

The Scriptural Reality of Speaking in New Tongues

“As it is said, ‘Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion’” (Heb. 3:15, ESV).

In my college training the phrase “they shall speak with new tongues” (Mark 16:17) was somehow whited out, redacted and hidden from the eyes of all. Once I took off the blinders, I finally asked, “What exactly does that phrase mean?” I quickly learned that it means what the Bible said it means.

The beginning of the fulfillment of that phrase is recorded in Acts 2, when the Parthians and Medes and 14 other nationalities heard the Word of God spoken in their own language. The 120 people who gathered in the Upper Room on the day of Pentecost (Acts 1:15) were suddenly filled with the Holy Spirit and they “began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (2:4).

Throughout the bulk of my ministry life, I tried to dismiss speaking in tongues for two reasons: 1) I was taught to do so, and 2) I’d never experienced it. I honestly thought people who practiced it were crazy. In my natural understanding, I would think the text cannot possibly mean what it says it means. But it did exactly that on the day of Pentecost, and in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians he went to great lengths to describe the difference between speaking and praying in tongues.

In reference to speaking in tongues, Paul concluded the passage by warning us to never forbid the speaking of tongues, rather to ensure it always flows for the edification of the church and never takes the place of prophesying (1 Cor. 14). Why? Because the Bible teaches that the person who spoke the tongue is not to be the same person who interprets the tongue

(1 Cor. 14:27–28). They represent two different gifts in two different people. So, the spoken tongue leads the way to the prophetic interpretation, and the mystery of this transaction rests in the Spirit of God.

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The Scripture says we must have both gifts in operation at the same time because there is to be no spoken tongue without an interpretation—God is not the author of confusion. When it is real, you'll know it's real for this reason: a true spoken tongue as a gift of the Spirit will always produce a righteous result for the edification of God's people and for the conviction of lost people. The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 14 that tongues are a sign for those who believe, and if people hear it that believe not, the prophetic interpretation of the tongue will bring them under conviction. And as we saw at Pentecost, it will bring them to Christ.

So Jesus said in effect, "Here are the signs that are going to follow the people that believe: they're going to cast out devils and speak in new languages." It's important to note that not everyone has the exact same experiences in the exact same ways. Not everybody has all the gifts or the same set of gifts. That's why they're gifts; God gives them freely to various people, for purposes of His own. He freely gives and administers the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and they're all of the same Spirit. In the body of Christ, some of us are eyes, some are hands, some are feet, some are ears, and so on.

In reference to praying in tongues, there is a type of prayer discussed in Romans 8 where "the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words" (v. 26, ESV). Through this type of tongue, the Holy Spirit prays through us with verbalizations that cannot be uttered in the words of our common language, so it will indeed sound foreign to people who

overhear it. We call this form of tongue our spiritual language or prayer language.

I don't have to understand how it works to know that it indeed works. Jesus said it will follow those who believe, so today, in obedience, I finally flow in it; as should you, as the Holy Spirit leads. {eoa}



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