

Why We Don't Speak in Tongues

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Speaking in tongues seems to be a fast growing aspect of religion today. Before the 1900s, almost no one claimed to speak in tongues in the manner that many see today. Even the Pentecostal churches themselves (where modern tongue speaking originates) only claims to seven instances of speaking in tongues between the first century and 1901, and these are highly questionable¹. Modern speaking in tongues in the late 1800s and early 1900s, and usually refers to speaking in a language unknown by men (some would say a "tongue of angels"), that sounds to the human ear as gibberish. Studies of speaking in tongues (called *glossolalia*) by linguists have confirmed that it lacks any indication of being any kind of language².

After 1901 (the beginning of the modern Pentecostal movement), many churches have begun to claim that speaking in tongues is a major part of their spiritual life; indeed, some churches claim that speaking in tongues is a necessary sign of salvation (contrary to the teaching of the Bible in 1 Cor. 12:7-11, 29-30). Still others claim that prayers need to be made in tongues so that Satan is unable to understand (a teaching completely absent from Scriptures). Today, *speaking in tongues* refers to speaking in an unintelligible muttering that is not a language known in the world. We will come to understand that the unintelligible nature of speaking in tongues is ONLY a modern understanding.

Why is it that we do not speak in tongues, and believe that no one else does either?

1. Modern speaking in tongues is unscriptural: Speaking in tongues was introduced for the first time in Acts 2. There we read the following: "*And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance*" (Acts 2:4). This statement makes it clear that speaking in tongues was speaking in a foreign language. If it is not clear here, it is clear subsequently: "*they were amazed and astonished, saying, 'Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born'*" (Acts 2:7-8). When we see tongues again mentioned in Acts 10:46-47, we are told that this is the same phenomenon as in Acts 2. These are the only two examples of speaking in tongues in the Scriptures, and they both reveal that speaking in tongues means speaking in foreign languages. Even when Paul instructs the church on how to properly use these gifts in worship in 1 Corinthians 14, it still reveals that these gifts are foreign languages.

Early writers after the end of the first century also confirm that this was the nature of speaking in tongues. Irenaeus (115-202) records this to be the case from his knowledge of the time. Cyril of Alexandria (c. 400AD) did not claim to have direct understanding, but tells us that the common interpretation of speaking in tongues in the New Testament was speaking in foreign languages. Indeed, until the 18th century, speaking in tongues was commonly understood as such; it is ONLY A MODERN AMERICAN

¹ *Pentecostal Churches*, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1979, vol 14, p31

² Samarin, W J (1968) *the Linguisticity of Glossolalia*. Hartford Quarterly, 8, 49-75;

Samarin's extensive study of glossolalia leads him to conclude that "*in spite of superficial similarities, glossolalia fundamentally is not language*" (Samarin 1972). He characterized it as: "...strings of meaningless syllables made up of sounds taken from those familiar to the speaker and put together more or less haphazardly. Glossolalia is language-like because the speaker unconsciously wants it to be language-like." (quoted in Nickell, 1993: 108)

MOVEMENT that speaking in tongues is speaking a language not known to men. Therefore, modern speaking in tongues is a practice not known to the Scriptures. We reject those things that are an addition to the word of God (Revelation 22:18-19).

What about 1 Corinthians 13:1? Some point to Paul's statement "*though I speak in the tongues of angels*" as a testimony of the ability of one to speak in languages that belong to angels, and not men. However, most fail to read on where Paul also compares spiritual knowledge with "*knowing ALL mysteries*" and faith with "*removing mountains*", both things which do not happen and never did. In other words, Paul's statements are CLEAR hyperbole, an exaggeration of the example to make a point. Paul's point was that without love, even an extreme (and non-existent) manifestation of the gift was meaningless (1 Corinthians 13:1-3). It is a sin to take Scripture out of context for our own justification (2 Peter 1:20-21).

2. Modern speaking in tongues is carnal: In the New Testament, the word "carnal" is used with several other words to describe those things that come from worldly sources. In 1 Corinthians 2 Paul uses words such as "worldly" and "natural" to describe things that are not from God (which he calls "*spiritual*"). Later in James 3:15 James adds the words "*earthly*" and "*demonic*" to describe carnal things. If something does not come from the Spirit (meaning it is revealed by the Word of God, John 6:63), then it is a carnal revelation.

One of the characteristics of carnality is that it glorifies men and not God, it causes divisions, and increases vain glory. Consider now modern speaking in tongues. Today men boast of the ability to speak in tongues, are they not doing so because it brings them an appearance of spiritual superiority? In the New Testament, true speaking in tongues was not something given to all Christians (1 Corinthians 12:8-10). If today men use it as a testimony of their salvation, they are sinning, as the only testimony of our salvation is what is written (1 John 5:13), which is why the testimony of salvation is by faith (Romans 10:9 and James 2:26).

