

Speaking in Tongues

Evidence of the Holy Ghost? Gift of the Spirit? Or both?

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For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people. 12 To whom he said, This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing: yet they would not hear.

Isaiah 28:11-12

In the law it is written, With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that will they not hear me, saith the Lord.

1 Corinthians 14:21

There are a number of beliefs amongst modern Christianity today concerning speaking in tongues. Some believe that speaking in tongues today is only of the devil. Some believe that tongues have ceased from modern society and were only for the New Testament church. Some believe that tongues is a gift that some have while most do not. Some believe that speaking in tongues is a (one of many) evidence that a person has been filled with the Holy Ghost while others, such as this organization, believe that tongues is the initial evidence of receiving the Holy Ghost.

The intent of this paper is to cover the scriptures pertaining to speaking in tongues, explain the different usages of tongues in the New Testament, make a case for the proper use of tongues in our lives today, and provide answers to some of the arguments against tongues...

Definition:

- According to Strong's Greek dictionary of the New Testament, the word 'tongues' comes from the Greek word, γλῶσσα (glōssa, gloce'-sah) meaning 'by implication a language (specifically one naturally unacquired)'
- 'Tongues' in reference to this paper, is referring to one 'speaking in tongues', meaning, speaking in a language that the speaker does not know, whether an earthly language (Acts 2:8-11) or a heavenly one (1 Corinthians 13:1).

Tongues Shall Cease

Some believe that tongues are not for us today, citing 1 Corinthians 13:8: *Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.* While this scripture most certainly states that tongues shall cease, it does not tell us when this will come to pass. It's quite obvious that knowledge has not ceased. Biblical prophecies are still coming to pass, especially as we get closer and closer to the end of the New Testament era. Many still believe in and see the gift of prophecy both in use and being fulfilled today. While both Biblical and modern day prophecy are studied in and of themselves, it's hard to argue that prophecy is no longer a part of our lives. Is tongues the only one that is no longer with us today?

In Mark 16:17, Jesus said *And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues*; When Peter explained the first recorded event of speaking in tongues, he declared it as the fulfillment of prophecy from Joel chapter 2. Peter states in Acts 2:16 *But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; 17 And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh...* Peter goes on to quote the prophet Joel, implying that these last days were now in process and continue up until the 'Great and notable day of the Lord'. Those that live to see *wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: The sun*

shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood (verses 19&20), will still be living in ‘the last days’ and have the opportunity to ‘call on the name of the Lord and be saved’ (verse 21).

If tongues were a one time event in Acts chapter 2, it could be written off as having ceased. If it was only referenced in the book of Acts, there may be the opportunity to consider that it was only for the very start of the New Testament church. But because tongues are addressed by Paul in his letter to the church of Corinth, it is quite clear that tongues were an active part of the church.

1 Corinthians 13:8 continues on: *9 For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. 10 But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.* This implies that until *that which is perfect is come* that prophecy and tongues will continue. Since this was spoken after the resurrection of Christ, the soonest that this could take place is at the rapture.

If we honestly believe that tongues have ceased we have to ask ourselves: Are we a part of the New Testament church? Are we still living in the last days? Is God still pouring out His spirit? Are we true believers?

Tongues as Evidence of Receiving the Gift of the Holy Ghost

According to Acts 2:38 and 39, you shall receive the Holy Ghost once you have repented and been baptized. Many believe that they have the infilling of the Holy Ghost and yet they cannot point to any specific evidence. Some teach that if you believe you are filled and yet Acts 19:2 asks, *Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?* Others feel that once you’ve been baptized you will have the Holy Ghost, and yet Acts 8:14-16 states that Peter and John *prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: 16 (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.)*. There are two key points that can be gleaned from these scriptures...

1. Believing, repentance, baptism, a sinners prayer, or anything else does not guarantee that you have the Holy Ghost.
2. You will know when you receive the Holy Ghost. It will be a specific point in time.

The question we must ask ourselves then is “How do I know that I have received the Holy Ghost as promised in the Bible”? Only the Bible can answer that question...

Descriptive Examples of People Receiving the Holy Ghost

The Bible never says that ‘you will know that you have received the Holy Ghost when this happens’. As a result, we need to seek out the answer by studying scripture. These are the ONLY scriptures that describe someone receiving the Holy Ghost...

