The Biblical Purpose for TONGUES"

I Corinthians 14:20-22

12-10-2023

INTRODUCTION: *We are to base our beliefs on Scripture, not experience or emotional feelings.

What is the Nature of Tongues?

Tongues were literal languages (Acts 2:2-11) (never gibberish or a "heavenly language")

What is the PURPOSE of Tongues?

SEE: I Cor. 14:20-22

I. Tongues were given as a SIGN (v.22)

("*Tongues are for a sign")*

II. Tongues were given as a sign to UNBELIEVING ISRAEL (v.21)

(*I will speak unto this people (Israel) [see: Isa.28:11-12])*

III. Tongues were given as a sign of JUDGEMENT to unbelieving Israel (v.21)

What is Wrong With Speaking in Tongues?

A. Today's "tongues" is wrong, because it is encouraged for everyone.

B. Today's "tongues" is wrong, because it is interpreted as proof of spiritual maturity.

C. Today's "tongues" is wrong, because it is claimed to be the sign of the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

D. Today's "tongues" is wrong, because it is not practiced according to the rules laid down in Scripture.

1. First: Tongues speaking must acknowledge the Lordship of Christ (I Cor. 12:3).
2. Second: There must be an interpreter (I Cor. 14:5, 27, 28).
   Edification was necessary if the gift was to be exercised in the church (I Cor. 14:3, 4, 5, 6, 17, 19).
3. Third: The "tongues" speaker must realize that "tongues" is not a priority gift (I Cor. 14:19); therefore, boasting of such a gift is unwarranted.
4. Fourth: Tongues should be exercised in the presence of unbelieving Jews (I Cor. 14:21-22).
   Jews require a "sign" (I Cor. 1:22).The sign gift of tongues was to "this people" (I Cor. 14:21 - Israel).
5. Fifth: No more than three persons may exercise this gift at any one meeting (I Cor. 14:27).
6. Sixth: Women are not to speak with tongues in church (I Cor. 14:34, 35).
7. Seventh: The gift must be governed by love (I Cor. 13:1), and by orderliness (I Cor. 14:40).

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INTRODUCTORY ADMONITION:

*We are to base our beliefs on Scripture, not experience or emotional feelings.

Experience cannot dictate doctrine. In other words, we are to test any experience by doctrine, not test doctrine by experience. We must "try the spirits" (I Jn. 4:1; Is. 8:20).

The Bible

For feelings come and feelings go,
And feelings are deceiving.

My warrant is the Word of God;
Naught else is worth believing.

Tho' all my heart should feel oppressed
For want of some sweet token,

There is One greater than my heart,
Whose Word cannot be broken.

I'll trust in God's unchanging Word,
Till soul and body sever;

For tho' all things shall pall away,
His Word shall stand forever!

What is the Nature of Tongues?

A. Tongues were literal languages (Acts 2:2-11)
(never gibberish or a "heavenly language")

Proof:

1. The definition of tongues:

   a. **"Glossa"** (from which we derive our English word "glossary")

      1) Refers to the literal physical tongue (Rom. 3:13)
      2) Refers to a tribe, kindred, people, or nation (Rev. 7:9)
      3) Primarily refers to a literal language (Acts 2:4, 11)

   b. **"Dialektos"** (from which we derive our English word "dialect")

      Only refers to literal languages (Acts 21:40 - "He spake unto them in the Hebrew tongue...")

      NOTE: The words "glossa" and "dialektos" are used synonymously in Acts 2. Acts 2:8, 11 - "We [hear] every man in his own tongue (dialektos). . . we . . . hear them speak in our tongues (glossa)."

2. The demonstration of tongues:
   (Acts 2:8-12)

   --**15** literal languages listed

   NOTE: The gift of tongues always involved a literal known ethnic language, though it was unknown to the speaker (he was not speaking a language he knew, but was speaking a language known somewhere in the world).

   The word "unknown" in I Cor. 14:2, 4, 13, 19, etc., is italicized, meaning it is not in the Greek.

B. Tongues were revelatory in nature (Acts 2:11)

The Spirit of God was speaking directly to and through those who spoke in tongues.

God is not pouring out new revelation today. The only way He directly speaks today is through the Bible!

What is the PROBLEM with Tongues?

Much confusion and unsound doctrine has arisen because of a misunderstanding of Scriptures dealing with the matter of tongues.

In the N.T. the sign gift of tongues is specifically mentioned in only five passages of Scripture:

A. <u>Prophetical</u> Passage - foretold by Jesus, Mark 16:17

B. <u>Historical</u> Passages -

1. The Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-13)

2. The House of Cornelius (Acts 10:44-47; 11:15-18)

3. The disciples of John the Baptist (Acts 19:1-7)

[NOTE: An implied reference is in Acts 8:16-18.]

C. <u>Doctrinal</u> Passage - the church in Corinth, I Cor. 12:1-14:40

There is a great need to understand I Cor. 12-14 in its <u>context</u>!

NOTE: The problems in the Corinthian church throughout the book.

