

# **Speaking in Tongues**

**A Brief History of the Phenomenon Known as  
Glossolalia, or Speaking in Tongues**

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## 1. The Present Situation

“We are a long way from Pentecost!”

So said the forceful speaker at a large interdenominational ministerial conference. He had been deploring the state of spiritual poverty to which the Christian world has come, its inability to face up squarely to contemporary secular problems, its apathy toward the colossal task of world evangelization, its absorption by selfish pleasure and worldliness. His facts and figures were impressive, and his audience was with him. They took up his phrase, “We are a long way from Pentecost,” and speaker after speaker reiterated it.

It is obvious that Christianity is entering a time of crisis. We could fill this booklet with admitted problems—poverty, illiteracy, crime, war, dishonesty, immorality, racial hatreds, religious divisions, and prejudices. Above all these problems is the corroding fear that we live in a “godforsaken world,” as one speaker put it.

It is this fear that we are far from God that helps to create our greatest problem, as far as our present study is concerned. When spiritual apathy goes beyond a certain point and becomes almost a paralysis in the church, then all sorts of things both good and bad can happen.

First, the truly devout few—and let us not forget that God always has His faithful ones—cry out to God:

“Come, Holy Spirit, heavenly Dove,  
With all Thy quickening powers;  
Kindle a flame of sacred love  
In these cold hearts of ours.”

Such a devout remnant pursues its course of prayerful witness, not allowing the soul’s spiritual fire to become quenched by the deluge of worldliness.

Second, many nominal Christians lose their spiritual glow. Either they remain frozen in the organization, or they drift away from God and the church.

The third group reacts in another way. Deeply concerned, they decide to do something about it. The decision to do something is laudable, and the sincerity of such people is unquestioned. They are unhappy in an organization that has “a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof,” and they “Turn away” from such to find a new way to God’s presence. 2 Timothy 3:5. It is certain that there is too little of warmth and spiritual power in the best of us, and we need to seek God more earnestly. We must get away from the emptiness, the indifference, the sinfulness, that beset too many Christians today. What shall we do? Where shall we find a remedy?

### The Desire for Revival and Its Results

The Pentecostal experience of Acts 2 has provided the inspiration for all kinds of revival movements, both ancient and modern. Men want the power with which God launched the Christian church upon the world, and they proceed by many methods to get it. Some of the results have been astonishing.

Modern attempts to receive the New Testament “baptism of the Spirit” often take the form of “the gift of tongues.” In more sophisticated Christian circles, such as among Episcopalians, Presbyterians, and Lutherans, speaking in tongues is called “glosolalia,” from the Greek words *glōssa* meaning “tongue,” and *laleō* meaning “talking.” In the same circles this is also referred to as “the Charismatic Renewal,” from “charisma,” a gift of God’s grace.

Some of the remarkable results of this modern manifestation of the gift of tongues were recorded in *The Saturday Evening Post*, May 16, 1964. People who had been seeking divine power by this method included ministers from the major denominations, university students, socialites, and others.

“One of the most uncanny aspects of the current revival, however,” says the *Post*, “is the way *glossolalia* has leaped out of its proletarian Pentecostal setting. Passing over the middle-class churches in between, it has made a startling appearance in the aristocrat of Christian communions—the august, decorous Episcopal Church whose members largely come from the best economic, social, and educational quarters.”

Some forty separate denominations are said to be affected. Remarkable emotional and physical experiences are reported from many sources. A forty-eight-year-old pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church in Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey, a man in rugged health, related that “something like a series of bolts of lightning went down my spine” when a fellow minister put his hand on the first man’s head and invoked the Spirit to come. The following morning he awoke soaked in perspiration, and while leaving the shower, “I had a vision of ticker tape, and I saw ‘Sa-da-ma-li’ printed. As I spoke this, a few more syllables came vocally.” Soon after this, Dr. Howard M. Ervin used these words in prayer: “Shan dama lai kushaiah hodhaiah salamah maqaiah shan dama lai maqaiah muriah.”

This, one of many cases, illustrated how words “not part of any known human language,” and unknown to the speaker, are accepted by thousands of people as a modern fulfillment of these words in Acts 2:4: “And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.”

In January 1964, in London, England, there was convened a regular meeting of the Islington Clerical Conference, and a notable address on the Holy Spirit was delivered by Rev. John Stott. This has been enlarged and made available as a booklet under the title *The Baptism and Fullness of the Holy Spirit*, published by the Inter-Varsity Fellowship (price two shillings). The author refutes the claim that “the indispensable sign of having received the Spirit is ‘speaking in tongues.’” This claim leads people to conclude that Christians who do not exercise the gift of tongues have not received the Spirit in His fullness. Mr. Stott asserts that the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life is something more demanding and more permanent than “speaking in tongues,” since it affects the moral fiber of the whole life rather than appearing in some temporary miraculous phenomenon.

### **Authorities Issue Warnings**

So widespread and sensational have these ecstatic experiences become that Episcopal Bishop James A. Pike of California issued a directive which virtually bans praying in tongues. He declared that the practice had become “dangerous to the peace and unity of the church” and a “threat to sound doctrine and policy.”

Dr. William Culbertson, president of the fundamentalist Moody Bible Institute, of Chicago, warned his entire student body against praying in tongues. Other leaders have issued similar warnings.

Proponents of the practice point out that opposition from church authorities can be expected because Jewish church officials opposed the Pentecostal outbreaks of Acts 2 with the slur: “They have been drinking!” Acts 2:13, NEB.

Some church authorities hesitate to condemn results that spring from sincere desires to find a deeper spiritual experience. They are watching results with an open mind. Certain it is that many prominent ministers and laymen not heretofore regarded of the “Pentecostal type,”

have openly espoused the new spiritual phenomenon. Though not doctrinally united, they appear to accept the dictum that true sanctification reaches its zenith in an ecstatic experience culminating in the gift of tongues. The Holy Spirit to them is not “in quietness and in confidence” (Isaiah 30:15), but in an ecstatic, external manifestation, in trances, sometimes in contortions, and in the use of languages known or unknown. It is this cruder excitement that appears unseemly to the liturgical church leaders. Their ideas of worship are expressed in the apostle Paul’s words: “Let all things be done decently and in order.” 1 Corinthians 14:40. Incidentally, this apostolic counsel was given to the Corinthian church in connection with their use of the gift of tongues.

Another indication of the growing concern of the church leaders is seen in the action of one of the Lutheran synods. It was announced in New York early in 1964 that because so many Lutherans are exercised over this tongues movement, a research grant has been obtained and a board appointed to make a thorough and objective study of the manifestations. The board will examine, among other questions, the types of personality involved in the actual experience. It will attempt to establish whether types with similar emotional backgrounds are mainly affected, or whether all personality types are involved. Hard cash running into many thousands of dollars is not expended in this way unless the church is seriously stirred to investigate something not easily explained.

There are questions to which intelligent Christians in these critical days must seek an answer: For what purpose was the Holy Spirit poured upon the church on the Day of Pentecost? Was the Holy Spirit a permanent gift to the church? Was the gift of tongues intended to be an essential and permanent sign of God’s presence with His church? Was the Pentecostal gift a sign to Jews, to Gentiles, or to both? Was the gift of tongues manifested after Pentecost, and if so, for how long? Were the tongues spoken at Pentecost known or unknown? What does church history reveal regarding the gift of tongues throughout the ages? What is the story of modern manifestations of the gift of tongues?

We shall endeavor to answer these questions in the light of such information as we have in the New Testament and in the records of history.

## **2. The Holy Spirit at Pentecost**

“And when the Day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all amazed and marveled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? Parthians, Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes, and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God” (Acts 2:1-11).

