



Conducted by
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"IN view of the wide claims made by some religious bodies with reference to speaking in tongues, could you comment on the question 'Has speaking in tongues and its purpose passed away and what was the original object of the practice?' I would like you to deal particularly with Mark 16:17 and 1st Cor. 14 as these seem to be the scriptures generally invoked in the practice."

This question comes from brethren in Africa to whom we send our warmest Christian greetings.

Let me say at the outset that speaking in tongues, its purpose and practice, passed away like all the other supernatural and spiritual gifts. It is, I think, strange and highly significant that of all the gifts and abilities that Jesus promised to the early disciples, the only two our modern religious cults claim to possess are speaking in tongues and healing of the sick. Very few, to my knowledge, claim to resist the bites of deadly serpents and to be able to drink fatal brands of poison with impunity! These latter abilities have, apparently, passed away, but the former remain!

The Promise to the Apostles

Let us look first of all at Mark 16:17, as asked by the questioner. Here Jesus, in sending out His disciples into all the world to preach the gospel to every creature, assures them that their preaching will be confirmed and consolidated by miraculous signs and wonders. Certain supernatural powers were to be given to the early disciples to set God's seal of approval and authority upon the message they preached: "And these signs shall follow them that believe; in my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands upon the sick, and they shall recover....."

What is meant by speaking in tongues?

The promise is given here that the early disciples would speak *in new tongues*. This phrase is taken, together with the mention of *unknown tongues* in 1st Cor. 14, to mean that these would be unknown tongues, and thus *carte blanche* is given to all our modern "tongue disciples" to babble all sorts of nonsense and gibberish. The term "new" tongues simply meant languages new to the apostles and disciples who were to speak them, but not new to the hearers. Little point would have been served in the implementation of tongues which were so new that neither the *speakers* nor the *hearers* understood them. At school I was exhorted to try to learn the meaning of a "new" word every day; but surely the English Master was not advocating that I learn *unknown* words, *but* rather words known to others but *new* to me. The fulfilment of Mark 16:17 in Acts 2 bears this out, I suggest. Verse 4 of Acts 2 says, "And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance." The apostles therefore spoke in other tongues (or new tongues) as Jesus had promised. Were these new tongues some unintelligible gibberish or some ecstatic babblings? Verses 6 and 7 provide the answer: "...the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans? And how hear we every man *in our own tongue* wherein we were born?"

The account goes on to cite the seventeen or so different languages being spoken by the apostles. Thus we have the fulfilment of Christ's promise that His disciples would speak in *new* tongues. They were certainly new to the apostles (being Galilæans) but not *unknown*;— indeed these languages were very well known to the hearers. Little purpose would have been served if that great audience had not understood the languages spoken. The purpose here of the speaking in other languages was not to preach the gospel—just as the healing of the sick, or the drinking of any deadly thing was not to preach the gospel; they were accompanying signs to confirm that the source of the gospel which Peter is about to preach is from God. The apostles praised God, but it was Peter who stood up to preach the gospel. The tongues, like the miracles, were thus a sign to the *unbelievers* to help them believe that God was behind all that was being transacted in those days. These tongues were no part of the preaching or teaching (prophesying)—a fact which is later confirmed in 1st Cor. 14. Those who claim to speak in tongues today should be asked to do what the apostles did, i.e. to speak in a foreign language which they have never learned. Then we would see if the Holy Spirit was with them. Let such an one who has never learned French, German or Russian speak in that language. Yes, let him!

In The Early Church: 1. Corinthians 14

Let us now refer to 1st Cor. 14, as requested it should, perhaps, be remarked that chapters 12 and 13 of this same epistle are also important on this matter of spiritual gifts. As introductory to Paul's arguments in chap. 14, Paul says in chap. 12:28, "And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues". Notice, being a prophet is second in importance only to being an apostle, and speaking in tongues comes well down the list in importance. This is the substance of his logic in chap. 14. He says "covet earnestly the best gifts", and that prophecy is superior to the gift of tongues. Prophecy, by the way, was by no means confined to foretelling future events, but meant any declaration of God's will. Like the apostles, they spoke under divine guidance. We also notice in chap. 13 verse 8 that whereas love would continue, prophesying and speaking in tongues would cease when their purpose had been accomplished.

