

What is the Scriptural View of Speaking in Tongues? #2

Acts 2:4-11

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The gift of speaking in tongues in Acts 2 was the miraculous ability to speak in foreign languages and dialects that had never been learned. Speaking in tongues did not consist of meaningless sounds or a so-called “heavenly language”, but actual foreign languages of people whose countries are listed in Acts 2:9-11. So it may be asked, what do you believe is behind those who claim to be speaking in tongues today?

Though I cannot speak for every case, I can address what I now believe was happening in my case when I believed I was speaking in tongues until my mid-twenties (which may well be the same for many who claim to speak in tongues today).

FIRST, I do not believe it was the Holy Spirit that prompted me to pray in the meaningless sounds that I uttered—for it was not a foreign language that I was speaking as was miraculously bestowed in Acts 2, Acts 10, Acts 19, and 1 Corinthians 12-14.

SECOND, I believe I was led by my own erroneous thinking and a sinful understanding of what the Scripture taught. I had a zeal (as Paul states), but not a zeal according to knowledge. I was sincere, but I was sincerely wrong.

THIRD, I believe I was also led by my own experience and the experience of others around me, rather than by an accurate understanding of God’s Word—the spirit was willing, but the flesh was weak. I was led by my feelings and emotions, more than by a Spirit-led study of God’s Word.

FOURTH, I do not believe I was possessed by Satan, but as in all errors which we all have at one time embraced (even as Christians), the world, the flesh, and the devil can certainly be involved in leading us astray (Jesus even said to Peter, “Get thee behind me Satan”, when Peter sought out of love for Christ to erroneously dissuade Christ from going to the cross, Matthew 16:23).

FIFTH, though the claim to speak in tongues (when it lacks the biblical criteria of speaking in foreign languages of the world) is **dangerous** (as is true of any error into which a Christian may fall), nevertheless, I do not believe it to be **damnable** in itself (as is true of denying the holy Trinity, denying the full deity and humanity of Jesus Christ, denying the substitutionary death and bodily resurrection of Christ, or denying that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone). There are even very committed five-point Calvinist Churches that are charismatic (Association of Reformed Charismatic Churches, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church etc.).

SIXTH, I certainly do not want to downplay the seriousness of the error of those who (like myself at one time) claim to speak in tongues today, for it has become the ecumenical glue to bring together Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestants (the charismatic renewal in the Roman Catholic Church has been very effective in this way since the 1970s). Even Mormons and Unitarian (or Oneness) Pentecostals claim to speak in tongues, as do other religions around the world. Thus, the claim to speak in tongues is certainly no indication that one is a redeemed and justified Christian at all (since many false religions and cults have a similar experience). Dear ones, when any one experience is used to forge compacts, agreements, common declarations with the Roman Catholic Church (which is the seat of the papal antichrist), all Bible-believing Christians ought to be concerned about the alleged biblical nature of such

an experience.

Let us now continue our study of the gift of tongues as it is specifically mentioned from our text in Acts 2:4-11. Last Lord's Day, the first characteristic of the biblical gift of tongues was addressed: **Speaking in tongues is the miraculous ability to speak in a foreign language of the world which one has never learned.** This Lord's Day, we add to that first characteristic a second characteristic of the biblical gift of tongues: **Speaking in tongues was intended by the Holy Spirit for the edification of the church (rather than merely for one's own personal edification).**

I. The Public Use of Tongues Was for the Edification of the Church in the Book of Acts.

A. Acts 2.

1. The very fact that the biblical gift of tongues that was spoken by the apostles and other believers in the foreign languages and dialects of those Jews and proselytes gathered in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost would imply that their speech or utterance was intended to be used by the Holy Spirit to proclaim a message and a testimony from the Lord to those whose languages were spoken (Acts 2:6,11).

2. Though we are not told precisely (word for word) what the message and testimony was that was communicated to the Jews and proselytes there in Jerusalem, nevertheless, we are told what was spoken in tongues by way of summary in Acts 2:11: "we do hear them speak in our tongues the great deeds of God."

3. Now I don't suppose that these messages in tongues were necessarily all proclaimed simultaneously (so that they were all talking over one another). Perhaps one message was delivered by one person in one language, then afterwards another message was spoken by a different person in a different language, until all who had received the

gift of tongues had proclaimed their message and testimony. This would simply be following the same instruction of the same Holy Spirit through Paul to those in the Church of Corinth (1 Corinthians 14:27).

