

WHAT YOU CAN PROVE ABOUT TONGUES

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There is no question about the fact that the Bible teaches that ^{the gift of} tongues ^{is} are a genuine spiritual gift (I Cor. 12:10). Neither is there any doubt that a lot of people are claiming to have received that gift and experienced the results of it. We cannot question the reality of anybody's experience, but the reality of the experience is not the issue. The question is whether or not this speaking in tongues is a genuine Scriptural experience.

No one who thinks that tongues are not for today doubts that God could give the gift any time to any person. The basic issue is: Can you prove that God is giving it today? Of course, in discussing a matter like this there must be an impartial court of appeal, and experience is not. If one thinks he has spoken in tongues, then he will quite naturally want to appeal to that experience. The same is true for one who has not. But if both sides will let the Bible be the final authority, then there is a basis for profitable discussion. It is true that the Bible does not say categorically whether or not tongues have ceased. But the Bible does say some very plain things about tongues which are beyond debate. What, then, can you prove from the Bible about tongues?

1. YOU CAN PROVE THAT IN THEIR DISTRIBUTION SOME GIFTS ARE LIMITED

We are often told that if God gave a spiritual gift in one generation He must give it in every generation because He is the same. In relation to tongues, this argument is used to prove that since the gift of tongues was given by God in the first century, it must also be given by the same unchanging God in the twentieth century. There are two fallacies behind this kind of reasoning. First, God's power is not affected by a change in His program. If He decided to send an earthquake to release Paul and

Silas from a Philippian jail and decides later not to release Paul from his Roman death cell, this does not mean He could not have done so. If God uses Paul to bring healing to many others (Acts 19:11-12) but does not let Paul be healed himself, (2 Cor 12:7-10) this does not mean He could not have healed Paul. If God gave the gift of tongues to only a few in the first century and not to others in later centuries, this does not mean His power is lessened.

Second, any spiritual gift given only one time to one person is a gift to the whole church. The gift of apostleship was given to a very few. But who today is not still profiting from that gift given to Paul or Peter in the first century? Apostleship and prophecy are said to be limited gifts, given only to a few people and given only in the founding era of the Church (Eph. 2:20). Since we are not in the foundation period of the Church, we do not expect to see foundation gifts because they are no longer needed. Further, the writer to the Hebrews (2:3-4) declares that certain spectacular gifts were given to those who knew the Lord in person which were not given to others who also lived in the first century. There are limitations placed on spiritual gifts. Not all are given to all people, and not all are given to each generation. Tongues seems to be one of those spectacular gifts which was limited even within the generation to which it was given.

2. YOU CAN PROVE THAT TONGUES ARE FOREIGN LANGUAGES

There is not any doubt that the tongues given at Pentecost were foreign languages. People from more than a dozen different places heard the apostles preach to them in their own native languages (Acts 2:8-11). You will notice that the word unknown in the phrase "unknown tongue" is in italics throughout I Corinthians 14, which simply means that the translators have added it. If the word unknown did not appear in I Corinthians 14, a

reader would receive the definite impression that the Corinthians were speaking in the same kind of tongues that were given at Pentecost--foreign languages. Indeed, there is no reason given in the passage to think that these tongues were anything else, least of all some kind of unintelligible heavenly language. But, even granting that the Corinthian tongues were not foreign languages, you CAN prove that Pentecostal tongues were, and if today's tongues are supposed to be after the pattern of Pentecost, they are not Scriptural simply because they are not foreign languages.

3. YOU CAN PROVE THAT TONGUES WILL CEASE

First Corinthians 13:8 plainly states that tongues will cease. It does not say when, but it does state that they will. Literally, the verse says prophecies will be abolished (passive voice meaning that someone will stop them), knowledge (this is not general understanding, but the spiritual gift of knowledge used in relation to understanding oral revelation from God before the New Testament Scriptures were written) too will be abolished (same passive voice); but tongues will cease of their own accord (middle voice in the ^Ggreek text which means to stop by themselves). In other words, the verse says that tongues will die out before or, at the latest, by the time the gift of prophecy (which was a founding era gift) and the gift of knowledge (which is the understanding of God's revelation before it was written). If prophecy is a temporary gift, then tongues is too. ~~And~~ ~~prophecy~~ was a temporary gift given only in the very beginning of church history according to Eph^s₁ 2:20. Therefore, tongues will cease--~~not~~ when eternity comes, but when the gift of prophecy ceases, and that happened long ago.