- Acts 2:2 *And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. 3 And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance...6 Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language...11...the wonderful works of God.*
- Acts 4:31 *And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.*
- Acts 10:44 *While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. 45 And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. 46 For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God.*
- Acts 19:6 *And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied.*

Old Testament Examples

While these scriptures describe someone receiving the Holy Ghost, we would generally discard them as a guide for the church of today since they are previous to the crucifixion. John 7:39 states *the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified*. While some were filled with God's Spirit in the Old Testament dispensation, it wasn't being poured out upon all flesh, it wasn't necessarily in the manner that we know of today. Logically, these scriptures would not be considered but are included for reference.

- Luke 1:41 *And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost:*
- Luke 1:67 *And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied...*
- John 20:22 *And when he had said this, he [Jesus] breathed on them, and saith unto them, **Receive ye the Holy Ghost**: (We don't know that they received the Holy Ghost at this time. The Bible does not state that they did. Jesus was more likely prophesying over them)*

A Supernatural Experience

Acts chapter 8 shares one of the most powerful, and likely most important stories about people receiving the Holy Ghost...

Acts 8:9 *But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: 10 To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God... 12 But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. 13 Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done. 14 Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: 15 Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: 16 (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) 17 Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost. 18 And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, 19 Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost.*

Simon was a famous sorcerer in Samaria who used witchcraft to accomplish supernatural things. When he believed on the Lord and started hanging around Philip, the Bible says that he saw miracles and signs being done and yet he only wondered at them. Yet when he saw someone receive the gift of the Holy Ghost through the laying on of hands, he tried to buy the same power and ability for himself. There is no question that when you receive the Holy Ghost, something supernatural will happen at that point! And yet in this story, we have no description of what Simon heard or saw.

From our four descriptive examples we have the following...

Evidence	Qty	Supernatural	Comments
Sound as of a rushing mighty wind	1x	Yes	Only seen the one time in scripture (the first time), never mentioned again and rarely, if ever, seen outside of scripture (history or modern day)
Cloven tongues like fire on the person	1x	Yes	
Speaking the Word of God with boldness	1x	No	While all three of these can and may be God inspired, they certainly wouldn't captivate the attention of a sorcerer and could easily be mimicked by someone with knowledge and ability
Prophesying	1x	???	
Magnifying God	2x	No	Mentioned in 3 of the 4 examples Historical evidence since Acts and still taking place today
Speaking in tongues	3x	Yes	

...the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word...**For** they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God... Acts 10:44,46

The word ‘for’ comes from the Greek word γάρ [gar]: “A primary particle; properly assigning a reason (used in argument, explanation or intensification; often with other particles): - and, as, because (that), but, even, for indeed, no doubt, seeing, then, therefore, verily, what, why, yet.”¹

It seems rather apparent that speaking in tongues is the supernatural evidence of God filling your life with the gift of the Holy Ghost. What else could it be?

Are Tongues an evidence or the evidence?

Many contend that tongues are one of a number of evidences that one has received the Holy Ghost. However, most that hold to this line of thought do not claim another supernatural occurrence in the place of tongues. They do not claim an evidence that can be ‘seen and heard’ at the point of infilling as noted in Act 2:33, *...and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear.*

Approximately 2000 years after the book of Acts took place, people are still speaking in tongues! It is becoming more prevalent every year as God pours out His Spirit in these last of the last days. Magnifying God, speaking the Word with boldness, prophecy, and other utterances often take place when someone is filled with the Holy Ghost but it always seems to be in conjunction with tongues.

Other Proclaimed Evidences

The following is a list of evidences that some claim are proof of the infilling of the Holy Ghost. None would deny that most of these traits are evident in the lives of those filled with the Holy Ghost, nor that they may be supernaturally inspired. But as we consider the actual signs of the initial infilling, we need to ask ourselves: Did it take place at the point of infilling? Is it noted in Biblical examples of one receiving the Holy Ghost? Is it supernatural (Would a sorcerer be impressed)? Is it seen and heard?