Obviously chap. 14 of 1st Cor. is too long to deal with verse by verse in "Question Box" so I will attempt to paraphrase groups of verses.

Verses 1-6: Paul contrasts prophecy and tongues and says that *in the church assembly* it was much better to prophesy than to speak in tongues. Prophecy edifies the church, and comforts them, but speaking in other languages does no one any good unless there is present some from the nation of the language spoken. Speaking in tongues had a place in early years of the church, but not as a teaching medium. If someone present had the gift of interpreting the unfamiliar language being spoken, that would make it acceptable.

Verses 7-17: Even inanimate objects which emit sounds must issue easily recognisable ones (such as a bugle summoning the troops to battle points). There are many differing languages in the world (v.10) and each important enough, but nothing is gained by listening to one we do not understand. The Chinaman and the Frenchman would be as barbarians to one another if they tried to lecture to one another without an interpreter. Paul admits that praying and praising God in an unknown language is an exercise of the spirit, but says that this is not enough; we must pray and sing not only in the spirit but with the understanding also.

Verses 18-22: Paul says that he could speak in languages more than anyone else, but in the church assembly he wouldn't do it — he would rather speak 5 words that could be understood than 10,000 in an "unknown language" (or rather an *unfamiliar* language). He thus underscores the fact that the gift of tongues was not for

teaching or for the edifying of the brethren, and goes on in the next verse (v.22) to reiterate that tongues were for a sign to the unbeliever and not the church member. Therefore the gift of tongues had little place in the meetinghouse and its use by those who had the gift should be limited. Rather the time should be used by those who had the gift of prophecy. Thus Paul gives us the answer as to *the purpose* of tongues — a sign (like the miracles) to unbelievers that God was backing the early Christians and that their message had God's authority and approval. Prophecy, on the other hand was for the edifying of the believers, not the unbelievers (v.22).

Verses 23-33: It seems that those with the gift of tongues (or languages) at Corinth were under a misapprehension respecting the ability that they had and the purpose for which the gift was intended. Apparently, in the church assembly, several of such would stand up, all simultaneously, and shout praises to God in many different tongues. Paul says this gave a very bad impression to any unbeliever who happened to come in and would be a sign to the unbeliever, if a sign at all, that they were all mad or deranged. This was not the sign that God intended the unbeliever to get. But, says Paul, if an unbeliever comes into the assembly and hears the prophets he will be convinced and convicted. (This may seem a contradiction of Paul's immediately previous statement that prophecy was for the church and not the unbeliever, but obviously the meaning is that prophecy was *primarily* for edifying the church, but that unbelievers would gain by hearing the teachings also.) Paul therefore criticises this situation at Corinth and the practice in the assembly, of different ones presenting a psalm, a doctrine, a tongue, a revelation and an interpretation all at the one time. He therefore seeks for things to be done in order and decency. He also regulates (v.27) those gifted in languages and restricts speaking in tongues to two members (or at most three) and instructs that they must speak, not together, but one after the other. Furthermore, this was to be allowed only if there was an interpreter present (to translate the words spoken for the limited edifying of the church members). If there was no interpreter no "tongues" were allowed in the assembly. "Tongues" were intended for use in the wide world outside the church assembly. Paul also regulates the prophets and says that two or three could speak, again one after the other, and that if any other prophet received a revelation while another was speaking he was not, as had been the practice, to jump up and interrupt the other with his message, but must hold his peace until the other had concluded. "For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted." (v.31). Paul indicates in v.33 the reason for his admonition, "For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints".

A Temporary Purpose

In summary therefore, and in answer to the question "Has speaking in tongues and its purpose passed away?" I think we can safely say that both have indeed passed away and, in fact did so after the death of the apostles and those in the early church possessing the gift.

As mentioned before, Paul said the practice would pass away (1st Cor. 13:8) like the miracles and prophecies. The original (and only) object of the practice was for a sign and wonder to the unbelievers.