## **On the Day of Pentecost in Jerusalem**

This is the primary source for any study of the descent of the Holy Spirit on the early church because it fixes *the date* as “the Day of Pentecost,” *the place* as “an upper room” in Jerusalem (Acts 1:4, 13), and *the persons* involved as “about an hundred and twenty” (verse 15) including Mary the mother of Jesus, the brothers of Jesus, and all the first disciples except Judas (verses 13 and 14).

There are two other references in the book of Acts. One is in chapter 10, verses 44-46, where the Holy Spirit came to both Jews and Gentiles, and speaking in tongues followed. The other is in Acts 19:1-7, where the gift of tongues came upon twelve men in Ephesus when their baptism into Christ superseded their baptism by John.

## **Were the Languages Spoken Known or Unknown?**

The language of Acts 2:4 states that the recipients of the gift of tongues spoke in “other tongues,” that is, languages other than those they normally used as their native speech. There were at the time of Pentecost “dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven.” Verse 5. These Jews had long been dispersed among the nations, and many of them no longer spoke Hebrew or Aramaic. The gift of tongues produced sermons and testimonials of “the wonderful works of God” (verse 11) through Jesus of Nazareth, so that these non-Palestinian Jews, pilgrims to the Holy City of Jerusalem, understood it all in their local dialects.

It is clear that known languages were spoken. The listeners were amazed “because that every man heard them speak in his own language” Acts 2:6.

“Every known tongue was represented by those assembled. This diversity of languages would have been a great hindrance to the proclamation of the gospel; God therefore in a miraculous manner supplied the deficiency of the apostles. The Holy Spirit did for them what they could not have accomplished for themselves in a lifetime. They could now proclaim the truths of the gospel abroad, speaking with accuracy the languages of those for whom they were laboring.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pages 39, 40.

In Acts 2:6, 8, 11 it is clear that the declarations in favor of the Christian gospel were all in known languages, and were definitely not a form of ecstatic utterance which nobody understood. The Holy Spirit had produced in these men a gift of utterance, not of interpretation. The latter was unnecessary.

## **A Miraculous and Fruitful Sign-Gift**

This gift of speaking in a foreign language was, of course, a striking miracle, much more so than speaking a form of words unknown by man or angel. This Pentecost outpouring was a fulfillment of our Lord’s prophecy in Mark 16:17: “And these signs shall follow them that believe; In My name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues.”

The Holy Spirit had used Jews at Jerusalem to speak to their visiting devout, but unbelieving fellow Jews in their own languages in order to establish the authenticity of the gospel of the risen Christ. It was a unique occasion, necessitating some special attestation. It was the greatest sign these people could have received, and the proof of the efficacy of this sign-gift is seen by its results: “Then they that gladly received his [Peter’s] word were baptized and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls” Acts 2:41.

There are six uses of the word “unknown” in connection with “tongue” in the King James Version, in 1 Corinthians 14:2, 4, 13, 14, 19, 27, but in each case the word is italicized,

indicating that the translators supplied it in an unsuccessful attempt to clarify the meaning. It is an unfortunate addition. This addition does not occur in some of the more modern renderings.

### **In the House of Cornelius in Caesarea**

In Caesarea, the Roman capital of Palestine, dwelt a Roman officer of unusual caliber. Cornelius was a centurion, “a devout man” who “feared God with all his house.” He was liberal and prayerful. Acts 10:1-43 should be read carefully to see how God dealt methodically with His servant Peter to confront him with this devout Gentile Cornelius, thereby breaking through racial prejudice. At the same time the Gentiles were brought more specifically into the extending kingdom of God. Antipathy on the part of the Jews toward the reception of Gentiles into the Christian fellowship caused much difficulty in the early church. See Acts 11:1-3. The stern Hebrew prohibitions against the non-Jew lingered so stubbornly in the minds of early Hebrew Christians that it took the strongest evidence of the Holy Spirit’s descent on the Gentiles to eradicate the prejudice. This will be seen in Acts 11:15-18.

The language of Acts 10:44-48 is similar to that in Acts 2. The difference lies in the fact that Peter’s Hebrew-Christian companions, reluctant to welcome Gentiles into the Christian fellowship, now see the Holy Spirit operating through Cornelius and his fellows, praising God in tongues not natural to them:

“And they of the circumcision were astonished, as many came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost” Acts 2:45.

Confirmation that this manifestation to unbelieving Jews and believing Gentiles was in languages understood by men, and not an unknown ecstatic utterance, is seen clearly in Acts 11:15. There Peter has returned to Jerusalem and is reporting the Cornelius incident to his contentious brethren who would not have Gentiles in their charmed circle. He said forthrightly, “And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, *as on us at the beginning.*” Acts 11:15. Clearly, “at the beginning” means at Pentecost, when the tongues were “foreign” to the speakers but known to the hearers.

### **A Witness to Both Jews and Gentiles**

At Pentecost the main objective of God’s gift was the conversion of His people Israel, but with Cornelius and his household the circle widened to include the outsider, the Gentile. We can well imagine the troubled self-righteousness with which the Judean Christian brethren challenged Peter and his companions after the thrilling episode in the home of Cornelius: “Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them” Acts 11:3.

Equally well should we be able to imagine the incredulity turning to holy joy as Peter “rehearsed the matter from the beginning.” Verse 4. Like Peter’s Hebrew companions in the house of Cornelius, who were astonished “because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 10:45), the prejudiced Jerusalem brethren were amazed. “When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life” Acts 11:18.

There is no evidence in these events that the Holy Spirit and the gift of tongues were in any sense different from the experience on the day of Pentecost. There was good reason why the family circle of Cornelius should speak in tongues, for Peter’s companions would otherwise not accept these Gentiles as valid recipients of the Holy Spirit’s power. This, again, was another sign-gift, testifying to reluctant Hebrew Christians that henceforth the church of Christ was to embrace men of every nation under heaven.

Exactly what language was spoken through the gift in the home of Cornelius is not stated. But is it not likely that these devout Gentiles praised God in the very tongue of the six incredulous Hebrew brethren—either Aramaic or Hebrew?

### **The Converts of John the Baptist at Ephesus—Acts 19:1-7**

The next instance brings us to an encounter between twelve converts of John, taught by Apollos, an Alexandrian Jew, and the apostle Paul at Ephesus. The great apostle was now preeminently “the apostle to the Gentiles.” He had promised to return to the city of Ephesus (Acts 18:21), and on doing so he found “certain disciples.”

Like their teacher Apollos, their knowledge of Christian teaching must have been limited, as this question reveals: “He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost” Acts 19:2.

These people seemed to know little beyond what John the Baptist had taught about repentance, relayed to them by Apollos. Paul apparently took it for granted that every born-again Christian must have received the Holy Spirit. In any true conversion the Holy Spirit performs a miracle in leading the sinner into an experience of “righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost” Romans 14:17.

Only partly instructed, these people had been baptized “unto John’s baptism.” Paul proceeded to indoctrinate them into the Christian faith. Not all of his discourse is given, but it is clear that Paul did not baptize without Christian indoctrination. The apex of Paul’s instruction is explicitly stated: “John verily baptised with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on Him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus” Acts 19:4.

Clearly this centralization of Jesus the Redeemer is the pivotal point in the conversion of these people, not the subsequent gift of tongues. These converts of Apollos were “in a halfway house,” someone has said, “between Judaism and Christianity,” and Paul brought them the rest of the way and baptized them into Christ. To him there was but “one Lord, one faith, one baptism” Ephesians 4:5.

“And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied” Acts 19:6.

