

14. “TESTING, TESTING, ONE, TWO ... NINE!”

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The heart-felt cry of the apostle Paul is that we might know the power of the risen Christ (who sits with all authority at His Father’s Right Hand) flowing to us with a mighty measure of His Spirit in all wisdom, knowledge and holy boldness, being fit for His eternal purposes! That’s what the power of Pentecost is all about --- God’s power in our lives to do His Kingdom-building work. (Eph. 1: 15ff; 5: 18).

But ...

Remember the dog in the ancient fable who, while crossing a bridge with a bone in his mouth, saw his reflection in the water below? The bone he saw in the reflection looked so much better than the one in his mouth, that he dropped the substance for the shadow and went hungry.

Multitudes of hungry believers are like that dog. They have dropped, ignored or by-passed the satisfying reality of God’s holy Pentecostal power for a shadow of exciting experience built around ecstatic speech. Majoring on minors and chasing the least of the gifts, the Corinthian catastrophe is being repeated.

Your experience and my experience must satisfy Biblical guidelines otherwise we run the risk of displeasing our Lord. Furthermore, as I have already indicated in the previous article, *My Experience With Tongues*, we may open ourselves and the Body of Christ up to practices that may range from fruitless distraction right through to harmful Satanic deception.

In this final instalment of *Charismatic Questions Answered* I shall set out the Biblical tests that must decide the genuineness of what is happening in the modern tongues movement. We will gather up what we have already considered, and we will introduce some new tests. This is a case of *Testing, Testing, One, Two ... Nine!*

1. PENTECOSTAL TONGUES WERE KNOWN LANGUAGES

Test number one: Do the tongues today meet the Pentecostal template?

The first time **other tongues (Acts 2: 4)** were given to the NT church was on the Day of Pentecost. Jewish pilgrims and local residents of Jerusalem were there for the Feast and they heard **the mighty works of God** being proclaimed in their own native languages in which they **were born (dialects ... Acts 2: 8)**.

These first Pentecostal “tongues” were given in the context of evangelism. They conveyed intelligible content **to men** --- not to God Who understands all languages!

The “tongues speakers” at Pentecost had not previously learned those foreign languages which were in common use throughout the Roman Empire and, they spoke to that ethnically diverse crowd **as the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2: 4)**. Pentecostal “tongues” therefore, had proper grammar and syntax and carried intelligible content.

The Jews who heard these miraculously-given languages still needed the inspired prophetic preaching of Simon Peter to bring them to conviction and conversion. This pattern of “tongues” with inspired prophetic interpretation sets the Biblical pattern, for we find it later in the church in Corinth where “tongues” must come with prophetic interpretation and application.

It is apparent the modern “tongues” do not meet this Pentecostal test. Charismatics solve this conundrum by suggesting that today's “tongues” are of a different order --- that is, they claim they are speaking with the “tongues of angels”, or, praying in “heavenly languages”, if you will. (More on that soon.)

2. TONGUES WERE A SIGN-GIFT TO UNBELIEVING ISRAEL

Test number two: Are the “tongues” of today practised as a sign-gift for unbelieving Jews?

Modern Pentecostals and charismatics teach that the “gift of tongues” is the evidence that the Christian has been baptised and has been filled with the holy Spirit. The apostle Paul on the other hand explains that “tongues” ***are for a sign, not to those who believe, but for unbelievers (I Cor. 14: 22)***.

And it was to a particular class of **un**believer --- the Jew who knew from the Law that hearing foreign Gentile languages in the holy Land indicated God's judgment upon the nation **(I Cor. 14: 22-25; Isaiah 28: 11: 11)**.

The Book of Acts gives us this doctrine in practice, for of the three recorded instances where “languages” are specifically mentioned **(Acts chapters 2; 10 and 19)**, unbelieving Jews were observed to be present. Here is the doctrine of “tongues” in their historical and contextual Jewish setting.

Biblical “tongues” were a miraculous sign-gift to indicate that God was dealing both in judgment upon national Israel which had rejected her long-promised Messiah, and in mercy calling them to repent and confess Jesus His Son to be their newly coronated and long-promised cosmic king.

