

LIVING WORD FELLOWSHIP CHURCH

Pastor Paul Cannings, D.Phil.

Tongues as Discussed in the Book of Acts

A. Introduction:

There are many things said about tongues, and the manifestation of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer, that is sometimes a result of inept study or just a repeat of information heard without a proper examination of the subject. The purpose of this study is to examine this issue from a biblio-centric perspective. It is not to refute or create controversy, and division among us, but to objectively evaluate what is consistent with the Word of God.

B. Tongues is it a Spirit Filled Gift for the Church Today?

There are only seven passages in the entire Bible that address this issue. The passages are Isaiah 28:11-12; Joel 2:28 which finds it's context in verses 19-32 and was quoted by Peter in Acts 2:16-21. Other passages related to this subject are Mark 16:17; Acts 2;10;19 and 1 Corinthians 12-14. We will seek to address each one as it relates to this subject.

C. Definition of tongues:

1. Tongues is from the Greek word *glossa* which refer either to the physical organ or to a language. This is found in (1 Corinthians 14:18; Acts 2 and 1 Corinthians 12-14).
2. Another word related to tongues that was used in Acts 2 is "*dialect*". This again refers to a known language.
3. *Unknown tongues* are mentioned in 1 Corinthians 13:1. This is a language that is not of this world. However, the word "unknown" is added to the King James Version that is why it is in italics. Paul, also in this passage states that speaking in a tongue that is not a known language is "only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal". In other words, it was meaningless. "*There are, perhaps, a great many kinds of languages in the world, and no kind is without meaning*" (1 Corinthians 14:10).
 - a) There were pagan religions in Corinth that were using meaningless chatter as a form of worship. I also believe that this is why Paul told the church in Corinth to get interpreters (1 Cor. 14:13,27), because he wanted to steer them away from meaningless chatter.
 - b) "*Unknown tongues.*" This is a language that is not of this world. Therefore, 1 Corinthians 13:1 cannot be used to prove that Paul is advocating meaningless, ecstatic speech or some kind of heavenly or angelic message.
4. *Tongue* (singular use in 1 Corinthians 14:2):
 - a) The context shows that Paul is focused on the fact that spiritual gifts are not for personal edification, it is focused on building others up. So, if someone was to speak in an unknown tongue, they are using their gift for their own personal benefit, and not the benefit of the body, and this is not the purpose of a gift.
5. It is quite obvious that Paul (1 Corinthians) and Luke (Acts) were speaking of a known language, not meaningless chatter, which we find much of today. The use of tongues was a sign of Israel's rejection of the truth (Isa. 28:11-12), and God's desire to reach the lost throughout the world (Acts 2).

D. Analysis of Passages Mentioned Above:

1. Isaiah 28:11-12 – the history surrounding what took place in Acts 2:
 - a) This passage serves as a rebuke to Israel's leaders for their refusal to listen to Isaiah. Because these leaders refused to listen to Isaiah; God, through Isaiah, states that He will speak to them in Gentile tongues. So, what occurred in Acts 2:4,6 serves as a condemnation to Israel because of their lack of respect for God's Word as well as Jesus Christ. They nailed Him to a cross.
 - b) Acts 2:1-13:
 - We have already discussed this passage and came to the following conclusions: the word tongues used in verse 4 was tied to dialect in verse 6, so this was a known language provided to disciples. This is why soon after they spoke in tongues the names of the countries are listed.

- This makes sense especially when you read (1 Corinthians 14:18-19).
- When Paul talks about tongues, he references it as a known language (1 Corinthians 14:18).

c) Acts 10:44-48 (Peter reports this incident in 11:17 & 15:7-9):

- There was a manifestation of the Holy Spirit first because they accepted Christ into their hearts. Tongues came later because I believe this was truly the only way Peter's Jewish companions as well as Peter would really believe that the Gentiles brothers were saved.
 - Christ had to give Peter a vision, and the Holy Spirit had to command him (Acts 10:1-29), before he would even consider going to Cornelius's house.
 - Paul had to hold Peter accountable (Galatians 2:11-14) for how he responded to the Gentiles demonstrating that Peter struggled with the Gentiles receiving salvation just like the Jews. Here are some examples:
 - i) 10:34: *"And opening his mouth, Peter said: "I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears him and does what is right, is welcome to Him."*
 - ii) 10:45: *"And all the circumcised believers who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out upon the Gentiles also."*
 - iii) 10:47: *"Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?"*

2. In Paul's case this manifestation was not necessary. Paul went to one place after another and Gentiles accepted Christ, but there was no such manifestation (tongues; Acts 19:1-7) because it was clear to Paul that his ministry was to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15-16).

3. Acts 19:1-7: **Question:** Does it take the laying of hands to receive the Holy Spirit after accepting Christ as Savior?

- a) When Paul placed his hands on them this was another significant time in church history (just like it was for Peter in the passage above) because Ephesus was a new center of the Gentile mission-the next in importance after Syrian Antioch. These twelve disciples were to be the nucleus of the Ephesian Church (Acts 19:9,10; 20:13-38).
- b) This had to be a significant event because there are several other times in Acts that the apostles place their hands on someone or individuals, and they did not speak in tongues (Acts 6:6; 13:3; 9:17). The Acts 9:17 passage is a significant demonstration of this because it states that when Ananias placed his hands on Paul, Paul was filled with the Holy Spirit, but he did not speak in tongues.

E. A Summary that supports what took place in Acts from 1 Corinthians 12-14:

1. There are several points in this passage which highlights Paul's desire to have less emphasis placed on tongues in the Corinthian church. These points are as follows:

- a) Paul viewed tongues as one of the lesser gifts (1 Corinthians 12:31).
- b) Tongues that are intelligible words do not edify the body (1 Corinthians 14:4, 9-17).
- c) Paul did not view tongues as important for church worship service (1 Corinthians 14:18-19).
- d) Tongues were for unbelievers, so what use is it for believers in a church service (1 Corinthians 12:21-22).
- e) Those who make tongues an important part of the church is thinking like children (1 Corinthians 13:8-12; 14:20).
- f) Intelligible words will not reach an unbeliever, it would drive them away (1 Corinthians 14:23-24).
- g) One of the reasons Paul discouraged tongues is that it creates confusion (1 Corinthians 14:9,16,23,33).

F. Conclusion:

With everything said about tongues in the Book of Acts I do not believe that tongues cease. I believe it exist as Paul states for drawing the unbeliever to Christ when those sharing the Gospel do not know the language.

I pray that tongues and Acts was helpful.