In this place Luke uses the word *glōssa* in recording the gift of tongues, the same word used in Acts 2:4, 11 and 10:46, and there is no reason for giving this any meaning other than known languages or tongues. It was another Pentecostal outpouring. It had its effect on Jews, as at Pentecost, but this time the locale was a center of Gentile life. Hence both Jews and Gentiles were astounded and profoundly convicted to the glory of God. They were qualified by this gift to proclaim the gospel in Ephesus and elsewhere.

### **How Widespread Was the Gift of Tongues?**

It has surely not escaped the thoughtful reader that these three passages that we have studied in the book of Acts (chapter 2:4; 10:46; 19:6) are but three incidents over a period of time. There is no evidence that the gift of tongues was widespread, or a universal experience in the early church. We will let S. Lewis Johnson, Jr., summarize for us:

“The gift of tongues according to Acts was a gift which enabled its recipients to speak in known tongues, or languages, at certain times determined by the Holy Spirit in order to authenticate the message of the early church in the presence of Jews. That it was not universally practiced by believers in the early church is evident from its limited occurrence in the Acts

period, as well as from specific statements in the epistles (cf. 1 Cor. 12:30; Heb. 2:3, 4).”—*Biblioteca Sacra*, October 1963.

Any conclusion that the gift of tongues was universal in the early church is not substantiated in the book of Acts. Nor should we conclude that the few specified instances of the reception of “tongues” implied added spiritual power above that seen in other believers.

“Aside from their first testimonies and ‘prophecies,’ are there any Biblical proofs that the household of Cornelius or the twelve Ephesians were more powerful or useful in the church of Christ than was Dorcas or Lydia? Surely every candid Christian will agree that there is no evidence in the Bible.”—H. J. Stolee, *Speaking in Tongues*, page 44.

The recorded instances of the gift of tongues in the book of Acts do not, as we have seen, present any great problem. But we shall discover more complicated matters in the first letter to the Corinthians. Apparently the Corinthian churches had difficulties of many kinds, including problems in church order as the result of speaking in tongues, as we shall now see.

### 3. Other New Testament Evidence

#### “Be Filled With the Spirit”

If, as some “tongues” devotees say, this gift should be the normal experience of Spirit-filled Christians, then we have some awkward passages in the New Testament to explain. We must here observe some of them briefly.

When our Pentecostal friends speak of “tarrying,” they infer that what Jesus meant by “Tarry ye, . . . until ye be endued with power from on high” (Luke 24:49), was to tarry, or wait for, the Spirit to come. Thus, believers today will decide to remain in prayer, praise, and worship during long meetings, till something happens—and it often happens late at night. In other words, the believer decides that he is going to seek for and obtain the gift of tongues. Obviously our Lord’s words forbade universal preaching of the gospel till the disciples were prepared by the Holy Spirit, not necessarily with the gift of tongues.

It is true that in Ephesians 5:18 the apostle Paul says, “be filled with the Spirit,” but not one word in the context, nor in the whole chapter, can justifiably make this verse mean, “Make up your mind to seek, wait, work, for the Spirit, and you will speak with tongues.” Nor is “tongues” even implied as the normal experience of every believer.

Moreover, a glance at Ephesians, chapters five and six, will show that Paul is speaking of the believer’s “walk in love” (5:2), or his everyday life in Christ, which involves moral purity, circumspect speech, avoidance of “works of darkness,” alertness to the perils of the times, sobriety, thankfulness, happy marital relationships, functioning as members of the body of Christ, honoring parents, and in general standing up in fearless witness for God. Not a word is said of “tongues” for such believers. But it is significantly stated, “For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth” Ephesians 5:9.

When it comes to the decision to obtain the gift of tongues, we find this categorical statement on the sovereignty of God’s will: “For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; to another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues: but all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He will” 1 Corinthians 12:8-11.

The last phrase shows that the presence of any gift of the Holy Spirit depends on the decision of God, not the will of man. Other renderings of this phrase are: “Who apportions to

each one individually as He will.” RSV. “Who distributes to each individual man, as He will.” Phillips. “Distributing them separately to each individual at will.” NEB.

God sets us as members in His body, the church, and empowers us in His own wisdom with spiritual gifts of varying character for the edifying of the church as a whole. “But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, *as it hath pleased Him*” 1 Corinthians 12:18.

### The Significance of Silence

The book of Acts has been called “The Acts of the Holy Spirit” by some scholars because the launching of Christ’s gospel into all the world is here recorded as the work of the Holy Spirit through dedicated men and women. We should expect this book, of all the books of the New Testament, to set forth clearly an answer to the question whether “tongues” is to be regarded as the norm of Christian experience.

What we find is that the Greek word *glōssa*—tongue, language—is used six times in Acts. Two of these texts (Acts 2:3, 26) have no reference to the gift of tongues, so that only four times in the twenty-eight chapters of this book is that gift referred to (Acts 2:4, 11; 10:46; 19:6).

The first two of these four texts refer to the same event—Pentecost. Therefore at the most only three incidents involving the gift of tongues are recorded in this stirring action book of early church history. (There are, of course, no references to the gift of tongues in the four Gospels.)

But the scarcity of evidence runs much deeper than this. There were 3,000 converts on the day of Pentecost. See Acts 2:41, 42. In Acts 2:47 others are mentioned: “The Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.” Then in Acts 4:4 about 5,000 converts are mentioned. Beyond this it is stated in Acts 6:7, “The word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.”

Did any of this vast accretion to the early church membership enjoy the “tongues” experience as a part of the normal Christian life? There is silence on the subject. They had the gift of the Holy Spirit upon them, but no gift of tongues, so far as the record goes.

We do read, however, that a large number of the believers “were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.” Acts 4:31. It will not be regarded as too pointed a comparison, we hope, if we say that what is needed today is more holy boldness to declare the gospel of salvation to a perishing world, rather than more ecstatic exhibitions to be enjoyed inside our churches or our homes.

A careful reader of the miracles of various kinds, and of other outstanding events in the book of Acts, will observe that the Holy Spirit was mightily at work. Yet there is no recorded experience of tongues. See Acts 3:1-11; 6:3-8; 9:36-42; 16:25-34, et cetera.

Again, take the outstanding characters in the book of Acts, aside from Paul and Peter. There were, for example, Stephen, James, Agabus, Simeon, Philip, Silas, Timothy, Barnabas, Lydia, Dorcas, Crispus, Apollos, Aquila, Priscilla, to name only a few. These did great service for God, but we know nothing of the experience of “tongues,” known or unknown, in any of them. How much more exciting and sensational the book of Acts would have been if “tongues” had been present in every believer! But this evidently was not in the purpose of God. Don W. Hills has said, “It is human nature to desire to magnify the dramatic. The Book of Acts successfully avoids this.”—*What Can Tongues Do for You?* p. 28.

Aside from the evidence we have set forth from the book of Acts and the First Epistle to the Corinthians, there is nothing more recorded in the New Testament about the gift of tongues. This is significant. But lest it should be regarded as negative evidence, we must remember the

many statements concerning the need of the Holy Spirit in the life of every believer. Let no one minimize the importance of the Holy Spirit in the Christian's life.

### **The Necessity of the Holy Spirit**

Said Jesus of Nicodemus, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." John 3:5. This is a reference to being "born again," as in verse 3; and in verse 8 this experience is said to be difficult to explain. It is a miraculous change wrought in the person who confesses his sins and who desires to be "quicken," or made alive, in Christ. Ephesians 2:5.

