What's All This Talk About Tongues?

A Look At The Tongues-Speaking Phenomenon

I sincerely hope that people who read the following commentary will appreciate my concern for the truth and the time that went into presenting this material. It was prepared to help Christians keep from being tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine and to scripturally understand the often emotional and divisive issue of speaking in tongues.

Question 1: Is a different gospel being preached?

When we say that a person needs to speak in some unknown or supposedly supernatural language to be truly saved, is the Gospel being added to? Well, many charismatics and Pentecostals are in effect saying we need something else beyond salvation to be complete in Christ, an experience they call the 'Baptism of the Holy Spirit', also known as 'the second work of grace', although this latter term is not used as much anymore. This is very dangerous talk since we may be adding to the Gospel of Christ which will put the curse of God on a person (Galatians 1:8). It is better to be safe than sorry when it comes to teachings about salvation. Since God's Spirit bears witness with our Spirit (1 John 5:6) when we are saved, we can know without a doubt that we are complete in Christ (Praise God!) apart from any experiences we may or may not have had since Jesus Christ came into our hearts and lives… scripture says that we are complete in Christ in Colossians 2:10. God's main concern for us in our lives is that we surrender our lives to His will daily.

Question 2: Is the ability to speak in tongues a sign of spirituality?

The tongues issue can be a source of serious division in the Church because those who supposedly have this gift are often considered more spiritual than those who don't. Those who don't are made to feel incomplete by Pentecostal churches that teach that you lack true 'power' from God if you have not had the 'experience' of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit as evidenced by the ability to speak in an unknown or unlearned language. Many Pentecostal churches teach that a person is not equipped to witness until he gets 'power to witness' by speaking in tongues through 'Spirit Baptism'. This attitude can easily discourage new believers from witnessing for Christ if they have not had this "experience". The Samaritan woman at the well in John chapter 4 did not have to 'tarry' before she started telling people about Jesus. Nor did the man born blind who witnessed to the Jewish leaders in John chapter 9.

A good gauge of who is spiritual, according to scripture, is someone who has a deep love for the Lord as evidenced by their desire to be obedient to God (1 John 2:4-6). Truly spiritual Christians have a love for:

1. the Lord and His return –> 2 Timothy 4:8
2. prayer ————————-> 1 Thessalonians 5:17
3. the brethren ————–> 1 John 2:10
4. the lost ————————-> Matthew 18:11
5. sacrificial living ———–> Romans 12:1
6. scriptural truth ————> Psalm 119:97
7. righteousness ————–> Matthew 5:6

Question 3: Is tongues speaking & spirit baptism really needed to obtain power to witness?

Regardless of what people may want, there are no short-cuts to Christian growth, just like there are no short-cuts to becoming an Olympic athlete or a major league superstar. It takes dedication and the desire to overcome *many* setbacks and failures along the way. Power to witness can only come from fervent prayer and Bible study and from the growing pains that result when we become fools for Christ and risk our reputation, our financial security, and everything else to bring light and hope to a world that is headed for eternal damnation in Hell. Paul himself said "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection" (1 Corinthians 9:27). Athletes don't just sit back, eat munchies, watch TV and then ask God for a miracle when the day of the race comes. And yet that's what belief in 'Spirit Baptism' can lead to, when you trust in a certain kind of supernatural experience from God to provide you with power to witness, especially if you've already received all the power from God that you need at the time that you became born-again.

Question 4: Should people be discouraged from testing the spirits?

Because of their stand on the doctrine of tongues, Pentecostal churches are more likely to overlook error rather than test the spirits (via scripture!) as the Bible says we should in 1 John 4:1. This is evidenced by the Pentecostal teaching that we could be committing the unpardonable sin of blasphemy of the Holy Spirit if we question the authenticity of a person's tongues speaking or if we question any claim about a supernatural ability that a person says is from God. This kind of "hands-off" attitude about questioning a person's gifts or claims is a built-in time bomb that makes it easy for a church to become flooded with lying wonders (2Thes 2:9).

Question 5: Do secret prayer languages help or hinder our communication with God?

When praying in a group, tongues speakers exercising their so-called prayer language have often distracted my attention away from God and away from a person being prayed for and towards the tongues speaker. God cannot be the author of such a thing because God is not the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33)… would God distract us when we are talking to God?