Once it became clear that that generation had finally hardened their stiffened necks, the NT says that tongues would **cease (I Cor. 13: 8)**. Their *raison d'etre* had finished. In plain language, this is to say, once Israel was divinely judged, once Jerusalem and the Temple had been razed by the Gentile armies of Rome in A.D. 70, once the Jews had

been irrevocably dispersed amongst the nations of earth by Rome in A.D. 135, then the purpose for the sign-gift of miraculous languages to Israel ceased.

In stark contrast, the modern teaching is that the person praying in a “private prayer language” does so primarily to edify and help himself --- all in the secrecy of the prayer-closet. How can praying in secret be giving a sign to anybody, much less to the unbelieving Jew?

It should be obvious that the modern “tongues” movement fails test number two, too.

3. THE TONGUES OF ANGELS ARE NOT GIVEN TO MEN.

Test number three: *Glōssa* in the entire NT --- unless obviously referring to the physical organ in our mouth, or the metaphorical flames of fire on each of the disciples’ heads at Pentecost --- always means known languages with proper grammar and syntax.

Always! The only exception may be the ecstatic cultic babblings of the pagans who were **carried away unto dumb idols** which some in the Corinthian church were apparently still inclined to bring over to the worship services (**I Cor. 12: 2**).

There is no lexical difference between the Pentecostal languages in the Book of Acts and the charismatic languages in the Book of Corinthians. We are not at liberty to invent our own meanings and definitions for Bible words. ^(**1**)

The apostle Paul clearly states in **I Cor. 14: 10-11** that he is referring to languages that have **signification** and **meaning in the world**. However, he says, if someone stands up in the church meetings and starts to speak or pray aloud in **“a language”** which the rest of the church does not understand or recognise, then there *must* be interpretation of that *unknown* language --- whether it be the supernaturally endowed sign-gift of the Spirit for the benefit of any visiting unbelieving Jews or simply a foreign language already practised in cosmopolitan Corinth.

Those who claim that today’s “tongues” are “heavenly languages” or, “the tongues of angels”, base that claim upon Paul’s *hypothetical* case, that if it were possible to **speak with the tongues of men and of angels** and yet not do it with the motivation of edifying love, he would just be like an empty-sounding brass gong (**I Cor. 13: 1**).

Indeed, the apostle tells us that although he had been **caught up to the third heaven** he was **not permitted to speak** the words he had heard being spoken there (**2 Cor. 12: 4**). The Greek word translated **not permitted** (*exesti*) may equally well mean **not lawful**. And notice he also says the words he heard in heaven were **unutterable, unable to be spoken**. Even our charismatic friends say they are speaking the words of angels.

¹ The description of **other tongues** (**Acts 2:4**) (*heterais glōssais*) is also found in **First Corinthians 14: 21** in combination with **other lips** (*heteros cheilos*) and should be consistently translated as, **by foreign languages and foreign lips I [God] will speak to this People**. The **other tongues** of Pentecost (**Acts 2:4**) are the “foreign languages” of the Gentile nations.

Therefore, those who claim to be speaking with the languages of angels are claiming something even the apostle himself says he could not do, nor was allowed to do! In this matter, the charismatic tongues speaker fails Bible test number three.

4. THE MIND MUST BE FULLY ENGAGED.

Test number four: Bible tongues must be with the understanding of the mind as well as with the spirit.

The modern “tongues” speaker justifies his or her practice of not meeting the first three tests by saying they are by-passing their understanding and eliminating the hindrance of the mind. This helps them to pray “in the spirit” unhindered and “in the flow” of God --- “He who speaks in a language speaks not unto men, but unto God” and “He who speaks in a language edifies himself ...” (I Cor. 14: 2,4). (1)

However, as we have seen, these words are Paul’s rebuke of the selfish way the Corinthians were behaving. The context concerns correction, not affirmation. The one who is speaking and praying in “tongues” without interpretation is selfishly puffing himself or herself up, not edifying the church, and must in fact, be silenced --- **if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God (14: 28)!**

Speaking **to himself** obviously means the pray-er understands what it is s/he is saying. It’s impossible to speak to yourself without understanding yourself! This is proved by the fact Paul says he will **pray with the spirit and with the understanding; he will sing with the spirit and with the understanding also (14: 15).**

The Bible never advocates the surrender of the mind in our prayers and in our meditations! Speaking in that mystical way opens one up to the deceptions of the demonic world.