To such converted people Jesus, when He left the earth, promised the permanent presence of "the Comforter, even the Holy Spirit." John 14:26, ARV. The purpose of the Holy Spirit's mission was to give believers a realization of Christ's presence, to glorify Christ in the Christian's life, to teach, and to guide into paths of truth. See John 16:7, 8, 13, 14. The Holy Spirit was to reveal "the deep things of God" to the believer (1 Corinthians 2:10), to seal him as God's own possession (Ephesians 1:13), and to be the assurance of Christ's presence with His church "even unto the end of the world." Matthew 28:20. See also John 14:21-23.

Believers, therefore, must be Spirit-possessed men and women. Romans 8:9. But nowhere in these and many other references to the Spirit's work do we find the lightest hint that any form of the gift of tongues was to be the fruit or the gift of the Holy Spirit in every believer's life. Instead, it is specifically stated that "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." Galatians 5:22, 23. Christians showing any of this fruitage in their lives were to enjoy "righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." Romans 14:17. The reader might care to note the *fruits* of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22, 23 and to compare them with the ninefold *gifts* of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12:4-10. It should be noted that Paul gives a second list of the gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:28, and that tongues is given last in each, though undue importance should not be attached to this fact.

There is a large amount of teaching in the New Testament on the person and functions of the Holy Spirit; but with the remarkably few exceptions we have mentioned, there is very little about the gift of tongues. These early Christians "went everywhere preaching the Word"; they witnessed "unto the death" for Christ; they faced a furious hostility almost everywhere; they "turned the world upside down" (Acts 17:6)—all by the empowering Spirit of God. But few, exceedingly few, and they a diminishing number, were chosen by God to exercise the gift of tongues. This puts some emphasis on the relative unimportance of this gift after its initial use on a few occasions.

If we could ask the great apostle Paul what his wish was for the believer, he would say: "Follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy. . . . I would that ye all spake with tongues, but rather that ye prophesied." 1 Corinthians 14:1-5. Would it be stretching the argument to see here, once more, an emphasis on the relative unimportance respecting the troublesome gift of tongues in the Corinthian churches?

Not all of us should speak in tongues, according to Paul. Even those who were to "covet earnestly the best gifts" were exhorted: "And yet I show unto you a more excellent way." 1 Corinthians 12:31. To love all men and to preach and glory in nothing but the cross of Christ—that is the more excellent way. Galatians 6:14.

## **4. The Gift of Tongues at Corinth**

### **The Spiritual Atmosphere of Corinth**

The apostle Paul devoted a good share of his first epistle to the Corinthians (chapters 12 to 14), to a discussion of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Much of his counsel dealt with the gift of tongues.

At His ascension Jesus “gave gifts unto men.” Ephesians 4:8. These gifts are listed as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. Verse 11. The purpose of these spiritual gifts is stated in verse 12: “For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.”

The spiritual tone of the Corinthian church was low. This is seen in almost the whole of Paul’s first letter. Corinth at this time was a cosmopolitan, sophisticated city, with commercial interests which brought merchants and mariners from east and west. It was the home of the famous temple of Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love and beauty, with 1,000 prostitute priestesses conducting their licentious rites on Acro-Corinthus. However, the city had a veneer of culture. It was commonly said that a profligate man with a cultured exterior had “gone Corinthian”—an expression still used today.

The Corinthian church was affected by its surroundings. It was gifted but unspiritual. It was proud, and tended to despise the simple Word of God. Such texts as 1 Corinthians 4:6-10, 18; 5:2; 14:37, and chapters 8 and 12, depict a church that was haughty and self-sufficient. It was also a contentious church (1 Corinthians 1:11), and fornication of an obnoxious kind existed in its ranks (1 Corinthians 5:1).

### **The Spiritual Gifts in Strange Settings in Corinth**

It was into such a church that the gift of tongues came as one of many spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:1-10). These nine gifts were wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discernment, tongues, interpretation. Verses 8-10. Above all others, tongues seems to be the gift in which the Corinthians gloried. It was undoubtedly an overemphasis which Paul sought to adjust.

In 1 Corinthians 12:3 the apostle says, “I give you to understand, that no man *speaking by the Spirit of God* calleth Jesus accursed.”

The italicized words—*en pneumati theou lalon*—are closely akin to his words in 1 Corinthians 14:2, used of speaking in tongues. It seems incredible that a man pretending to speak in tongues could anathematize Jesus (“accursed” is from the Greek *anathema*), yet apparently such appalling language was used, probably by heathen practitioners in the presence of new Christian converts under the guise of a supposed spiritual gift of tongues.

There were other excesses that appeared in this church. Women were enjoined to “keep silence in the churches,” not because it was wrong for them to take part in prayer and praise (see 1 Corinthians 11:13), but because the erstwhile pagan women had evidently been too brazenly vocal.

The fact is that the Christian church at this time had not yet developed set forms and orders of service. Hence pagan converts were not accustomed to doing “all things . . . decently and in order.” 1 Corinthians 14:40. Even the sacred Lord’s Supper was made a travesty of reverence by its revelry and drunkenness (1 Corinthians 11:20-22).

Into this kind of atmosphere came the gift of tongues. Obviously there were sincere and talented people in the Corinthian churches, otherwise no genuine spiritual gifts would have appeared. It was an unusual gift in an unusual setting. We must now examine the question of tongues in this local setting in more detail.

### **Paul and the Gift of Tongues in Corinth**

The apostle is not seeking to recommend or to magnify the gift of tongues as compared with other gifts. Primarily he exhorts these needy Christians to the practice of charity, or love: "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal" 1 Corinthians 13:1.

This "tongues of men and of angels" is, of course, rhetorical language used to emphasize love as a gift of greater importance than any other. The first three verses of this chapter stress the absolute necessity of love.

In the last half of the love chapter (verses 8-13) an appealing statement is made on the enduring nature of love, as this comparison shows:

1. Charity—never faileth.
2. Prophecies—shall fail.
3. Tongues—shall cease.
4. Knowledge—shall vanish away.

Thus the first emphasis is on the temporary nature of tongues, not on its transcendence over other gifts of the Spirit. There was evidently an veremphasis on tongues in Corinth. A Christian under the influence of any other of the spiritual gifts is not less powerful, or lower in God's sight, than one in whom the more spectacular "tongues" gift appears. For what it is worth here, we note that "tongues" is mentioned next to last in the two lists of gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, 28-30. If we must speak in terms of preeminence, then divine love as a gift from God is the outstanding spiritual gift. One wonders whether, if this supreme gift of love appeared in large numbers of Christians, there would be as much clamor and craving for the more spectacular gift of tongues. With more love, there certainly would be more of divine power in the church for the amelioration or solution of world problems and for universal Christian witness.

The gift of tongues in Acts was recognized as an extraordinary divine empowerment for a unique occasion, and it caused no confusion or contention among the believers. However, the gift of tongues in Corinth certainly created problems in the church, and some of these problems are still perplexing today.

The gift of tongues was here accompanied by the gift of "the interpretation of tongues." 1 Corinthians 12:10. Does this mean the interpretation of a foreign language? If so, then this is similar to the situation at Pentecost. Or does it refer to a language of the Spirit, known only to God, who therefore gives another church member the gift of interpretation?

In 1 Corinthians 14:2, 4, 13, 14, 19, 27, RSV, the word "unknown" is omitted, but it does not solve the problem when we observe the last part of verse 2: "For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit."

This has led many to conclude that there is a mysterious language of the Spirit, which no one besides the recipient of the gift understands. Thus no interpreter is needed, and God is glorified. Paul, however, seems to answer this by saying, "If you in a tongue utter speech that is not intelligible, how will anyone know what is said? For you will be speaking into the air." 1 Corinthians 14:9, RSV. He then proceeds to deemphasize "tongues" by saying, "Since you are eager for manifestation of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church" Verse 12, RSV.