4. What might the “wonderful [or mighty] works of God” encompass?
 - a. Perhaps the ministry and miracles of Jesus Christ, as well as His death, bodily resurrection, and bodily ascension into heaven.
 - b. Perhaps the wonderful works of God included the baptism of the Spirit that united them to the glorified Christ and to all who are united to Christ.
 - c. Perhaps the wonderful works of God included the miraculous ability given to unlearned Galileans to speak in languages they had never studied.
 - d. Perhaps the wonderful works of God included a warning to the Jews and proselytes to repent and turn in faith to Christ lest they receive of the mighty hand of God’s judgment.
 - e. Perhaps the wonderful works of God included all of the above and more. But what is most important is that the gift of tongues was given to be understood by others for their instruction, edification, and even their warning. The gift of tongues in Acts 2 was not given so that they might go into their private prayer closet at home or merely for their own instruction, edification, or warning. The gift of tongues was not given to hide the truth from others, but rather to reveal the truth to others. There was a much bigger and more inclusive purpose for the gift of speaking in tongues—it was to be understood by others for their edification. This being the first time God gave the gift of tongues, we should expect the same purpose to be realized by the Holy Spirit in the subsequent biblical cases as well.

B. **Acts 10.**

1. This is the second account of speaking in tongues we

considered last Lord's Day in which Peter preached the gospel unto Cornelius, the Roman centurion, and who was brought to faith by the power of the Holy Spirit and was given the same gift of speaking in tongues (along with family members and friends of Cornelius) just as was given to those on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 10:46-47; Acts 11:17).

2. In as much as this was the same gift of the Holy Spirit and the same gift of tongues that was graciously given on the Day of Pentecost, we therefore are assured that they too spoke in foreign languages they had never learned (the same word, *glossa*, is used in Acts 2 and in Acts 10).

3. Moreover, the message and testimony spoken in tongues was understood by Peter and the others Jews who were with Peter, because we read in Acts 10:46 that the general content of that message in tongues consisted of this: "and they magnified God." It would appear that at least Peter was given the gift to interpret the message in tongues. This was a message and testimony that was once again given in tongues (languages) in a public setting with the intention of the Holy Spirit that those gathered together were blessed and edified by these words in their magnifying, exalting, and praising God. This gift of tongues was once again not given for the purpose of merely one's own private edification, but for the edification of others in the assembly.

II. The Public Use of Tongues Was for the Edification of the Church in 1 Corinthians.

A. 1 Corinthians 12.

1. The primary purpose of speaking in tongues (as with all gifts of the Holy Spirit) is the profit, edification, and benefit of others who are present, rather than merely for the profit, edification, and benefit of the one who speaks in tongues. In other words, if the gift of tongues is to profit those who are present in the assembly, it must be a gift that is used

publicly rather than privately (1 Corinthians 12:7 [“to profit for the common good”, 14-20 [all the members of the body function for the benefit of the whole body and not merely for the benefit of the individual member]]).

2. What would the Lord think (and what would you think) if I only used the gift of teaching to profit myself, but not to profit others in the Church of Christ? Or what if others who had the gift of helps only used that gift to help themselves? Or what if the eye only used sight for its own profit but not for the profit of the whole body? You see, dear ones, all the gifts of the Spirit are given for the edification of others, and when others are edified, you will individually be edified in ministering to and in serving one another—we are the most blessed when the Lord uses us to serve others with the gift He has given to us.

3. That, dear ones, is the problem that I had in my mid-twenties with the alleged gift of speaking in tongues—I was using it as a mere “prayer language” for my own edification in my private prayer. However, that is not the Spirit-inspired purpose of spiritual gifts in general or of speaking in tongues in particular.

4. When I began to evaluate the gift of tongues I thought I possessed, it became very, very evident that I did not have the biblical gift of tongues because I was not speaking in a foreign language that I had never learned and I was using it for my own mere edification in prayer, rather than for the edification of others in public. Dear ones, the goal of all spiritual gifts is the glory of God in service to others, not self-service.