The “tongues” speaker who disengages his or her own mind fails this fourth crucial test.

5. TONGUES MUST BE GIVEN WITH INTERPRETATION IN THE CHURCH

Test number five: If the one who stands up in the church speaks or prays in a language which nobody else present recognises or cannot interpret for everybody’s edification, then the divine instruction is that such a speaker must **be silent (14: 28).**

There is to be no “tongue” used in the church services which people do not understand. Paul says he would rather speak just **five words** that everybody profits by, rather than **10,000 words** in an untranslated language (14:19).

That’s a ratio of one word to every 2,000. However, Paul’s odds are actually far, far worse when we understand that in the Greek world the biggest number counted was

10,000. But not in our world! We can put many more zeros after 10,000. We can count to a trillion, and beyond to a quintillion! (²)

Paul was actually saying, “think of the biggest number you can conceive”. Ramble on in your *unknown* language all you like, but my five intelligible words that build your faith up, count as far, far better, than all your unintelligible raving.

The regular practice of “tongues” in charismatic church services without interpretation fails Bible test number five.

6. THERE MUST BE NO MORE THAN TWO OR THREE TONGUES SPEAKERS IN ANY SERVICE.

Test Number Six: The apostle clearly states that in any given church worship service, there is to be a maximum of three “language” speakers only --- **If anyone speaks in a language, let there be only two or at most three ... (14: 27).** Three “tongues” **at most!**

The usual practice in Pentecostal and charismatic services is that many, if not most, of the congregation engages in praying in tongues. This fails this apostolic test badly.

7. TONGUES MUST BE CONSECUTIVELY SPOKEN

Test number seven: Whenever “tongues” are used in the public church services, the one, two or **three at most** must wait in line and not talk over the others --- **and each in turn (14: 27).** Get in line and wait your turn! One “tongue” at any one time, please.

Every time I have attended a Pentecostal service, this Bible test is flouted, for all break off into singing or praying or speaking in “tongues” together.

8. WOMEN ARE NOT TO SPEAK IN TONGUES IN THE CHURCH

Test number eight: (And if you think our exegesis so far has been controversial, wait for this one!) It is **a shame** for women to speak in tongues in the church --- **God is not a God of disorder, but of peace. As in all the churches of the saints, women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the Law also says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church (14: 33-35).**

There is no space to enter at length into this eighth Bible test for the proper use of tongues. However, we must observe where this test comes in the context of the Corinthian charismatic confusion. It comes right at the climax of Paul’s correction of the Corinthian controversy. His aim is to set that congregation in order and to restore harmony in God’s church where tongues were running out of control.

² A quintillion is one million raised to the power of 10 to the 30. Not to mention that the British billion used to be a million million, whereas the American billion is a thousand million. Makes me wonder that, if Paul was writing now, what number he would have landed upon to make his point!

So the apostle's instruction that **women should be silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate** is designed to restore order to the chaos in the way the Corinthians were doing their "tongues".

Obviously, Paul does not *per se* forbid women from speaking publicly in church services. If he is saying that, then he is very forgetful of what he wrote just a little previously. He has already given instructions for how women may pray or prophesy in the church --- provided they do so with their head **covered** (whatever that may mean will have to wait for another day, but at a bare minimum surely means they must do this dressed modestly) (**see 1 Cor. 11: 1ff**). Clearly, the apostle does not forbid women to remain absolutely silent in the church! **(³)**

It would appear that in Corinth it was the women who were taking the lead in "tongues" speaking. They were seizing control and usurping an authority **not permitted** for them. Gross confusion was the result. The particular women in this chaotic "tongues" setting are told to **be silent** ... which is the same command given to those men who were trying to speak without an interpreter or talking out of turn: **Be silent ... hold your peace (14: 28, 30)!**

The command has nothing to do with misogyny or androgyny. It has everything to do with restoring God's peace and order in the church in the matter of languages.