The Corinthians are described as "divisive" (1:10) and "carnal" (3:1).

Therefore, the bulk of the teaching Paul gives in this book is <u>corrective</u> in nature. Paul does not condone their practices but actually condemns and corrects their practices (one such practice was their speaking in tongues).

<u>Chapter 12</u>

The need for unity and harmony in the church. The problem at Corinth was that everyone in the church was seeking to be in the limelight (or to be prominent, to have the eye-catching, notable gifts which could be seen by others, such as tongues).

In chapter 12 Paul, therefore, unfolds the importance of every gift and every body part.

<u>Chapter 13</u>

While everyone was busy coveting the "best gifts," Paul in I Cor. 13 shows the prominence and necessity of Love over gifts (specifically over tongues -

v. 1, 8).

Chapter 14

In this chapter Paul condemns the improper use of tongues, and shows the priority of "prophesying" (teaching people in a language they know and understand).

Two key ideas in 14:1-19 -

Prophecy edifies, tongues does not (v. 1-12)

Prophecy is understandable, tongues is not (v. 13-19)

[NOTE: In order for tongues to edify or be understood, interpretation was needed - v. 5, 26-28]

What is the PURPOSE of Tongues?

SEE: I Cor. 14:20-22

v.20 ***"...In understanding be men"*** **-** be mature; grow up when it comes to understanding God's purpose for tongues.

When we understand the purpose of tongues, we then can answer the following questions:

1. What is this unusual sign gift all about?

2. Is tongues for today?

3. If tongues ceased, when did it cease?

Paul gives the purpose of tongues in I Cor. 14:22:

I. Tongues were given as a SIGN (v.22)
("*Tongues are for a sign")*

The gift of tongues was a <u>miraculous sign gift</u>

1. **"Miracle"** = a <u>supernatural</u> event that occurs in the <u>physical</u> world by the direct <u>power</u> of God for the purpose of <u>proving</u> that God is directly speaking and specifically acting (either independently or through a chosen person).

   Greek words: "dynamis - a display of might or power; "teras" - a miracle that causes wonder and amazement.

2. **"Sign"** = ("semeion") a miraculous mark or token that proves a claim (authenticates) or provides a warning.

   The Jews sought for signs - I Cor. 1:22

3. **"Gift"** = ("charisma") an endowment of grace given by the Holy Spirit to believers to accomplish God's will (Rom. 12:6; I Cor. 12:28).

   While every believer has a gift or gifts from God,
   **the basic purpose of <u>sign</u> gifts is to confirm (authenticate) a <u>message</u> or <u>messenger</u>.

   Examples:
   --A message confirmed - Heb. 2:3-4
   --Messengers (apostles) confirmed - II Cor. 12:12

II. Tongues were given as a sign to UNBELIEVING ISRAEL (v.21)
(*I will speak unto <u>this people</u> (Israel) [see: Isa.28:11-12])*

Verse 21

Question: Who is meant by ***"this people"*** in verse 21?
Answer: Israel (cp. Ezekiel 3:4-7)

The scripture Paul cites in verse 21 is Isaiah 28:11-12

Because Israel wouldn't listen to Isaiah, he had to lecture them like little children - "precept upon precept, line upon line, here a little, and there a little" (v. 10).

When they mocked this way of teaching, soon God would give them His message in a language they would not understand (Assyrians, then Babylonians) (READ V. 11, 12)

III. Tongues were given as a sign of JUDGEMENT to unbelieving Israel (v.22)

In verse 22, Paul gives his conclusion based on what he just said in verse 21.

Tongues are a sign of judgment to unbelieving Israel.

ILLUS: Our church is bilingual (in some cases trilingual) for the most part. How would it make you feel if you were in a group of people who knew your language fluently, but they spoke in their own language about something wonderful. You would feel left out (rejected) and curious. They would be wrong for doing it.

But suppose you were a person who just mocked, made fun of, and didn't believe what that same group always talked about. So then they said, "OK, this guy doesn't want what we have to say. Let's leave him out, by speaking in our second language that he doesn't know." They would be justified for doing this. You don't deserve to hear.

This is what God did by sending tongues.
God used language as an evidence of judgment throughout the Bible:

1) At the Tower of Babel
"The whole earth was of one language, and one speech" (Gen. 11:1). The people did not obey the command given to Noah to "replenish the earth" (Gen. 9:1) but became proud (Gen. 11:4) and united without God, so God confused their languages and established the parent languages of the earth (today over 3,000 languages and dialects).

2) **Deut. 28 Blessings & Cursings** - curses were to be a "sign" (v. 46) Deut. 28:49 - "The Lord shall bring a nation against thee from far, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flieth; a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand;"

3) **Jeremiah** the "weeping prophet" preached, and Israel would not repent from her backsliding, so God said He would send judgment. Jer. 5:14-15 - "Wherefore, thus saith the Lord God of hosts, Because ye speak this word, behold, I will make my words in thy mouth fire, and this people wood, and it shall devour them. Lo, I will bring a nation upon you from far, O house of Israel, saith the Lord: it is a mighty nation, it is an ancient nation, a nation whose language thou knowest not, neither understandest what they say."