Evidence	Point Of Infilling?	Biblical Examples?	Super Natural?	Seen & Heard?	Comments
Fruits of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, etc)	Could	No	No	Yes	Even non Christians can exhibit fruits of the spirit
Gifts of the Spirit	Could	Some*	Yes	Yes	God honors faith (See Matt7:21-24)
Love for God	Could	No	No	Yes	People’s hearts change towards one another through time and experiences (even non Christians)
Love for others	Could	No	No	Yes	

*Tongues & Propheying are seen in Biblical examples

The Gifts of the Spirit

In I Corinthians chapter 12, the Apostle Paul introduces the nine gifts of the Spirit. He describes the church members as the body of Christ (I Cor. 12:27). Just as a physical body has many parts, each having their own functions and abilities, so are members of the church. We aren’t all the same. We have different talents, personalities, character traits, backgrounds, etc. In like manner, different members of the body of Christ are blessed with different gifts from God (I Cor. 12:18). These gifts are not given to us for our benefit but rather to benefit others as stated in I Corinthians 12:7: *the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.*

Two of these spiritual gifts are ‘divers kinds of tongues’ and ‘interpretation of tongues’ (I Cor. 12:10). Tongues and interpretation of tongues go hand in hand. God speaks a message to the church through tongues, and then that message is interpreted into the known language in order for there to be

understanding. Paul states in I Corinthians 14:28 that *If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course; and let one interpret.* In other words, no more than 2-3 people should speak in tongues before someone interpret what the tongues mean. It's important to understand that the gift of tongues in and of itself will only cause confusion. Verses 6-11 compare the gift of tongues without interpretation to musical instruments with no distinctive sound. Verse 8 says, *For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?* Verses 11 & 12 imply that tongues without interpretation is like listening to a foreigner that you can't understand (barbaric), and is non edifying to the body. For this reason, Paul states in verse 28 that *if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God.*

In I Corinthians chapter 14, it appears that Paul was addressing a problem in the Corinthian church. Too many people were talking in tongues to the church, without the edification of an interpretation. When the Spiritual gift of tongues takes place in the church, the body (members) grows quiet, waiting to hear from God through the gift of interpretation. If no interpretation takes place, the church is left hanging, not sure what to do next. Is the interpretation coming? Is the interpreter questioning whether God is truly using him or not and therefore not speaking up? Were the tongues not a gift of the Spirit meant for the church but rather someone simply talking in tongues? Generally the church will wait upon the Lord (and upon the interpreter) for a period of time. If the interpretation does not come, the person leading the service will move on. If this happens too often it can stifle the use of the gifts.

While addressing this issue, Paul wanted to make it clear that speaking in tongues is a good thing...

- Verse 5: *I would that ye all spake with tongues* (The CEV version says *I am glad for you to speak unknown languages*).
- Verses 18: *I speak with tongues more than ye all:*
- Verse 39: *forbid not to speak with tongues*

But he continues on in verse 19 by saying *Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue...23 If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad? 26 How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying. 27 If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course; and let one interpret. 28 But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church;*

Paul wanted the church to understand that the gift of tongues and interpretation of tongues were for the edification of the church. If everyone is speaking in tongues, or speaking over one another, people are going to be confused and think we are crazy. He compels the members to desire gifts such as prophecy, which edify. *Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church* (Verse 12). He sums up his discussion on spiritual gifts, and the the misuse of gifts, by saying *Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues. 40 Let all things be done decently and in order.* (I Corinthians 14:39-40)

Tongues are a Gift

Some people use scriptures about the gift of tongues to show that tongues are not the evidence of the infilling of the Holy Ghost, but rather one of the nine Spiritual gifts, which you may or may not have. 1 Corinthians 12:30 appears to support this belief by saying *Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret?.* Before going any further, lets look at the purpose of tongues.

The purpose of tongues

Speaking in tongues have some specific intents and purposes...