4. YOU CAN PROVE THAT YOU CAN BE BAPTIZED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

AND NEVER SPEAK IN TONGUES

People insist that speaking in tongues is ^x"The initial physical evidence

of the baptism with the Holy Spirit." But you can prove that there were Corinthians who were baptized with the Spirit and who did not speak in tongues. Indeed, every believer has been baptized by the Spirit, for this work of the Spirit puts the Christian into the body of Christ. And since there are no believers outside the body of Christ, all have been baptized by the Spirit. Paul wrote that all have been baptized into one body by the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13; 14:5). Therefore, some were baptized by the Spirit who did not speak in tongues, and tongues cannot be said to be the necessary evidence of having been baptized by the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, not once in either letter to that Church did he exhort those who had not spoken in tongues to seek to speak in tongues. Every Christian has been baptized by the Spirit into the body of Christ, and tongues is not a necessary sign of that baptism.

5. YOU CAN PROVE THAT THE ORIGINAL PURPOSE OF TONGUES IS NOT
PRESENT TODAY

When Paul explains why some of the Corinthians spoke in tongues, he quotes an Old Testament passage (1 Cor. 14:21), and this passage (Isa. 28: 11-12) states that tongues would be given for the purpose of speaking to "this people" --that is, Jewish people. Tongues, therefore, were given for a sign to the unbelieving Jews ("this people"). This was true of the tongues that were given on the day of Pentecost as a sign to the Jews "out of every nation under heaven" who were gathered at Jerusalem (Acts 2:5). The tongues that are being practiced today do not meet this Scriptural purpose for the giving of that gift, for they are not used today in the presence of, and for the purpose of convincing unbelieving Jews of the truth of the gospel. The purpose for which today's tongues were used is not ^{the} a Scriptural one, for which they were given.

6. YOU CAN PROVE THAT THERE ARE MANY MORE IMPORTANT GIFTS THAN
TONGUES

When Paul lists the spiritual gifts in order of priority he puts apostleship first, prophecy second, teaching third, then miracles, healing, helps, administration, and tongues last. The Greek words for "first", "second", and "third", in 1 Corinthians 12:28 indicate a listing of the gifts in order of rank. It would be very helpful to the Church if some who are so concerned today about speaking in tongues would be more concerned about helping. The gift of helps is more important than the gift of tongues; since it appears ahead of tongues in Paul's list (1 Cor 12:28). Therefore, the person who helps a neighbor or who picks someone up in his car to go to Church is exercising a more important gift than the person who speaks in tongues. Time spent in the kitchen may be better spent than that which is spent at the altar seeking or practicing tongues.

7. YOU CAN PROVE THAT IT IS UNSCRIPTURAL FOR WOMEN TO SPEAK
IN TONGUES

A great deal has been written on the meaning of 1 Cor^{in Thims} 14:34--"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." Whatever the verse includes or excludes, it must be connected with the subject of the chapter which is speaking in tongues (the same word for "speak" is used in the chapter for speaking in tongues (v. 4) and for forbidding women to speak (v. 34)). So, whatever else the verse means, it must include the meaning that women are not to speak in tongues but are to keep silent. Therefore, many cases of speaking in tongues today are unscriptural simply because women are doing it.

8. YOU CAN PROVE THAT CHRISTLIKENESS DOES NOT DEPEND ON SPEAKING
IN TONGUES

The fruit of the Spirit is Christlikeness, and the fruit of the Spirit does not include speaking in tongues (Gal. 5:22-23). Therefore, speaking in tongues is not a requirement for Christlikeness. Furthermore, there is no record of Christ's ever having spoken in tongues. Indeed, the first instance of tongues was at Pentecost, after His ascension. Therefore, one could perfectly imitate Christ and never have to speak in tongues. No one should ever feel under pressure that his spiritual life is lacking in some way because he has not spoken in tongues. Christlikeness does not depend on that.

Why, then, has there been this current interest in speaking in tongues. Undoubtedly in many individuals it stems from a genuine desire to have an experience with God. In some instances I am confident that Satan gets into this picture. This is not to imply that he is involved only with fanatics. Satan is trying to promote a counterfeit and orderly religion, and I believe that the orderly practice of tongues is one of the ways he is doing it today. Neither does this mean that God may not also enter the situation and rescue it from Satan's complete domination. Satan counterfeits the will of God for Christians in many areas; there is no reason to exclude him from this area of religious experience of a counterfeit speaking in tongues. Deep fellowship with the Lord is fostered by greater knowledge of the Lord, and such knowledge comes through His written Word. It is high time for believers to concentrate on knowing the Word, imitating the Lord, and exercising the important spiritual gifts. You CAN prove these things are important and necessary.