

A Concise Examination of tongue speaking?

This is a condensation of a larger paper 'What about Tongue Speaking' to aid those with less time to study detailed arguments over 24 pages. The prior view here is that the baptism in the Spirit is not a second experience of grace for some but a divine operation whereby the Spirit is given to all at conversion, joining them to the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:13).

The questions to be examined are:

1. Are tongues a gift to all believers who have been baptised in the Spirit?
2. Are tongues unintelligible sounds, claimed to be the tongues of angels?
3. Can tongues be used today?

Being filled with the Spirit does not always lead to tongues in the NT.

- Many of the greatest believers in scripture who were filled with the Spirit did not speak in tongues [Jesus, Elizabeth, Zacharias, John the Baptist]
- Jesus and John the Baptist told us to expect the Spirit but never told us to expect tongues.
- Many folk, on nine occasions, who were filled with the Spirit in Acts did not speak in tongues [e.g. the 3,000 in Acts 2, the jailer's household in Acts 16, the Samaritans in Acts 8].
- The most godly saints and powerful preachers in history never spoke in tongues.

We can confidently state that being a spirit-filled believer does not necessitate speaking in tongues.

Problems with the Charismatic/Pentecostal idea of tongues.

1. IN ACTS 'TONGUES' REFER TO REAL HUMAN LANGUAGES. This is clear from Acts 2 and the word 'tongues' (*glossa*) is the normal Greek word for human languages.
2. TONGUES WERE NOT BABBLING NOISES. This would not have been a divine sign to anyone.
3. ECSTATIC SPEECH WAS COMMON AMONGST CULTS AND OCCULT RELIGIONS. Christian tongues were different and special. The foreigners understood what was said in Acts 2 by unlearned peasants.
4. EARLY PENTECOSTALS AND CHARISMATICS ACCEPTED THAT TONGUES WERE KNOWN LANGUAGES.
5. THE TONGUES DECLARED THE WONDERFUL WORKS OF GOD.
6. THE TONGUES IN THE REST OF ACTS ARE THE SAME – HUMAN LANGUAGES. The same word is used (*glossa*). Cornelius' party's tongues were understood without interpretation (Acts 10:46).
7. IN 1 COR 12-14 TONGUES ARE ALSO KNOWN HUMAN LANGUAGES. Again *glossa* is used.
 - 1 Cor was written earlier (55) than Acts (60) and Luke (as a colleague and friend of Paul) wrote of the same experience using the same terms. Acts helps us to understand what 1 Cor teaches.
 - Paul uses analogies that directly imply a meaningful language was in view (musical instruments use a known language, a war trumpet gives a meaningful sound to call to arms).
 - Paul even compares tongues to intelligible human speech (1 Cor 14:8, 12:10, 28).
 - Paul compares tongues to the speech of Assyria (1 Cor 14:21 quoting Isa 28:11).
 - The gift of interpretation means translating from one human tongue to another.
8. THE EMPHASIS OF PAUL'S TEACHING WAS TO ENSURE INTELLIGIBLE SPEECH THAT EDIFIED LISTENERS (1 Cor 14:9, 19). There is no endorsement of meaningless gibberish.
9. TONGUES WERE A SIGN (ALONG WITH OTHER GIFTS) TO UNBELIEVERS IN THE INITIAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHURCH AND GOSPEL OUTREACH (1 COR 14:21-22).
 - To Gentile unbelievers: it was a divine witness that men spoke in unlearned foreign languages and even in regional dialects.
 - To Jews it was a sign of the universality of the kingdom, that the Spirit had been poured out on all flesh according to Joel's prophecy.
 - It was also a sign of judgment towards Jews that it was the end of the Judaic system. This refers to OT passages (Isa 28:11) where God promised to send nations speaking other tongues against Israel in judgment for her rebellion. The rejection of the Messiah led to judgment; the kingdom was removed (Matt 21:43).
10. TONGUES / INTERPRETATION ARE THE LEAST OF THE GIFTS. They come at the end of lists where they occur. They are less value than prophecy. They are useless in church without interpretation.

