

ARE TONGUES FOR TODAY?

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INTRODUCTION

- Tongues (*glossolalia*) is one of the nine *charisma* or “grace-gifts” of the Spirit in 1 Cor 12:4-11. Tongues has two functions:
- (1) In the Book of Acts, it is an authenticating gift meant to affirm a new group entering the church
- (2) In 1 Cor 12-14 or Rom 12, it is a “spiritual gift” bestowed upon select individuals

KEY ISSUES

- What is the nature of speaking in tongues— unknown or known languages? Either/or? Both/and?
- Is the Holy Spirit still dispensing this gift and is it in operation today?
- Is there a special filling or “baptism with the Spirit” subsequent to regeneration and conversion?

EVANGELICAL CAMPS

- Conversion-Initiation: The idea of “baptism with the Spirit” occurs in two passages in Acts (1:5 [2:4]; 11:16), which were unique experiences. But for us today such a baptism takes place at conversion (cf. 1 Cor 12:13)
- Wesleyan holiness movements seeks a second-step experience (“entire sanctification”)—distinct from conversion—when believers experience the fullness of the Spirit
- Charismatic-Pentecostals emphasize the power for witness accompanied by sign gifts

MEGA-CHURCH IN SINGAPORE

- “We believe in the baptism in the Holy Spirit as a real experience at or subsequent to salvation, with the scriptural evidence, namely, speaking in other tongues as the Spirit gives utterance” (Acts 2:1-4; 8:14-17; 10:44-45; 19:6)

GOSPELS

- In Lu 3:15 (cf. Matt 3:11), John the Baptist prophesies that the Messiah “will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.” Pentecostals often see in this as a precursor to their doctrine of “baptism in the Holy Spirit.”
- More likely, the passage looks forward to Pentecost (Acts 1:5; 2:4). The theology of Luke-Acts demonstrates that the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost was an integral part of Christian salvation (Lu 3:16; Acts 1:5; 11:16; 1 Cor 12:13) and not a “second blessing” of the Spirit’s work attained by all believers (Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 35)

GOSPELS

- “Again Jesus said, ‘Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.’ And with that he breathed on them and said, ‘Received the Holy Spirit’” (Jn 20:21-22)
- Johannine Pentecost: Did this contradict the Jewish Pentecost? Was it proleptic?
- Jn 20:22 likely refers to a private infusing, while Acts 2 was the public empowering that inaugurated the new age of the Spirit

ACTS

- The case for *glossolalia* relies heavily on the narrative passages in Acts (1:5; 2:4; 8:4-17; 10:44-45; 19:1-7)
- While the theme is present, the major theological thrust deals with global mission (Acts 1:8; 2:9-11)
- Acts is about the spread of the gospel from Jerusalem to the Samaritan Pentecost (8:14-19), the Gentile Pentecost (10:44-46), and the Ephesian Pentecost (19:6)

ACTS

- In addressing the Samaritan Pentecost (8:14-19), Gentile Pentecost (10:44-46), Ephesian Pentecost (19:6), two misconceptions are highlighted:
- (1) Baptism with the Spirit as a second step filling. Should historical descriptions be used as prescriptions? There are many episodes in Acts where tongues are not initiatory experiences (4:31; 8:17; 9:17-18)
- (2) Tongues as a sign gift to authenticate the apostolic message. In actuality, they authenticated the addition of new groups to the church for the sake of those in Jerusalem

1 COR 12-14

- Tongues are no longer treated as apologetic proof but a part of worship
- Are the tongues expressed in 1 Cor different than those in Acts? (e.g., 1 Cor 13:1; 14:2)
- The basic problem at Corinth was elevating tongues to the greatest gifts and the lack of Christian love. Paul seemingly considers it the least of the gifts (12:28)

1 COR 12-14

- 1 Cor 14 explores the value of tongues. Without interpretation, it is incomprehensible and does not edify like prophecy. As a sign, it seems to outsiders as madness (14:21-23)
- Paul recognizes the validity of tongues as a spiritual gift (14:18). Nonetheless, it is relegated to private devotions (14:28) and must be used in worship with dignity and order (14:26-33)
- Finally, Paul would not forbid tongues, as long as it is expressed in a fitting and orderly manner (14:39-40)

KEY QUESTIONS

- Are tongues for every age?
- Are tongues the necessary sign of baptism with (in) the Holy Spirit?

NON-CESSATIONISM

- Pentecostals and most Charismatic answer “yes” to both questions
- They make a clear distinction between baptism with the Spirit (Acts) and tongues (1 Cor)
- The former is for every believer; the latter is given to those whom the Spirit chooses
- Since *glossolalia* is the initial evidence of Spirit baptism, every believer should seek it
- The outbreak of tongues in the 20th century refers to the “autumn rains” (Joel 2:23) prophesied for the last days in Acts 2:16-21

CESSATIONISM

- This group answers “no” to both questions
- Supernatural gifts ceased at the end of the apostolic era or gradually faded away
- Sign gifts were meant to authenticate the message of the apostles
- The “perfect” in 1 Cor 13:10 refers to the close of the canon and tongues “ceased in and of themselves” (παύσονται, middle voice 13:8)

MIDDLE POSITION

- Proponents answer “yes” to the first question but “no” to the second
- The term “perfect” (τέλειον) in 1 Cor 13:10 refers to the “perfect age” after we will see Christ “face to face” (13:12)
- Paul says, “Do not forbid speaking in tongues” (1 Cor 14:39), though not all speak in tongues (1 Cor 12:30)
- The gift of tongues is not the initial sign of Spirit baptism, since there was no consistent pattern in Acts

CONCLUSIONS

- While the Bible does not explicitly teach that tongues have ceased or are relegated to the first century, many are cautious about modern day practices that do not conform to the Bible
- Rather than miraculous gifts, the church should emphasize evangelism, Bible study, and faithful obedience as keys to personal and church growth
- Our attitude should be “seek not, forbid not”
- Pentecostals and Charismatics have contributed to refreshing worship and renewal in faith

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What new insights, if any, did you gain from the presentation today?
- What is at stake—theologically, spiritually, and ministerially—if one holds to tongues or not?
- Why do you suppose the subject of tongues is still controversial or divisive in Singapore today?