understand the meaning of what he was saying. This is so because the tongue speaker edified himself, and a person cannot be edified if he/she does not understand the message (1 Corinthians 14:4,5).

**12.** Was there any profit for tongue speakers to speak in tongues to others if the listeners did not understand? A: No, again, for there could be no edification without understanding (1 Corinthians 14:8,9,19,28). Remember, speaking in tongues was not some type of gibber-jabber – it was a real language. But, if those who heard someone speak in tongues could not make any sense out of what was being said, then it could not be beneficial to them without an interpreter. [In the same way, today if a man comes into our worship assembly and begins speaking in Italian to everyone assembled, but those present do not understand a word of the Italian language, then there would be no spiritual benefit in his continuing to speak in Italian, unless someone interprets it into a language that the listeners know.]

**13.** Was it acceptable for an unlimited number of Christians to speak in tongues at the same time in some sort of chaotic fashion? A: No. Why? “*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 . . . For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints . . . Let all things be done decently and in order*” (1 Corinthians 14:27,33,40).

**14.** Was the miraculous gift of tongue speaking

temporary, or permanent? A: Temporary, as seen by this statement: “. . . *whether there be tongues, they shall cease*” (1 Corinthians 13:8).

**15.** How long were tongues to be in effect, i.e., how long did God plan to continue to give men the power to speak in tongues? A: Just as long as His plan called for men to have prophetic powers, miraculous knowledge, and other spiritual/miraculous gifts. The Bible says that such gifts were “*in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away*” (1 Corinthians 13:8-10). So, there was to be the practice of speaking in tongues until the coming of “*that which is perfect.*”

In the context of 1 Corinthians 13:8-10, “*that which is perfect*” does *not* refer to Jesus or His second coming. Rather, it refers to the perfect or complete revelation of God that was given in the New Testament. So, speaking in tongues and all other miraculous gifts that were given to men were only a temporary phenomena. They were part of God’s plan only until the time that His complete truth was given to mankind.

**16.** But what about statements, such as those in 1 Corinthians 12:31 and 14:1,5, which tell Christians to desire miraculous gifts, including the gift of speaking in tongues? Don’t those still apply today? A: Once again, all of those spiritual gifts were temporary. They were only provided as long as they were needed for the edification of the church. *We do not need them today* because we have the complete truth (John 16:13), and we are built up or edified by God’s truth (Acts 20:32).

**17.** If we say that people still speak in tongues today, then what does that imply? A: It implies that God’s revelation to mankind is not yet complete, and that He is still using miracles to confirm new revelations from Him. But, the Lord *has* given us all of His truth (John 16:13), and the Bible *is* complete, so there is no need for any new revelation of religious truth from God to mankind. Since there is no need for more new truth or revelation to be given, then there is no further need for speaking in tongues (cf. John 20:30,31; Acts 20:32).

**18.** What are some problems that face those who claim to speak in tongues today? A: (1) Their *messages/doctrines* often *contradict one another*. In

some cases, what “tongue-speaking” Group A supposedly says “by the Spirit” contradicts what “tongue-speaking” Group B claims to say “by the Spirit.” One such group says that the Godhead consists of three: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Another “tongue-speaking” group says that Jesus is the only one in the Godhead. Obviously, it is not possible that both groups are right, though both claim that the Holy Spirit guides them to speak in tongues. If they were both teaching the truth, then their messages would not contradict each other (because truth cannot contradict itself).

(2) Their *message* often *contradicts the Bible*. For example, some “tongue-speaking” groups allow women to preach in the presence of men. Yet the Bible says, “*But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence*” (1 Timothy 2:12). If these people that claim to speak in tongues by the power of the Holy Spirit are really doing so, then why does their message contradict what the Holy Spirit says in the Bible?!

(3) Their *practice* often *contradicts the Bible*. For instance, as we have seen, the Bible teaches that in order to provide edification and to avoid confusion, no one is to speak in tongues in the assembly without an interpreter (1 Corinthians 14:28,33,40). Modern “tongue speakers,” often simultaneously with others, ramble on without anyone interpreting their message, and thus not one single person understands anything they say.

(4) There is a final matter that is quite revealing. When groups that say they practice speaking in tongues send their preachers to foreign countries, those preachers have to study the foreign language(s) just like everyone else does! Jesus’ apostles spoke in tongues, meaning they *did not need* to study the language(s) that they used to communicate the gospel (Acts 2). Do you not wonder why it is different for those modern denominational preachers that claim to speak in tongues?!

Union Grove church of Christ  
4889 Bates Pike SE      www.ugcoc.org  
Cleveland, TN 37323      Tel: (423)-479-8307  
Service Times: Sunday at 10:00 a.m. & 6:00 p.m.  
   Wednesday at 7:00 p.m.

This booklet was written by Roger D. Campbell.

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