Question 6: Is tongues speaking really related to prayer?

In Matthew 6:9-13 Jesus tells us how to pray and He says nothing about praying in tongues nor is there any mention in the Bible of Jesus speaking in tongues or in a mysterious 'prayer language'. This is a very significant omission, especially when many Pentecostals say that every believer could or should have this 'prayer language'. And who can question what they are saying when they claim that only God can understand their utterances? Not only that, but what examples in the entire Bible can you find for someone who spoke to God in a language that they themselves did not understand? Scripture makes it clear that God wants us to know what we are saying to Him as we see in 1 Corinthians 14: "14 For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but **my understanding is unfruitful**. 15 What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also." Paul says we are to pray and to sing *with our understanding* otherwise what we say is *unfruitful*.
Those who are unfruitful are often those who are unsaved (see Matt 7:18-19). If you really feel strongly about your need to speak and pray in tongues, I urge you to examine yourself to see if you are indeed "in the faith" (2 Cor 13:5). Make sure that you are really a child of God and not somebody who equates salvation with signs and wonders. Jesus said that people who seek after signs were 'the wicked' (i.e. unbelievers):

> Matthew 12:39 – "But he answered and said unto them, **An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign**; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas"
> Matthew 16:4 – "**A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign**; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas. And he left them, and departed."

True believers are more than satisfied with what Christ has already done for them by saving them from the eternal wrath of God and translating them into His glorious kingdom by the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Question 7: Is there an over-emphasis on getting a gift from God?

Some Pentecostals say that the gift is only for those who want it, who seek it. However, we must not forget that God is sovereign. He does what *He* pleases when *He* pleases. He gives spiritual gifts for His own reasons and for His own glory as we see mentioned in Hebrews chapter 2: "3 How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; 4 God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, **according to his own will**?". God gives spiritual gifts *according to His own will*. Note also that the signs and wonders were a witness to the authenticity of the prophets of God who were proclaiming God's

word to the people. We see also in Romans 12:6 that gifts are given to believers according the God's grace: "Having then gifts differing **according to the grace that is given to us**, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith".

As difficult as it may be for people to admit, the practice of seeking after the tongues experience causes excessive preoccupation with oneself and with what a person can get from God, when we as believers, should be thankful for our salvation and all the other blessings and gifts that God has *already* bestowed upon us. We should be concerned about what we can do for others with the gifts God has already given us. This misplacement of believers' priorities is what Paul was addressing in his first letter to the church at Corinth, especially chapter 12, and that is why he admonished the church about love being of utmost importance in 1 Corinthians chapter 13.

Pentecostal churches focus so much upon speaking in tongues yet Paul considers it to be one of the least of the gifts in 1 Corinthians 14:19 where he says he would rather speak just a few words that people understand than TEN THOUSAND that people do not understand. Why is one of the least of the spiritual gifts the most prominent and sought after gift in Pentecostal churches today? Why is it almost exclusively manifested within the four walls of a church building instead of in public where lost souls abound if indeed Paul is correct in saying that it is a sign for unbelievers in 1 Corinthians 14:2?

Question 8: What about tongues speaking in the Catholic Charismatic movement?

Why is it that in a church that most definitely preaches a false gospel of works, sacraments, and human traditions, do we also find many tongues speakers (in its Charismatic movement)? It is because there is no one there who knows the true, unadulterated gospel who is willing or able to test the spirits and who is willing or able to search the scriptures. This statement is based on:
1. first-hand knowledge of the Catholic Church
2. involvement in charismatic Catholic prayer group
3. research into teachings and origins of Catholicism
4. research into the origin of the Catholic charismatic movement.

Question 9: What really happened at Pentecost:

Acts 2:41 says that about 3000 people were saved in one day after the apostle Peter preached the Gospel to a large crowd of people. Who can we attribute this mighty accomplishment to? Peter or the apostles who now had this special Pentecostal 'power' from on high? That's what many Pentecostals believe. Surely they were vessels that God used but there have been non-Pentecostal preachers who had large numbers of people respond to their preaching also. One must ask: "where did they get their power from?". Did someone forget to tell them that they were not yet ready to witness because they had not experienced 'the second work of grace'? And did someone forget to tell the listeners who were being saved that the preachers had never

received the second baptism of the Holy Ghost as evidenced by speaking in tongues? No, the power was in the Spirit of God and the Word of God that the non-Pentecostal preachers proclaimed… "faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17)… "for the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword" (Hebrews 4:12).