Today, speaking in tongues has become a matter of glory and honor to many. They make a point of putting it on their websites, or of telling others of their secret prayers in tongues. Yet they fail to realize that in doing so they are making carnal what they think is spiritual. While we have seen that modern speaking in tongues is not the same as biblical speaking in tongues, even if it were, the obsession and braggadocio by most would make it something that we ought not to seek after. This seems to be Paul's point to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 14:17-19.

3. Modern speaking in tongues is unnecessary: The miraculous spiritual gifts of the first century were given with one purpose: to confirm the message being preached by the Apostles. "*How will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will*" (Hebrews 2:3-4; Mark 16:20, Acts 2:22, Romans 15:18-19, 1 Corinthians 2:4, etc.). The miraculous gifts of the Holy spirit, of which tongues is one, were to demonstrate that those who spoke did so by the will of God. Yet the New Testament writers made it clear that their message was finite; it would be completed, and these gifts would no longer be needed. Peter said at the end of his life that "*His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of*" Jesus (2 Peter 1:3). Jude said that our faith has been "once and

for all handed down” (Jude 3). Perhaps most effectively Paul said, at the end of his life, that *“all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work”* (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Paul’s clear statement left no room for anything else to be needed. In other words, if we are thoroughly equipped with the Scriptures, why would we need the gift of tongues? If we are made complete by Scriptures, what need of there is the gift of tongues? The answer is clear: there is no need for this gift. It was necessary to confirm the Word as it was being given, but once finished, it was no longer necessary.

This point is one that Paul told the Corinthians about beforehand. In 1 Corinthians 13:8-10 he says *“love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away”*. Of course, that which is perfect is the Scriptures; indeed, the same term describes what the Scriptures accomplish within the man of God, perfection. Here is a direct statement by an apostle that the gift of tongues is going to cease.

4. Modern speaking in tongues may be demonic: If we are to understand that modern speaking in tongues is not from Scriptures, that it contradicts scriptures, and it is in fact a worldly or carnal practice, another frightening possibility emerges. *“The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie”* (2 Thessalonians 2:9-11). We are told that this will come through power, signs and wonders performed by the working of Satan. We are told that God will send a strong delusion. All of this is because there are those who do not love the word (manifested as the Scriptures, the Word of God) will be sent a strong delusion.

If we know that the Scriptures reveal that modern speaking in tongues is not the same as the early Christian gift of the Holy Spirit; if we know that Scriptures reveal that a spiritual gift cannot be used to verify our salvation, and if we know Scriptures reveal that these gifts were meant to end when the New Testament was completed, then it would follow that anyone who practices modern speaking in tongues does so in opposition to the truth; therefore, they have a distinct and demonstrable lack of love for the truth. It is these that we are told will be deluded by the workings of Satan by signs. It is not clear how people who speak in tongues do so; many have admitted to making up the experience of speaking in tongues to “fit in”³, and others may merely work themselves into this behavior unwittingly (the unintelligible muttering found in modern speaking in tongues is not unique to Christianity, but is found in many pagan cultures today⁴). But the most disturbing possibility is for those who have not made up the ability nor have merely worked themselves into a frenzy: this is a sign from Satan. Scriptures reveal that he disguises himself as an “angel of light” (2 Corinthians 11:14). We are told that we must consider all gifts

³ Spanos, Nicholas P.; Cross, Wendy P.; Lepage, Mark; Coristine, Marjorie (February 1986). “Glossolalia as learned behavior: An experimental demonstration”. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 95

⁴ Goodman, Felicitas D. (1972). *Speaking in Tongues: A Cross-Cultural Study in Glossolalia*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press

and messages as potentially counterfeit (Galatians 1:8-9, 1 John 4:1). Yet too many accept speaking in tongues without that important test, and may be misled by Satan himself.

We do not practice speaking in tongues. Indeed, we fear such, knowing it is not from God. In churches where tongues are NOT identified as a gift today, NO ONE speaks in tongues. In the churches of Christ in the United States, it is unknown for speaking in tongues by church leaders or worship leaders to occur. Some might claim that the Spirit simply has not come upon those who do not believe in tongues, but at the same time they claim that speaking in tongues is an uncontrollable gift. It came on Cornelius before he was a Christian (Acts 10:44-48), so why not on sincere Bible believing Christians today in churches of Christ? Some might say that this means that members of the church of Christ are therefore unbelievers; yet the gift of tongues were given to convict unbelievers (1 Corinthians 14:22 "tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers"). There is only one answer: if only those who believe tongues are a gift today receive them, yet in Scriptures they were given as a sign to those were not believers, then what people call speaking in tongues today is NOT the same thing.