9. THE FINAL TEST ... ARE YOU SPIRITUAL?

Test Number Nine: The apostle closes out his loving but strong correction of the Corinthian charismatic confusion with a tone of indignant protest ... **Or did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only ones it has reached (14: 36)?** The Corinthians acted without thinking of any but themselves, as though they were the one Church in the world, or might set the fashion to all the rest. **(⁴)**

We are not islands of splendid isolation. Any who think they are islands unto themselves in this Christian life, any who set out with a spirit of self-sufficiency and disregard for the Body of Christ and especially any who disregard the foundational teaching of the apostle do not pass the test of genuine spirituality. ...

Anyone who claims to be a prophet, or to be spiritual --- a man of the Spirit --- must acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord. (⁵)

But if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant (or, as the NRSV has it, Anyone who does not recognise this is not recognised) (14: 37-38).

³ This is not the place to discuss the apostle's alleged misogyny here, or to discuss whether this command is no longer relevant in today's enlightened society. Suffice to say, that the apostle always grounds his rationale in theology, not society. Which is to say, there is a **subjection** (*hypotassō*) which Paul teaches is evident in God's created order, nature and plan for the sexes which supersedes the changing *mores* of any society, whether ancient or modern.

⁴ *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, Gen. Ed. W. Robertson Nicoll, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 1956, Vol. 2, p915

⁵ **πνευματικὸς** (*pneumatikos*) does not refer to spiritual powers as some translations like the **NRSV** put it. Rather it refers to spiritual **character**.

So, the true prophet and the truly spiritual believer will prove it by agreeing with and obeying the apostle's instructions on "tongues". This is the last crucial test. The person filled with the Spirit and possessing true spiritual maturity will know that Paul is writing under the inspiration of the holy Spirit and that his instructions are indeed **a command of the Lord**.

Any Corinthian, and for that matter, any Christian who claims to be spiritual will obey Paul's *bone fide* credentials and directions. The believer who ignores his directions and corrections is to be *ignored*, **not recognised!** (⁶) His or her failure to submit to the apostle's teaching only proves how **unspiritual** they are!

And this my dear reader, is the last solemn test. If my Pentecostal and charismatic friends will not submit to these nine tests regarding their own practice of "tongues", then they pronounce upon themselves rejection by the Lord himself. Repudiating the Lord's commands and authority through his apostle leads to their own repudiation.

Did not our Lord earnestly warn that, "**Many will say to me in that Day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your Name ...' ?** They are **not recognised**, except they obey the teaching, and will hear the fearful rejection, "**I never knew you: depart from me, you who work iniquity**" (Matt. 7: 22-23).

So ... Should anybody claim they are speaking "tongues" according to the Bible pattern, they will meet all of these nine criteria!

They will be speaking known [foreign] languages in use from the world of men,
they will be using their gift as a sign calling unbelieving Jews to repentance,
they will not be claiming they can speak in the heavenly languages of angels --- for that is not only impossible (being **unutterable**) but also **forbidden**,
they will know exactly what they are speaking for they will be praying with their minds and understanding as well as their spirits,
they will insist their 'language' be interpreted for the edifying of the entire Body of Christ,
they will be sure that in any given public service there will be **at most** only three "tongues" speakers,
they will make sure they are speaking consecutively and in turn, one at a time,
they will ensure the women remain silent where the use of tongues is concerned in the church, and finally,
they will be sure the whole church acknowledges these tests and instructions are the commands of the Lord Jesus Christ himself, otherwise they are not to be recognised.

But if all these tests can be met, then by all means, **do not forbid speaking in languages (14: 39)!**

One important lesson the Corinthian charismatic chaos has taught us is that possessing a spiritual gift is no guarantee the believer is spiritually mature. The Corinthians were

⁶ *Agnoeō* means to be ignorant, to fail to understand, to be wrong, to fail to recognise, hence to be disregarded.

enriched in all the *charismata* and yet were **of the flesh and infants in Christ (I Cor. 3: 1-4)**. They were off chasing chimeras for self-edification and not the building up of the whole Church. It's possible to have a spiritual gift and remain in a poor spiritual condition.

It's time to do some, *Testing, Testing, One, Two ... Nine!*