11. THEY ARE NOT GIBBERISH. 'Mysteries' (1 Cor 14:2) does not refer to unintelligible noises but to hidden truths now revealed in the Gospel (Matt 13:11; 1 Cor 4:1; 1 Tim 3:16; Rm 11:25 etc.).
12. THEY ARE NOT ANGELIC LANGUAGES. Why would spiritual beings need a language? When angels appeared to men they spoke the local tongue (e.g. to Abraham or Mary). Tongues cease before the end (1 Cor 13:8) but if there was a heavenly language it would remain forever. In 1 Cor 13:1 Paul is using a hypothetical poetic hyperbole (exaggeration) to make a point. Just as a person cannot understand all mysteries or have all knowledge, he can't speak angelic tongues.
13. THOSE SPEAKING WITH TONGUES UNDERSTOOD WHAT THEY WERE SAYING.
 - This forms part of the important sign of tongues being a reversal of the judgment at Babel. Babel was judicial sign of tribal dispersal, confusion, separation, and degeneration. The Gospel is announced at Pentecost with a sign of inclusion and universal understanding through tongues instead of confusion.
 - It is not said in 1 Corinthians that the speaker did not understand his tongue; the need for interpretation was for the benefit of others.
 - The gift of interpretation was necessary since the general meaning was known by spiritual intuition but it would be impossible to translate it exactly as inspired, especially if it were long.
 - 1 Cor 14:4 ['if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful'] does not mean that the speaker did not understand what he said. He did understand in his spirit (which is an organ of knowing), but his intellect was unfruitful in that it did not help others; his understanding bore no fruit; his ministry did no good to others.
 - Praying in tongues was not an unconscious act.
 - Worship is rational and not passive (Rm 12:1, 'reasonable' = 'logical', 'rational', *logikos*). God does not give gifts to be used in meetings that promote irrationality. In 1 Cor 14:16-17 the tongue-speaker knew rationally that he was giving a blessing and giving thanks.
14. TONGUES ARE NOT SPECIFICALLY FOR PERSONAL EDIFICATION. All spiritual gifts are given for the edification of others in fellowship, never for personal use (1 Cor 12:7, 24-25). In 1 Cor 14:4 Paul is being sarcastic; here tongues are being used for personal enjoyment (or even status) instead of what they should have been used for. Paul is very critical of the use of tongues in Corinth since they were not edifying others. Tongues used without love for others are a useless noise (1 Cor 13:1). If tongues were primarily for personal use then all should have them, but all didn't (1 Cor 12:30). Either tongues are not for personal use or God has let many people down!
15. Babbling or unintelligible gibberish is forbidden in prayer (Matt 6:7 – 'repetitions' is literally 'babbling', i.e. *battologeo* = 'to stammer', 'to prate', 'to babble', 'to repeat the same words over and over'). This is a very important argument against personal tongue speaking.
16. Linguistic professors have studied Charismatic tongues carefully and declared that these tongues are not languages but 'linguistic nonsense' – and thus are not Biblical.
17. Tongues, as the speaking of babbling nonsense, are evidenced in many false religions, occult groups and heretical sects; for example: witchcraft, Mormons, the original JW's, Roman Catholic mystics, Islamic Sufis, aboriginal shamanism (witchdoctors), certain Hindu sects, some Buddhist cults; Edward Irving's 19th century church and even Innuits. Indeed this type of tongue-speaking is a central feature of satanic works.

We can, therefore, affirm that tongues are not unintelligible noises, are not angelic languages and are not for personal use. If modern tongues are not human languages then they are false. If they are false, they are satanic.

The methods of generating / receiving tongues in Charismatic circles are unbiblical.

- Psychological manipulation is always present – with instructions to force tongues out irrationally without thinking. No apostle ever used such methods.
- Patients suffering from brain disorders (e.g. trauma, tumours, stroke) as well as those suffering from schizophrenia can produce exactly the same speech patterns as those speaking in tongues. Whenever conscious control is bypassed, either through injury, degeneration or choice, the same speech patterns are produced. This is why most tongues fit into a very few stereotypical types, and disciples copy them. Many ex-Charismatics have stated that they copied the sounds.
- Spiritual gifts are given upon God's sovereignty (1 Cor 12:11) not by man's desire or efforts. Men cannot force God to give them a gift by tarrying, having hands laid on them, constant prayer, trying to speak babbling noises, falling over etc.

- There is no command to speak in obscure sounds unknown to men; indeed the reverse is the case, we are to speak clearly that which is understood for building each other up.

The focus on tongues is opposed to the emphasis of the Holy Spirit.