#### **Other Features of Spiritual Gifts at Corinth**

Paul was impressed by a lack of edification in some Corinthian church practices. Thus in 1 Corinthians 14:26 we read, “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.”

These impulsive Corinthians, without the background of Hebrew doctrine and lacking reverent forms of worship, were eager to participate in church services. Some loved worship in song (the psalms), others had teaching aptitude, still others wanted to communicate some knowledge they felt they had received from God, and tongues and their interpretations were also prominent. These Corinthians were eager, contentious, and often immature. Evidently at times their eagerness was quite marked, and this led to Paul’s exhortation that every part of worship should be edifying and done in orderly decency (1 Corinthians 14:40). “God is not the author of confusion,” he warned, “but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.” Verse 33.

It is not unlikely that these church members desired to prove that the exhibitions of ecstatic speech in pagan worship could also be duplicated in Christian worship. Incoherent ejaculations were commonly used by the heathen in their worship.

Whatever the reason, these Corinthian Christians were admonished to restrain their emotions regarding tongues. Apparently too many sought this gift above others. This led Paul to say: “Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not: but prophesying serveth not for them that believe not, but for them which believe. 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?” 1 Corinthians 14:22, 23.

Tongues are here said to be a sign of the authenticity of the messenger to the unbelievers, whereas prophesying was a sign to believers. And too many speaking in tongues at one time led to an appearance of dementia or drunken frenzy. This kind of confusing display among the Christians (see 1 Corinthians 14:23, 26-33, 40) must have been distressing. No wonder the apostle had to say, “Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant. Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away with these dumb idols, even as ye were led” 1 Corinthians 12:1, 2.

They had once been carried away by heathen excesses. They were now in danger of excessive zeal in the Christian church, and that could easily lead to satanic deception. The gift of tongues must not become a confusion of tongues.

### **Some Conclusions**

We are now ready to formulate some conclusions about the Corinthian gift of tongues.

1. Among the spiritual gifts in Corinth there was a considerable manifestation of the gift of tongues (1 Corinthians 14:13, 26). The apostle Paul claimed to have this gift (1 Corinthians 14:18). These factors suggest a genuine gift of tongues, which cannot be discounted by excess and abuse on the part of some members of the church.

2. There was an excessive zeal to obtain and demonstrate publicly the gift of tongues. 1 Corinthians 14:23. This led Paul to counsel the believers to “covet earnestly the best gifts,” the greatest of which was Christian love (1 Corinthians 12:31; 13:13).

3. The gift of tongues was inferior to the gift of prophecy (1 Corinthians 14:1). Some early Christian churches appear to have despised prophecy (1 Thessalonians 5:20). Corinth may have been guilty of cultivating the spectacular gift of tongues and to have neglected the gift of telling forth, or witnessing to, the truths of the gospel.

4. Speaking in tongues was, except where it was in a known foreign tongue as at Pentecost, speaking mysteries “unto God” (1 Corinthians 14:2). “Mysteries” in Romans 11:25 were gospel truths unknown to the uninitiated, such as the rejection of Israel and “the fullness of the Gentiles.” In Romans 16:25 Paul uses “revelation of the mystery” of the full unfolding of the gospel through preaching. If this manifestation of tongues in 1 Corinthians 14:2 refers to a speech or language of the Spirit known only to God, or through an interpreter selected by Him, then two conclusions result: (a) This was different from the outpouring at Pentecost some twenty-five years before; (b) this manifestation was intended to strengthen the faith of new converts, and not to satisfy or honor the recipient of the gift (1 Corinthians 14:22, 24). These considerations still leave us to answer the question, Did such a gift as this remain with the Christian church during and after New Testament days? For that we must appeal to the pages of church history.

5. In church services there was not to be confusion through simultaneous speaking in tongues, but one at a time should speak and then only if one person interpreted to the congregation (1 Corinthians 14:27). *Without an interpreter, silence was the rule.* Verse 28. The Corinthians had broken this precept. Modern practice largely breaks down here also.

6. A situation in which many spoke at once, apparently in some ecstatic form of speech, with or without interpretation, or even through the gift of prophecy, is sternly rebuked thus: “God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.” See 1 Corinthians 14:26-33.

7. While exhorting believers in Corinth to “covet earnestly the best gifts” of the Spirit, Paul magnifies love as “a more excellent way” and elevates prophecy (“that is, the gift of interpreting the divine will and purpose” [1 Corinthians 12:10, *Amplified New Testament*]) above tongues. The apostle is seeking to correct abuses in the use of tongues, yet he does not condemn the genuine gift of tongues because the spurious sometimes manifests itself.

8. The three chapters under consideration (1 Corinthians 12, 13, and 14) are the *only* Scriptural reference to the gift of tongues outside those we have noted in the book of Acts. This suggests that between about A.D. 57, when the Corinthian letters were written, and about A.D. 96, when the book of Revelation is believed to have been written, the gift of tongues was of waning significance. We shall later advance a good reason for this.

## 5. New Testament to Reformation

### The First Four Hundred Years of the Christian Era

Not only are the later pages of the New Testament silent on the gift of tongues, neither is there concrete evidence of the genuine gift during the first 200 years of the Christian Era.

The first reference we can find is in the time of Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons, martyred in A.D. 202. This states only that the good bishop had heard that in certain places there were people who spoke in all sorts of languages. A little earlier than the time of Irenaeus a contemporary of his, Justin Martyr (martyred A.D. 168), reported having heard of the use of prophetic gifts, but did not name “tongues.”

Some writers mention the Montanists as being “tongues” enthusiasts. They were followers of Montanus, a Phrygian cultist of the second century who tried to restore Christian simplicity and purity. He established a rigid way of life, but actually nothing more than an ascetic zeal in cultivating spiritual gifts can be attributed to him.

Tertullian (A.D. 150-230), who had Montanist sympathies, was presbyter of Carthage. Among his numerous polemical works is the well-known *Against Marcion*, in volumes 5 and 8 of which he states that possibly “tongues” appeared among the Marcionites.

One of the most famous of all the Early Church Fathers was Origen (A.D. 185-253), a pious man famous for his exegetical writings. His *Hexapla*, a columnar arrangement of the Hebrew Scriptures and five Greek versions of it, became a valuable source for textual examination of the Scriptures. He claimed in the third century that there were certain prophets who spoke in tongues, but the details he gave suggest rather prophetic utterances, and it is not even clear whether he was speaking of Christians or of other religionists.

Toward the very end of the fourth century the golden-voiced orator John Chrysostom (A.D. 347-407), Patriarch of Constantinople, wrote a comment on 1 Corinthians 12 in the course of which, referring to the gifts of the Spirit and specifically to the gift of tongues, he said:

“This whole place is very obscure: but the obscurity is produced by our ignorance of the facts referred to and by their cessation, being such as then used to occur but now no longer take place.”—Homily XXIX, *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 1st Series, Vol. 12, p. 168.

This same good John Chrysostom repeatedly compared the apostolic days with his own, pointing out that the establishment of the true religion through Jesus Christ had brought the age of faith; and therefore miracles, in which he included the gift of tongues, were no longer necessary. See his extensive homilies in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 1st Series, vols. 9 to 14. It is true that a reference to reports of the existence of “tongues” among certain groups is made by, for example, Augustine in the fourth century, but they are so few and vague that they are insignificant to our argument here.

### **What Does This Evidence Mean?**

This is almost all the relevant evidence we can find, in some four and a half centuries, and it is significant enough to call for some comment.