B. **1 Corinthians 13.**

1. This chapter on love is placed between 1 Corinthians 12 and 1 Corinthians 14 for the very purpose of demonstrating that if the gifts we claim to have are not being used out of love for others and to the profit of others, then we are nothing (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

2. But also observe that when Paul begins to detail the outworking of *agape* love (which is a self-sacrificial love like that of Christ) in the use of spiritual gifts, he states in 1 Corinthians 13:5 that charity “seeketh not her own” (i.e. seeketh not her own profit primarily, but the profit of others first and foremost—Ephesians 4:12; 1 Peter 4:10).

3. I learned as I was evaluating the gift of tongues I thought I had against the inspired and infallible teaching of God’s Word that I was selfish and self-centered to think that God would give any spiritual gift simply to edify myself. This truth likewise led me to reconsider the gift of tongues I believed I had, and I looked all around me, and nearly all I knew who likewise claimed to have the gift of tongues were doing what I was doing—using it as a mere “prayer language” in the privacy of their own prayer closet at home, contrary to the clear teaching of Scripture.

C. **1 Corinthians 14.**

1. In 1 Corinthians 14 Paul continues to demonstrate that the primary purpose of spiritual gifts is to glorify God by edifying others in the Church of Christ. Paul does so by contrasting the gift of tongues (when it is not interpreted into the language of the people) to that of prophecy (which is spoken in the language of the people)—1 Corinthians 14:2-3; 1 Corinthians 14:4; 1 Corinthians 14:17; 1 Corinthians 14:18-19; 1 Corinthians 14:23-25.

2. But Paul also states the general principle that should guide the use of all the gifts of the Spirit (including speaking in tongues): “Let all things be done unto edifying” (1 Corinthians 14:26).

3. From this very brief survey, we see that the primary goal of the gift of tongues was not for the private edification of the one who spoke in tongues, but was for the glory of Christ and for the edification of others who heard it.

4. The only time that Paul instructs those with the gift of tongues in Corinth to speak silently to themselves is when they realize

there is no one present in the assembly with the gift of interpretation or translation (1 Corinthians 14:28). This is an exception to the rule; it is not the rule. And it certainly is not a warrant for making tongues a prayer language at home. There is nothing in Scripture that would lead to such a conclusion.

5. Some have also appealed to **Romans 8:26**. Whether it is the Holy Spirit that is groaning or whether it is the believer that is groaning, note that it is a groaning that cannot be expressed in words—there is no speaking in any language at all.

In closing, I would like to leave you with the following application.

During the Middle Ages and before the Protestant Reformation in Europe, there was such ignorance that reigned among the people. They came to worship and watched as the priest read in Latin and spoke in Latin with his back turned away from the congregation and toward the altar. There was no biblical edification because it was all conducted in a language the common people did not understand. Salvation was far away from the people because edification in understanding was far away from the people.

But then the Holy Spirit began to move in great power upon men like Wycliffe and Tyndale who translated the Scripture into the common tongue of the people, and the people were brought to Christ, edified, and able to teach others what they were learning.

Dear ones, we presently take so much for granted. Our hearts should be rejoicing in the edification brought by the Holy Spirit through our Protestant and Reformed forefathers. There were two biblical principles they emphasized in worship. (1) Worship is first and foremost for the glory of God—therefore, we worship the Lord according to what He has

revealed and not according to what we think He would like or what we think would benefit us the most or appeal to the greatest number of people. Worship is regulated by God alone speaking in His Word (Regulative Principle of Worship as found in the Second Commandment). (2) Worship that is regulated by God must edify and build the people of God through their understanding what is being read, sung, and preached. Otherwise there will be no edification. The Bible must be faithfully read, sung, and preached in English. The prayers of the minister must be prayed in English. Sermons must consist of doctrinal preaching, but also consist of practical application to the hearts and lives of God's people. And, dear ones, the reason we line out the Psalms is for this grand purpose of edification: edifying not only those who can read, but also edifying those who for various reasons cannot read (whether it be young children, the aged whose sight is failing, mothers or fathers with small children in their arms, the blind, or those who do not own a copy of the Psalter). Worship is all about glorifying God and edifying the Church of Christ. And that is why this principle of edification is so important to the Holy Spirit and ought to be important to each of us. That is why we all must prepare ourselves diligently for worship each Lord's Day—not only the minister, but also the people. You will not glorify God, nor will you be edified. You may hear the Scripture read in English, the Psalms sung in English, the prayers prayed in English, and the sermon preached in English, but if you are not prepared, you will not glorify God and you will not be edified. Let us each one come to worship, praising God that we are not in the dark, but have the light to glorify God and to be edified.

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