4) **In the NT** (after Mt. 12 - unpardonable sin), Christ spoke in **parables** because of the hardness of the people's hearts. They would not listen to plain talk, so He veiled His speech by parables. (READ Mt. 13:10-15).

I Cor. 14:22 - Tongues were <u>not</u> for:

1) <u>Self-edification</u> but a sign of judgment
2) <u>Entertainment or amusement</u> but a sign of judgment
3) <u>Spreading the Gospel to other nationalities</u> but a sign of judgment
4) <u>The benefit of the assembly</u> of believers (church) but a sign of judgment
5) <u>private use</u> but for <u>public</u> as a sign of judgment
6) a sign that you finally had the <u>Holy Spirit</u> (Paul said not all spoke in tongues; but all had the Holy Spirit)

Because tongues is a sign of judgment for Israel - it is <u>a sign of **blessing**</u> for Gentiles.

<u>God's judgment of Israel</u>:

1) Rom. 11:13-24 - natural branch (Israel) broken off; wild olive tree (Gentiles) grafted in.
2) Mt. 21:28-22:14 - 3 parables describing God's judgment on Israel (Mt. 21:43 - "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof."

The sign of tongues was to show that God was going to accept Gentiles

(people of a different tongue). This was a hard lesson for Peter and the apostles to learn.

Peter and the other Apostles would need objective proof that God had accepted the Gentiles on an equal basis with the Jews and that they were given the same Holy Spirit that they received on Pentecost.

--So when the Samaritans were saved, they spoke in tongues (Acts 8:17, 18)
--When the Gentiles were saved, they spoke in tongues (10:46)
--When the proselytes of John were saved, they spoke in tongues (19:6)

No longer would God confine Himself to one people as a channel; no longer would God operate His work of grace through one nation and speak one language.
Tongues ceased when their purpose was done. (it was a temporary sign gift).

ILLUS: If a store kept the signs up saying "Grand Opening Sale" 100 years after it began, we would say the manager was crazy!
The church has bene in existence now for about 2,000 years. Israel does not need God to still give the sign to them for 2,000 years. They got the message long ago!

Ill. Signs to NYC are not needed when you are in NYC.
ex. NYC 100 miles ahead, 75...,50...,25...

Tongues ceased because its specific purpose was fulfilled. In 70 A.D. Titus sacked Jerusalem, killing 1,100,000 Jews and scattering the rest all over the world.

What is Wrong With Speaking in Tongues?

Answer: Nothing was wrong with the gift of "tongues" -- as it was originally given and during the time when it was given by God.

What is wrong is the "tongues" that is practiced and witnessed today.

See article by Roy E. Knuteson, The Discerner, Vol. IV, #4, Oct.-Dec., 1962, Religion Analysis Service, Inc., Minneapolis, MN.

A. Today's "tongues" is wrong, because it is encouraged for everyone.

1. All spiritual gifts are given at the discretion and wisdom of the Holy Spirit - "as He will"
(I Cor. 12:11).

2. Not all Christians spoke in tongues (I Cor. 12:30), but all had the Spirit (Rom. 8:9; I Cor. 12:13).

3. Speaking in tongues is never commanded by God.

4. For everyone to speak in tongues in a Church gathering would produce a confusing message to outsiders who visit the assembly (see: I Cor.14:23-25)

B. Today's "tongues" is wrong, because it is interpreted as proof of spiritual maturity.

1. Proof of spiritual maturity does not come from the gifts of the Spirit, but from the "fruits of the Spirit."

   The Corinthian church had all the "gifts" (I Cor. 1:7), but did not have the "fruits" - they were carnal babies (I Cor. 3:1-3).

2. For many contemporary Pentecostals and Charismatics, tongues is a "badge of spirituality." Unfortunately, tongues is often all they base their spirituality on.

C. Today's "tongues" is wrong, because it is claimed to be the sign of the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

1. If tongues were to be the proof of the baptism of the Spirit, why did only some believers have such proof and not all? All believers received the baptism (I Cor. 12:13), but not all spoke in tongues (I Cor. 12:30).

D. Today's "tongues" is wrong, because it is not practiced according to the rules laid down in Scripture.

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E. Today's "tongues" is wrong, because God said "Tongues would cease" (I Cor. 13:8).

1. The middle voice of the verb "cease" indicates that tongues ended on its own.

2. When did it end? Answer: When its purpose was finished - that is, when the sign of judgment to unbelieving Israel was no longer needed (I Cor. 14:21-22).

CONCLUSION:

Three explanations for modern day tongues:

1. **<u>Intentional</u> counterfeit** (many fake it to receive recognition by their peers)

2. **<u>Psychological</u> counterfeit** (many want "it" so badly, they induce themselves to

utter "tongues")

3. **<u>Satanic</u> counterfeit** (speaking in tongues is not a practice limited to the Charismatics or Pentecostals, but has been widely practiced by spiritists, demon worshippers, and occult groups of many diverse cultures and religions).