First, the time from Pentecost to the end of the first century—the Apostolic Age—saw a more widespread dissemination of the gospel than any comparable period ever saw. It began with a mighty attestation in the outpouring of the Holy Ghost in varied gifts to various people. That all the crowds assembled at Jerusalem might hear, the gift of tongues appeared. This served the divine purpose on an occasion likewise unique. Apart from two or three smaller manifestations, this gift became less and less apparent; and, after the Corinthian episodes already studied, it almost disappeared from recorded history. Probably the gift of tongues was with the Christian believers during the quarter century between the day of Pentecost and the tongues episodes in Corinth, but no New Testament record attests this. Had tongues on the Pentecostal order been a major factor in the work of the Holy Spirit, some references, canonical or noncanonical, would have come down to us. But there is silence.

Does this mean that the Holy Spirit was withdrawn from the church? It cannot mean this, for this was the period during which occurred the miracles and fruitful preaching recorded in Acts, chapters 3 to 12. References to the Holy Spirit’s presence and power are written on every page of these chapters. This was the beginning of the epochal period during which “the word of God grew and multiplied.” Acts 12:24. The believers were “all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.” Acts 4:31. The word of God as the gospel of redeeming grace was spreading like fire in this period. Also, many Christian letters and documents were being written; thousands of them were spreading everywhere, some of them later to become part of the Sacred Scriptures. This assuredly was the day of the Holy Spirit in the church, despite the fact that the gift of tongues evidently diminished as the gospel spread to far-off places.

Second, from about A.D. 31-63 is the period covered by the book of Acts, of which Luke, probably a Gentile, was the author. It is commonly acknowledged that the book known as *The*

*Acts of the Apostles* is in reality the acts of the Holy Spirit through the apostles and early believers. Paul's three missionary tours—the first (Acts 12:24; to 14:28), the second (Acts 15:36 to 18:22), and the third (Acts 18:23 to 21:17)—are all in this period. During the first 100 years of the Christian Era the persecuted believers of the early church “went everywhere preaching the word.” Acts 8:4. Dare we say that because, aside from the perplexing Corinthian story, the gift of tongues appears less and less in the picture, the Holy Spirit was being withdrawn? The evidence is that the genuine gift of tongues, although unquestionably one of the gifts of the Spirit was neither permanent nor a universal gift to the first-century Christian church.

We pass on now to times subsequent to the New Testament church, and subsequent to the fourth-century Fathers.

### **The Story of Tongues in Later Ages**

It would be presumption to suggest that after the periods we have discussed, God never again used the gift of tongues. He may well have used all the gifts since New Testament days as it pleased Him; but we know little about them.

The last book of the Bible—the Revelation—was probably completed about A.D. 96. From then on for several centuries the New Testament writings and many other highly regarded Christian letters and manuscripts were privately circulated. In the fourth century the canon of the New Testament Scripture was agreed upon, and the Bible as we now have it was accepted by a majority of Christian leaders.

The reader will have observed that by the time the Bible was becoming available, the gift of tongues was receding from use among the churches. And by the time the canon was fixed, this gift had about ceased. Could it be that, since we are to live by the standards of the Holy Word, finding there our knowledge of God and of truth as well as the power that enlightens and saves, God saw that Pentecostal tongues were less needed by His church?

“There is . . . wonder-working power in the blood,” we used to sing. Where only do we learn of the shed “blood of the Lamb”? Only in the precious Word of God. If we serve Him with devotion, we do not need exhilaration through external gifts, for we have the fire of God in our souls. God could, of course, use any gift through His servants if He saw that the need existed. That we need the Holy Spirit is, we say again, without question. But there is a question as to whether we need “tongues,” as some people suggest, as the major proof of God's presence.

### **The Middle Ages**

The long darkness of about a thousand years confronts us here. Secular historians are naturally skeptical of unusual spiritual manifestations, and devote little space to them. Church historians also have been conservative, either avoiding mention of such things or presenting them with skepticism. Religious apologists have too often given us exaggerated pictures of superstitions and myths. As George W. Dollar puts it in *Bibliotheca Sacra*, October 1963, “Here we are dealing with so much that is superstitious, mystical, inexplicable, awesome, weird, and monastic that one must be extremely careful in ferreting out instances of deep-rooted New Testament spirituality, and especially would that be true in the case of gifts.”

There are references in church history to certain hermit monks in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries who spoke another than their mother tongue, and the famous Francis Xavier in the sixteenth century claimed to be able to use a language understood in India. But caution is warranted in accepting these sketchy claims.

B. B. Warfield, in *Miracles Yesterday and Today*, page 127, points out that the Roman Church claims “miraculous powers in a permanent endowment.”

## **In Reformation Times**

If there is any era in church history, since the days of the apostles, when some signal evidence of divine presence might be expected, surely it is the time of the sixteenth-century Reformation. Spiritual darkness had settled over the souls of men, with prevailing corruption, persecution, ignorance, and superstition. The great church was spiritually apathetic and powerless. Earnest souls here and there could but pray, "How long, O Lord?"

Then the hour for reformation struck, and devout people were revived by another great outpouring of the Holy Spirit, undoubtedly the greatest since New Testament times. The day that Luther, Melancthon, John, elector of Saxony, and others presented their Reformation beliefs before Emperor Charles V has been called "the greatest day of the Reformation, and one of the most glorious in the history of Christianity and of mankind."

The sixteenth-century awakening was marked by the virility of its doctrinal beliefs—sin, justification by faith, the inspiration of Scripture, the priesthood of Christ, et cetera. The excitement of those stirring times led to charges against the Protestants of extremism, and indeed there were cases here and there of emotionalism and ecstatic ebullition. A number among the Anabaptists, the Munsterites, and the Albigenses of Languedoc were said to have been fanatical. But, allowing for the possibility of almost inevitable extremism in exciting times, most of these charges were leveled against them by their bitter enemies.

Bible doctrines, studied and proclaimed with power from the Holy Spirit, were the basis of the Reformation. But we study in vain to find the genuine gift of tongues in this great spiritual upheaval. Of all the eminent preachers, scholars, and writers produced by the Reformation, not one credits the gift of tongues with playing a part in this epochal revival.

Once again we see historic proof that the Holy Spirit was mightily at work without employing the gift we are studying. We must conclude that the manifestation of tongues is not the only sign—nor the most important—of God's presence and power.

## **6. Post-Reformation Days**

### **In France and England**

This brings us to modern times, in which we have, in contrast with the previous fifteen hundred years or more, an abundance of evidence of "tongues" movements. Aside from the "little prophets" of Devenc, France, at the end of the eighteenth century, when little three- to ten-year-olds stood up and preached in correct French, the next well-known case of "tongues" occurred in England.

A Presbyterian minister by the name of Edward Irving, born in 1792, was a powerful and popular preacher in London. He could preach for hours, and he often prayed in public for thirty minutes at a stretch. He preached the doctrine of the imminent Second Advent to large crowds with telling effect. But he was of deeply emotional disposition, and he set great store by subjective experiences as proofs of God's blessing. He and others prayed for long periods for Pentecostal renewal; and, of course, things happened.

One by one, members of his congregation heard strange noises and unintelligible words. Some passed into cataleptic trance. Some prophesied future events in their own tongue. Many prayed unceasingly for days for the "baptism of tongues" or a "second Pentecost." (The Presbyterian Church had severed Irving's connection with them, and he was independent.)

What came was a fearsome fanaticism that eventually wrecked itself. Wild scenes under the "tongues" outbreak ensued, and soon apostles and prophets arose in the group, claiming

true succession from the Twelve. A young woman, Mary Campbell, claimed the gift of prophecy. Fantastic “revelations” came, such as that the Bible societies were a curse. Eventually well-balanced people withdrew. The once-gifted Irving saw his influence fade out, and in a few years he died in sadness. All that remains to remind us of this movement today is a small church in London, the Catholic Apostolic, with a tiny following and a small property in Surrey. The present members do not claim kinship with Irving in his extremism, and they do not care to be reminded of it.