The emphasis of 1 Cor 12 is a balance of various gifts to edify the body. Not all have the same gift. A variety is necessary for the proper function of church life. The Charismatic emphasis that all should have tongues and possibly prophecy but few will have other gifts, is unbiblical. The claim that everyone should seek tongues is the opposite of Paul's command to desire the best gifts not the least (1 Cor 12:31). Paul stated that he would rather speak five understandable words than 10,000 words in an unknown tongue in a meeting (1 Cor 14:17-18). This is tantamount to saying that tongues are worthless in church – this is because they were a sign to outsiders and of little value in meetings.

The utterances in Charismatic circles have no self-authentication and are not tested.

- Why does everyone in Charismatic meeting simply accept that a tongue is divine?
- Why is it not tested as all things are commanded to be (1 Thess 5:21)?
- Pagans utter tongues and they are common in occult groups.
- Tongue speakers in Charismatic churches have been disfellowshipped for gross sin in the past, and clearly some were unsaved people – what tongues were they speaking when they were in church?
- Christians can fall and speak satanic things (Matt 16:23).
- Apparent Christians can be unsaved people even though they perform miracles and prophesy (Matt 7:21-23).
- Paul warns that only tongues from God are safe, others can be blasphemous (1 Cor 12:1-3). John demands that we test the spirits for the same reason (1 Jn 4:1). But Charismatics never test tongues. Blasphemy could be being tolerated all the time in meetings (I believe it is – since genuine tongues have now ceased see later).

The command to always interpret tongues is often violated by Charismatics.

- For example: in a meeting when no one interprets; when people speak in tongues quietly in worship; when singing in the Spirit; when people are baptised in the Spirit; when spoken in private devotions.
- The apostolic instruction is that only one person interprets (*heis* = 'one'; it is not *tis* = 'a certain one, someone') even if two or three speak in tongues (1 Cor 14:27-28).
- These verses also teach that the knowledge of an interpreter being present was necessary before anyone spoke in tongues to ensure edification [*'if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent'*].

The defence of tongues by Charismatics is unbiblical.

- Charismatics do not properly expound 1 Cor 14, since it would destroy their position.
- They cherry pick verses out of context, such as 1 Cor 14:4, 5, 18 and 39 for support; but verses 4 and 5 are followed by a *'but'* while verse 18 (with 19) is followed by a *'yet'*. Only verse 39 is positive, but even this means 'don't prohibit them altogether' (since some sober Corinthians had demanded this due to the abuses). Thus Paul's warnings about tongues abuse are used as support for emphasising them.
- The meanings of Greek words, such as *glossa* ('tongues') or 'mysteries' are completely ignored.
- They fail to show the absence of mention in the rest of the NT and the later lists of gifts.
- No one explains that false religions and occult groups use this gift in the same way, generated by the same methods, and uttered in similar sounds.
- Often, the chief Charismatic support is anecdotal stories about people who came into this gift.

Tongues have ceased.

- In 1 Cor 13:8 the word for tongues ceasing is different to that applied to prophecies and knowledge. Prophecy and knowledge end (*katargethesontai*) at the close of the age when the consummation of the kingdom (the perfect, v10) comes. However, the Greek form shows that tongues will have ceased by themselves before this time (*pausonta*). This is why tongues are not mentioned in verses 9 and 12 because they have already vanished.

- Thus when tongues stop in history, they have ceased forever. Greek scholar AT Robertson says, 'They shall make themselves cease or automatically cease of themselves.'
- This happened by 100 AD or earlier, probably around 70 AD when Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed. Since their primary purpose was as a sign to Jews, when Judaism was finished they had no purpose any more.
- The church fathers state that tongues had ceased by their time except in heretical ecstatic sects.
- The first letter to the Corinthians is amongst Paul's earliest, and the book of Acts appeared shortly afterwards written by Luke, Paul's fellow worker. Paul does not mention tongues in his later letters to other churches; neither are they mentioned by James, Peter, John or Jude.
- Manifestation of tongues in subsequent history were all in aberrant groups: Catholic mystics, Anabaptist fanatics, the heretical Shakers, the Mormons, the Irvingites etc.