Question 10: How did the tongues movement start?

Why is it that tongues speakers did not appear on the scene (with a few exceptions who were considered heretics) until a woman named Agnes Ozman had a tongues speaking experience in 1901 in Topeka Kansas, followed by others who had similar experiences on Azusa Street in Los Angeles in 1906? These incidences were not all that isolated either. Birds of a feather tend to flock together. Many early-1900s Pentecostals were disciples of other tongues-speaking advocates. Many modern-day cults have had similar beginnings based on the experiences of their founders rather than on the Word of God. The Pentecostal reference to scriptures in chapter 2 of Joel about God pouring out his Spirit in the last days is by no means a specific statement that tongues speaking was going to proliferate at some point in the future. God has poured out His Spirit on every believer since the day of Pentecost. The Bible says so in I Corinthians 12:13 – "For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body". Pentecost was the day that Joel 2:28 was fulfilled as recorded in Acts chapter 2, verses 16-21 where Peter quoted Joel 2:28. That prophecy need not be continually fulfilled or repeated.

Question 11: So just what are we witnessing?

In most cases we are witnessing learned behavior, much the same as when a child learns to speak by consciously or unconsciously imitating sounds that he or she hears. I have heard tongue speakers repeat the same sounds every time they made an utterance to the point where I myself could imitate them. I have heard others speak in a known foreign language that corresponds to their ethnic background, and yet someone in church would interpret something they said and the interpretation would take half as much time to speak as the original utterance and they would speak in the 'first person' as if it was God himself speaking. Since with God all things are possible, there could still be rare instances today when God enables someone to speak in a known language they have not learned as a sign for unbelievers but that does not mean the 'prayer language' is scriptural. God wants us to know what we are saying to him. Prayer is not for God's benefit, for He has need of nothing (Psalm 50:9-12). People quote Roman's 8:26 and I Corinthians 13:1 to back up their belief in a prayer language and yet neither of these verses gives a clear endorsement of such a practice.

Question 12: If tongues is no more than learned behavior, why is it becoming so widespread today?

Based on the negative fruit that is often associated with this gift (pride, envy, division, and confusion), what we usually see of this phenomenon is just

fulfillment of 2 Timothy 4:3. Like Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, many Pentecostal believers start out as innocent babes in Christ who are lead astray by a belief that what God has already given them is not sufficient and that they need something He has not yet given them, the so-called 'second work of grace'. There are lots of bad teachers out there who insist that you need a supernatural tongues experience to be a complete Christian and this is just not true, neither is it scriptural. Consider how much division this "gift" causes in the body of Christ and also take note of what Jesus said in John 17:21… "that they all may be one". Unfortunately, the unity being preached by most leaders in Charismatic ministries today is a satanic unity – a unity of professing evangelical Christians with the unsaved at the expense of Biblical truth. Christians in these ministries are redefining what a Christian is to allow Catholics and apostate Protestants to be referred to as fellow Christians for the 'greater good' which today consists of uniting for some social cause or family values at the expense of warning the lost do-gooders to flee God's wrath. This corrupt unity would never have been so successful if not for the Charismatic/tongues movement sweeping Protestant and Catholic churches today.

Conclusions: What should someone do who has already spoken in tongues?

First, the person should prayerfully consider the possibility that they were taught a lie. It is difficult to admit that we are wrong about something as personal as speaking in tongues because we have to admit that we were deceived by people we trusted very much, and coming to terms with that fact can be very difficult even if the people who did the deceiving did not do it intentionally. The person speaking in tongues would also have to admit that they are engaged in an unscriptural practice and that is not easy, especially for someone who has been doing something wrong for years AND who has told others to do it. Besides stopping the practice of speaking in tongues the individual needs to repent and tell the Lord that they are sorry that they did not search the scriptures as much as they searched for an experience and that they may have been overly preoccupied with themselves and getting something from God.

The Lord wants us to faithfully use the gifts He has undeniably given us to minister to a lost and dying world – a world that desperately needs to see self-sacrificing Christians going about God's business instead of being preoccupied with themselves. — *RM Kane*

For a lot more information about speaking in tongues and about modern Charismatic teachings see our "Articles About The Charismatic Movement" web page.