A man who withdrew from Irvingism wrote a *Narrative of Facts*, in which he says the following: “It was manifest to me that the power was supernatural; it was therefore a spirit. It seemed to me to bear witness to the work and the fruits of the Spirit of God. The conclusion was inevitable that it was the Spirit of God; and, if so, the deduction was immediate that it ought in all things to be obeyed. . . . Awful, therefore, is the mistake if a seducing spirit is entertained as the Holy Spirit of Jehovah. The more devoted the Christian seduced, the more implicit the obedience to the seducing spirit.”—Anderson, *The Gift of Tongues*, quoted in Stolee, *Speaking in Tongues*, page 62.

When men drift far from the teachings of the Word of God in their search for power, they may enter the realm of the psychic. They may delve into realms where they certainly stir up spiritual power, but not the Holy Spirit of God. Such deceptions do not disprove the genuine work of the Holy Spirit, but they do warn of possible satanic deceptions.

### **In North America**

The work of the Great Awakening under Jonathan Edwards, in 1734, which was supported by Whitefield, the Tennants, and others, swept from Massachusetts through all of the colonies. Under the powerful and vivid preaching of Edwards, there appeared remarkable physical reactions, or motor phenomena, as happened in the eighteenth-century work of the Wesleys. Exaggerated emotionalism produces such reactions at times, and Jonathan Edwards occasionally had listeners screaming and falling like dead men. However, there is no evidence that these men spoke in tongues, genuine or spurious.

The Pentecostal movement in America numbers some forty-five sects which give prominence to speaking with tongues as part of worship. They are in every state and overseas, and they have grown rapidly in recent years. This type of religion is relatively new in American religious life. It certainly was not found among the Pilgrim Fathers, the Puritans, the Presbyterians, the Methodists, or others of early days. A little of it appeared among Wesley’s followers, but it did not flourish for long. The Mormons are among the early advocates of “tongues,” for Joseph Smith had visions and revelations and believed in the gift of tongues, at least in the way the *Book of Mormon* came to him. The Shakers’ founder, “Mother” Ann Lee, claimed a knowledge of over seventy languages. Whole congregations would dance and shout for joy, during which exercises many of their hymns were composed, even though in unintelligible words.

The members of “tongues” groups naturally do not like to be reminded of events connected with the supposed gift of tongues in the Southern States. Our reference to them is intended only to show the dangers of extremism arising out of otherwise worthy desires on the part of earnest people.

At Inez, Kentucky, in 1933, a group with bizarre practices stirred widespread comment, such as the following:

“This company indulged in a fantastic rite denominated ‘the death of sin.’ After a period of fasting, dancing, incantations, and talking in unknown tongues prolonged for nearly a week,

an aged woman, Mrs. Lucinda Mills, was selected as a human sacrifice and was choked to death by her son, John H. Mills. It was said that preparations were being made to burn her body on a rude altar when officers, attracted by the uproar, invaded the shack where the rites were in progress. Three other women had been selected for similar fates. In court Mills uttered only guttural sounds, similar to the unknown tongue, while attendants held his writhing body on a cot."—Elmer T. Clark, *The Small Sects in America*, revised ed., 1949.

Numerous sects arose around 1900, intent on holiness, sinlessness, perfection, spiritual power. Most of them cried out to God for restoration of the gifts, especially that of tongues. Groups arose in Virginia, Tennessee, and Kentucky claiming the fulfillment of Christ's words, "They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover." Mark 16:18. Some of these developed into the "snake cults," which went to such extremes that some states have banned snake handling in religious services. "Tongues" practices have continued undisturbed, and in some cases have taken less spectacular and more respectable forms.

A group in Topeka, Kansas, in 1900 set out to study the Scriptures, but they studied little other than a spiritual "baptism with signs." Soon the "tongues" came and much excitement ensued, until finally the leaders fell into disrepute. Thereafter Los Angeles became the center for this type of religion, notably the old Azusa Street Mission, where adherents claimed to have produced "a second Pentecost." In time the humble mission gave place to more pretentious sophisticated temples, though the services were still flamboyant, and such physical signs as healing and tongues were emphasized.

Not a few moral, mental, and domestic tragedies have appeared in these movements that ostensibly seek the gifts of the Holy Spirit. It is unnecessary to do more than mention the numerous cases of sensuality and insanity which can be found recorded in readily available works on the subject.

### **A Personal Experience**

During the First World War, I was much in the company of a group of men among whom were a number of worshipers of Pentecostal persuasion. They pressed me incessantly to have an open mind and attend their church. I went on one occasion and endeavored to evaluate my experience as objectively as possible.

There was much singing, which gradually increased in tempo, with hand-clapping and foot-stomping. Then came a prayer season punctuated with much emotional ejaculation from the congregation. In turn came brief reading of Scripture passages relevant to Pentecost and spiritual gifts. Then the emotional depths erupted to my consternation as one after another testified and exhorted us to "Yield to the Spirit!" "Give in to the Lord!" Many of the people began to shout and clap. Then some began shouting words beyond my comprehension, and some mumbled and groaned. Finally some fell to the floor and lay there stiff and glassy-eyed. Others were in a state of ecstatic "jerks." I felt I was in the presence of an influence quite foreign to my religious sensibilities, and I walked out into God's fresh air unimpressed that any divine presence had attended that gathering.

If only these people had understood Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 14:27, 28: "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. But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God."

After this experience I could believe what had before sounded unbelievable. I was reading an account of these ecstatically emotional outbursts of shouting and groaning in the South,

where women went into “jerks” so violently that “their long loose hair would crack almost as loud as a wagoner’s whip.” See Clark, *The Small Sects in America*, revised ed., 1949, p. 93. After my own personal observation, I am much less skeptical of what I used to think were exaggerated reports by enemies. They are too tragically true.

False signs and exhibitions do not, of course, negate the truth that God gave gifts to His church. If today instead of creating the emotional, psychological atmosphere born of our own inner tensions and determinations, we were to gather together humbly and quietly, studying the Word to ascertain God’s truth and His will as did the believers in the upper room (Acts 1:14; 2:1), these disorderly sessions of unedifying “speaking in tongues” would disappear. “Let all things be done unto edifying” 1 Corinthians 14:26.

One thing arising out of my personal experience is not often stressed. If I had remained in attendance at such meetings and had allowed myself to be persuaded that I “needed an experience in the Spirit,” then sooner or later something deep within me would have been stirred. I might have fallen victim to what I verily believe is a delusive psychical experience that is harmful to the sanity and equanimity of the soul. The repetitious rhythm, the ecstatically charged atmosphere, the pent-up tensions of modern high-pressure existence, the human determination to “get” something new and revolutionary—these are the gateways through which satanic deceptions so easily captivate these human spirits of ours.

Even more conventional evangelists often use methods which may unduly stir emotion, to get *en rapport* with the congregation. How careful preachers should be not to overdo the aids and gimmicks, the external paraphernalia, to the exclusion of solid Christ-centered, Bible-based exposition of eternal truths!

## **7. Will There Be Another Pentecost?**

### **Prophecy and the Solution of Our Ills**

But understand this, that in the last days there will set in perilous times of great stress and trouble—hard to deal with and hard to bear” 2 Timothy 3:1, *Amplified New Testament*.

