

Is Speaking in Tongues Just Gibberish?

This is quite a revelation to some people. When it comes to speaking in tongues, some people are afraid they cannot do it, or that what comes out may not really be a language. They have little faith.

One must have faith in the operation of God.

The fact of the matter is that any language that one does not understand sounds foolish. Hearing a foreign language sounds silly to one who does not understand it. It would just be gibberish as far as the listener is concerned. But hearing a language one recognizes would not sound foolish. Because one does not know a language spoken by one speaking in tongues, they might think, "Well, they're just making it up."

But 1 Corinthians 14:10 is the key to this mystery. The apostle Paul states, "There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world, and none of them is without signification." That means there is nothing one utters that would not have a meaning to God. Nothing! Any kind of sound one would breathe out! Any kind of sound one would make! No matter how foolish it sounds, it would have meaning as far as God is concerned.

So when speaking in tongues, if it sounds foolish, silly or like gibberish, and one does not think it is a language, he should remember this: There is nothing one can utter that does not have meaning as far as God is concerned.

In Newport, Rhode Island, at the senior US Navy Chaplains School, a professor from Indiana University Northwest spoke to the chaplains on voice—how to speak. He also sat in and judged a class when chaplains did some speaking. One chaplain spoke on the Holy Spirit, and it was well received by him. He wanted

to talk with that chaplain privately about it. He was already favorable to the message on the Holy Spirit, which was wonderful.

He said to the chaplain, "I'll give you another illustration to add to your presentation. When a baby lies in the crib, a baby has a way of making his wants known, even though he does not have a structural language. And any mother can tell you what the baby wants, without even looking at him, just hearing him in the other room! She knows what he wants. He either wants something to eat, or he has got a wet diaper, or something else is the matter. But she knows what's going on!"

Sure, they do. The child has no structural language. He continued, "That's the way it is when you speak in tongues. You don't wait until you get a structured language. You just start with what you have, and then the structured language comes." That was beautiful. So one does not wait for it, but just starts speaking out. Some Pentecostals have been known to say that when people begin speaking in tongues, that it is just gibberish, that it is not a real language. The first question is, "How do they know so much?"

Larry Christiansen was in Germany, and he spoke with Dr. Theodore Rapp, professor of languages at Mainz University in Germany. Dr. Rapp spoke eight languages fluently and worked in many others. He has also done some work in the tribal languages in Africa. But Larry asked Dr. Rapp, "Doctor, if someone who was going to speak in tongues spoke gibberish, would you know? Could you tell if it was?"

This great linguist made this point. He said, "No, I couldn't, not unless I had 16 typewritten pages of phonetic script and heard it spoken for a great number of times. Not even then could I decide."

But how does a common individual on the street of America decide that it is gibberish when he does not know anything

about it or has not got half the mind that Dr. Rapp has? Such Pentecostals do not know what they are talking about. They are silly. One should not be too quick to call anything gibberish. Before one says anything is not a language, he has got to speak about 6,000 languages, because there are about that many languages and dialects in the world today.

☒ So all utterance has meaning. The difficulty is that one needs to have faith in God's Word and trust it to be true. How wonderful it is to see somebody who has never spoken in tongues do so when they do not know how. When laying hands on them, telling them to utter anything, they begin to utter something. Then all of a sudden they assume a language. This is the way it works.

They do not wait until they have a perfect language. They start with what they have, and God takes over and helps them.
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Chaplain Stanford E. Linzey, Jr. was endorsed by the Assemblies of God as the first active duty Navy Pentecostal chaplain, and was the first to attain the rank of Captain. He wrote "Pentecost in the Pentagon," "The Holy Spirit in the Third Millennium" for which he received the 2005 "Writer of the Year" award from the San Diego Christian Writers' Guild, and "Baptism in the Spirit." He wrote for the Pentecostal Evangel and Voice. As a sailor he was a World War II hero as a survivor of the Battle of Midway aboard the USS Yorktown. He received a B.A. degree at Linda Vista Baptist College, an . degree at the American Baptist Seminary of the West, a . degree at Fuller Theological Seminary and was selected by the US Navy to attend Harvard Divinity School in residence for a year. He inducted into Who's Who in Religion in America, International Men of Achievement and 5,000 Personalities in the World.