- 1Corinthians 14:2: *For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries.* Speaking in tongues is ultimately communication to God. Although the speaker does not know what he is saying, there is a strong spiritual connection as God uses the speakers most unruly member, the tongue (James 3:8). Acts 2:4 says that *the Spirit gave them utterance*, or the words to speak. Similar to Romans 8:26 (*Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered*), when we speak in tongues, we can pray to and magnify God in a way that we can not do on our own. It's a wonderful experience.
- 1Corinthians 14:4: *He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself:* To edify is to build up, confirm, or embolden¹. Speaking in tongues is meant to strengthen and encourage the speaker. Knowing that, it makes perfect sense that tongues would also be evidence of receiving the Holy Ghost.
- 1Corinthians 14:22: *Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not:* Tongues are also meant to draw the attention of non-believers. This is likely because it is a supernatural phenomenon. The believer has no problem receiving a prophecy, but the non-believer may tend to write it off as something that the speaker made up. Speaking in tongues caught the attention of thousands in Acts chapter 2, it caught the attention of a sorcerer in Acts chapter 8, and it can catch the attention of people today.

So the scriptures show us that tongues have three specific purposes: Communication with God, Self Edification, and a Sign to Unbelievers. Paul made it quite clear in his discussion about the gift of tongues that it wasn't one of the more desirable gifts. It ranks lower in value than other gifts (I Cor. 12:28), and more importantly, it does not edify others (I Cor. 14:2, 4-5, 12-13, 21, 39). With nine different gifts of the Spirit, why did Paul need to address the overuse of the gift that you should desire the least? It seems logical that people were speaking in tongues already. Speaking in tongues when you receive the Holy Ghost is self edifying (salvation is affirmed), a form of worship or communication to God (not meant for the church as a whole), and is definitely noticed by unbelievers. In their exuberance, some were likely disrupting the service, believing they had a message for everyone when they didn't.

Another thing to consider: Faith is a gift of the Spirit (I Cor. 12:9) and yet Romans 12:3 tells us that all men have a *measure of faith*. Just because faith is a gift that God gives some to edify the church, it does not mean that nobody else has faith. The same is true with tongues...

I Corinthians 12:30 - *Have all the gifts of healing? No. do all speak with tongues? Not as a gift, no. do all interpret? No.* Paul is wrapping up the chapter by pointing out that just because you speak in tongues, it does not mean that you have the gift of tongues. The gift of tongues and the evidence of the Holy Ghost may both involve someone speaking in tongues, but they are different!

The Purpose of Tongues was to Communicate to Foreigners

Some people claim that the purpose of tongues was so the gospel could be spread to people of other languages. There is no Bible to back this up. There is only one example in the Bible where others understood the language: Acts 2:8-11. If you read the rest of the chapter, they were not won over by what was spoken in tongues, they were won over by the preaching of the Word. There was no implication that tongues were meant for those that spoke the language. They simply heard it...

1Corinthians 14:2 says *For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God:*

Just like it happened in Acts 2, people still speak in tongues today when someone happens to be in the crowd who recognizes the language being spoken. This tends to happen most often with missionaries in foreign lands who will hear someone magnify God in perfect English. While it certainly is possible for God to use tongues in this way, it is not the intent of tongues as a whole.

Praying or Singing in Tongues

1Corinthians 14:14-15 - *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.*

CEV Version - *For example, if I use an unknown language in my prayers, my spirit prays but my mind is useless. 15 Then what should I do? There are times when I should pray with my spirit, and times when I should pray with my mind. Sometimes I should sing with my spirit, and at other times I should sing with my mind.*

Paul is making the same point with praying and singing in tongues as he was with speaking in tongues: It's generally between the individual and God and not meant to disrupt the service (Also see Romans 8:26). However, I was in a service once where God was moving in a powerful way when someone began singing in tongues. Normally, everyone would continue worshipping with the understanding that this is not meant for the entire body, but this time a hush fell over the entire church and we simply basked in God's presence, experiencing Him in a way that few ever will. It was a rare and special event and everyone knew it. It was amazing.

Summary

Do you know that you have received the Holy Ghost? Was it a specific point in time? Did people around you know based on what they saw and/or heard? Consider what Peter said in Acts 11:15... *And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning.*

While the Holy Ghost is a gift, we all need to make sure that we have received it. We can do great things for God. We can even feel confident in our salvation. And yet without the Holy Ghost in our lives, God may reject us. If you have not spoken in tongues, how do you know that God has accepted you?

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock:

Matthew 7:21-24

Rather than try to disprove tongues as the evidence of the infilling of the Holy Ghost, why not honestly seek God and ask for it? You may never be the same again...

He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.

John 7:38



References:

1. Strongs Greek & Hebrew Dictionary