What about Paul's encouragement of tongues? [1 Cor 14:5, 39]

1. This would only apply to genuine tongues (human languages not gibberish).
2. It would only apply to the time when they were in use, for the formation of the church in the 1st century.
3. Paul's regulations in 1 Cor 14 would have to apply.
4. In 1 Cor 14:5 [I wish you all spoke with tongues] it is possible that Paul is speaking ironically (as he does elsewhere). Firstly, he knew that all would not speak in tongues and stated that we should desire the best not the least gifts. Secondly, he is saying that if everyone spoke in tongues (not in church at the same time) there would be no status problem, i.e. some thinking that they were better than others since they had an obvious gift.
5. It also appears likely that some sober members of the church had called for the prohibition of tongues as a result of the chaos caused by multiple, un-translated utterances. While Paul agrees that this is wrong, he says in verse 39 that they should not be forbidden. Since the gifts were divinely given, they should not be prohibited, just practised correctly.
6. The modern practice of speaking unknown gibberish would have been condemned by Paul and the Corinthians as pagan babble. This cannot be applied to Paul's encouragement in verses 5 and 39.
7. So, the encouragement for all to speak in tongues is part of this initial phase in which the Corinthians were, more than usual, abundantly supplied with supernatural gifts (1 Cor 1:5-7), though these did not aid their spiritual maturity. If tongues were to be encouraged in all churches for all time, there would have been teaching and exhortations on them in other letters. When Paul talks about the equipping of the saints through gifts in Ephesians there is no mention of tongues; when talking about the service of gifts in Romans, tongues are absent – but he does emphasise prophecy, teaching and exhortation (Rm 12:ff).

Singing in the Spirit (1 Cor 14:13-16)

1. This cannot be singing in gibberish or unintelligible speech (if it is singing a tongue) since we have proved that tongues were real languages. We are told not to allow chaos and disorder in a meeting, but if everyone sung in a genuine tongue, it would be a cacophony of a multitude of human languages all sung at once. This cannot be what Paul is implying since it would deny his own commands. Indeed, he introduces this with, 'what is it then', i.e. what is the conclusion of his previous argument? It is nonsense to suggest that after emphasising intelligible speech he then suggests singing babble.
2. It is not a corporate hymn sung in unison. Paul says 'I will sing', not 'we will sing'. Just as tongues-speaking was individual, so singing with spirit must be individual.
3. 'Sing' (*psalo*) primarily means 'to sing a song of praise' in the NT and singing must benefit others (Eph 5:19; Col 3:16). The Charismatic practice is not singing a song of praise at all, but rather improvised sound-making in harmony with others. Most people ungifted in song or music will simply utter one note, use sound words or speak in tongues on one note as in a chant. This is chanting like the oriental chanting of a mantra rather than singing a song. Singing in the Spirit is the Charismatic characteristic that bears the closest comparison to obvious occult practices. It follows no scriptural norms but very closely mimics pagan chanting.
4. The best interpretation is that singing in the spirit is one person singing a spontaneous, improvised song given by the Spirit to praise God and edify the brethren. There is no suggestion that this was in a tongue; but if it was (based on 1 Cor 14:14) then it had to be interpreted.

However, praying in the Spirit is more likely praying in the power of the Spirit as in Eph 6:18 and Jude 1:20; therefore singing in the Spirit is singing under the power and inspiration of the Spirit.

5. Multiple singing in tongues is condemned just as multiple speaking in tongues was condemned (1 Cor 14:23, 27).
6. There is no evidence here for the practice (pagan in origin) of a corporate, improvised series of sung unintelligible tongues around a musical keynote.

Summary of indisputable facts

1. Tongues are human languages given by divine inspiration.
2. Tongues are not gibberish (unintelligible sounds).
3. Tongues are not angelic speech.
4. The tongue speaker understood his tongue in his spirit.
5. Interpretation is a translation of the foreign tongue into the local language.
6. Tongues declared the wonderful works of God, usually in prayer form.
7. Tongues are a sign to unbelievers; they are not primarily for use in the church.
8. This sign to unbelievers is foremost towards Israel as a sign of judgment and as proof that the Spirit has been outpoured on all nations.
9. Tongues must not be centred on and are of much less importance than teaching gifts.
10. Tongues cease on their own long before the cessation of other spiritual gifts.
11. Tongues are not mentioned in the NT outside of Mark, Acts and 1 Corinthians – all early books. The passage in Mark 16:9-20 is of very dubious authenticity. If it is accepted as genuine, the tongues must accompany drinking poison and picking up snakes. No one thinks this is viable (except some fanatical Pentecostal sects where over 60 people have died from snakebite).
12. Tongue-speaking was said to have died out by the post-apostolic fathers.
13. Pagan religions and occult groups speak/sing in tongues as gibberish.