Paul proceeds in the next three verses to portray selfishness, inordinate love of money, pride, arrogance, boastfulness, blasphemy, disrespect for parents, ingratitude, ungodliness, profanity, inhumanity, slander, false accusation, loose morality, fierce hatred of goodness, treachery, sensuality, religious formality and powerlessness, hypocrisy—all as the conditions that will prevail “in the last days.” There is more, and the reader should read carefully the first seven verses of this chapter.

“In the last days” is a phrase that has significance. A well-known commentator says, “The majority of commentators have referred ‘the last days’ here spoken of to the period immediately preceding the second coming of the Lord—a day and an hour somewhere in the future but hidden, not merely from all men, but from the angels, and even from the Son (Mark 13:32).” —*Ellicott’s Commentary*.

Many Christians believe that the mounting tensions and appalling conditions of our time point to the end of all things. They look for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ to redeem the righteous and to judge the wicked among men.

Before that time arrives there is to come another great outpouring of the Holy Spirit as at Pentecost. When the Christians at Pentecost were charged with drunkenness, the apostle Peter cried to the mockers, “Ye men of Judea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you: . . . ‘But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams:

and on My servants and on My handmaidens I will pour out in those days of My Spirit; and they shall prophesy.'" Acts 2:14-18.

That was a primary application of Old Testament prophecy to new times. Is there a second application and a greater fulfillment ahead of us in modern times?

It seems reasonable that a God of love and mercy would not hurl the world into fearful judgment without giving every warning to mankind. And if God used the early Christians to give signs and warnings to their generation, will He not use Christians again to give His warning signs and wonders to the last generation of mankind?

Again, if the hardened Greco-Roman world was given unique signs in the gifts of the Holy Spirit to the infant church, why should not God use these gifts with added power in a judgment-bound world? Surely the situation today calls for some divine manifestation beyond that experienced at the original Pentecost.

### **A Divine Manifestation to Out-Pentecost Pentecost**

Many Christian bodies look for the premillennial return of Christ, and they hold that both the church and the world will figure in a spiritual revival before the cataclysmic event takes place.

John wrote that "unclean spirits" were to go forth into the world: "For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty" Revelation 16:14.

*The Amplified New Testament* rendering says, "And they go forth to the rulers and leaders all over the world, to gather them together for war on the great day of God the Almighty."

Nothing but a mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit could counteract the satanic influences here described.

This is where the gifts of the Spirit will be renewed to the dedicated people of God. Who shall say that the genuine gift of tongues, as opposed to the false manifestations to which we have referred, shall not again become a sign-gift from God through His church to arrest and warn the godless of coming judgment?

"The events of the Day of Pentecost shall be repeated with even greater power than on that occasion. John says, 'I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory.' [Revelation 18:1.] Then, as at the Pentecostal season, the people will hear the truth spoken to them, every man in his own tongue."—*The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Vol. 6, p. 1055.

There is not, of course, any hint here that "tongues" will be anything other than a God-given ability to preach the saving truths of the gospel "to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people" Revelation 14:6.

### **Résumé and Conclusion**

1. Was the gift of tongues the only gift?

1 Corinthians 12:11. God gave different gifts "distributing them separately to each individual at will." *NEB*.

1 Corinthians 12:29, 30; 14:5. The gift of tongues is no more important than other gifts, for it is placed next to last in the lists in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, 28-30. Nor did it make the recipient more esteemed than others by God or man. Further, there is no evidence that a man filled with the Spirit must therefore have the gift of tongues. Bishop Pike, referred to in the first chapter of this study, appointed a commission of investigation, and it admonished against

teaching that “glossolalia is the essential sign of God’s presence and that those lacking it are in any sense second-rate citizens in His kingdom.”

2. Why was the gift of tongues given?

Acts 2:1-11. In order that people from many lands could hear the good news of salvation.

1 Corinthians 14:22. For a sign to unbelievers, especially to unbelieving Jews. See Acts 2:5.

A few years later Paul and Barnabas turned from Jewry and carried the gospel to the Gentiles, as clearly stated in Acts 13:46: “It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.”

1 Corinthians 14:26. Like all the gifts tongues must be, said Paul to the Corinthians, for “the edifying of the church.” The gift of tongues was also to comfort, to profit, to bless, to produce gratitude, in the church. 1 Corinthians 14:3, 6, 16, 17.

3. Was there any difference between the gift of tongues at Pentecost and at Corinth?

Acts 2:7-9. At Pentecost, all who could not speak the language in which the apostles normally testified (Aramaic) now heard Galileans (normally lacking in culture) preaching in the languages of nonresident Jews, or those of the Dispersion. In contrast, at Corinth no specific languages are mentioned, and the majority of the members were presumably non-Jewish.

At Pentecost no interpreters were mentioned or needed, whereas Paul insisted at Corinth that whatever was spoken by the Holy Spirit among the believers must be interpreted. 1 Corinthians 14:13, 27.

Acts 2:6-11. At Pentecost there was astonishment at the preaching in tongues both in the house and presumably in the streets, but there was no evidence of confusion. At the churches in Corinth there was confusion and extremism. 1 Corinthians 14:26-33.

Acts 2:6. At Pentecost the hearers understood. At Corinth at times the speakers uttered words not easily understood. 1 Corinthians 14:9.

4. Were there instances where the Holy Spirit was given without the gift of tongues?

Acts 6:5-8. Stephen was “full of faith and of the Holy Ghost”; “full of faith and power.” He “did great wonders and miracles,” but had no gift of tongues, according to the record, other than the gift to use his mother tongue to God’s glory.

Acts 10:38. “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power.” He did good everywhere, healing even the devil-possessed, but spoke only His native Aramaic, as far as we know.

Mark 16:15-20. The disciples “preached everywhere,” and were often challenged and opposed. They then were used by God to impress the people by the confirmation of “signs following.” No references mention their use of tongues.”

5. Was the gift of tongues used only when foreign tongues were involved?

Acts 2:4-13; 10:46; 19:6. The evidence seems clear that at Pentecost only known foreign tongues, of which the speakers had no previous knowledge, were involved. In the case of Cornelius and the twelve men at Ephesus the evidence is not so clear. There may have been a special gift of praise and prayer, glorifying God in some new way.

1 Corinthians 12-14. At Corinth the apostle seems to speak at times of known tongues, and at others of a speech understood by God if not by the speaker. It edified the speaker. See 1 Corinthians 14:4. But the whole point of these three chapters is not what tongue was spoken, but that there must be no confusion, extremism, or abuse of the gift. Certainly Paul does not forbid tongues, though he minimizes the importance of this gift as compared with love and prophecy.

6. Are all the New Testament gifts of the Spirit with the church today?

Not in the form or measure of the early New Testament church. The gifts of the Spirit as listed in 1 Corinthians began to diminish, and some to disappear, in the second century before the canon of Scripture was settled. Yet some of the gifts have always been with God's people. Even the gift of tongues has been in another form with the church, for how else could the truths of the gospel have reached almost every land through missionaries?

Reports of the gift of tongues in some miraculous form have existed at different times; but, as with reports of miraculous healing, they are generally difficult to verify. The providence of God has doubtless manifested the gifts of healing and of tongues in times of crisis, when human extremity has been reached.

It is possible to be more concerned about the external *gifts* of the Spirit than the more deeply spiritual *fruit* of the Spirit. See Matthew 7:15-20; Galatians 5:22, 23.

7. Are there counterfeits, especially in the last days?

Revelation 16:14, 15; Matthew 24:24. The spirits of demons can simulate the true work of the Spirit and deceive even the elect if they are not watchful.

1 John 4:1; Isaiah 8:20. We are to test the spirits by the standards of God's Word to see "whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world." This is more important than any human test or any type of exhibition, however sensational. Only by the standard of God's Word, rightly divided, can we discern the true gifts.