Those who claim to engage in the practice today are obviously misguided, although perhaps well intentioned. They build their case on the term "new tongues" (as in Mark 16:17) but in the actual outworking of the promise (in Acts 2 and thereafter) there is certainly no evidence that completely new languages were spoken. There is however unassailable and incontrovertible evidence that the "new" tongues of Mark 16:17 were but languages new to the speakers, elsewhere described as "other" tongues (Acts 2:4). The other phrase upon which modern "tongue disciples" build their case is in 1st Cor. 14, where "unknown tongues" are mentioned. This

does not help their cause in any way at all, for the word "Aunknown" is not to be found in the original, and has thus been dropped altogether in the Revised Version.

I trust these remarks may have been helpful.

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TONGUES

IN this article we choose to use the simple term "tongues" rather than a longer term "speaking in tongues." Moreover, the present effort is not for the purpose of passing judgment on any people who may have experiences out of the ordinary; rather it is to point out some facts gathered from the study of the Scriptures which may be used as guide-lines.

1. Signs.Promised

Let us consider the signs promised by the Lord in Mark 16; then observe some unfortunate if not deadly mistakes made by modern exponents of the movements.

1. Cast out demons by His Name.
2. Take up serpents without harm.
3. Speak with new tongues (new to them).
4. Not be hurt by imbibing poison.
5. Revive the sick by laying on of hands.

Do you ask: To whom was this commission given? Read vs. 19,20: "And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word by signs that followed." The apostles are in view.

Along with v. 20 we do well to consider Heb. 2:3,4: "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great a salvation? which having at the first been spoken through the Lord, was confirmed unto us by them that heard; God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders, and by manifold powers, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to his own will."

6. We may add a sixth power given to some of the apostles, even that of raising the dead. But it would embarrass the exponents of spiritual gifts today. The book of Acts is a good commentary on how God fulfilled these promises to the apostles.

2. Unfortunate, Even Deadly Mistakes Made Today

We do not apologise for the blunt way we head this section. Read on; you will understand. Yes, we mean to list certain mistakes made by some or all of the exponents of the tongues movement today. These errors would include the following:

1. Of the five signs given to the apostles in Mark 16 plus that of raising the dead as was done in Acts, most of these exponents choose only the matter of tongues. Why is this so?

2. They confuse the signs given to the apostles and make wrong general applications.

3. They affirm what the Bible does not say; i.e. that the Word being confirmed originally needs to be confirmed today after 2,000 years. And in the face of 1 Cor. 13:8: "Whether there be tongues they shall cease." So one counters: It also says that knowledge shall be done away. Has it? Exactly; knowledge has been done away—according to the context. Mind you, this section of 1 Cor. 12:14 is talking about spiritual gifts, and knowledge as a spiritual gift (new revelations) has been done away. (See Jude 3 and 1 John 2:13) Now we have Christianity in its final form as given by God; there are to be no new revelations.

4. They affirm the statement: One must be able to speak in tongues as evidence that one possesses the Holy Spirit. This is entirely foreign to the teaching of the New Testament. We heard the president of some tongue-speaking group make the statement. He further said that only three percent of the Pentecostal people speak in tongues. Wherein does the error lie? In Rom. 8:9b we read: "But if any man hath not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his." If you put these two things together you see it simply means: If one does not speak in tongues, one is not saved. Christ never made that assertion; Paul by the Spirit did not say it to the Romans, nor to the Ephesians, nor to the Philippians, nor to the young preacher Timothy.

5. It has been observed that there is a tendency for those in the movement to consider themselves to be of a superior spiritual breed. The Corinthian church where this gift was given to an unusual extent by God was a carnal and not a spiritual group. It could be, in ways not fully understood, that the tongues movement may be far more of the flesh than is realized.

6. The sixth mistake is an inference or wrong condition drawn from Acts 1 and 2. We believe the error is quite essential to the advocates of the movement. Read the record and the movement falls apart.

Find who is the antecedent of "they" in Acts 2:1. The verse says: "And when the day of Pentecost was now come, THEY were all together in one place." Who are classed as the antecedent of this "they"? Chapter one ends with "the eleven apostles." (With Matthias) So when the day of Pentecost was now come, "they"—the apostles—were all together in one place. And there appeared unto "them" tongues; and "they" were filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance (see Acts 2:1-4).