

Are We Pentecostals Losing Our Religion by Holding Our Tongue-Talking?

Praying in tongues is getting a lot of attention in secular media these days. *The New York Times* recently published an article called “Why We Talk in Tongues,” and the Associated Press is reporting “Messages in Tongues Down Among Pentecostals.”

Wait, what?

Can you even be Pentecostal—or charismatic—without praying in tongues? Isn’t it somewhat of an oxymoron to stumble upon a born-again, blood-bought, Spirit-filled believer who doesn’t speak in tongues? After all, the evidence of being filled with the Spirit is speaking in other tongues and prophesying (Acts 19:6).

I was shocked by the AP report about a small Assemblies of God congregation that looks just like every other Pentecostal church service—except nobody is speaking in tongues. The wire service positions Three Crosses Church as an example of a downward trend in tongue-talking—for the sake of moving into the mainstream.

Wait, what?

Squashing a gift of the Spirit to cater to the mainstream? Suppressing spiritual gifts to find acceptance in the mainstream?

God forbid Pentecostals and charismatics stop speaking in tongues at church for the sake of the mainstream! I mean, since when has true Christianity ever been mainstream anyway? We’re supposed to have a reputation for turning the world

upside down (Acts 17:6), not putting God in a seeker-friendly box so churchgoers—wearing foam earplugs in case the music is too loud and duly caffeinated with lattes from the cafe—have a more comfortable experience.

“It’s different now,” Pastor Ken Walters of Three Crosses Church told the AP. “People don’t like to stand out if they don’t have to.”

Wait, what?

Many churches have already conformed to the world, tapping into a spirit of entertainment to make the church more seeker friendly. Do we now have to conform to the world in our prayer life also (Rom. 12:2)? I mean, what’s next? Do we stop praying in church altogether and turn a worship service into a weekly Sunday morning motivational seminar with no mention of Father, Son and Holy Ghost, lest we make visitors uncomfortable and they don’t give an offering? God forbid! The Bible says, “Do not quench the Spirit” (1 Thess. 5:19).

I’ve shared in the past how the first time I saw people praying in tongues it completely freaked me out. Of course, that wasn’t in a church setting. Don’t get me wrong; I’m not suggesting that church folks should bust out in tongues in the middle of a service or get so carried away during worship that they distract the congregation, claiming, “The Holy Ghost made me do it!” Nor am I suggesting that the preacher should replace his Bible teaching with a message in tongues that no one understands (1 Cor. 14:1-12). Everything in church should be done decently and in order (v. 40).

But during prayer meetings, during worship or during an altar call, quietly speaking in tongues is a natural part of the Pentecostal/charismatic service. Putting a lid on tongues at church not only risks quenching the Spirit, but it may also grieve Him.

If the Spirit gives us utterance and we don’t release what

He's saying—even if that's intercession in an unknown tongue—we could be hindering God's purposes: "For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered" (Rom. 8:26). If we expect to see more miracles, we need to give the Holy Spirit free reign—and that means allowing people to speak in tongues when the Spirit gives them utterance (Acts 2:4). Again, decently and in order.

Speaking in tongues is one of the defining marks of Pentecostals and charismatics. So, are we losing our religion? And if we lose this aspect of our faith, what else are we ultimately giving up with it? Are we moving into an age of "don't ask, don't tell" if you are filled with the Holy Spirit and speak in a supernatural prayer language? God forbid!

"This is our power," Nick Farone, a pastor who runs a Christian center in Louisiana and a member of the Pentecostal Church of God, told the AP. "We shouldn't be ashamed."

Can somebody say, "Amen"?

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