Conclusion

The apostles never mention tongues in their letters outside 1 Corinthians. If tongues are vital for personal edification, as Charismatics insist, then why are there no instructions about them in all the other letters (which are full of instructions on the devotional life)? No other book encourages their use, either personally or in meetings. The sign of tongues was relevant to the early part of church history, as a sign to Gentiles and particularly Jews, that God's kingdom was amongst them.

The Charismatic version of tongues as unintelligible noises is to be condemned. Genuine tongues (languages) are not for believers in any case, but are for convincing unbelievers, **'tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers** (1 Cor 14:22). They are an unusual occurrence that primarily points to the opened door of salvation to all nations. Why highlight this gift today in church since it is not primarily for the benefit of believers? Why make it a central feature?

Charismatic claims that tongue-speaking brings spiritual power, is vital for private devotions, is essential for a daily walk with God, is necessary for walking in the Spirit, have absolutely no Biblical basis at all. Paul never says that tongues are a doorway into a better spiritual experience. Centring an experience on them is utterly opposed to Paul's teaching that they are the least of the gifts (even if they were not obsolete today).

Consider the danger of the Charismatic/Pentecostal position – they teach that the tongue by-passes the mind and is not understood in any way by the speaker (not even spiritually). They teach that the utterance is an unintelligible sound (claiming it is angelic). They teach that this gives the speaker a good feeling inside that edifies him – though he knows not why. They teach that the interpretation is the essence of what was said, not what was actually and exactly said. All this is mystical nonsense and enables anyone to say anything and then someone to interpret it as anything. This is just what occult groups do. This is a recipe for disaster.

Note that the late appearance of tongue-speaking in the modern church correlates with a number of degenerative factors in religion and world history such as: liberalism, evolution, modernism, scientism, humanism, atheism, many cults and sects appearing, re-emergence of witchcraft and magic, popularity of Eastern religions, growth of paganism, hedonism, New Age and its precursors

etc. These all began or were initially developed in the late 19th-mid 20th century, just as the ‘tongues movement’.

The Charismatic version of tongue-speaking is to be condemned.

Some questions for Charismatic tongue speakers

1. How do you know that your gift is from God?
2. How do you explain why your tongue is no different from those appearing in demonic religions and the occult?
3. Since tongues are a sign to unbelievers, how can an unintelligible tongue be a sign? Ecstatic, unintelligible speech was a characteristic of pagan religions and relatively common. There is no sign value in a tongue being expressed like a pagan. It can only be a divine sign if it is a genuine but unlearned language.
4. Since Biblical tongues are genuine human languages, how do you explain what yours is?
5. If tongues are a gift from God to all the church, why did you need to get this gift from a man just as in occult religions? [I have never heard of a Charismatic receiving this gift alone, except in one or two cases where it followed an earlier meeting with a person who already had this gift.]
6. Since all spiritual gifts are given sovereignly by God as he wills, why are people exhorted to seek tongues specially, to pursue after them, get hands laid on them for it, and get coached into uttering something?
7. Biblical tongues are said to cease before the end; Charismatic tongues are claimed to continue until the end. How can you defend something so clearly anti-Biblical?
8. Since everyone admits that tongues ceased for hundreds of years, and since scripture tells us that once they ceased they were finished, how do you explain what you utter?
9. If tongues are for corporate edification, why do you use them for personal benefit?
10. If a tongue is a prayer (1 Cor 14:2, 14), why do you disobey Jesus’ command not to pray in gibberish (i.e. an unknown, unintelligible sound)?
11. Since meetings must be conducted in decency and good order (1 Cor 14:40), how can you incorporate tongues, which can’t be tested as to their origin by anyone. A person could bring a pagan tongue and no one would know.
12. Since Biblical tongue-speakers understood what they uttered, how do you defend what you speak if you do not understand what you utter?
13. Why is the requirement to always interpret a tongue often violated? This happens in many meetings (either spoken aloud or quietly under the breath in worship), during singing in the Spirit, almost always when someone speaks after being ‘baptised in the Spirit’, or in private devotions.
14. If tongues are part of God’s empowering for witness, why has the UK church dramatically declined in the period when tongues-speaking became widespread?

The overwhelming conclusion is that modern tongues are a false, satanic intrusion in worship. They bear no similarity to genuine tongues evidenced in the first century as a sign to unbelievers that God’s kingdom had arrived as prophesied. Be warned!

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